

Wilmer's Story

My parents were William Burgess and Mariah Pulsipher. I have five sisters, three brothers, three half brothers and one half sister. My parents crossed the plains in 1848. My father filled a mission to the Indians on the Snake River in 1854.

(I was born on the first day of April, 1850 in Salt Lake City). The place I was born is located on the corner of Fourth West and North Temple, where the Union Pacific Railroad Station is today.



Wilmer Burgess

When I was eight years old, I commenced to drive oxen for my father to bring rock for the Salt Lake Temple. When I was nine I drove four oxen to my father's saw mill in what is now Park City. At that time it was called Parley's Park. All that summer I worked in the timber with my cousin George Burgess. My cousin George made seven trips across the plains when he was nine or ten years old. When I was twelve years old, my folks were called to Dixie to help build up that part of the country. George and I drove three yoke of oxen in order to get our things all moved.

In the spring of 1863 we were called to the Pine Valley Mountains. My father started a saw mill. I helped with the lumber and logging until I was sixteen.

From then on I did a lot of rambling. Part of the time I stayed on my uncle's farm. I traveled around through Nevada and Arizona with pack horses. My traveling companions were Clint McLain, Charley Ely, and Billy Higby. But McLain and myself were together the most of the time.

The year I was seventeen, I crossed Death Valley in California. Twice the Mojave Indians tried to capture us, but we escaped. We were near Las Vegas when this happened. That summer we were traveling around, the Indians surrounded us but we escaped on our horses, as they had none. We also saved six steers for the man we were working for that the Indians had stolen.

About this time, Frank Wooley was killed by the Indians. These same Indians captured W. Levitt, and Ira Hatch, just before they tried to catch us. The Indians sentenced them to death and when they were about to slay them, they asked if they could pray. When permission was given, they knelt down and began to pray. Before they were through with the prayer, about half of the braves were willing to let them go, and the other half wanted to kill them. But the chief of the tribe took them in his tent and kept them guarded until morning. Then they got them breakfast and set them free. The Indians kept their horses and they had to walk a hundred miles to Las Vegas.

In Nevada we were working for Mr. Ely on his ranch rounding up cattle. One day when I was out on a round-up, I ran across some good looking rock, so I broke off some and took it to Mr. Ely to see what it was. He was real interested. He said, "If you will show me where these rocks came from, I'll give you a horse, saddle, and bridle." At that time in my life, nothing was more important to me or any boy, than to own your

own outfit, so I took Mr. Ely to the spot and you all know what it turned out to be, a great mine. It was called the Ely mine and it produced lots of rich ore. (The gold-mining town of Ely was founded in 1868. Now more noted for the large copper mine, gold and silver are still mined there.)

When I was eighteen I went back to Pine Valley to help father in the saw mill and getting out timber for the mill. Father also had a contract to get timber out for the Tabernacle Organ and Pine Valley was the only place where white pine grew and was good for organ pipes. In the fall I spent my time riding the range and running wild cattle into Bull Valley.

In the spring of 1869 I went with my uncle to Clover Valley, Nevada to help move his folks. It was here I met my future wife, Tressie Jane Heath. She was working for my uncle's family. She was going back to her home, so I took her with me to St. George. On the twentieth of June we were married. After we married, we lived in Pine Valley for about a month, then we went to Salt Lake City. I got a job hauling ties for the railroad on the Weber River.

We returned to Washington County three weeks before Christmas. On the tenth day of January, 1870 I was called to join the Iron County District Militia of Utah, to guard against the Indians for a month and seven days. I was fired at twice by an Indian, but I shot him. I don't know whether or not I hit him, but he didn't bother me any more and I was able to save two hundred horses. His companions carried him off. There were twelve Indians on the raid, and we six guards, but some of the guards were sleeping in a log house near the horses. We sure had a bad time that night. The Indians came upon me first and I fired five shots to scare them off, that's how I shot the Indian. I

was subject to call any time, day or night, until the Indian trouble was over in 1875.

After returning home, I broke a pair of wild mules and started hauling lumber into Pioche, Nevada. I worked at team work, freighting and hauling lumber, and saw mill work until the fall of 1876. That winter I moved my family to Panaca, Nevada. But this time we had two children, Will and Eva. I spent the winter hauling and burning coal for the mines. We were making charcoal from the coal.

In the spring, we returned home to Pine Valley. I was called to make a road to Mount Turn Bow to a saw mill to haul lumber to St. George to help build the Temple on the twenty-third of June 1876.

