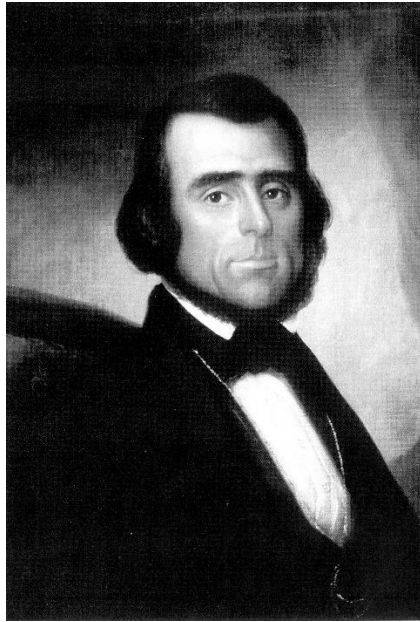




ABRAHAM OWEN SMOOT

A Utah Pioneer

Born - February 17, 1815

Died - March 6, 1895

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Born

A. O. Smoot was born February 17, 1815, in Owenton, Kentucky. Owen's first twenty years of his life are noted best by his ill health. In his earliest childhood, he was afflicted with a lung disease. When he was nine years old, his death seemed so eminent that his burial clothes were made. He had a great desire to live. It was at this time, when Owen was nine, that his father, George, a physician, and lawyer died.

Education

Formal education was limited in the isolated area of Henry County, Tennessee. Whitney relates, "Smoot received little schooling but was shrewd, apt and self-reliant, well fitted in various ways, for his future career as a colonizer." Although A. O. had limited formal education, his ability to read and write was probably learned from his extended Rowlett Family and close associates. Legal documents signed by A. O.'s mother show only an X for her signature. Although Ann was not able to write, her brother could.

Life

When Owen was twenty years old, early in 1835, two Mormon missionaries came to the family home in Tennessee which caused his whole life to change. The entire family joined the Church. In confirming Owen, a member of the Church, David Patten promised him - in Owen's words:

"That I should be healed of my infirmity and become a strong and powerful man. This prediction was verified to the letter; I began to grow strong immediately."

With new strength and having a complete commitment to the Lord and the Restored Gospel, his life exemplifies by its record the promise the Lord gave him. During the years 1836 through 1845, Owen served as a missionary for the Church, approximately 4 1/2 years, at intervals, in the States of Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, South Carolina, Illinois, and Kentucky. The last mission being from October 1844 to May 1845, with his wife Margaret, covering the Southern States to raise money for the building of the Nauvoo Temple. She also endeavored to get the Saints to go to Nauvoo to prepare to move West.

In October and November 1836, following his first mission, Owen travelled from Tennessee to Kirtland, Ohio, where he met the Prophet Joseph and other leaders of the Church, and saw the New Kirtland Temple. Owen stayed in Kirtland and studied Latin grammar for several weeks. Joseph Smith then advised Owen to return to Tennessee and raise a company of Saints to go to Far West, Missouri. Before leaving, Hyrum Smith Sr., the Church Patriarch, gave Owen a patriarchal Blessing.

A. O. Smoot built a cabin in Zarahemla, Iowa (across the river from Nauvoo) where he and his family lived - when he wasn't on one of his missions in the Southern States. He served as a High Councilor, President of the Keokuk, Iowa Branch of the Church, a policeman in Nauvoo, a worker on the Nauvoo Temple, an officiator in the Temple, and a pioneer who left his Iowa home as a leader of pioneers moving across Iowa (Winter Quarters) where he spent the winter of 1846-7. Owen was ordained a Bishop in January 1847 by Wilford Woodruff and continued to prepare with others for the journey West. He journeyed west as the captain of 100 in a train of 500. His company arrived in the Salt Lake Valley September 24, 1847.

A. O. Smoot became the first Bishop of one of the original wards in Salt Lake City - the 15th Ward. He was a bishop during his life of six wards. Owen became the bishop of the Sugar House Ward when it was first organized. Brigham Young called him to supervise construction of the Sugar Mill.

Owen was the first Justice of the Peace in the Territory of Utah. Including his journey across the plains in 1847, he made that same journey across the plains 17 times, usually with ox or mule teams. These journeys were for missions, or for business purposes.

A. O. Smoot was the Mayor of Salt Lake for ten years. He labored without pay. It was during this period that the City Hall was built and dedicated. In 1953 he became construction superintendent of the sugar factory and first bishop of the Sugar House Ward.

In January of 1868, Owen was called by Brigham Young to move to Provo for the purpose of unifying the county and leading the people. Brigham Young explained to him: "You can either go to Provo or go to Hell!" Owen chose the former. After moving to Provo, he became "Head of the Church, Government, Mercantile interests, industrial and financial in Utah County. He became leader in Road Building, Woolen Mills, Lumber and building products, construction business and banking. He was Stake President of the entire County and was the Mayor of Provo for twelve years. 'Owen truly was the Father of Utah Valley development.'" (Berlin P. 90) Owen became President of Provo Woolen Mills, one of the organizers and President of First National Bank of Provo, organizer and principal stockholder of Utah County Savings Bank and its president. Other businesses he developed in Provo were: The Smoot Lumber Yard, The. Smoot Flour Mills, The Provo Foundry and Smoot Drug Company, two banks, plus other industries he gave his support.

Brigham Young Academy in Provo. Smoot was one of its founders and development of BYA. He was chosen President of the Board of Trustees. The many contributions A O Smoot made to BYU cannot be counted. Smoot gave his time and assets to Brigham Young Academy and was largely responsible for the survival of the school. He raised funds to rebuild the Academy when it burned down. Just before his death, he endorsed notes for the academy in his name to various lending institutions for more than \$85,000. He guided the school through one financial crisis after another. One of his largest projects in Provo was the building of the Provo Tabernacle.

On October 10, 1962, the Abraham O. Smoot Administration Building (on BYU campus) was dedicated in his honor. On October 25, 1994, a bust of Smoot was erected and dedicated in front of the building in his honor.

A postscript note: I am proud to say that A. O. Smoot was my Great, Great, Great, Great Grandfather on my mother's (Maxfield) side of my family.