

The Autobiography of
Samantha Call Willey

1814 – 1905

I, Samantha Call was born November 15, 1814, at Fletcher, Franklin County, Vermont. I was the oldest daughter and the fourth child of Cyril Call and Sally Tiffany Call.

My father was born June 29, 1785 at Woodstock, Vermont. My mother was born November 27, 1790 at Cambridge, Vermont.

When I was four years of age my parents moved from Franklin, Vermont to Madison, Ohio, where we lived for a short time. From there we went to Mentor, Ohio, but finding the climate very unhealthy, soon moved back to Madison. Our means being limited, my father taught school, which I attended. Years flew by and by hard labor father made enough money to buy a farm, which he did near Grand River, about five miles from Lake Erie. We all helped in getting along the best we could. I went out to nurse, sew and spin. At the age of seventeen, I went to the Art, Coal, and Furnace Boarding House with Hettie Parker, and cooked six months for twenty men. On recommendation, Mrs. Allen, the landlady of the Unionville Tavern, came to see if I would assist in getting an oyster supper for the Caravan. I did so and remained three months, but the hard work I had been doing the last nine months had pulled my health down so that I was obliged to return to my lighter labors of sewing and spinning. I supported myself entirely and helped father some.



At the age of fifteen, I joined the Methodist Church. My parents belonged to that church. About the time I was working so hard at cooking. The Elders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints would often come and hold meetings. I would listen to them explain and tell of the principles of the gospel and enjoyed hearing what they had to say. But, being a sincere Methodist and whether through pride or fear, and not having the privilege of going to

their meetings often, did not join. My father approved and soon accepted the gospel, but mother was very much opposed to it.

In the year 1836, my brother Harvey, sister Fanny and myself were baptized in the Grand River in the state of Ohio, by Elder Almon Babbit, thus uniting ourselves with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Soon after we were baptized, Brother Babbit came to our house and asked me to go to his place and stop with his wife as she had a very sick baby and he was obliged to leave her alone with so much traveling and preaching of the gospel. Soon after going to Brother Babbit's, a Brother Field and his two sisters came to visit them; Mary, the one who married Hyrum Smith and became the mother of our beloved President Joseph F. Smith, and their younger sister and her lover, Brother Thompson. They were married a few days after.

While here with Brother and Sister Babbit, I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting with the Smith Family and attending meetings in the Kirtland Temple, but being of a bashful disposition, and very timid, I did not speak with our Prophet.

In the fall, I returned to my father and in 1837, father sold his farm and prepared to go with the saints. In 1838, we left with others of the saints to go to Missouri.

After traveling a few days, my sister, Malissa was taken very sick and we could not go on with the company. Uncle Orvis waited with us and as mother had young babies, the twins, I had the entire care of my sister. We had lost all hopes of her getting well when we received help from an Indian doctor. When she became strong enough, we started again on our journey.

We crossed the Mississippi River at Quincy, the general crossing place and after going a short distance we began meeting teams that were leaving Missouri as our saints were being driven out. Father was persistent and did not want to give up, so we went about fourteen miles beyond the river to a place called Palmire where he and Uncle Orvis rented a double log house. This was in December, and as our house was on the main road it proved to be a resting-place for the traveling saints. While here at Palmire, I worked at the millinery trade, trimming bonnets, hats, etc. I do not remember just how long.

Among the traveling saints who rested at our place in passing back and forth was Elder Jeremiah Willey, who at once seemed to know that I was to be his future wife. But I, being so much younger than he, did not favor the suit. After becoming better acquainted with him I learned to love and care for him, knowing that he was a good man.

I remained most of the winter with Mrs. Thomas, working at millinery and early in the spring I returned home. In March, we re-crossed the river and went to Illinois. Sister Sarah and I stopped at Quincy one month with our Aunt Phoebe Call, while father and the rest of the family went on about thirty miles further, which was near Warsaw and Carthage, where there was a branch of the church. I believe Green Plains was the name of the place. Father sent for us and Elder Willey accompanied us to our home. On April 28, 1839, Brother Willey and I were married.

Father bought a farm and built a home at Green Plains. My brother Anson and my husband contracted work on the railroad and hired ten men. I did the cooking for them. My husband built a small cabin near the railroad and my brother Anson was our nearest neighbor. We were only married five months when the Prophet gave my husband a short mission through Kirtland and Madison, Ohio. Brother Anson and his wife went with him. While my husband was absent, I remained in our little cabin by the railroad. He returned about the first of March 1840, and on March 15, 1840, I gave birth to my oldest child, Samantha Ellen. When our baby was about three weeks old, we moved on Dr. Chalmers place and rented some land. This was in Warsaw. Soon after moving there, we were called to part with our little one who died of inflammation for the brain on July 9, 1841.

