

Phoebe Melinda Butler Sevy (1837-1892)

Phoebe Melinda Butler was born December 16, 1837 in Caldwell County, Missouri to John Lowe Butler and Caroline Farozine Skeen. At the time the family was moving from Simpson County, Kentucky toward Nauvoo, Illinois. They lived for two years at Adams, Illinois and went from there to Nauvoo. Her father was one of the bodyguards for Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet. At one time he made quite a demonstration at an election in Nauvoo when a mob decided to prevent the Mormons from voting. John Lowe Butler knocked down several men with an oak stick, clearing the way for the voters.

At the time of the exodus from Nauvoo, the family went to Winter Quarters and there they were to remain for some time. Mr. Butler, being a blacksmith, was counseled to remain there to repair wagons, shoe oxen and horses and to keep the many companies rolling. Later they moved to different locations along the route, the last of which was Green River, Wyoming, where they stayed until 1852, when they decided to go on to Salt Lake City. The following is taken from the autobiography of John Lowe Butler:

“It was a hard trip from Green River to Salt Lake City. Our food, clothing, and shoes were either gone or in poor state of repair. A scout was sent into the city to report conditions to President Young, who immediately went to the people of the city for food to be taken to the hungry immigrants. The women of the company had started out ahead of the teams, and in the morning, at the head of Echo Canyon, they met Joseph Toronto returning, and he said to my wife, ‘Sister Butler, I have brought you something to eat.’ She asked, ‘Where is it?’ Then he told her the wagon was just a little way on the road. It was really a happy time when the wagon arrived! We went into the city and on to Spanish Fork with George Wilson. I left my wife Caroline and the children in the city, taking my wife, Sarah, with me. A few months later, my first wife and family came to Spanish Fork and here we prepared to live.”

On the 5th of January 1854, Phoebe Melinda Butler was married to George Washington Sevy, a son of George and Hannah Libby Sevy. They lived in Spanish Fork for a time, and the fun and hardships of building homes in a new country were many. Their house was a single log room with a fireplace. The cooking was done by hanging an iron kettle on a hook suspended from the fireplace. Phoebe said she had as good a straw bed as anyone—except for the tick. She was industrious and frugal, and it wasn’t long until she had a fine garden, a cow, and some chickens. Four of her children were born in Spanish Fork.

In 1861, George Sevy was called to help settle Utah’s Dixie. His destination was to be Fort Harmony, later known as New Harmony. This pioneering couple answered the call and assisted in this settlement. Phoebe helped in making the adobes that went into their new home, and was ever at her husband’s side doing her part. They had a few sheep and she washed and carded and spun the wool, then wove it into cloth for clothes for her little family. Her husband made their shoes when they had any. He was assisted by her in every way, being thrifty people, and prosperity rewarded their efforts.

In 1871, her husband was again called [to pioneer], this time to Panquitch, Utah to help in the resettling of the community. They were ever ready to do the bidding of their leader, so they went. It took them about three days from Paragonah to reach Panquitch Valley. The homes of the former settlers had not been molested so there were some who located in them. There were about twenty-five families in this second company. Their first winter was very cold, with lots of snow, poor roads, and their provisions were very low. Wheat that had been saved for seed had to be used to sustain the settlers. Phoebe boiled it so that none would be wasted, and the people had to come to her for their rations. They killed some of their cattle, and finally some of their men went over the mountain to Parawon on horseback [to get] some flour.

Phoebe was a hard worker. She milked cows and made butter and cheese. Her son Tom once said that she used to get up in the morning, warm a pan of milk, put some bread in it, give each of them a spoon, and the children would surround a stool on which she placed the pan and they would have bread and milk for their breakfast while she was doing her morning chores.

A short time before leaving New Harmony, George had married a plural wife, which was a great trial to Phoebe. However, she had her interests in her family, and her Church. She was a counselor in the Relief Society. In the summer she ranched on Panquitch Creek about ten miles from town, where her husband operated a sawmill. When the older boys took a load of lumber to Pioche, Nevada to sell, Phoebe would send her cheese and butter too. The first she sent netted her \$400. Now, she determined, she would have the kind of mattress of which she had long dreamed. In the beginning they had had a straw bed, but no tick. Now she would have a feather bed with a good tick, for they were prospering as well as happy.

One day while the family [was] living at the sawmill, her son James, fourteen years old, was driving some horses, and when he was crossing the bed of the creek, the hammer of a gun he was carrying caught on some willows and discharged. The bullet [went] into the calf of his leg. The family tried in vain to get a doctor, and after six weeks [of] suffering terribly, the boy died, despite all their best efforts.

Phoebe was the mother of fourteen children. Four were born in Spanish Fork, where her second child, little George W., died when he was eight months of age. Six more were born in New Harmony, the first two being twins, whom she named Joseph and Hyrum, for the prophet and his brother. However, these two she lost too—Hyrum when eleven days old, and Joseph when four months old. Phoebe's last four children were born in Panquitch: Sarah Adeline, Martha Jane, Mary May, and Pearl. Along with the hardships of settling new territory, there seemed to be ever the heartaches of sickness and death that visited their home—the fourth time it was little Mary May, only three years old.

It was 1885 when her husband George decided, after much consideration, to go to Mexico [and take] his plural wives. He now had a third wife...Martha Ann Thomas. He wanted to take Phoebe with him, and he tried to get her to see how important it was to him to have her with him, but Phoebe reminded him that it would be necessary for someone to stay in Panquitch and look after their interests there, and since she was getting older, and with her children beginning to marry and settle here and also since she had already helped to settle and colonize three different localities, she felt that she should be the one to keep up the properties they had in Panquitch. He could go to Mexico, then when the colony was finally set up and he still needed her, she would come, or perhaps, by that time he could return to her. So it was now Phoebe's responsibility, with the help of her family, to carry on and take care of the property, which consisted of a farm, livestock, cattle, horses, and sheep, a ranch at Panquitch Lake and her younger children. She ranched at the place at Panquitch Lake during the summers.

In December of 1889 her daughter Sarah Adeline, a lovely, brown-eyed young woman of 18, died of meningitis. Three years later on April 12, 1892, a married daughter, Georganna Cameron, passed away following childbirth, leaving her husband, two little girls and the new baby girl, so Grandma Sevy took the baby and cared for it until she herself became very ill. She passed away just a few days later. During the illness, the baby became ill too and died, so the family held services for the two of them together. A beloved mother, grandmother and a community friend went to her final rest.

At the time of her death on August 14, 1892, all her living children were married except her youngest, Pearl, who was thirteen years old. Pearl later went to Mexico to be with her father. Phoebe is buried in the Panquitch Cemetery in Panquitch, Utah.