

Biography of Reuben Collett

Pendock, England, is a small village in southern Worcestershire, ten miles northwest of the city of Gloucester. Here on 19 July 1839, a third son and fourth child was born to Daniel and Esther Jones Collett. He was christened Reuben.

The following year was a memorable one for this family as the Gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was brought to them through the missionary work of Wilford Woodruff. Daniel, his parents, William and Elizabeth Bromage Collett; his two sisters, Ann and Elizabeth, were among the more than eighteen hundred who were baptized that year, 1840.

Immediately, the family began preparations for emigration to America. When they sailed, 10 May 1841, on the ship "Harmony" from Bristol, Reuben would have been not quite two years of age, Sylvanus six and Rhoda Sylvia four.

They landed at Quebec, Canada, then journeyed to Nauvoo, Illinois, which was their home for the next five years. There two sisters were born and died. At seven years of age he would remember having to leave his home in Nauvoo and, in the exodus of the saints, cross the Mississippi River into Iowa. He might have recalled in latter years that in camp on Sugar Creek, Lee County, Iowa, his sister, Mary Ann, was born in a wagon box.

The three years at Winter Quarters, where his father, a blacksmith and wheelwright, built wagons, carts and other conveyances for those moving west, and a sister Elizabeth Matilda was born at Council Bluffs across the river, would be well remembered for he was ten years old when their westward journey began in 1849. They traveled in the Ezra Taft Benson Company, arriving at Salt Lake City the twenty-seventh of October.

Reuben's youngest sister, Julia Ann, was born at Mill Creek, southeast Salt Lake City, where they made their first home in the valley. The stay here was short and the year 1851 found them in Lehi, Utah County. Eight years were spent in this town where two brothers, Charles Albert Capper and James Jones, joined the family and his mother, Esther Jones Collett, died 4 June 1857.

Reuben, eighteen years of age, was called to the Salmon River Mission at Fort Limhi in Idaho. His brother, Sylvanus returned from the fort that same year and their paths crossed. The mission being abandoned the following spring, March 1858, Reuben arrived back in Lehi some time later.

The next move came in 1859 to Plain City, northwest of Ogden, where their stay was of only one year's duration. Reuben and his father plowed the first irrigation ditch, with an ox team, in this vicinity.

Smithfield, Cache County, Utah, their next home, 1860, was the final move for Reuben's father. He passed away there 8 June 1894. Among others pioneering this town came the Merrills. There were four marriages between children of these two stalwart families. The first one, 17 January 1861, was that of Reuben Collett and Elthura Roseltha Merrill, daughter of Samuel Beamus and Elizabeth Gardner Runyon Merrill. It was also the first marriage to be performed in Smithfield.

This couple's first six children were born in Smithfield; Phoebe Teressa, 24 July 1862, died 16 January 1863; Reuben Samuel 26 May 1864; Sylvester Daniel and Sylvanus (twins) 15 December 1866; Julia Ann, 20 February 1869; Adelbert Teancum, 3 November 1872. Reuben Samuel arrived during the absence of his father who was on a trip to Missouri for emigrants. During this time they were endowed and sealed in the Endowment House, 23 December 1865.

Reuben was actively engaged in farming and stock raising, owning, at one time, around four hundred acres near the town of Smithfield. He operated one of the first horse-powered threshing machines in Cache Valley. In the late fall of 1866, while working at Weston, Idaho twenty miles northwest of Smithfield, he had the misfortune to catch his glove in the gears of the thresher, while oiling the machinery. His right arm was pulled in and mangled to the elbow. After much difficulty freeing him, he was placed in a wagon and the long drive, through mud and snow, to Smithfield began. A man on horseback was dispatched to Logan for a doctor, who plodded his way to the little town by team. How many precious hours all this took has not been recorded—but when the doctor did arrive, he had no tools for the operation. It was a neighbor, Mr. Green, who brought his old time meat saw and butcher knife. With these crude instruments the arm was amputated. He survived this ordeal very well.

Reuben was twenty-seven years of age at this time. Such a handicap might have deterred a lesser man—but Reuben overcame this difficulty and it did not seem to curtail his activities in any way. While living in Smithfield, he operated a sawmill in Hard Scrabble Canyon, Morgan County, Utah.