I was called by the St. George Militia to join a military company on the Colorado River to build a fort. This was to prevent the Indians from crossing the river and to keep them away from the settlements. They had made threats that they would kill and raid as long as there was an Indian left. In the company there were about forty men. We arrived there on the fourth of July. I had charge of all the horses, and I was head scout. I was continually riding from Lee's Ferry to the Old Lite Ford, forty miles above watching the trails for Indians. Thales Haskell was our head captain at Lee's Ferry. I was continually riding and scouting around until October 15, 1874. Then we had a peace conference and made peace with the Indians. I was released and got home the first of November – I believe I got home on Sunday. On Tuesday, I was called to take a band of horses to Lee's Ferry Fort to trade to the Indians. These horses were traded to the Indians to keep them from going into the settlements.

At the time we made the peace treaty with the Indians, we promised to keep a trading post at Lee's

Ferry so they could trade their Navajo blankets and other things for horses and supplies. Jim Heath, Jacob Hamblin and his son Ben, accompanied me on this trip. There were five men at the fort when we got there, including Captain Haskell and his men. I had the job of head trader. I traded about seventeen head that trip. I got into a dispute with them, and twenty five Indians gathered around me with their bows and arrows ready to shoot. The chief's daughter, twenty years old, stepped in and crowded the Indians back. She said, "You will have to give me a horse for saving your life." I asked the chief if it would be all right and he said, "Yes." So that settled that trouble.

The chief's daughter gave me many presents and wanted me to go home with her. The chief said he would protect me if I would go, and he had two other daughters who were just as pretty, and I could have one or two or all three. I told him I had a wife, and three children. He said that was all right – I could bring them also, so I told him I would talk to my wife about it. I gathered and sold about three hundred head of horses to the Indians that winter.

The captain gave me the privilege of coming home that winter, and on the nineteenth of January, our twin girls (Terrilla Vilate and Terrissa Louisa) were born. But they only lived until the twenty-fifth of February. We buried them in Pine Valley.

On the first of April, I was notified to take my family and go back to the fort. We got as far as Navajo Springs where I met Captain Haskell. He told me the mission was broken up by the fort. I was given an honorable release. We returned home to Pine Valley and I took my oxen and went to logging. Our daughter Frona was born the twentieth of May, 1876. I worked steady with the oxen until the fall of 1879 hauling logs

for the saw mill.

I would like to relate a beautiful, awesome experience on one of my trips to St. George with a load of lumber from my father's mill.

I was driving four oxen, and oxen are slow and stubborn, so when I got to the foot of the grade we had to climb, the oxen refused to budge. No amount of nice talk would faze them, so I had to use some strong cuss words and the whip. Finally they started up the hill. We finally made it to the top, and I allowed them to rest a spell. When I started up, I discovered a man walking beside me and he was all dressed up, had on a gray suit, and hat, and his hair was gray. I was startled to say the least, because we were miles from St. George or any other place and I couldn't imagine how he had gotten there. There was no kind of conveyance in sight. He started to talk to me. He said, "I see you had a lot of trouble at the bottom of the hill." "Yes," I said, "and I had a lot of help." "Who?" he asked? "I had the devil and all his imps," I said. "Yes," he said, "and that's what I want to talk to you about. Young fellow, you must change your ways and go to the temple and have your children and wife sealed to you, for the Lord has a big work for you to do." This aroused my curiosity and I had so many questions to ask.

About this time the oxen were getting lazy again so I turned to touch them with the whip, and when I turned back the man was nowhere to be seen. I looked all around, stopped the oxen, climbed up on the lumber and looked in all directions. The place where I was quite a flat country and I could see a long distance, but there was no sign of him. Well, this really gave me food for thought. I really thought and wondered. I could hardly wait until I could get back to Pine Valley. But I did have to get to St. George, unload, let the oxen

eat, and rest, so I couldn't leave until morning.

As soon as I got home I went directly to my dad and asked him what it all meant. He said, "He is a messenger from our Father in Heaven, and I'm sure he is one of the Nephite Prophets." The next day I went to my mother's father, who was a patriarch (Zerah Pulsipher). I repeated the story and he said the same, that he was a messenger and was one of the Nephite Prophets. Believe me, I changed my ways. My wife and I went to the temple and we were married for time and eternity and had our children sealed to us. Also the twins we lost.

Years later, when I was fulfilling my calling, I always walked to and from the temple. I was on the east side of the temple about ready to go in when this same man joined me and said he was very glad to see me working in the temple. Again I was going to ask some questions, but he disappeared right before my eyes.

