

GEORGE SPEIRS

Born November 6, 1836

Pioneer - Missionary - Trail Blazer

George Speirs was a pioneer of Utah, born at Bridge Water, Beaver County, Pennsylvania, November 6, 1836. His father, Thomas Speirs, was born July 14th, 1804, near Edinburgh, Scotland, emigrated to America in the year 1825, married Mary Cochran, December 29th, 1829, at Pittsburg, Pa., joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and settled with them at Nauvoo, in the year 1839, from which place he, with the body of the church was driven in the year 1846, and two years later arrived in the Rocky Mountains, making his home in the 10th Ward, Salt Lake City, Utah. He died July 8th, 1877.

Mary Cochran Speirs, his mother, of Irish descent, was born September 30th, 1804, near Portland, Me., and remained a true and devoted wife and mother until her death, June 20th, 1871. Her parents were pioneers in Maine, where they resided for a good many years preceding the American Revolution in which her father took part.

Thomas and Mary Speirs had born to them five children as follows: Mary Pendleton Speirs, Adam Speirs, George Speirs, Orson Speirs, and Harrison Speirs.

George Speirs came to Utah with his parents in 1848 when he was twelve years old.

His father and mother became converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through the teachings of Orson Pratt and forsaking their good home, relatives and friends and a prosperous business, gladly joined the new movement.

There, they, with their family numbering four sons, Adam, George, Orson, and Harrison, and one daughter, Mary, endured many hardships, trying to make a new home in a sparsely settled country, deprived of comforts and many necessities. Many of their company became ill of "fever and ague", but, quoting from memoranda of Adam Speirs, George's oldest brother, "Through the providence of God, our family was preserved."

Seven years of George's boyhood were spent here, during which time he witnessed the rapid growth of Nauvoo, the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the desecration of the Temple by the mob that finally drove the Mormons from the city in 1846.

George's father thereupon secured three teams and wagons, the family packed their household goods, leaving all bulky furniture and started west, spending a year in Montrose, then going to Winter Quarters, where they passed the winter of 1847. George, with his brothers and sister, attended school in a log building erected under the direction of President Brigham Young. Eli B. Kelsey was their teacher.

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In July 1848 they started out again, this time on the much longer journey across the plains to Salt Lake Valley in the company led by Amasa M. Lyman, George helping with the driving of the teams. They saw thousands of buffalo and other wild animals and passed through large Indian villages—mostly Sioux, but were not molested by them. In fact, according to Adam, "We were treated better by the Indians than by the so-called Christians that we left behind."

The family arrived in Salt Lake Valley October 17, 1848, the year following the settlement of the original pioneers. They began immediately "gathering logs" from the canyons with which to build a shelter for the coming winter which finally consisted of log sides and canvas top. The canvas was from

severe. Many cattle being lost through lack of enough food for them, they had to depend entirely on what they could pick above the snow, since the crops put in by earlier settlers the preceding season had been largely destroyed by crickets, also many of their cattle were stolen by the Indians. However, the family did not suffer much, having been able to provide sufficiently for themselves and even being able to go on half rations, to help others less fortunate.

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Being a blacksmith by trade, Thomas Speirs and his sons built a shop of logs secured in the canyons and George spent the next several years helping in the shop and attending school in the old Council House, also exploring the surrounding country. During the years, the old Speirs home was erected, a two-story adobe, on the corner of what is now known as Sixth South and Eighth East Streets in the Tenth Ward, where a group of four of the first "Gold Diggers of 1849" on their way to California, were entertained.

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In the spring of 1854, after taking an active part in exploration work, he was called, along with seventeen or eighteen young men, including President Joseph F. Smith, to go on a mission to the Hawaiian Islands. He helped in planning the trip over the desert region and they started their journey which lasted six weeks.

After arriving in California, they worked until they earned enough to pay their passage to the Islands where they arrived in September 1854. George was in the Islands approximately four years. He soon learned the language and became a capable missionary.

In 1905, on the occasion of the reunion of the "Trailblazers," George, along with some of the other men who were still alive, were the honored guests of Senator William A. Clark.

They were taken on a train over "The Salt Lake Route," now known as the Union Pacific route, which was the trail they blazed to California fifty years before.

They were given the best hotel accommodations in Los Angeles and were treated royally by the railroad company.

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On Feb. 11, 1861, George married Adeline Pamilla Harris, whose family had come to Utah from England also as converts of the church, enduring all the attendant hardships. The marriage took place in the Endowment House. Eight children were born to them: Adeline, George, Thomas, Mary, Lucy, Annie, Jessie and William, all of whom grew to maturity, married and had families. George built a home for his family in the Tenth Ward on the corner of 5th South and 7th East. During the early years of his married life he was in partnership with George Pope. They opened a rock quarrie in the small canyon south of Emigration, of which they held possession until the early nineties.

In 1904 George was made custodian of the old abandoned Copper Plant on the Jordan River near 10th North, where he established his residence, remaining there until his death on March 6, 1911. His wife died on October 6, 1896. All eight of his children and twenty-six grand children survived him at the time of his death.