

A life sketch of

Annie Roberts Willey

1847 – 1905

Annie Roberts Willey was born in Stratford, Essex, England on March 26, 1851. She was the daughter of Ann Reed Everington and Benjamin Roberts. She spent her early youth living near London where her mother sewed for hire and her father did a variety of work including blacksmithing and horse training. Her parents were both converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.



When Annie was eleven years old, she migrated from England to America with her mother and baby brother, Thomas. Her father, Benjamin, drifted away from the church and never joined his family in Utah. Annie's mother was forced by lack of means to leave two children in England (Brigham Henry and Mary Ann Martha) when she immigrated to America.

Anne and two children sailed from England in the spring of 1862. It was a very difficult, stormy voyage taking six weeks to cross the Atlantic Ocean. From New York to Utah, Anne and her children traveled in a wagon train. Thomas, who suffered from hydrocephalitis since birth, contracted 'ship fever' while crossing the ocean, which greatly weakened his already poor physical condition. The long, weary travel across the plains only complicated his condition. As the pioneers reached the mid-point of their journey Thomas died in his mother's arms. The Captain of the group prepared a bread box, which he carried in his wagon and used it for a coffin to bury the boy in. The broken hearted mother and Annie left him in a shallow grave at the base of Chimney Rock, Wyoming.

After experiencing many hardships while crossing the plains, Annie and her mother arrived in Salt Lake City, Utah on a fall day in 1862. They soon moved north to a settlement

called Sessions Settlement, later Bountiful, where Annie would grow to maturity, marry, raise her family and live the remainder of her life.

Annie immediately started to do housework and her mother, Anne, did sewing and millinery work in order to save enough money to send for the two children left in England. After several years, enough money was saved and the children were sent for. When they finally arrived it was a joyful reunion!

Annie had a beautiful singing voice. At her funeral one of the speakers commented that with training her voice was good enough to have sung in professional opera. A grand daughter said,

“I remember one time my grandma and I were riding in to Salt Lake with Uncle B. H. Roberts and my grandmother was singing as we rode along. He turned to her and said, ‘Well Ann, you may not have had your chance here but when you pass on you will surely sing with the angels in heaven.’”

At the age of 15, she joined the Bountiful Choir where she did a great deal of solo work under the direction of Brother Edward Thomas, their leader. She sung in the ward choir for 32 years. Annie also took leading parts in many local dramas. David Willey, Malcolm McDuff and B. H. Roberts played lead opposite her in several plays.

On March 14, 1868, Annie was married to Jeremiah Russell Willey in the Endowment House by Daniel B. Wells. They made their home in a log house on what was called Willey Block in Bountiful. This is where they had their family. This is where they worked, served and lived there for 23 years.

The Willey family consisted of:

Jeremiah Russell Jr.	January 11, 1869
Annie Everington	January 7, 1870
Samantha Audrey	February 12, 1872
Mary May	May 15, 1824

Sarah Louise	May 17, 1877
Rose Byrnina	September 27, 1881
Lorena	April 29, 1884
LaVoun	November 1887
Myrtle	April 29, 1891

Annie and Jeremiah's son died when just a few days old. Their eight daughters grew to young womanhood and were married in the Salt Lake Temple. Two of the daughters died in childbirth. Annie took some of the grand children left by these women and raised them as her own.

Just before the youngest child was born to this large family, they moved into a comfortable rock home also located on Willey Block. The entire family helped in the building of this home, even carrying some of the rocks it was built with. This home still stands in Bountiful.

One morning, Jeremiah Willey, whose occupation was farming, went up the canyon above Bountiful to get some wood for fuel. He started off and then returned, calling his daughters who were home, to come and sing one of his favorite hymns, "Oh My Father". He then went on his way. As dusk fell, and Jeremiah had not returned, Annie grew concerned. Jeremiah was long past due. Annie called relatives and friends to search for her "Jeddy". Before long they found him. He had died from a heart attack. It was January 26, 1905.

Annie was 51 years old at the time. Jeremiah had left her a comfortable home and some land. They owed no one. Annie remained independent throughout her life with the aid of savings and a small pension she received because of Jeremiah's service in the Black Hawk War.

Although Annie's home was not luxurious, it was comfortable and homey. It was always a gathering place for young people. Sunday evening, after church, there was always a happy group of young people gathered there singing and enjoying themselves.

Annie served as President of the Primary for seven years and as a councilor for eight years.

In the winter of 1929, Annie spent some time in Salt Lake City. In early February, she was taken very ill. Her brother, B. H. went to see her. As he entered the room he said,

“Sister Annie, are you going to leave us?”

She smiled faintly and said she did not know. B. H. then anointed her head with oil and gave her a blessing. After a short while, Annie expressed a desire to go to her home in Bountiful. B.H. immediately called a taxi and took her to her home. A few days later, in the early morning hours, Annie suffered a heart attack and died. It was February 9, 1930. Annie was buried in Bountiful, Utah.

This Life Sketch of Annie Roberts Willey was compiled from stories, documents and other records collected and kept in the Family History Library of K. Oswald.

Names, places, dates and recorded events have been verified with family genealogy information, historical and family history records in possession of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, as far as it is possible.