The town of Corinne, Utah, also known as "The Burge on the Bear," born of the railroad, was for a few years the "Gateway to Montana" and its mines. Being the last town on the long line of the Union Pacific Railroad, all goods for the northwestern states were deposited there and hauled by freight wagons to destinations mostly in Idaho and Montana. During these years, 1869-1872, Reuben Collett was one of these freighters, hauling supplies to the different mining towns.

An incident, which occurred on one of the trips, is of interest. Reuben, in company with George Merrill, was loaded with Chinamen bound for Helena, Montana, at so much a head, payable on delivery and kept out of the Chinamen's wages. As they neared Helena, the Chinamen threw off their bundles, jumped from the wagon and tried to escape. They had to be subdued with whips.

On arriving at the mining camp there was no one to receive the cargo and the Chinamen began to scatter. The trick was that if they could get away and mix with the hundreds of their country men there, they could not be indentified and the receiver would not have to pay for freight undelivered. George Merrill stood over them with a whip and six shooter until Reuben hunted up the man, then they were released to their new owner.

In 1873, the Collett family moved to Bear Lake County, Idaho—first settling at Nounan and later Bennington, five miles north of Montpelier, where Charles Merrill was born 6 June 1875. That fall came another move—this time to Cokeville, Wyoming, where Reuben's brother Sylvanus and John Boren had been the first white settlers. There a coal mine was worked and coke ovens were built to process the coal—therefore the name of Cokeville. Here Reuben followed the cattle and sheep business.

He made good friends with the many Indians in the valley, learning their language and dealing fairly with them at his Trading Post. In this way he followed the admonition of Brigham Young that "It is better to feed the Redman than to fight them."

From Cokeville the Collett family moved to Circleville and then to Escalante, Garfield County, Utah, in the fall of 1877. This was an isolated little town on a creek by the same name, sixty miles from the Colorado River, cut off in winter, by big snowbound mountains, from the outside world. If the little flour mill froze up, the people would often have to subsist on corn bread and molasses until spring.

Here a home was purchased and the front room fixed up for a store and the Post Office. He also acquired sheep and cattle, as there was a good summer range and they could winter on the desert southeast of town. A daughter, Princetta, was born on 11 January 1878.

Reuben was chosen first counselor to Bishop Andrew P. Schow. He and the Bishop scouted eighty miles along the Colorado River for a possible crossing and for making a wagon road at the time of the "Hole-in-the-Rock" Expedition which was making its way to Bluff, San Juan County, Utah. In 1879, he acted as guide to a scouting party headed by Lemuel H. Redd.

As Town Constable, reuben Collett, had many experiences enforcing the law. One happened in November of 1878, when partners, Boyington and Phips, quarreled at their ranch south of Escalante, and Phips was killed. The constable arrested Boyington and brought him to Escalante. Here he was held at the Collett home for preliminary hearing, then taken to the county seat, Panguitch, for trial. He was given the death penalty.

The move to Lehi (Mesa) Arizona, beginning in April 1881, was a tremendous undertaking. With seven children (the youngest, Princetta, only three years old and

the eldest, Reuben Samuel, seventeen), wagons, horses and two hundred head of cattle, it must have been quite a spectacle. The twins, Vest and Vean, were fourteen years old so they were of great help, as were Julia, twelve and Dell, nine. However, it was often a trying experience for Charles. He got into many predicaments, as a six-year old will, and had to be “rescued.”

The family had several wild experiences. On one occasion the boys were watering the cattle at a spring in a canyon gorge and R.S. (Reuben Samuel) the eldest son was riding a wild horse which became frightened, fell, broke his hind leg and had to be shot.

The route taken was south from Escalante across the desert range where they gathered cattle. The road was very rough—just a cow trail. On many occasions, the wagons were held upright by man-force. Other times they had to be let down over steep sandstone slopes.

Arriving at the Colorado River, which was reached after winding and sliding down gorges and canyons with towering walls hundreds of feet high, they found the water high at the crossing. The ferry was a rude flat boat, propelled by men with oars, which would hold one team and wagon.