October 20, 1841, our second child was born, William Wallace, and when he was seven months old, his father was again called on a mission to the Eastern Counties. He went to New Hampshire and from there to Maine where he baptized seventeen and organized a branch of our church. He returned as far as New York where he met Brother Benson and remained with him for sometime returning after an absence of one year and three months. While my husband was away on this mission I lived with my sister, Fanny, who had married Brother Chester

Loveland. When my husband returned we bought forty acres of land and built us a little home and began to till the ground. He was also taking care of the branch of the church at this place.

One Sunday morning, Jeremiah awakened and said, "Samantha, there is something going to happen, I better get up."

I tried to persuade him not, but he got up and went out into the yard and was feeding our own stock when he found an old gray mare tied up. He came in and told me about it and said, "Samantha, about ten o'clock you will see a band of men coming over the hill."

Meantime, he notified the brethren what had happened and I went on getting our breakfast. After we had started to eat he got up, went out and then returned and said, "They are coming sooner than I expected."

Soon there was a kick at the door. The door flew open and Colonel Williams said, "Old Willey, we have got you at last."

Brother Willey answered, "I am here."

They went out. I looked out and it seemed to me as if there were twenty-five men in the mob. Old Williams and some of them talked together and then said to Brother Willey, "We will go to Warsaw and get a Writ."

Brother Willey replied, "Go ahead, I will be here on your return."

They were gone but a little while and when they came they had a writ all right, but never served it. They had accused Brother Willey of stealing the old gray mare, but they told him if he would give her back they would drop it. They took their mare and left.

In the morning about forty of the brethren gathered at our house expecting the mob back. They sent me away to my brother Harvey's to stay over night and at twelve o'clock, Brother Willey started for Nauvoo to see and council with our Prophet. Brother James Duncan gave him the use of one of his best horses to ride. Some of the brethren stayed at our place all night expecting the mob back, but they did not return.

The Prophet advised Brother Willey to return to his home, which he did and remained there until the brethren thought he would be endangering his life by remaining longer, so we moved to Nauvoo, about fifteen miles from Warsaw. This was in May of 1844.

On June 27, 1844, Joseph Smith, our Prophet was killed.

July 16, 1844, I gave birth to another little girl, Elizabeth B.

About the 1st of September we sold our place for little or nothing to Chester Loveland. We moved to Nauvoo where we bought a house and lot. We there lived about one year and a half. The saints were compelled to leave, so we sold our comfortable little home for one pound of stocking yarn and we only had two hours to pack our things. Father took our bedding and clothing in one of his wagons as my husband had sold everything we had to buy our house and lot. We then left all we possessed and were glad to get away without thinking of what we had left behind. It was no more than one drop in the bucket to me to leave all we possessed on earth, which we did with the exception of one cow and our clothing.

Father took us as far as Pisgah, where he unloaded our things. He went over into Missouri to get provisions and then on the Missouri River and wintered near the Punka Indians. I did not see any of them again until my son Jeremiah Russell was born February 17, 1847. At that time my brother, Josiah came to see me.

We had nothing to protect us from the boiling sun but a blanket, which we put up on some willows to make shade and in that condition I was left with my sick baby. My husband went into the timber to cut logs and we soon had a little log cabin. Brother Willey was very quick at all kinds of work and this was the first house in Pisgah.

Pisgah is about one hundred and fifty miles from Nauvoo, and is the place where the Saints made a settlement. Brother Willey plowed a little piece of ground and put in a garden and three weeks later he was called to go to the Mexican War.

My Willey gave our house and garden to an old gentleman if he would take us as far as Council Bluffs. This is where the main body of the church was located at the time. The next

morning Brother Willey left with the other Brethren who were called to form the Battalion and were to be organized.

I was left among strangers and my things were left in Brother Sheldon's tent. A few days later Brother Sheldon was called to go to another place so he began pulling up his tent and of course this left my things exposed.

Brother Willey before leaving had asked an old friend of his, Brother Hale (Jonathan), if he would look after me, but Sister Hale (Olive), his wife, was confined and died. After her death, Brother Hale was taken very sick and died just two weeks later. So that was the reason I was left so entirely alone with strangers.

Brother Willey had been married before I met him to a Miss Basheba Stevens, whom he buried about one year previous to my marrying him. They had no children of their own, but had a little girl given them by a friend who had lost his wife. The child's name was Abigail Washburn Willey, born January 10, 1833 at Dover, New Hampshire. Brother Willey's wife was buried near Indianapolis, Indiana.

Brother Bird came along and wanted to know what was meant by my being left alone like this. After I explained to him, he went through the camp and found a man with two tents and asked him to let me put my things in one of them. Oh, my but how this tent did leak! It rained, with thunder and lightening every night for a week.

The heads of the Church had gone on, and the Saints had nearly all left and at the end of this week the man pulled up his tents and left also. Leaving me on my box without any shelter what so ever and my little sick babe in my arms. "The Lord will provide".

Brother Benson happened along just them, or at least the Lord sent him. He saw me sitting in the sun with my two little ones and said, "Well, well, Sister Willey, what does all this mean, I will have something different from this."

