

PHEBE WHITTEMORE CARTER



Born: 8 Mar 1807, Scarboro, Maine, daughter of Ezra Carter and Sarah Fabyan

Died: 10 Nov 1885, Salt Lake City, Utah

She joined the Mormon Church in 1834, against her family's wishes. She journeyed to Kirtland, Ohio where she met the Prophet. Joseph Smith and became a close friend of the family. She received her Patriarchal blessing from Joseph Smith, Sr. on Nov. 10, 1836. She was a schoolteacher when she 1st met Wilford Woodruff on January 28, 1837. They were married on April 13, 1837 at the home of Joseph Smith. Frederick G. Williams, 2nd counselor in the 1st Presidency, performed the ceremony.

Wilford's 1st mission after their marriage was to the Fox Islands in Maine. While he was there, Phebe went back and spent time with her parents. She even was a companion briefly to her husband. She gave birth to their 1st child, Sarah Emma while there. Leading a small wagon train of Fox Island saints, they headed west late fall of

1838. In Ohio, Phebe became deathly ill and at one point "felt her spirit lift out of her body." Wilford thought he had lost her, but upon seeing her rally, he took heart, rebuked the disease and she miraculously recovered. When the Saints started to develop Nauvoo, the family took up residence in an old army barracks at Montrose, Iowa (across the River). Before the 12 left for their mission to England, the Woodruff's hosted a dinner for Joseph Smith and the 1st Presidency. During Wilford's absence, Phebe was blessed with a son, Wilford Jr. and suffered the death of daughter, Sarah Emma. Prior to Wilford's return, Phebe again visited her parents. Upon their return to Nauvoo, Wilford built his family a substantial federalists style brick home. Two more children, Phoebe Amelia and Susan Cornelia, were born. Following, the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Wilford was called to preside over the English mission. On this trip he took his family. Upon their return they found the Saints moving out of Nauvoo and on the plains of Iowa. Wilford, Phebe, and their family joined the exodus, having hardly used their new home. Winter Quarters was a very trying time. Phebe gave birth to a son, Ezra, but he died shortly after birth. Their young son, Joseph, also passed away within a month of Ezra's death. Phebe also attended Sister Benbow at her death in Winter Quarters and stayed there while her husband participated in the Vanguard Pioneer Company in 1847. Phebe gave birth to a daughter, Shuah Carter, 3 days before Wilford returned that year. In 1848-49, Wilford took Phebe and the children with him on his mission to the Eastern States. Enroute to the mission field, they lost their young daughter, Shuah. The family lived in Boston while Wilford traveled extensively. In 1850, the Woodruff family trekked across the plains to Utah. Phebe gave birth to another daughter in Utah, Beulah, and a son, Aphek. Aphek lived but briefly. Of 9 children born to Phebe, only 4 lived to maturity.

During the Pioneer trek and in early Utah Wilford took four plural wives, who subsequently had children. Phebe settled into the role of matriarch of a much larger family. Phebe was called as President when the Relief Society was organized in the 14th Ward in Salt Lake in 1856. In 1870 she was very politically active. She gave a speech at a mass meeting protesting the Cullom (Anti-Polygamy) Bill in January and was named to a committee to promote women's suffrage in February. In her later years she served on the Deseret Hospital Board of Directors. Phebe lived to the age of 78. During the last years, her husband was in hiding because of polygamy. He was unable to attend her funeral. "I saw the procession as it passed the office, I saw the hearse that carried my wife ...to the grave," he wrote, and then a poem. "Sleep on Dear Phebe, but ere long from this; The conquered tomb shall yield its captive prey, Then, with thy husband, children, friends and Prophets and Apostles; Thou shall reign in bliss as wife, queen, mother, and Saint to an eternal day." It is undoubtedly true that much of the success of her husband is assignable to the character and ability of this unusual woman.

[Alan J. Hill, 6-14-20]

Sources

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LDS Vital Records from the LDS Family History Suite 2.

Wilford Woodruff's Journal

PHEBE or PHOEBE?

Depending on what one reads, the spelling of Phoebe or Phebe's name can be found both ways. Some contend that it should be one way and others contend for the other way. Phebe is the way that she signed or own letters. Phebe is the name most often used in Wilford Woodruff's journals. However, in "Leaves from my Journal" Wilford spells his wife name, Phoebe. Matthias Cowley, who wrote the first official biography of Wilford Woodruff uses Phoebe, and Phoebe is on the memorial in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. Many subsequent writers have continued to use Phoebe.

After using Phoebe for many years, this writer has now been converted to Phebe, as the most correct. As one editor of my work pointed out, "How would you feel if you wrote your own name the way you do, and then someone changed it?" This involves going back over all my past work to make the change. If the change still appears as Phoebe, I beg forgiveness. In the 19th century it was not uncommon for individuals to spell their names different ways. They were more phonetic and less rigid in their thinking and spelling. This is a case where both spellings honor her and her name.

SARAH or SHUAH CARTER WOODRUFF

Shuah Carter Woodruff was the seventh child of 9 born to Wilford Woodruff and Phebe Carter. In Wilford Woodruff's journals, particularly under the date July 22, 1848, is quite clear that her given name is Shuah Carter Woodruff. He does this in reference to her birth and death, and has a discussion on the manner of her death and burial. Shuah Carter was the name of her aunt (mother Phebe's younger sister) who lived from 1810 to 1905 in Portland, Maine, married Freedom Moulton and had 4 children.

In spite of clear evidence, that Shuah was the correct name for Wilford and Phebe's seventh child, over time her name has been changed to Sarah. Matthias Cowley, author of "Wilford Woodruff, History of His Life and Labors", gives her name as Sarah Carter Woodruff both in his narrative and in the listing of children, contained at the end of his book. He was closely associated with the Woodruff family, a friend of Abraham Owen Woodruff and called as an Apostle on the same day as Abraham Owen. But he was not present at the time of Shuah's birth and death. His book probably started the use of the name Sarah. Early family group sheets of the Woodruff family also list her as Sarah Carter Woodruff, and subsequent authors of Wilford Woodruff have used the Sarah Carter name. That doesn't make it right. This commentary is an effort to set the record straight and to use her correct name – Shuah. **[Alan J. Hill, 7-31-20]**