The river had eddies on either side with a very swift current through the center. The boat would be pushed off, carried upstream by the eddy until it came in contact with the current, then the oarsmen would pull for dear life to cross the center. By the time they cut the current, the boat would be well below the place of taking off. Caught in the opposite eddy the craft would be carried upstream to the landing place. It took as many of these hair-raising trips as there were teams and wagons. The family was taken across in a small skiff, which went through the same experience.

A different process was used with the cattle and loose horses. They were driven down another side canyon some two miles up the river and shoved off into the water, with the expectation that they would land where the wagons were. Some of the teams were driven to the upper end of the landing to attract the other horses. They landed, but the cattle swam right on past. The swift current carried them like drift wood down the stream for about a mile where they landed on a small rock slide under a cliff, on the wrong side. The small space would not accommodate all of the, so they were in the water for a day and a night.

A raft was built of logs tied with ropes and on it R.S. floated down to herd the cattle into the river. They swam on another mile, only to land on the same side again. Once more they were forced into the water and this time they landed on the other side at the mouth of a small canyon, three miles below the wagons, through which they were driven. Only one calf was lost.

After leaving the Colorado they passed through a wilderness country which was covered with cedar and pine. Water was very scarce and the cattle suffered, some of them dying. Reuben had large barrels lashed to the sides of the wagons to carry water for the family, but sometimes this supply would run out. In that case, the people would have to share with the cattle in mud springs and "pot holes" in the rocks, many of which contained water the year around. It had to be strained through a cloth to separate the wigglers and bugs.

Desirous of getting some better water, Elthura and daughter, Julia, took a bucket and went on a search, while waiting for the men to come in with the cattle. They walked several miles and came to a big canyon which they decided to descend. Down they dropped from ledge to ledge not thinking of their return. When the water was procured and the way back started, they were dismayed to find places which they could not climb. There was no thought of giving up or abandoning the precious water. Elthura would boost Julia up a ledge, hand her the bucket and climb up with her aid. They finally reached the top and eventually the camp, but it was long after dark.

In the meantime, Reuben and the boys had brought the cattle in. Many had become crazy from thirst. As they approached a smooth, steep incline an enraged cow made for Sylvanus. He ran down the hill with her after him. They both fell, but fortunately in the opposite directions. The cow was killed but the boy escaped injury.

Early one afternoon, they came to a large "tank" of water, the level of which was too far down for the cattle to reach. By tying ropes on the buckets it could be bailed out and poured in smaller "pot holes" in the sandstone. It took all afternoon to water the herd. While the boys were doing this, Reuben went scouting to find grass for feed, which was discovered about four miles from the camp through a dense thicket of cedar and pine.

At almost dark, the watering was finished and the three, R.S., Vest and Vean, started the foot-sore and tired animals for the night feed. As time passed, the parents began to get uneasy and Reuben decided to set a tree afire as a beacon, then fearing it might be seen by the Indians it was put out. As yet they had seen no Indians, although several battle grounds were known to be near, but the fear of them was always present. It was twelve o'clock before the tired and weary boys came into camp, ready for their hard slab beds.

When they arrived at the San Juan River, some ten miles below the town of Bluff, they camped for a week to let the cattle rest. Some of them had become too sore-footed to travel and had been left behind. During the week, these were brought up to the main herd. This camp was on the Navajo Indian Reservation. One day two Indians swam the river for a visit. The next day they came again with a dressed goat on their backs as a token of friendship.

The journey continued with the same routine of travel until they came to Mancos, Colorado where they camped in the mountains for three weeks of rest and recuperation. There was a fine range with grass and water claimed by a man from Denver. During the Indian trouble several hundred of his horses had been stolen and scattered over the country. The boys were hired to round them up, and Reuben bought and traded for some of them.

While Reuben was in Durango selling some beef cattle, an Indian came into camp. He was very frightened as he had been shot through the upper arm. Elthura dressed the wound and allowed him to stay for the night. Sometime in the very early hours of the morning, he left without anyone knowing it. On the way home, Reuben met him and was told of the incident. He said, "Your squaw fix-em arm."

In early August, they broke camp and traveled down into New Mexico. After leaving the town of Fruitland on the upper San Juan, they had to pass through the Navajo Indian Reservation for a distance of about ninety miles, so an interpreter and guide was hired to go as far as Gallup, New Mexico.

