

ABRAHAM OWEN WOODRUFF



Born: 23 Nov 1872, Salt Lake City, Salt Lake Utah, son of Wilford Woodruff and Emma Smoot Smith.

Died: 21 June 1904, El Paso, Texas

He was known as Owen. He spent his young life on the farm (near present 5th East and 17th South). Some of his earliest recollections were of gathering watercress from the spring in Liberty Park and selling it for pocket money. At ten he herded cows where he was able to earn as much as \$15 a month. In 1886, he accompanied his father and family on an extended family vacation to the Uintas. His father was being hunted by the U.S Marshals at the time because of polygamy laws. In Aug 1888, his father told of Owen riding a strange horse, which ran into a buggy. Owen was thrown off the horse and broke every spoke in the hind wheel. The horse was not hurt, but Owen was nearly killed. He had other illnesses and close calls, but survived. He attended the 40th District School and from there went on to attend the Latter-day Saints' College where he trained under such

scholars as Done, Talmage and Maeser. At 18 he went to work for the bank, first as collector and then as an assistant bookkeeper. In 1893 he received his mission call to Germany. His father was particularly impressed with him as a missionary. "He manifests a noble spirit...I never saw better in a young missionary in my life than his letters manifest." On Wilford Woodruff's 89th birthday celebration, he referred to another letter from Owen. "He {is} working hard. He is going from Berlin a while to build up a new place. He is doing a good work. He sent me history of the whole church in Germany..." Upon his return in 1896, he resumed his work in the bank. He married Helen May Winters on June 30, 1897. She was a graduate of the B.Y. University and had taught school in Salina and Coalville. Owen and Helen were parents of four children: Wilford Owen (b.1899), Helen Mar (b.1901), June (b. 1902), and Rhoda (b. 1903).

During October conference 1897, at the age of 24, Owen was ordained by his father as an Apostle in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He enjoyed the closest association with his father during the later years of Wilford Woodruff's life. There was a companionship between them. He had a profound reverence for his father, not only as a parent, but as a Prophet of God. As an apostle he was given the responsibility to oversee the colonization of the Big Horn country.

Sometime between 1900 and 1903, Owen took a 2nd wife Eliza Avery Clark. This occurred after his father had issued the Manifesto. The practice of plural marriage continued, to some extent, for a few years. The colonies in Mexico were considered a safe haven for this practice. Eliza was living with her family, in Wyoming, and was engaged to another young man. She was approached by Owen Woodruff and his colleague, Matthias F. Cowley. They spoke to her of the blessing she would receive by marrying Apostle Woodruff in polygamy. She was persuaded. She broke off her previous engagement and married Owen. They had a daughter, Ruth Clark, born Apr. 11, 1904 in the Mormon colony of Juarez.

In May of 1904, Owen and Helen and their four children went to visit the settlement of the Saints in Mexico. Helen contracted small pox in Mexico City and died on June 7. Owen contracted the disease while waiting upon his wife, becoming ill on train enroute to Juarez. He sought care in a hospital in El Paso, Texas but followed his wife in death, two week later. Helen was buried in the American Cemetery in Mexico City, Owen in Evergreen Cemetery in El Paso; nearly 1000 miles from each other. In 1993, descendants arranged for disinterment of their bodies and they were reinterred in the Woodruff plot at the Salt Lake Cemetery.

[Alan J. Hill 6-22-20]

SOURCES

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Wilford Woodruff Journal

DISCREPANCIES

The Abraham Owen Woodruff Family Group Sheet and Logan Temple Records show that Eliza Avery received her endowments and was married on November 1, 1900. Matthias Cowley said he married the two sometime in 1903 in Present, Idaho.

FOOTNOTE ON PLURAL MARRIAGE

It is known fact that the practice of plural marriage continued for a few years following the Manifesto. The manifesto did not address all the issues. What should happen to plural marriages in effect at the time? Since U.S. law prohibited plural marriage, could it be consummated on the high seas or outside the country? President Wilford Woodruff excluded himself from involvement in subsequent marriages, but it appears that Counselor George Q. Cannon approved several of these marriages. There is evidence of ten polygamous marriages by seven different Mormon apostles after 1890. Many other plural marriages may also have occurred during this time. Antony W. Ivins, presiding over the Mexican colonies, performed several plural marriage ceremonies. The Colonies in Mexico were considered a safe haven for the practice. The Reed Smoot hearings (1904-1907), concerning his ability to be seated in the U.S. Senate brought the practice to public light. The Church was embarrassed. In April Conference 1904, President Joseph F. Smith issued what as becomes known as the 2nd Manifesto. It prohibited all plural marriages in the Church and made the practice grounds for excommunication. In 1905, Apostle Matthias F. Cowley and John W. Taylor were asked to resign their apostleship because have their belief in and practice of plural marriage. It is quite likely that Owen Woodruff would have been caught up in the controversy had he not passed away the year before.