

WALTER G. WIEST – BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I was born on February 16, 1922 in Price, Carbon County, Utah, the first child of Walter Emil Wiest and Irma Annette Gibson. The family lived in Price for five years after my birth, and then moved to Provo, Utah. I attended the Parker School through grades 1-6, and then the Farrer Junior High School. I completed a college preparatory course in 2 years at Provo High School and was admitted to Brigham Young University in 1939. My Major was chemistry with a minor in mathematics.

After completing two years at BYU, I was called to serve an LDS mission in the New England States Mission, beginning my service in March 1942. I served in Providence and Cranston, Rhode Island, Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Rutland, Vermont. Following my honorable release from missionary service, I was inducted into the US Marine Corps. After completing boot camp, I was ordered to Officer's Candidate School in Quantico, VA, and commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in March 1945. I served in the Pacific Theater in Hawaii and on Guam.

Following my discharge from military service in October 1946, I resumed my studies at BYU, graduating in the spring of 1948 with a BS degree in Biological Chemistry. During my college years I met and married Marlene Romney. We were sealed in the Covenant in the Salt Lake Temple on 4 June 1948. After our marriage, we moved to Madison, Wisconsin where I was enrolled at the University of Wisconsin, completing the requirements for a Ph.D. in physiological chemistry in June 1952. During the interim, Marlene gave birth to our first child, a son named David.

We accepted a faculty appointment at the University of Utah in the Department of Biochemistry and moved to Salt Lake City, where we bought our first home in Murray, Utah. We lived in the Salt Lake Valley until 1964 during which time we became the parents of five more children, three more boys and two girls. In the fall of 1964, we moved our family to St. Louis, Missouri where I was given a faculty appointment in the Medical School at Washington University. Shortly after our arrival in St. Louis, our seventh child was born, a daughter, completing our family of four boys and three girls.

During the twenty-three years of our residency in St. Louis, we raised our family to adulthood and were blessed by our activity in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The children were educated in the public schools there and five of them graduated from BYU, and two from Ricks College. I retired from Washington University Medical School in January 1987 as a professor emeritus. Our children having left home for lives of their own, Marlene and I accepted a call to serve a mission in the Massachusetts Boston Mission. Following our release in January 1988, we chose not to return to St. Louis.

In midsummer 1988, we bought a home in Bloomington Hills at 2896 South Fort Pierce Drive, and in August 1988 we were called to be ordinance workers in the St. George Temple. Why did we leave our home and friends in St. Louis and move to St. George? I've jokingly answered that question by saying that the move placed us one rung higher up the celestial ladder. Actually, there were many motives and urgings, some only vaguely realized, that led us here:

I remembered that my grandmother, Adella Cowley, was born in St. George, and that great-grandfather Zerah Pulsipher had helped establish Hebron, Utah, as part of the Dixie Mission. But I had no idea where Hebron was located. We chose St. George because it is situated midway between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City where some of our children had located. It had a temple that we considered vital to our spiritual development, and it had a college to stimulate intellectual pursuits. And lastly, it had a moderate climate without much snow in the winter.

Little did Myrlene and I realize just how intimately tied to the Cotton Mission migration and the St. George community our ancestors had made us. All eight of Myrlene's great grandparents were among those pioneers called by Brigham Young to settle in this region: Bunkers, Cottams, Lees, and Romneys. My own ancestors called to the Cotton Mission included Pulsiphers, Cowleys, and Algers. It was natural, therefore, that once we found ourselves in this community, surrounded by the building and records of the past, we began digging to uncover our ancestral roots.

Early on, I made an effort to find the location of Hebron by asking some of the people I met on the street, Most were either vague in their answers or totally ignorant of the place. Checking further, I learned that Hebron no longer existed except for a decrepit cemetery. Joining with Phil Tyler and others who also were descendants of Zerah Pulsipher, we began a project to better memorialize the cemetery and the community of Hebron. This effort eventually led to the organization of a chapter of the Sons of Utah Pioneers, called the Cotton Mission Chapter, which has played a significant role in placing a monument at the cemetery and identifying and marking all the graves located there. Both Phil Tyler and I have since served as president of the chapter, this involvement in the affairs of the Sons of Utah Pioneers has brought much growth and satisfaction to both Myrlene and me.

Life in St. George has provided opportunities for service and involvement in many affairs of the community. For the first two years after our arrival, I was an adjunct member of the Dixie College faculty, teaching a course in biology, and I served as president of the Institute for Continued Learning, an organization serving retired persons who wished to avoid intellectual stagnation. For a number of years, I taught one of the classes in the institute which I called "Medicine's Miracles and you", intended to consider afflictions common to older people and the newer advances in medicine for treating these illnesses. I was asked by Mayor Karl Brooks to serve as a member of the City Arts Commission which I did for several years. Mayor Brooks also asked me to mobilize the Cotton Mission Chapter as a force to design and construct the St. George Memorial Plaza; he and the officials of the New Zion's Bank planned to beautify the vacant corner of Main and St. George Blvd. This was the property where the Erastus Snow home once stood.

The Plaza features nine sandstone pillars with memorial plaques identifying the Erastus Snow "Big House", The Pioneer Courthouse, The Tabernacle, The Temple, The Brigham Young Winter Home, The Gardeners' Hall, The Social Hall (Opera House), The Dixie Academy, and The Woodward School. The project was brought to a successful conclusion with a dedication ceremony on 3 June 1994. Mayor Dan McArthur accepted the Plaza on behalf of the City of St. George, Steve Snow represented the Erastus Snow descendants, giving an interesting history of the property. Angus Belliston, National President of the SUP and Zion's Bank official talked about the integrity of the places being honored, as well as the founders of St. George, and, Wells Meeks, Vice President of the Cotton Mission Chapter offered the dedicatory prayer.

Our service in the Cotton Mission Chapter, Sons of Utah Pioneers has brought a wealth of enjoyment and satisfaction to Myrlene and me over the sixteen years we have been affiliated with it. We have benefitted greatly from our association with its local members, as well as the international membership. We have gained much from our participation in projects that have contributed to the memorialization of persons and places of St. George and surrounding communities. We have gratefully accepted the generous awards given us from the International Society: the 1994 Encampment Award and Distinguished Service Award given in 1992; and the Outstanding Couple Award given us by the Cotton Mission Chapter for the year 1996-97. Thank you, one and all!