At that time the Santa Fe Railroad was under construction and they followed this route as far as Holbrook, Arizona, on the Little Colorado River. From that point they expected to go south over the White Mountains through the Apache Reservation. Since these Indians were on the warpath, the government had closed the route to travelers. Reuben had planned to go through the Gila Valley to the San Pedro, but having to take the other route, they went west to Flagstaff, thence to Phoenix and then to Lehi (Mesa), arriving in October 1881. Because of the warring Indians, Reuben's hopes of making the San Pedro Valley his destination had to be given up. He visited this valley several times, as his oldest sister, Rhoda, lived at St. David.

During the five years in Lehi, three more children were born to Reuben and Elthura: Orrin, 16 July 1882, died 22 December 1883; Roseltha May, 27 April 1884; and Clarence James, 5 May 1886. In 1883, R.S. left on a mission to England.

On two different occasions, Reuben was called by Church Authorities to head exploring parties through southern Arizona and old Mexico. One of these groups was composed of President John Taylor, Heber J. Grant and others. He served as a counselor to Bishop Thomas Jones of Lehi and was a member of the High Council of Maricopa Stake.

On 2 June 1886, Sylvanus married Sara Elizabeth Simkins. That same year R.S. returned to Salt Lake City from his mission and was soon called to Vernal, Uintah County, Utah to be a counselor to President Samuel R. Bennion in that newly formed Stake. He wrote his father of the wonderful possibilities in Ashley Valley for cattle and horse raising, so Reuben decided to move once again. He sold his farm for \$3500, taking some cattle and horses in trade, which were to be picked up on the way north.

They were joined by Sylvanus, Sarah and the families of Reuben's two sisters: Mary Ann Collett Wamsley and Rhoda Collett Eldredge. This time they traveled, in four wagons with four horses to each wagon, plus about one hundred and fifty head of loose horses, over the same route as far as the Little Colorado. From this point, the road went northwest down the river for about thirty miles, then almost directly north to Lee's Ferry. In the meantime, Reuben and son Sylvanus picked up some of the horses traded for, at Snowflake.

At the crossing of the Colorado and the road is chiseled down the canyon side for a distance of several hundred yards, with only enough space at the water's edge for a team and wagon to stand on the dugway waiting for the ferry. It was a large flat boat manned by men with oars, accommodating one team and wagon. The horses were led into the water by towing one of the mares across behind the skiff, which had ferried the family to the other side.

The road north into Utah and Cannonville, was through Paria Canyon. Up until this time the weather had been fine and nothing out of the ordinary had happened, but that night in the canyon, it snowed about twelve inches. This was the first snow they had seen in six years. It took three days to go through the canyon and with the wind blowing it seemed as if it was snowing all the time. The dense growth of willows which carpeted the canyon were bent almost to the ground with the heavy snow and the horses passing under the trees were kept soaking wet all the time.

The weather turned so cold it froze the creek over. The first team could cross on the ice but by the time the wagon came along, the ice had broken and the water backed up so the horses in the rear were deep in icy water. The last day, they camped just at the head of the canyon with the teams but drove the loose horses out to a big sage brush flat to graze. The night was so cold that some of the animals froze and William Wamsley's feet were frost-bitten.

Cannonville was reached the next day, where the bishop let them stay in the church. There was a large stove which kept the building warm and on which they could do their cooking. This was in November near Thanksgiving time. From there they broke snow-road over the mountains to Escalante and spent the winter in the place they had left six years before.

On 30 March 1887, Sylvester left Escalante to fill a mission in Old Mexico from which he did not return, dying there 5 May 1889. He was buried in the American Cemetery at Mexico City. The cause of his death was never known.

In the spring the journey on to Vernal was begun, by way of Rabbit Valley where some cattle were gathered which had been bargained for prior to leaving Lehi. One can imagine their feeling of joy and relief on 20 August 1887, when they

arrived at their destination. On modern highways and roads it would be a trip of almost one thousand miles.

Reuben bought a farm that fall and for a number of years was in the horse business. Here on 17 September 1888 a son, George, was born making their twelfth child—eight sons and four daughters. Nine of these children married and gave Reuben and Elthura a total of sixty-six grandchildren.

