

A Life History Of Sophronia Strobridge Cook

This history is based on “A Life Sketch of Sophronia Strobridge Cook”, written by Gertrude Cook Jackson and Henry Freeman Wilcox. The date of the writing is not known. There are three variations of the “Life Sketch” in the Sophronia Cook file at “The Pioneer Memorial Museum” of The International Society Daughters of the Utah Pioneers (DUP), 300 North Main Street, Salt Lake City, Utah. The earliest date of histories deposited is June of 2001.



The file also contains information on Sophronia furnished in February 1961 by Margaret Dayton Hughes, which appears to be foundational information for the “Life Sketch”; a brief synopsis of Sophronia’s life by Rebecca V. Hardy Poland (no date of deposit); and a Life Sketch of Lutie Bassett Swensen (who is a granddaughter of Sophronia) which provided a description of the Rock Fort in Cedar Fort. All of this material is listed in the Bibliography. For this history we also drew on excerpts from the histories of her husband, Henry Freeman Cook, Julia Ann Bercier/Rocker (Henry Freeman Cook’s second wife), Lucy Chapman Cook (Henry Freeman Cook’s mother), William Cook (Henry Freeman Cook’s son), and Adrian David Cook (Henry Freeman Cook’s grandson through his son David Franklin Cook). Again, all references are footnoted and sources cited in the bibliography.

Sophronia Strobridge Cook was born 14 March 1813 in Solon, Cortland County, New York. She was the daughter of George Augustus and Abigail Lull Strobridge. [In our branch of the family her birthday has come to mean quite a day. There has been a grandson, a great-grandson and a great-great-great-great granddaughter born on her birthday—Margie Taylor Martin.]

Her father was born 3 September 1785 in Claremont, Sullivan County, New Hampshire. She married 9 April 1837 in New York State, Henry Freeman Cook. Soon after her marriage she and her husband, along with her husband’s parents and other families moved to Comstock, Kalamazoo, Michigan. This new land, which they helped to pioneer, must have brought many hardships. The histories of Michigan say that insects were terrible and that diseases were rampant in the soil. Four of their children were born in Comstock: John, 22 May 1838; James, 14 January 1840; Hannah, 22 January 1842; and Mary Jane, 2 January 1844. They heard the gospel and accepted it there in Comstock. Sophronia was baptized in March 1843; her husband Henry Freeman Cook was baptized the 15th of May 1843.

Some time after the birth of their fourth child and before the birth of their fifth one, Charles, 21 February 1846, born in Nauvoo, they left Michigan and moved to Nauvoo to be near the other saints. [Charles died 10 September 1846 on the Des Moines River in Iowa.] When they arrived the persecution of the saints had already begun, so they were not allowed to remain in Nauvoo very long. They, along with other families, went to Council Bluffs, Pottawattamie, Iowa.

They lived in Council Bluffs, or near it, for three or four years. Their home was in a heavily wooded area, the homes being a long way apart. One day when her husband was away helping a neighbor, one of the children became very ill. Her son John, who was the eldest of the children, was sent through the woods several miles to get the doctor, and had a frightening experience with a black panther.

He was on his way back home when he noticed a very black panther following him. He was very frightened but took time to break a limb from a hickory tree. Then he remembered that his father had told him that if he were to ever meet a wild animal he was never to turn his back, but to walk backwards and face it. He did as his father had told him and walked backwards for a long way. It became dark before he arrived home, but the panther did not attack him. When he told his mother about his experience.

She told him she had been praying constantly for his safety. When his father came home, they showed him the limb John had broken from the hickory tree. His father tried to break the limb but could not. They knew the Lord had protected their son and given him the strength he needed. 4 They joined the company at Kaneshville, Iowa in June of 1852—Margaret Dayton Hughes. 5 In those days there were many Indian scares. A rock fort was built for protection of the Saints. It was about a half-acre square and wide enough for a steer to walk on top. The church was inside and provisions were stored and kept replenished for emergency use—Lorette S. Hansen.

Their sixth child, William, born 19 October 1847, and their seventh, George, born 20 March 1850, were born in Council Bluffs. Soon after the birth of George they moved to St. Louis, Missouri where they prepared for the trip to the West.

