

Biography of Abiah Wadsworth

Source: Cox, Elnora Arave. Wadsworth, Frederick James.
Abiah Wadsworth: His Wives and Family, 1810-1979. 1979. 12-21.

Abiah Wadsworth was born May 25, 1810 in Lincolnville, Maine. He died April 18, 1899 in Taylor, Idaho. His parents were also born in Maine. His father's name was Sedate Wadsworth and his mother's name was Susan Hassen or Harsen. For several generations, the family had been carpenters and ship-builders, and as they lived on the coast, there was always plenty of work. Abiah used to tell fireside stories to his children and grandchildren. He would tell them of watching new ships being launched to make their first trip out into the great Atlantic Ocean.

From his stories, his early life was most interesting and useful. Abiah learned while young the use of carpenter tools and became a good carpenter, as his father had been. He also learned to play the violin and drums at a very early age, making music and entertaining at parties as well as in the home.

At the age of 21 years, in 1831, he married Eliza Hardy, also of Maine. She was the daughter of Joseph and Betsy Thorndyke Hardy, also of Maine. After they were married, they continued to live in Lincolnville and Siersmont, Maine, Abiah following the trade of his father and making a good living.

In the fall of 1839, quite a commotion arose in the town of Lincolnville. An Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, William Hyde, came and preached a wonderful new religion. Everyone soon became interested and many were converted, among whom were Abiah and his wife, Eliza, who were soon baptized and made members of this church. Their great desire then was to leave their home in Maine and join the main body of saints which was then in Nauvoo, Illinois. Soon they made plans for this journey which was to be made across an almost trackless country. Abiah bade farewell to all of his relatives and a host of friends. His wife, her three brothers and their families were in the group and they took with them only absolute necessities, sacrificing much to join the saints.

Of this period of time, Abiah writes in his journal the following:

“The winter and early spring that I was 21 years old, three brothers of us, Charles, Jeramiah and myself, built a vessel 58-ton burden and was five days hauling it 4½ miles to Camden where we launched it into the sea. Some days we had one hundred pair of oxen on it to draw it.

“The same spring (21 years old) we built the vessel, I took Eliza Hardy to wife. After I got married, I commenced business for myself. I lived in the neighborhood several years, had two children, Joseph and Lucy Adeline. After a few years, we moved into the town of Hope, joining Lincolnville where I was raised.

“When I was 30 years old, December the 30th, 1840, I was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and ordained a teacher and presided over the Branch until I left that country for Nauvoo, 1842. We arrived in LaHarpe, 20 miles east of Nauvoo the 6th of November following. We lived in LaHarpe and that neighborhood until the fall of the burning and then moved into Nauvoo. (NOTE: This burning probably refers to a time when mobs began to burn out homes of

saints in the settlements around Nauvoo. Some estimates were made that as many as 175 homes and farms were burned, leaving families homeless at the beginning of winter. See Robert's "Comprehensive History of the Church", Vol. 2, pgs. 516 and 517.) Remained there until the saints were driven out of Nauvoo, then moved to a place called Utica (Montrose). From there we moved to a town called Salem in Iowa. Remained there over winter and worked at wagon work until the 18th of next May and then started for the Bluffs (Council Bluffs), three hundred miles, and lived there until May, 1851, then started across the plains. Arrived in Salt Lake City September 15th."

Upon reaching Nauvoo, Abiah's family immediately became acquainted with the Prophet Joseph Smith, and until the time of the Prophet's death were good friends. Abiah, being very fond of athletics and being near the same age, size and weight as the prophet, told of contests, games and wrestling they enjoyed together. Abiah often told his children that Joseph was the fairest specimen of manhood he had ever known and that he was the truest friend a man ever had. Tears always filled his eyes as he spoke of the martyrdom.

Abiah was at the meeting which was held after the prophet's death to determine what the saints were to do and whom they could choose as their leader to take Joseph's place. The saints now felt lost and alone and were hated by those around them. At this meeting, Abiah heard Brigham Young speak in Joseph Smith's voice. Then and always he was convinced that Brigham Young was chosen by God to take the place of the Prophet of God, and Abiah lived to see the wisdom of the choice as Brigham proved himself so competent and worthy of the position he held with great honor until his death.

After the prophet's death, there was trouble and confusion and the Saints were compelled to flee for their lives. Zachariah Hardy, Abiah's wife's brother, died from fatigue and exposure to bitter cold weather while ferrying saints across the Mississippi River. On February 12, 1846, Abiah with a few others buried him during the night in the Nauvoo cemetery. Zachariah's sad widow and family moved to a small town called Montrose.