When I would get my sick babe to sleep I would throw something over the wagon, put something on the ground and then lay my baby down to protect her from the sun and heat.

Brother Benson called a meeting, laid my case before the Brethren who were left there, and a Brother Porter who had settled about five miles from the Bluffs said that he would look after me and that I would fare just as well as any one of his family.

He returned to his home for a wagon and came back for me about sundown. We reached his home about midnight. Brother Porter intended to winter there, but his father persuaded him to go on to Winter Quarters. By the time we reached Winter Quarters, I was so sick I could not get out of the wagon, and my babe was sick also. They were all so good to me. Sister Porter did all she could and Brother Porter went to see President Young and he sent Dr. Sprague to see me. The doctor said I would never recover if I remained in the wagon, so Brother Porter went at once and cut down timber and built me a little house. He moved me from the wagon and made me as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. I gradually gained strength and grew better. We did not remain here long, but moved down by the river. Brother Porter took my cabin with us on the flats near the river. He put the house up again and I believe it was the first one at Winter Quarters.

Brother Porter was now made Bishop and had others to look after besides myself. He came and asked if I were willing, a Sister Messer would move in with me to which I consented. Sister Messer was very hard to get along with and as Brother Porter had built a larger place he just moved me into the dug-out they had been living in and left Sister Messer in my cabin.

December 20, 1846, my little girl died and was buried at Winter Quarters. Before she died Brother Porter came in and little Elizabeth called for him to take her out. He did so and took her over to his place only a few steps away. I got ready and went right over and there she died and we had to take her back a corpse. Sister Alvira Clapp laid her out.

On the 17th of February 1847, my son, Jeremiah Russell was born. When he was about two weeks old we had a thaw that brought the water into our dugout nearly shoe deep. My brother Josiah came and moved me about a block from there into a little cabin without a floor. He got a cowhide somewhere for the children to sit on, but I guess my back was fitting for the burden for I did not even take a slight cold. We had no stove, but a Dutch Chimney to cook on. One of my neighbors, Brother Taff, came and rolled a great log to our door. Oh, I was so

thankful for this, and Wallace could pick up the pieces and chips so that we could have a nice fire.

As spring was opening and it was time for gardens to be put in, I went to Brother Porter and told him I would like a garden. Brother Porter came and fenced off a piece of ground and plowed it for me. Abigail and I planted it. I gave \$1.25 for a bushel of potatoes and raised seventeen bushel from them besides raising beans, peas, cabbage and squash.

My husband returned sometime in the fall of 1847. We wintered here and then crossed the river over to Little Mosquito, which is about eight miles from Cainesville. Here we went to farming and gardening trying to get ahead so as to come to the valley and in the fall of 1849, September 26th, our son David Orson was born at Potawatamie, Iowa. In 1851 we left this place for the valley. We were four months on the road and came with ox teams.

My father and mother had come the year before and moved to Bountiful, Utah, so when we came, they sent for us to come right up and stay with them. We reached there September 15, 1851. My husband bought the corner where I am now living and we moved here in March 1852.

Mother was sickly all the time and wanted to come and live with me, which she did.

May 3, 1852, Cynthia Armenia was born at Bountiful, Utah.

The years 1852 and 1853 were spent principally in farming, gardening and doing the best we could to get along.

In January 29, 1854, we lost our baby Cynthia.

We started building and improving our place the best we could, my husband not being well as he had not enjoyed good health since the severe trials and exposures of the Battalion. We hired a man, Harry Bullock to help us.

December 17, 1854, Parley Pratt was born.

Nothing of importance taking place, we continued with our farm labors and church duties. Mother died March 16, 1856. Willard Cyril was born June 10, 1857. After this father lived with us or made it his home until his death May 3, 1873.

In 1858, we went south with the Grand Move and were gone two months. We found home and surroundings all right on our return and my husband and boys resumed their labor on the farm. On August 24, 1858, after our return, we were called to part with our little son Willard.

May 17 1859, our son Joseph was born. We went on in our quiet way for some time after that.

On May 21, 1868, I was called to part with my husband and companion who was drowned.

At the death of my husband, our house was built only to the square. The boys then took hold and soon finished it off.

I was a worker in the East Bountiful Relief Society from the organization in 1868 until 1897, acting as President of the Teachers the last fourteen years. I was also a Sunday School teacher for three years.

I have done Temple work for the dead both in the Logan and Salt Lake Temple, and had the privilege of receiving my washings and anointing in Nauvoo.

This Autobiography of Samantha Call Willey is as she gave it a few years previous to her death. She died November 13, 1905 at the age of 91 years, lacking two days. She lived the life of a faithful Latter Day Saint.

This Autobiography of Samantha Call Willey is published as she wrote it and as it has been preserved through family members.

Names, places, and dates have been verified with family genealogy information and records in possession of K. Oswald, and family history records in possession of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.