They traveled with the Warren Snow Company. They joined the company at Kaneshville, Iowa in June of 1852. They had one cow in their Ox Team that was giving milk. Every morning the milk left from their meals was put in a bucket and hung under the wagon. The swaying of the wagon churned the milk so that each night they had a pattie of butter to use the next day. They must have experienced a great many trials on their trip but they were people with a vision and accepted them as they came along.

They arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in October 1852. They stayed at Big Cottonwood (or Fort Union) for the winter and until after the birth of their eighth child, Harriet Ann, born 20 May 1853. Sometime during this year they moved on to Cedar Valley, Utah County, Utah where they helped to colonize the town of Cedar Fort. In those days there were many Indian scares. A rock fort was built for protection of the Saints. It was about a half-acre square and wide enough for a steer to walk on top. The church was inside and provisions were stored and kept replenished for emergency use. Their little Harriet Ann died the 25th of March 1854, and was one of the first to be buried in the old Cedar Fort Cemetery. Their ninth and tenth children, twin girls, Marrett and Jannett, were born in Cedar Fort, 17 March 1856.

Sophonria Strobridge Cook was a refined, kind, generous, courageous and faithful woman. She had a child-like faith, which she exercised on many occasions. One story of her great faith that has come down to us is vouched for by one of her great-grandsons, Henry Freeman Wilcox, who heard her tell it many times. On crossing the river in their exodus from Nauvoo, there were many people, wagons, cattle and other stock which all caused a great confusion. Many of them were crossing by ferryboat, the Cooks among them, and in the confusion of the day their little six-year old son, James, was accidentally left on the other side of the river. It was getting late and a storm was

brewing when it was discovered that James was not with the other children. The man with the ferryboat refused to make another trip, because of the storm, which was whipping up great waves. Sophronia was frantically trying to find someone with a boat who would take her across. She knew a small boy in a strange place and in a storm wouldn't have "much chance of survival". She found many men with boats, but none who would take her across.

One man with a small rowboat finally told her that he would do it, but he knew his small boat would be swamped before it had gone more than a few feet. Then Sophronia promised him in the name of the Lord that if he would take her he would be able to make the trip over and back safely. He was so impressed by her faith that he said he would try. Almost immediately the wind died down and waves quieted. They were able to make the trip across the river, find the boy, and return. Upon their return the storm began again with greater intensity.

Sophronia had spunk as well as faith. One day while they were living in a log cabin within the old Cedar Fort, she had churned and was washing the churn when the door flew open and two drunken soldiers burst in. She ordered them out, but they refused to go. She hit one with the churn dash she still had in her hand and knocked him out. Then she took the other one by the nape of the neck and threw him out. Camp Floyd was only five miles from Cedar Fort and the soldiers caused the settlers almost as much trouble as the Indians. One time when the Indians were particularly bad, they and seven children spent one winter in a dugout twelve feet by fourteen feet dug into the bank of the Jordan River.

She took good care of her family until they married and had homes of their own. She then assisted them in every way she could. It is remembered by family members how she helped her daughter Hannah dry bushels of apples, apricots, plums and peaches during the summer to send to Dingle, Idaho to those of the family who had moved from Cedar Fort to the cold Bear Lake country—Margaret Dayton Hughes. 7 Margaret Dayton Hughes writes: Her faith was always strong in the Church. She lived each of the principles of the gospel to the letter, as she knew and understood them. She always maintained that she witnessed the appearance of one of the Three Nephites and partook of his assistance in time of need. It was in the early days in Cedar Fort. The food supply was very meager, consisting mostly of poor beef and greens. Everything to make bread had all been consumed. Consequently the people of the little settlement were really suffering with hunger. The meat and greens diet caused an epidemic of dysentery. At the height of the sickness a man came to the Cook home and left a good sized sack of refined, white flour with instructions that it be distributed among the sick, not to be used as bread, but mixed with water and drank as a cure for the dysentery. He left as suddenly as he had come. There was nothing on the flour sack to indicate where it had come from, and on following the man outside she could find no trace of him. Sophronia and the rest felt the incident was an act of God, which saved their lives in a time of need. 8 At her death she was survived by five of her ten children, eighty grandchildren, one hundred nineteen great-grandchildren and five great great grandchildren. Her funeral services were held in the meetinghouse on July 26th and was largely attended, many coming from other places.