Abiah also moved his family to Montrose, but he was called back to be a guard at the Nauvoo Temple which the mob was threatening to burn. In the meantime, Abiah's brother-in-law, Lewis, moved all the families to Salem, a small town about 50 miles away, where they lived in peace and safety for one year.

Abiah and his son, Joseph, worked for a farmer doing carpenter work and farm labor. For their pay they received a team of horses, a wagon and supplies to take them on their journey to Council Bluffs. They made this trip in 1847, and stayed there until 1851. In the meantime, Abiah had obtained a team of young oxen and numerous other supplies to help companies who went west before he was called. He, being a carpenter, was kept busy making and repairing wagons and other needed supplies for the long journey.

They started on their long trip west on the 10th day of May, 1851, all in good health and high spirits in Captain Abraham Day's company of fifty people. Abiah had a very good outfit of five yoke of oxen, one team of ponies, and four cows with three wagons in which to carry household goods, grain and supplies. Abiah drove two yoke of oxen and one of cows and one wagon, and his oldest son, Joseph, drove one yoke of oxen and one yoke of cows on one wagon, and Eliza, Abiah's wife,

drove the ponies on another and kept her youngest children with her. The family then consisted of six children - Joseph Warren, Susannah Aroline, Nancy Ellen, Eliza Ann, Abiah Jr. and Lucinda Marthina.

Just before leaving Council Bluffs, Elder George A. Smith came to Abiah and said, "You had better take all your tools with you as there are several very poor outfits in the company and you will certainly need them." This statement was very true as there was hardly a stop that the call was not heard, "Bring Brother Wadsworth and his tool kit." When arranging the companies, the leaders always tried to send someone who could doctor cattle, as well as sick people, and some who could do carpenter work. Abiah also took his violin and his two drums that he had used in the band at Nauvoo. In the evening after a hard day of traveling, Abiah would play a few tunes on his violin and in a short time the whole camp would gather around the campfire and sing and dance and forget their worries of the day. Abiah often said that altogether it was a very jolly company and they had very little trouble of any kind; but often after a long, dry day with no water for the animals, when they reached a stream, the cattle would gorge themselves until they groaned with pain. Their remedy for this was salt and soda. For insect bites, they used tobacco or mud poultices; for sprains or strains, they used hot packs of wild sage and salt; for swelling and burns, they used axle grease.

They arrived in Salt Lake City September 15, 1851 with every member of the company in high spirits. They went to a meeting the next day and Brigham Young expressed his delight that they had had such a pleasant journey. He also told them he wished them to join a company going to colonize a town at the mouth of Weber Canyon, then called East Weber. He advised them not to unpack their wagons but rest a day or so, then start on the last stretch of their journey. Leaving Salt Lake the 18th day of September, they reached East Weber September 20, 1851.

Soon after arriving at their new location, a call came from the church for every member to pay tithing. Abiah turned in one yoke of oxen and a new rifle. Here they settled down for the winter, cutting and hauling logs for houses and wood to burn. They got along fairly well, being troubled only a few times with the Indians; however, they were quite treacherous and it was unsafe to leave women and children alone.

In the spring of 1852, Abiah went to conference and a call was made for volunteers to go to meet a company of saints who were coming that fall. Abiah volunteered to go, but when the time came, he could not leave on account of sickness, so his son, Joseph, went instead. Abiah said, "Joe is a much better bull-whacker than I am anyway." Joseph went the latter part of August and returned to Salt Lake City early in November, having been gone for more than nine weeks. The company had endured many hardships and could come no further on account of the loss of cattle and broken wagons with deep snow multiplying their problems.

Abiah sold his farm that fall for a good price and he and his son, Joseph, built a three-room log house on a piece of land his son had taken up. They had plenty and got along very well that winter. However, they did not enjoy peace very long, as in early spring, Brigham Young called all the settlers into the forts for protection against raging Indians who threatened attacks upon the scattered saints. It was in May of 1855 that peace was restored and the saints could return to their homes. This made it very late to put in their crops. The crops were planted in such dry soil that very little was raised.

The following item of interest is inserted here as it deals with the same period of time. It was supplied by Iris W. Sowell of Hooper, Utah and is a quote from the "History of Weber County".

