



Ira Rice

One fascinating early American ancestor of ours was named Ira Rice. A life sketch for him was found online:⁶⁷

Introduction

An admirable attempt has been made in recent years to establish verification for the incidents and circumstances that surround the life and works of Ira Rice. Some details have been rather allusive and what has been written concerning him has not always been accurate. The following is written according to that which has been given in several accounts and include such statements that seem to have common agreement.

Ira Rice & the War of 1812

Ira was born on October 28, 1793 at New Ashford, Berkshire County, Massachusetts, the son of Titus Rice. His mother's name is recorded as Lois, but her maiden name is yet unknown.⁶⁸ Ira was the youngest child in his family and became an orphan early in life. We find him living with relatives in Western New York State where he grew to manhood. A state of unrest existed in his home area following the boundary dispute that had been settled after the Revolutionary War. The British, in that particular area, held territories to the West of the thirty-mile distance of the Niagara River, between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Ira became familiar with the fertile land that bordered both sides of the river and he, no doubt, had heard much about the importance of waterways to American shipping. The British, holding the opposite bank of the river, were well fortified. For some time prior to the War of 1812, both British and Americans engaged in preparation for a coming conflict.

It is noted that Ira enlisted in the War of 1812 when he was 19 years of age. His enlistment papers describe him as a farmer, five feet eight inches tall, light hair, blue eyes, having come from New Ashford, Berkshire County, Massachusetts.

The American recruits were poorly equipped and wretchedly disciplined. Their weapons were personally owned and they were without uniforms, but their cause was real. During Ira's eighteen months of service, and while at Fort Erie, the near defeated British

⁶⁷ From <http://www.familyheritageseries.org/histories/rice/rice.php>, which states that the information came from a book called *Rice Pioneers: Family Groups and Stories*, compiled by David Eldon Rice, published in Pocatello, Idaho, 1976.

⁶⁸ According to our files (unsourced), Lois' maiden name was Kellogg. Is there reason to doubt this, since this well researched life sketch does not include it?

put the American Independence to one more of its many tests. They set fire to a powder magazine, resulting in an explosion that scattered a small force of two hundred or more men in every direction. Nearly all of the American boys were either drowned trying to escape across the river or were shot at the bank. Ira slid over the bank and saved himself by swimming downstream four miles to safety. He liked to tell how he leaped over the steep bank into a small hemlock tree, broke off a limb, and with it slid into the dancing waters below the falls of the Niagara River to escape with his life. It was January 1, 1813, the end of his last enlistment period.

The Ira Rice Family

A year later Ira married Minerva Saxton, and to them was born five children: Ira, Jr., Asaph, Maryette, Juliette and William Kelsey. They lived in Farmington, Palmyra, and other near areas of Ontario County, New York.

Details grow dim, but the Rices, who were living so near the place where the Prophet Joseph Smith received his first vision, must surely have heard of this sensational event. It was in this area that Ira's wife, Minerva, died in 1824, and it seems evident that, shortly following, Ira accepted a Government payment to veterans of the War of 1812 in the form of a land grant in Michigan. Though the land was considered unfit for habitation, it must have given Ira one of his greatest challenges.

It has been said that Ira married his second wife, Sarah Ann Harrington, before leaving for Michigan. She was the daughter of Benjamin and Ruth Harrington. Census records of Wayne County, Michigan list Ira and Sara with five sons and three daughters which, no doubt, included the three living children of Minerva, showing that Sarah Ann had added five children to Ira's family. By 1831, the Rice family had moved to Ypsilanti, Washtenaw County, Michigan, and six or seven more children were born to them while there.

In spite of the unfavorable account given concerning the wilds of Michigan, men such as Ira tackled the task of cutting down trees, building log cabins and planting crops. Ira and his sons shot bears and their pelts were used as bed coverings and rugs. Fish, wild game and wild fruit were plentiful and, at times, their only food supply. His land holdings, as well as his personal property and livestock gains prove that Ira's move to Michigan was a successful venture.

Pioneering West

The Rices were visited by missionaries of the newly organized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the family became members in about 1840. The spirit of gathering urged them to join the driven Saints in Nauvoo, Illinois. Records show the extensive property and livestock holdings of Ira Rice and his sons in and near Nauvoo, as well as farmland property in Pontoosuc Township. Had the Rices renounced their religion and remained in Illinois, they could well have become wealthy people. We are told that their comfortable home near the Temple was burned by the mobs. It is thought that Ira and his family were among the many who left Nauvoo in February of 1846 and crossed the

Mississippi into a snow covered wilderness.

While at Mt. Pisgah, Ira and his son, William Kelsey, returned to Nauvoo to obtain grain and other supplies from their farms. They were successful in obtaining as much as could be loaded in their caravan of wagons.

