

## Stories from the Life of David H. Cannon

Two true stories from the life of David H. Cannon (youngest brother of George Q. Cannon) were broadcast on “Death Valley Days” programs. The first incident, called “Sego Lilies,” pictured his wife, Wilhelmina Mousley, a sensitive, tenderly reared young woman from Delaware, pioneering Utah’s desert Dixie. With all the hardships, she suffered most from the lack of refinement and beauty. Disheartened, she told her young husband that if he could show her one single thing about the place which was beautiful, she could be satisfied to remain and work for the future. He finally brought her a sego lily, whose exquisite loveliness inspired her to renewed effort.

The second episode was called “Faith of our Fathers.” Ten years had elapsed since the pioneers entered St. George. Meantime, while still subsisting on the barest necessities, they were busily engaged in the erection of a costly tabernacle.

A million feet of lumber had been hauled 80 miles by team and wagon. The baptismal font, cast in Salt Lake City, was drawn 300 miles by oxen.

Early one evening David Cannon came hurrying home to his wife and his little son David with the exciting news that the glass for the tabernacle windows, after making the voyage all the way from New York around Cape Horn, had arrived in San Bernardino by freight team. David had been commissioned to leave in a week with wagons and team to bring it the remainder of the way. It was left to him to assemble the necessary outfits, as well as to raise the money—\$800—to pay the freight charges due at the end of its journey.

His wife Willie (Wilhelmina) was dismayed at the idea of gathering all that money in a week—and that from people who, as she said, “during the last two years have already pinched and scrapped—gone without food and clothing and decent food—even to dig up the last possible penny they could spare! Couldn’t they wait until spring?”

Postponing the trip would produce two alternatives; either leaving the empty windows gaping all winter with the glass only 300 miles away, or of risking a trip across the mountains in the snow by wagons heavily loaded with glass. Both were unthinkable to David.

He said, “Was there ever a time when the folks of this colony weren’t hard up—when they weren’t just recovering from floods or drought or famine or sickness?” Still his certainty of their ability to do whatever was required was unwavering.

“It’s the duty of every one of us—the duty and the privilege—to contribute all we can to it—in labor and in money. Even Davey here is not too young.”

David Jr. piped up: “I offered to go with you, sir, an’ help you haul the glass from San Bernardino—but you said ‘no’.”

David was amused. “Perhaps there’s something else you can do.”

The child pondered, “I have got a 2¢ piece I’ve been saving. If it’ll help any you can have it.” “Thank you, son,” David said.

Willie colored. “Davey, you put me to shame.” Willie said, “There’s \$3 and a half in silver I had put away toward a new dress. I was going to send to Salt lake for some red cashmere. But I can do without it for another year, I guess.”

David was moved. “If everyone is as generous as my own family, I can see I’ll have no trouble raising \$800.”

David Jr. produced his coin. “Here you are, sir.” “Thank you, boy, I’ll use it as the starter fund, and when the tabernacle is finished, you can look at it and say to yourself, ‘I helped to put

one of those panes of glass in one of those windows—those windows through which the light of Heaven shines down.”

But in spite of the good start his family gave him, David found raising the money a difficult business. Every morning he was out early making the rounds of St. George and vicinity, entreating the people to contribute something, no matter how small. Nights found him too tired to eat, too troubled to sleep.

The evening before the appointed day one of the men assigned to make the trip arrived. To Willie’s amazement, David calmly let him leave his team in the corral and agreed to be ready for an early morning start. Not until they were alone for her questioning did he admit that, even with his trip to Santa Clara that day, he had been able to scrape together only \$200—\$200 out of 8!

“Folk just don’t have it to give, Willie. If they could pay in produce or labor, they’d do it gladly, but cash is just something they haven’t got.”

To her almost indignant exclamation as to how he could let the men continue to count on leaving in the morning, he replied undaunted that daybreak was still 11 hours off.

They rose early—Willie to prepare breakfast, David to greet the arriving teamsters, though not with his characteristically gay twinkle of the eye. A look of undeniable solemnity had supplanted it.

The rest of the men came in. They were invited to join in the family’s usual pre-breakfast prayers. With fervor born of faith in dire need, David’s prayer grew eloquent. His was the simple confidence of one whose efforts, though futile, had been his utmost. As often occurred in family prayers, the silent participants were incidentally informed of timely news. David’s prayer soon revealed the sad state of affairs to the bowed heads.

Questioning eyes met his as he arose to his feet. He confessed he didn’t have the money. “A man can’t squeeze blood out of a stone.” A knock at the door broke the trying silence. It was Peter Nielsen from Washington, a settlement six miles away. “Well Brother Nielsen,” said David, “what brings you to St. George at such an early hour?” The good peter was bewildered that he was not expected. He explained that in a dream which had persisted all night until he could endure it no longer, he was ordered to come and bring his cherished savings to David. So at 4 o’clock he had arisen and had walked to St. George with the money. While he told the story the gold pieces rang out as he poured them onto the table before the amazed spectators. He had been dotting on spending it for a new front portion on the tiny two-roomed house he occupied with his wife and son. He had spent the previous evening drawing plans on paper and was expecting to start that very next day to get the lumber.

“How much is there?” queried David. The silence in the room was tangible when the old man replied, “\$600.” Within an hour the wagon train was on its way to San Bernardino, and Peter Nielsen, on a borrowed horse was jogging back toward Washington. Though he gave his entire treasure unreservedly, the Church felt it right to reimburse Peter when it was able. The new front was eventually added to his little house.

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George Q. and David Cannon went to the temple to do their father’s work. As David looked at George he saw their father standing behind George Q. He seemed to be standing above the floor. He asked George if anything was different today. George said, “Our father was here.”