

WILFORD WOODRUFF, JR.



Born: 22 March 1840, Montrose, Lee, Iowa, son of Wilford Woodruff and Phebe Whittemore Carter.

Died: 6 May 1921, Salt Lake City, Salt Lake, Utah

At the time of Wilford Jr.'s birth, his father was converting the United Brethren at Benbow's farm in England. His older sister, Sarah Emma, died shortly after his birth in Montrose. His mother, Phebe, took Wilford, Jr. to her parents in Maine until Wilford, Sr. returned from his mission. The first few years of Junior's life were spent in Nauvoo or in the vicinity. Although, just a small boy, he had remembrances of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He later wrote, "The prophet called often at our home, and I remember well, how he used to play games with me; and although his life was filled with so many cares, he never forgot a kind word for the children." He also remembered the terrible scenes incident to the martyrdom. When his father was called on his 2nd mission to England, 4-year-old Wilford, Jr. stayed with the Benbows. Two years later, he was a pioneer boy crossing the Iowa hills to Winter

Quarters, where he was baptized at the age of 8. His father presided over the Eastern State Mission, in Boston, in 1848-49. So, the family went east again before going west. Wilford Jr. received formal schooling during this period. In 1850, as a 10-year old, he crossed the plains to Utah. For a youngster he saw quite a bit of travel and learned early that his father was a man of many responsibilities, and Wilford Jr. assumed great responsibility in caring for the family. Wilford Jr. had his share of illness and accidents, particularly in his young life, but he survived to be the patriarch of the Woodruff family. During the Utah War, Wilford Jr., now 17 was of greater service. On Aug 13, 1857 Wilford Sr. "prepared balls (rifle bullets) for [his son] that he might be ready." In 1858, Wilford Jr. helped with the evacuation. Wilford Jr. served a 3^{1/2}-year mission to England between 1863 and 1866. His letters home indicated "a good report of his mission and faithfulness."

On Oct. 12, 1867, Wilford Jr. married Emily Jane Smith. A few days later, they left for the Muddy River as settlement missionaries. Following their mission, Wilford Jr. along with David Woodruff, ran the West Mountain livestock operations. In 1871, Wilford Jr. settled in Randolph, Utah. His father moved his wife Sarah Brown and her family there also. His father's visits involved plowing, planting, building fences and digging ditches; however, they also in enjoyed some hunting and fishing. While his father tended to his other families and duties in Salt Lake, Wilford Jr. was the patriarch of the Randolph Woodruffs. He and his family returned to Salt Lake in 1876. He and his wife Emily Jane had 4 children; Lucy (b. 1869), Wilford (b. 1871), Elias (b. 1873) and Asahel (b. 1876). Emily Jane died at young age of 27 in 1878. Son, Asahel died in 1887, and was buried next to his mother. Wilford Jr. married Julia Spencer (age 23) on May 25, 1879. They had 5 children; George (b. 1880), Leo (b. 1882), Phoebe (b. 1883), Emily (b. 1885) and Julia (b. 1887). They also adopted Frank Carter in the early 1890s. Three of the birth children, George, Phoebe and Emily, passed away in infancy, leaving Leo and Julia along with adopted Frank. Tragedy again struck the family in 1895 when Julia (Wilford Jr.'s 2nd wife) passed away at the age 39. Wilford Jr. married one more time. He married Maria Louise Erickson (age 37) on Apr. 24, 1896. They had 3 more children, Marie (b. 1897), Ezra (b. 1899) and Ruth (b. 1901). Ruth died young. Of Wilford Jr.'s 12 birth children, 7 lived to maturity, 8 including Frank. Following Wilford Jr.'s mother Phebe's death in 1885, his father divided the lot on which the Valley House stood between Wilford Jr. and his sister Susan. In 1889, Wilford Sr. wrote in a letter to a friend. "Wilford is living in the city, has quit farming and is now engaged in delivering goods for Z.C.M.I." During his father's last years, Wilford Jr. took a more important role in his father's business affairs and was an executor of his father's estate. He was in the Presidency of the Liberty Stake High Priests and worked in the Salt Lake Temple. His oldest daughter, Lucy Emily married George Albert Smith, who became 8th President of the Church.

[Alan J. Hill, 6-22-20]

SOURCES

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Wilford Woodruff Journal

The Courtship and Marriage of Wilford Woodruff Jr. and Emily Jane Smith

Wilford Woodruff Jr. had returned from an honorable mission in England in 1866, at the age of 26. For about a year, he continued to work diligently with his father. On October 7, 1867 at a General Conference, which was held in the nearly completed new Conference Center, Brigham Young announced missions to the south, which was known as Dixie, including what was to be the “Muddy River” in what is now northern Nevada. Another of Brigham Young’s announcements was the following: “All young men and maidens old enough to marry are required to marry and fulfill the Law of God. All young men who are 25-years old who do not get married in a month will be required to pay \$200 in cash into the perpetual emigration fund.”

On October 10, the following occurred in the home of Judge Elias Smith in Salt Lake City. As a girl of seventeen Emily was called into her father’s presence and introduced to Wilford Jr. by his father, Wilford Woodruff, Sr. Judge Smith said to her, “Emily, do you know Wilford?” She replied, “I have seen him but I have not met him.” Her father continued, “He has been called on a colonizing mission and it requires that he be married and take his wife with him, and he would like to marry you.” She asked, “Is this what you desire, Father?” He replied, “Wilford is a wonderful young man and I am sure he would make you a fine husband. What do you say?” Emily replied, “Is it our pleasure Father?” He said, “Yes, my daughter.” She answered, “Very well Father, I will.”

On October 12, Wilford Woodruff recorded the following in his journal. “I sealed my son, Wilford Woodruff Jr. & Emily Jane Smith) in the Bonds of Matrimony over the Altar, according to the order of God. The parents of both parties were present. Emily Jane Smith is the daughter of Elder Elias & Lucy Smith. May the blessings of God attend them in their future life & their posterity after them.” He added, “The Lord heard & answered my prayers & has given my son one of the lovely daughters of Zion who is virtuous & good. May God bless them.” On the 15th he set them apart for their missions, and on October 16th, 1867 they were on their way to the Muddy River Mission.