She was very industrious and very neat. She told her great-grandson that her family raised their own hemp and flax to weave the linen. She still had pieces of clothing and some of the thread when she died. She had a place for everything in her home and everything was kept in its place. It was said of her that she could go in the dark and put her hands on anything in her house she wanted. The thought of eating any wild meat was very repulsive to her and since wild meat was often the only kind the settlers had to eat she no doubt went without the food she needed many

times. One of her grandsons at one time decided it would be great fun to fool her. He had some venison cooked up, took it to her and told her it was lamb. She ate it and enjoyed it but when he found out how much it would have upset her to know, he never dared to tell her what it was.

Sophronia was generous with the things the Lord had blessed her with. No one ever went away from her home hungry. When the Relief Society was organized in Cedar Fort, she was chosen as the President with Phebe Rodeback as her second counselor. A short time later Phebe became her first counsel with Martha Wilcox as her second counselor. These three sisters served in this capacity for many years. While she was the President of the Relief Society, the sisters were asked by President Brigham Young to glean and store the wheat from the wheat fields left by the harvesters. Many people said the wheat would not keep. They said weevil would soon destroy it. Sophronia told the sisters that a Prophet of the Lord had told them it was the thing to do and as far as she was concerned she was going to obey. Time proved her right. She also served as the Bishop's wife. Her husband was sustained as Bishop in June 1876.

She learned to live in polygamy, too, when her husband took a second wife, which could not have been easy as she still had young children. Margaret Dayton Hughes writes: Her faith was always strong in the Church. She lived each of the principles of the gospel to the letter, as she knew and understood them. She always maintained that she witnessed the appearance of one of the Three Nephites and partook of his assistance in time of need. It was in the early days in Cedar Fort. The food supply was very meager, consisting mostly of poor beef and greens. Everything to make bread had all been consumed. Consequently the people of the little settlement were really suffering with hunger. The meat and greens diet caused an epidemic of dysentery. At the height of the sickness a man came to the Cook home and left a good sized sack of refined, white flour with instructions that it be distributed among the sick, not to be used as bread, but mixed with water and drank as a cure for the dysentery. He left as suddenly as he had come. There was nothing on the flour sack to indicate where it had come from, and on following the man outside she could find no trace of him. Sophronia and the rest felt the incident was an act of God, which saved their lives in a time of need.

During the last years of her life she was cared for by her daughter Hannah Cook Dayton. One night her great-grandson, Henry Freeman Wilcox, was privileged to observe how great her faith was. He said it has been a testimony to him all of his life. His grandmother, Hannah, became very ill in the middle of the night and sent him to bring her mother, Sophronia. He was just a young boy and by the time he had lighted a lamp, aroused Sophronia and helped her get up and into her daughter's room, his grandmother had lost consciousness. He helped Sophronia, and she knelt by the bed, placed her hands on her daughter's head and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, Hannah, arise." She opened her eyes and said, "Mother". Freeman said he would never forget the feeling that came over him to see his grandmother healed before his eyes.

Sophronia passed away⁸ the 24th of July 1909. She is buried in Cedar Fort Cemetery, beside her husband. She and her husband have a large posterity. They have left us a great example to follow with their faith and courage in accepting a new religion and in their pioneering of new lands.

At her death she was survived by five of her ten children, eighty grandchildren, one hundred nineteen great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren. Her funeral services were held in the meetinghouse on July 26th and was largely attended, many coming from other places.

Contributors were Lucile C. Christofferson, 442 East 500 North, Lehi, Utah 84043; December 3, 2004 Barbara Anderson, 759 East 525 North, Morgan, Utah 84050; April 3, 1995 Margie Taylor Martin Margaret Dayton Hughes; February 1961 Lorette S. Hansen in the "Life of Lutie Bassett Swensen", page 1. (Lutie Murette Bassett is the daughter of William H. Bassett and Murette Cook). Rebecca V. Hardy Poland, 3779 South 4800 West, West Valley City, Utah 84120 Phyllis Cook Bennett; June 14, 2001 "The History of the Life of Sophronia Strobridge Cook" written by Margaret Dayton Hughes, February 1961

The Cook-Strobridge-Rocker Family Association

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