“When Ogden was settled in 1848, it was not long before people made a road up Weber Canyon where they went after timber for construction of their houses and for fuel. In 1855, the Legislature granted Ira N. Spalding, Abiah Wadsworth and Thomas J. Thurston the right to build a good road through the canyon and to ‘keep the said road in repair from the tolls collected for they had the privilege of erecting a toll gate on said road at such place as they shall think best.’”

In the spring of 1857, Abiah married Phoebe Augusta Hubbard who was born January 15, 1840, and died August 2, 1919. They lived in East Weber for several years planting crops and making a living as best they could, but grasshoppers came and destroyed the crops along with the feed for the cattle; hence, they had to be turned out to find their own feed. The cattle grazed along the Weber River where grew acres and acres of willows. That year they lost many head of oxen and cows, some of them being so poor the crows wouldn’t even eat them. This winter was extremely hard for the people as their food was limited, [b]ut Abiah said that by sharing with each other and getting some wild meat to help out, they weathered it. This was done only with the help of our Heavenly Father who assisted them in good management and hard work. Abiah said he and his son, Joe, hewed many sets of logs for houses. Joseph was an expert log cutter and Abiah quite as efficient. They worked with a broad axe. They hewed many sets of logs making them flat on two sides. In this way, they would fit together making a much warmer house and requiring less filling between the logs. They traded many loads of house logs for necessities which they would not otherwise have gotten.

Abiah and his family lived at East Weber until the year 1858. Then they moved to Mountain Green, a small town in Weber Canyon. Here he built a shop and continued to work at his trade. He made household necessities, such as furniture, churns, tubs, buckets, terkins (containers for butter), barrels, and many other needed articles. Indians again caused them to leave Mountain Green and they moved to Morgan some miles east. Here there were more settlers and better protection. They moved in 1860, staying two years until the Indians were at peace again. He was a friend to the Indians and they called him “Big Chief”.

While in Morgan, he helped to build a saw mill, grist mill and a number of houses; he also helped to build a small tannery or place where they tanned hides for leather which was made into harnesses, saddles, boots, shoes, and leggings which were needed at that time. In 1862, they returned to their homes in Mountain Green, where Abiah served as Bishop also having served in that capacity in Morgan.

As Abiah now had two families, he found it necessary to move where he could have more land. So they moved in early 1869 or 70 to Hooper, Utah, where he arranged his home and work shop. His two sons-in-law helped him in his carpenter work, his shop being located across from the Naisbitt’s estate. They all commenced making household furniture and necessities as buckets out of wood along with lard and butter containers and churns out of cedar. Johnston’s army had left strips of iron which they gathered and used for hoops for their buckets and tubs. Abiah mended shoes, making pegs out of hardwood to hold the soles on. He made and mended harnesses and where rivets are used now, he used raw hide. They did excellent work in the shop, having the best tools obtainable, and all were excellent workmen. Abiah was free with praise but just as free with criticism. He was a man of humor. He was thought of as the village blacksmith. Children from the little school house just a few steps east of the workshop ran to watch him at his work. The flame from the forge drew them near with interest. Among these children was Martha Ann Hardy who later became the wife of

William Myron Wadsworth, a grandson of Abiah. Abiah was an athlete and joined his sons with wrestling and games until he was troubled with rheumatism. He was game at any time to join their fun. He was very fortunate, however, in having his children settled around him. They almost encircled the block in which he lived, making a wonderful home.

However, in later years, his first wife Eliza, who had been troubled with her eyes, became blind. This was very sad for the family as the father, Abiah, was too aged now to care for her or for himself. The home was broken up as Eliza went to live with her daughters and Abiah was cared for by his second wife, Augusta.

Most of the foregoing was taken from a History of Abiah Wadsworth, written by Elnora Arave Cox, a granddaughter. The following are excerpts from a history of Abiah Wadsworth written by his son, Frederick James Wadsworth.

No call from the church for material aid went unheeded by my father. He was a firm believer in the law of tithing. In the summer of 1845, he traded a horse for several bolts of cloth which he turned in for tithing. He also turned in a horse to help with the expenses of the Nauvoo Temple which was being finished that fall. In the spring of 1846, Brigham Young called for help in getting the first company of saints ready to start for the west. My father gave his team, harness and wagon after which all he had left were three cows and a few head of sheep. In 1849, while living in Salem, Brother George A. Smith asked for help to start another company on their way to Salt Lake. Father gave a yoke of young oxen and some supplies, and with all helping, the company was soon on its way.

