

BRIGHAM YOUNG WOODRUFF



David Patten Woodruff (standing) & Brigham Young Woodruff (seated) probably taken about 1870

Born: 18 Jan 1857, Salt Lake City, Salt Lake Utah, son of Wilford Woodruff and Sarah Brown

Died: 16 Jun 1877, Smithfield, Cache, Utah

Brigham Young Woodruff grew up in the Valley House. At age 14, when his mother's family was moved to Randolph, he remained in Salt Lake City to complete his education at the University of Deseret. He could have been a great help to the family in Randolph, but the rest of the family valued his education. He was diligent in his studies and ambitious in his effort to obtain an education. He was also very spiritual and devoted to the gospel. His father looked forward to his son's labors in the Church. Many years later Heber J. Grant said about him, "I remember hearing Wilford Woodruff say on one occasion that he had set his heart upon his son, Brigham, a young man about my own age. We were schoolmates as youngsters. Brigham was one of the finest, brightest and choicest boys I ever knew."

Brigham graduated from the university. Brigham's sister, Phoebe Arabell and her husband arranged to take Brigham to Smithfield. The Moses family and Brigham arrived on Friday, June 15, 1877.

The next morning, June 16th, before breakfast, Brigham went to see the Bishop and school trustees about teaching school. After breakfast, several of the family, and visiting party decided to go out to the Bear River. At one o'clock, David, Brigham's brother came racing home on horseback. He staggered into the house, clasped his mother in his arms and cried, "Oh! He was too good to live." It seems that David and his brother Newton had taken a gun with them. At the river they shot a duck. Brigham took off his clothes and plunged into the cold water of the Bear River to retrieve it. He swam to the duck and took it in one hand and started for shore. Although he was a good swimmer, he developed cramps and was drowned! He was in the river 6 days before his body was found. Both white settlers and Indians combed the river night and day searching for the body. He was found below the old Hampton Bridge by a white man and an Indian. He had gone through the narrows between Cache Valley and the Salt Lake Valley. Sarah Brown, his mother, was devastated by his death and was sick in bed for three months.

Wilford Woodruff, his father, then president of the St. George Temple, was advised by telegram, but was unable to be present for the funeral. In his journal, Wilford recorded the following:

"Thus my Son Brigham has lost his life....We cannot always comprehend the ways of Providence...I never saw a person more anxious to obtain an education than he... He has studied until midnight a good deal of the time for the last two years. He has just finished his education and gone home to his mother in Smithfield, Cache Co. and drowned in Bear river. He was a good young man, virtuous, temperate, honest and lived his religion. He had received his endowments. I have felt calm, composed and reconciled in this bereavement. I have thought that as I was doing so much for the dead here in the Temple in St. George, that it might be necessary to have one of the family in the spirit world."

Brigham Young Woodruff died at age 20, unmarried. He died a month and a half before the death of his famous namesake.

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

SOURCES

Family Group Sheet, Wilford Woodruff and Sarah Brown.

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Handley, Sylvia Moses, Sarah Brown Woodruff, 4th Wife of Wilford Woodruff, published in Our Pioneer Heritage, Vol. 10, pages 215 and 236.

Madsen, Carol, The Wives of Wilford Woodruff, from a transcript of a talk presented to the Wilford Woodruff Family Reunion, March 1998. (Quoting remarks made by Heber J. Grant in a funeral sermon)

Moses, Phoebe Arabell Woodruff, History of Phoebe Arabell Woodruff Moses, native Pioneer of 1859, as told by herself at Willow Valley Camp, Cache County, Utah. (First-hand account of events surrounding Brigham Young Woodruff)

Woodruff, Ensign, Life History of Ensign Woodruff, written by himself, dated May 23, 1933. It and other notes attached to family group sheet of Ensign Woodruff and Isabel Shields (records of Wilford E. Woodruff, Sandy, Utah.)

Woodruff, David Patton, Life History of David Paton Woodruff from His Own Journal, written between 1925 and 1936. (First-hand account of events surrounding Brigham Young Woodruff)

Daughter of Utah Pioneers file FamilySearch have photo family group sheet of Wilford Woodruff and Sarah Brown.

Wilford Woodruff's Journals