

SYLVIA MELVINA WOODRUFF



Born: 14 Jan. 1862, Salt Lake City, Salt Lake, Utah,
daughter of Wilford Woodruff and Sarah Brown
Died: 7 Aug. 1940, American Fall, Idaho

She would have been nine when her family moved to Randolph, Utah. Her family lived in a tent for six months, before they could move into a home. Her sister, Phoebe Arabell, stated in her life story that she went “boat riding with (her) sister (most likely Sylvia) in a tub on Little Creek. When Sylvia was fourteen when they moved to Smithfield.

Sylvia was 17 when she married Heber John Thompson on Nov. 13, 1879 in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City. In the 1880 census, they are listed in Sarah Brown Woodruff’s household along with Sylvia’s siblings (Newton and Mary). Their first two children, Sarah Elizabeth (1880) and Wilford Woodruff (1882) were both born in Smithfield. Heber John, Jr. their third child was born in Liberty, Bear Lake County, Idaho on 24 July 1885. Sylvia’s niece, Sylvia Moses Handley, who wrote her grandmother Sarah Brown Woodruff’s life story, states that in June 1887 everyone

“went to Bear Lake to visit Aunt Sylvia.” Heber and Sylvia’s fourth child, Robert Leslie, was born in Vernal, Utah on 20 June 1889. He died as a child shortly after his birth. It is not known if the family was living there or just visiting at the time. The balance of Heber and Sylvia’s children, David Newton (1891), Mary Arabella (1892), Milton Woodruff (1894), Beulah (1898) and Thomas Jesse (1900) were all born in Smithfield, Cache County, Utah. The family was living in Smithfield for the 1900 census. The family must have been in the process of moving to Idaho, as son, Heber John, Jr, was taken from them on 21 March 1900 in Haden, Idaho at the age of 14, cause of death unknown. Daughter, Mary Arabella, had married in February 1910 and was living in Driggs, Idaho at the time. The Thompson family had completed their move and was living in Haden, Fremont, Idaho at the time of the 1910 census. Father, Heber John is listed as a farmer and his sons as farm hands. The family shifted slightly to Tetonia, Teton, Idaho, where in 1916, youngest son, Thomas Jesse, while haying in the field near the family home was killed by lightning. He was 16. The family is still living in Tetonia for the 1920 census, but the family is down to three living at home, being Heber and Sylvia along with their 29-year old widowed son, David. David subsequently remarried twice and lived a long life. However, daughter, Mary Arabella, passed away in 1923, leaving a husband and young family in Pocatello, Idaho. The 1930 census has Heber John and Sylvia still farming, living in to Neeley, Power, Idaho. Their daughter, Beulah, and her family, are listed as nearby farmers. Their son, Milton, had been working in the shops of the Oregon Shortline Railroad in nearby Pocatello for about 9 years. He passed away in 1931 from pneumonia at the age of 37, leaving a wife and somewhat grown family. Phoebe Arabella, Sylvia’s sister, passed away in 1939. Sylvia Thompson of Neeley, Idaho is listed in her obituary as a survivor. Their oldest daughter, Sarah Elizabeth also preceded her parents in death in 1940. She passed away at the age of 60 and left a large grown family, but it impacted mother Sylvia. She had become ill with a heart condition, and the death of her daughter broke her heart again. She just seemed to give up on life. She loved her children very much. She was active in the LDS church all her life and taught Sunday School and Relief Society. She was known for her fervent testimony of the gospel. She said she loved her husband more each day of her life.

Heber and Sylvia had nine children and several grandchildren, but early deaths had a dwindling effect. Sylvia was 78 when she passed away in 1940. Her husband, is listed as a patient in the county hospital at age 94 in the 1940 census. He followed his wife in death in 1943. The are both buried side by side in the Neeley Cemetery, American Falls, Power, Idaho.

[Alan J. Hill, 7-30-20]

SOURCES

Family Group Sheets: Wilford Woodruff and Sarah Brown: Heber John Thompson and Sylvia Melvina Woodruff.

FamilySearch (2020): Sources were traced on family search for census and death records to fill in the sequence of dates for this story. Photo for this story also taken from FamilySearch.

Handley, Sylvia Moses, Life Sketch of Sarah Brown Woodruff, Utah Pioneer of 1852, prepared by her granddaughter, July 17, 1950.

Obituaries for David P. Woodruff and Phoebe A. W. Moses.

Daughter of Utah Pioneers had photo family group sheet of Willford Woodruff and Sarah Brown.