Early in the Spring of 1847, Ira was preparing to leave Council Bluffs with the first company of emigrants. Once more President Young felt that it would be wise for Ira to return to Nauvoo for more grain and supplies. Ira owned good teams and wagons and was able to freight supplies and assist many families to get to Winter Quarters, including the Orson Pratt and Lorenzo Snow families. For this reason, the trek further West, for the Rices, was delayed until a later company left. One written sketch asserts that they were assigned to Captain Hunter's 100, C.C. Rich's 50, and Shurtliff's 10 that left Winter Quarters June 21, 1847. In the same sketch we are told that Ira Rice, his two sons, Asaph and William Kelsey and William Kelsey's wife, Lucy, and their baby daughter, Ellen, arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, September 28, 1847, and spent the Winter in the Old Fort.⁶⁹

Ira Rice In Utah

In those early companies, it was not unusual for the men to precede their families to Zion to prepare for them. This was the case with Ira. He sent word back for his family to come to the Valley in the Spring of 1848. Ira and Asaph had built a log cabin in what is now known as Farmington, Davis County, Utah, hoping that Sarah Ann and the rest of the family would soon be united with Ira. When the expected company arrived, it was found that his son Leonard Gurley, but 18 years of age, had brought his three brothers, Oscar North, age 13; Adelbert, age 9; Hyrum Smith, age 4; and two sisters, Adeline, age 11 and Caroline, about age 7. Data is indefinite regarding the death of Ira's wife, Sarah Ann. She had given birth to twelve children under most difficult conditions. The sacrifices occasioned by the cruel treatment of the mobs and the exposures that were endured by the pioneers had undermined the health of many. This we know—Sarah Ann died, but the where and the when has not been established to date.

When Ira's son, Leonard Gurley, returned to Iowa in 1851, he wrote to his wife, Elizabeth Elmira, saying that he had seen his older sisters, Harriet and Henriette, but that his younger brother Ephraim, who would have been 5 or 6 years of age, had drowned. This grieved Leonard much, for he had been most anxious that all of his mother's family be reunited in Utah. He made no mention of his mother in his letter, so we have to assume that she had died earlier.

Ira did not remain long in Farmington. When a settlement was opened up in North Ogden, he is given credit for building the first log cabin there. An excerpt in the North Ogden Centennial, reads, "On March 4, 1853 ... Thomas Dunn, who had been President of the temporary Ward (Branch), set up the previous December, became Bishop, with Ira Rice and Edwin Austin his Counselors." It was here in North Ogden that Ira married his third

⁶⁹ Independent research indicates that the Rice family joined the Samuel Russel Company (Captain of 2nd Fifty under Abraham O. Smoot, Captain of 4th Hundred), which left on June 17, 1847 and arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on September 25, 1847 (Ancestry.com, *Sons of the Utah Pioneers – Utah, Pioneer Companies*).

wife, Elizabeth Ann Morris Butler, November 20, 1856. Ann was a handcart pioneer of 1856, whose husband had died in South Wales. She and her two fatherless children had found the stability of home and family once again.

Cache Valley, Utah

The glowing report of Cache Valley reached the ears of Ira and his sons, Asaph and Oscar North, and they moved in 1859, locating in what is now Providence. During the first few weeks, and until logs had been hauled from the canyons for building homes, each pioneer family was sheltered in their wagon boxes. Houses of logs with dirt roofs and rough board floors and with cloth covered windows were soon built. Each house had a fireplace in one end where fires were started with a flint and tinder.

In a local history written by Joel E. Ricks, it is noted that on 29 November 1859, High Priests came together at a meeting and among those from Providence was Ira Rice. By 1866, Providence was a thriving settlement; Ira and Ann were living in comparative comfort. Ira was 73 years of age and his eyesight had been impaired by an infection. When the call came from President Young for volunteers to go on a colonizing mission, called the Muddy or Cotton Mission to the south under the direction of Erastus Snow, Asaph accepted. Ira and his son, Asaph, had remained close associates through the years, living and working together much of the time, so Ira again chose to accompany him on this mission. Reference has been made, though the source is unavailable, that President Young advised Ira and Asaph to return to Cache Valley, rather than continue on to a new settlement in their waning years. But they had already sold their properties in Providence and the lure of the trail won out.

Washington County, Utah

The journey became even more difficult as the desolation of the land was encountered. From a journal of Ephraim Hall, who was with the company called at the same time, we understand that when they reached Ash Creek near St. George, President Snow instructed them to go on 90 miles further South and settle in the Muddy Valley. Most of the company did go directly to the Muddy, but Ira and Asaph, with a few other families, settled at Beaver Dam, now in the state of Arizona. In another journal, William E. Jones wrote:

“On the 23rd of December, 1867, flood waters came down the Beaver Dam Wash and raised to the top of its banks. The next day, the bank where the homes stood, began to cave in. By noon, all had moved their goods from their houses. Some of the houses went in the flood.”

The Rices were left homeless. According to several reports, Ira worked so hard helping in the move to higher ground, not just once but two or three times, that he became severely ill as a result of over-exertion and exposure. The story, as told by descendants of Ann's children, relates the fact that Ira never fully recovered from the experience of the flood at Beaver Dam. From the time of the flood in December of 1867 and April of 1868, Ira and Ann moved from the flooded settlement back to Ash Creek near St. George, now known as Washington, Utah. Ira died April 14, 1868, at Washington. Verification of details

is found in Ann's application for a War of 1812 widow's pension.

Ira's grave may never have been marked, but if it was, it has long since been obliterated by time. Only through a recent investigation has the location been established and a worthy monument been placed at the site. No pioneer is more deserving of words of praise in his memory. His sacrifices for the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ in latter days and for the establishment of Zion in the West can be matched only by a few of our pioneers. He left an emulative heritage that can only be compensated by posterity through individual loyalty of faithfulness.