Reuben Samuel	--	20 November 1890	--	Flora Elsie Colton
Sylvanus	(1)	2 June 1886	--	Sarah Elizabeth Simkins
	(2)	21 January 1904	--	Ethelwynne Stringham
Julia Ann	--	13 May 1905	--	Beense William Postma
Adelbert Teancum	--	25 December 1893	--	Harriet Penelope Goodrich
Charles Merrill	(1)	9 March 1898	--	Mary Elnora Munk
	(2)	--	--	Fannie Weeks Winn
Princetta	--	12 August 1897	--	James Albert Bills
Roseltha May	--	24 December 1901	--	Albert Wellington Nielsen
Clarence James	(1)	5 February 1907	--	Margaret Watkins
	(2)	30 June 1959	--	Amanda Peterson Spencer
George	(1)	15 October 1914	--	Melvina Duke
	(2)	31 March 1960	--	Leona May Larsen Raleigh

While living in Vernal, Reuben made several trips to Bear Lake and Cache Valley. During the winter of 1899, he drove to Gila Valley, Arizona by team.

The government opened up the Uintah Indian Reservation for settlement in 1905. A year later, Reuben, his sons (R.S., Dell and Clare) and son-in-law, Albert W. Nielsen all filed on homesteads for the maximum of one hundred and sixty acres each. The law required that to “prove up” on the land and acquire a clear title from the government, the homesteader must make it a place of residence, cultivate and improve the property, to a specified dollar amount, for three years. This was accomplished by Reuben on his seventieth birthday.

In this area, between Myton and Roosevelt, known as Hartford Flats, the land was productive with irrigation, but it was a tremendous undertaking to dig miles of canals and ditches to bring the water from Lake Fork River. Until this could be done, water had to be hauled, in barrels, from the Duchesne, a distance of three or four miles and had to be shared with the horses and pets. It was too precious to use for bathing, so the weekly ablutions were performed in the river.

The year of their Golden Anniversary, 1911, found Reuben and Elthura back in Smithfield, the scene of their marriage in 1861. Here their last home, number twenty-two, was built and enjoyed for a few years until the death of Elthura, 13 July 1915.

Too little has been said of this remarkable woman, Elthura Roseltha Merrill Collett. Hers was a valiant, pioneer spirit. Loyal and loving, she accompanied her husband on his many journeyings and made of twenty-two houses, that many homes. Over steep mountains, through verdant valleys, across sere deserts and swift rivers, she followed him in pursuit of his dream—all the while bearing and rearing a family of twelve, ten to maturity and nine to have families of their own. Each one was a credit to this upbringing and could indeed call their mother blessed. Three of them, R.S., Sylvester and Charles, filled honorable missions for their Church and all of them took an active part in religious and civic affairs.

After Elthura's passing, daughter Julia (and family) moved into the home and cared for her father during his remaining years. Death came to Reuben Collett the 21 January 1920, in his eighty-first year. He had spent his life in pioneering and building up a new country, making it possible for others to live. He was a man of sterling character and his word was his bond, being known from Canada to Mexico.

Tribute to Reuben Collett - 1939

One hundred years ago on this old earth
A tiny boy was given birth;
A boy whose parents, wise yet gay,
To a strange land took him away.

So young he started on wandering far,
To fill the destiny of his star.
No path too hard to find, no task too hard to do,
He opened pioneering doors for others to pass through.

The great wide west knew well his face
And now it is his resting place.
Twelve children were born to his wife and him
And happily, as his eyes grew dim,

He watched them grow and take their place
And add distinction to the Collett race.
The homes he builded numbered twenty-two,
Made each a home as pioneers do.

Suffered a heart pang as he left each one,
But cheerfully went on until his task was done;
He lived in mountains and by rivers deep,
Planted many a crop for others to reap.

Honest he was his whole life long,
Always willing to right a wrong.
The Indians to him, as he traveled afar,
Brought friendly gifts instead of war.

When he came west it was drab and drear,
Only fools would settle here;
Forbidding mountains, stark and high,
Great plateaus, so dusty and dry,

Roaring rivers and desert land
Met his eye on every hand.
Did he falter and turn back?
Did his high courage ever slack?

No! ever forward with a prayer in his heart,
He traveled these paths and did his part.
Now, as his children, we look to the past
And honor him—and so at last
We can only pray as his story we tell,
We may each one live our lives as well.

Bliss Ivins Jones

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