Providing a living for their families was not all that was required of these pioneer men and many of them gladly gave time and talent to help build up the communities in the state. Father and Joe spent about 40 days hauling material for the temple and tabernacle from the canyon near Salt Lake, Father did carpenter and Joe team work on both buildings. Father also built the first flour mill in Morgan. After moving to Hooper when the people began to raise sugar cane, he built a large molasses mill which was used by most of the people in Hooper at that time.

In Hooper, my father was made Presiding Elder. He was like a father to the ward, and was known far and wide as "Uncle Bide." My father dearly loved music and was a very good violin player. Many evenings after a day of hard work or looking after the affairs of the ward, he would relax by entertaining the family and their friends, both young and old, with singing, violin music, and step dancing.

During the family's stay in Hooper, all of my father's first family and five of my mother's children were married. Of the first family, Joseph married Lydia Stoddard and Abigale Higley and because of having these two wives was forced to spend five months in the penitentiary. Aroline, the oldest daughter, married Nelson Arave. Nancy married George Higley, and Ann, the youngest to come west with the family, married Eli Spaulding. These four children settled and raised their families in Hooper. Abiah, Jr. married Cornelia Robinson and settled on part of his father's land. Cynthia, youngest child of the first family, married William Miller. They made their home near Salt Lake but later moved to Canada. In later life they moved back, did temple work, and died in Salt Lake City.

Charles Warren, the first of my mother's children to live, having lost Phoebe Theodicia and John in infancy, married Harriet Hardy about 1883 who died in 1911 leaving five children. Charles later

married Elizabeth Rappley. Mary Elizabeth married Charles Rapp. They made their home in Ogden until he died, then Mary sold the home and moved to Salt Lake City where three of her children were located. Susan Victoria married John Child of Riverdale. They lived in Riverdale, moved out to Taylor, Idaho, near her folks and then back to Roy, Utah where she now lives, March, 1948. Flora M. married Heber Child of Ogden. They lived in Ogden for some years, then moved to Shelley, Idaho where she died. Julia A. married Nathan Child of Riverdale. She died when her second child was born.

In 1885 and 1886, many of the saints were being persecuted and put in jail because of polygamous marriages. My father, being about 76 years old at that time, felt it would be better to move than risk a term in jail. The Snake River Valley in Idaho was being homesteaded and quite a colony from Hooper had moved to Taylor, Bingham County, Idaho. Many of our friends and relatives had settled there, among them our brother, Charles, and our half-brother, Abiah. So in June of 1886, my father, mother and the five younger children moved once more to an unsettled country. The younger children who went to Idaho were Sarah Lunette, nearly 13; Frederick James, nearly 10; Daniel Chester, age 7 past; Ray William, age 4; and Minnie Augusta, age 15 months.

Word had come to the folks at Hooper that this part of the Snake River Valley was a good cattle country - that cattle could feed out during the winter and be in good condition in the spring. My father sold one of his homes in Hooper and bought forty head of young cattle which he took to Idaho with him. They obtained the land by Squatters Right and so required little cash.

The first summer they were very busy selecting land, hauling logs, building houses, and trying to get provisions for winter. The cattle roamed the range with feed from 6 to 18 inches high. In the fall the worst blizzard Idaho had known for many years swept the valley. The cattle were scattered and driven before the storm and some of them were frozen to death in the snow. It was known that cattle thieves were working through the country and it seemed to be the general belief that they rounded up our herd with some others and shipped them from Blackfoot. Although they spent many days looking for them, one cow was all they ever saw of their cattle. This was a very severe blow to the family. Father was too old to start all over again and I, Fred, age 10, was his oldest help. Charlie, my oldest brother, helped all he could and we worked together more like father and son than like brothers.

The following years were indeed hard ones. It was a constant struggle to get the bare necessities of life. My mother was a midwife and in that way earned a little to help out. We seldom had sugar and when we could buy 25 worth, we were all willing to save it for "Father" whose health and appetite were poor due to his age.

In order to raise crops, water had to be brought to the land which meant digging canals and ditches. But in spite of the hardships, the people would get together at different homes for social evenings and always on my father's birthday everyone in the community would plan to come, bring their picnic and celebrate with him.

The hardest years were passed and the family had a home and 40 acres of land under cultivation when my father died at the age of 89. He died in Taylor, Idaho, on the 18th day of April, 1899 and was buried in the Taylor cemetery.