In the spring of 1879 I was called by Apostle Snow to go to Arizona or other places, Freemont Valley, or Wayne County to help build up settlements. On the fifteenth of August, 1879, our son John was born. He was our second son. Apostle Snow gave me the choice of going to Nevada, or Arizona. I told him we could not live there, it was too hot. He asked me where I would rather go, and I told him I wanted to go to Rabbit Valley, Wayne County, or Freemont Valley. At the time I was called, sixty other men and their families were called.

The reason why we were called was the scarcity of timber and farming land where we were living. They wanted all the young people to get homes for themselves, and settle down. On the fifteenth of October we started to Rabbit Valley. In the party was

Joe Meeks, my brother-in-law and his family; Orson Robbins, another brother-in-law, and family; Jim Burgess, my brother and family; and Ben Clark and family. We arrived there on the fifth day of November. We laid out our town site. I was put in as Presiding Elder.

We soon built a small settlement and named it Thurber after A. K. Thurber who owned a small ranch there. Later my Father and I bought his ranch. Soon after we arrived in our new place, many other families followed us, making eighty families in all.

We each had a farm of one hundred and sixty acres. I built the first house, helped haul the first logs for the school house and helped put it up. We stayed there about five years. We made butter and cheese, and lumber and shingles. Our daughter Della was born there on May fifth, in 1882.

In 1885 we were called to go to Huntington, Emery county, to make shingles and lumber. That same year our daughter Emma was born on the seventh of July, 1885. We stayed there, then moved to Price, Carbon County. Our daughter Bertha was born there on the eighteenth of January, 1888.

I bought four acres of land and built a house on it. Soon afterwards I started hauling freight from Price to Fort Duchesne and Vernal. I worked at this for twenty years. Our last child, a daughter was born March second, 1892. We called her Effie. We liked the country out around Fort Duchesne, so after the Uintah Reservation was thrown open for settlement, my son John and son-in-law Ross Peterson, and Jim Peterson and myself made a trip out there and John filed on a hundred and sixty acres. I furnished the money. Jim Peterson furnished the money for his brother Ross to file on a hundred and sixty acres also. They filed in the

fall of 1906.

At that time this was located about one half mile below what later became Hayden. In the spring of 1907, we moved most of our families out. We began farming, although the land was awfully rocky. Some had to clear the land of both rocks and sage brush. We were also raising a few cattle. We built a house when we first moved out.

In the fall, mother, Della, and her son Joe, Effie and Bertha, John and his family went back to the coal camp to work for the winter and we lived in their house until they came back in the spring. Then we moved up on the corner of John's land and lived in some tents until just before Christmas 1907 and by then I had built a log cabin in Hayden. We were very glad to get into a nice warm cabin. Later we added two rooms on the back.

John also built a blacksmith shop near our house and he had a big room on the back, so some of the girls and little Joe slept out there.

I have helped to build up eight small towns. Hayden, Neola, Hebron, Pine Valley, Pierrear, Thurber, Huntington, and Price.

After we had lived in Hayden a few years, I filed on a homestead of eighty acres north of the town of Hayden. We lived there for several years. During this time we made several trips to Price with a team.

In 1921 we sold our place in Hayden, and moved to Salt Lake for the rest of our lives. I have worked in the Temple ever since, up to August 14, 1927. I have gone through the temple for twelve hundred men, besides doing their ordinance work. My wife and I were sealed in the St. George Temple. I started working in the temple before I received my recommend. My wife and I went to meeting one day, and the bishop and one of the sisters asked me if I would like to work in the

temple. I told them I would, but didn't have my recommend. The bishop told me to go to the temple on Wednesday, and my recommend would be there, and it was. I was born under the covenant and I know the gospel is true and if we live as we should we will earn a great reward.

We have two sons and eight daughters, including our twins who died as infants. At the present time we are visiting our son and family at his home in Neola. Sode, John's wife, is writing this history for me. We have been here five weeks and Effie and Ray are here to take us back to Salt Lake tomorrow.

I have had many wonderful faith promoting events in my life, and I am eternally grateful for them.

Aunt Effie said, "Dad continued his temple work going every day except Saturday and Sunday. He walked from Ninth South and Second West up and back. He came home one cold day in January with a cold from which he never recovered. On his way home from the temple he had fallen, due to a new snow fall and he laid there quite a while until some school girls came along and helped him get on his feet. He got pneumonia. We called the doctor, doped him up and they put mustard poltices on him but he didn't want to stay in bed. In fact he was in bed only one day. He got home Friday evening and died on Monday morning. That's the only time I remember seeing him in bed sick. He died January 29, 1932."