

THE STATUE – HOW IT BEGAN

A few years back Richard Whitehead ran across a story written by his childhood friend Stephen D. Schmutz. Here is that story as recorded in documents held by the Washington County Historical Society, Washington County, Utah. The document is entitled DAVID HENRY CANNON, Story of the Segó Lily.

An event that occurred in the Pioneer days that involved my great grandfather, David H. Cannon, helped strengthen my testimony of the importance of having a strong testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel and a testimony of the divine calling of our prophet. While I was growing up in St. George, we had no T.V. Many of our evenings were spent gathered around the radio in our living room while we would listen to popular radio programs of the day such as Zorro, the Lone Ranger, and Jack Benny. One nationally syndicated program was Death Valley Days which told stories of the old West. One of the stories was titled "The Segó Lilly" that related the story of Grandpa Cannon.

In 1860, shortly after returning to Salt Lake from a proselyting mission to Great Britain, Grandpa Cannon was called by the Prophet Brigham Young to go on a settlement mission to St. George in Utah's Dixie. By the way, as I was growing up on the farm in St. George I learned that the area around St. George was called DIXIE because the early saints were sent to that area in Southern Utah to build cotton mills and to grow and process cotton for the church. The Southern Utah area was similar in climate to the good old Dixie in the southern area of the United States. Today, when you visit St. George, you can see the name DIXIE painted on a large rock face of the red hill overlooking the town. BUT I DIGRESS... Back to the story of Grandpa Cannon. He took his new bride, Wilhelmina, and went with others to Southern Utah to settle St. George. When the settlers arrived at St. George, they dug huts in the sides of the red hills until more permanent housing could be established. The floors and walls and ceilings were nothing but dirt and the country was not very inviting. Grandma "Willie", a sensitive, tenderly reared young woman from Delaware, bore the hardships of pioneering Utah's desert DIXIE with few complaints. She suffered most from the lack of refinement and beauty that she had experienced as she was growing up back East, and being discouraged, she told her young husband how much she longed for the beauty of the life she had given up to come to a desolate place where her home was but a hole in the dirt. She challenged him to show her one single thing about the place which was beautiful, or she could not be satisfied to remain and work for the future. David accepted the challenge and went about the countryside searching for something he could use to persuade his new bride to stay and accomplish the task

for which they had been sent to do by the Prophet. He prayed to The Lord and diligently searched. One day as he walked he came to an embankment. Looking down the forbidding hillside, he saw the object of his search, the most beautiful flower he had ever seen, a beautiful Sego Lilly grew not far away, but out of his grasp. He went down the slope and retrieved the key to his wife's happiness. As he turned to retrace his path up the grade with the Sego Lilly firmly grasped in his hand, he slipped and fell back down the hill, breaking his leg. There he lay at the bottom of the hill until evening when he was found lying in the dirt clutching the lovely Sego Lilly. Grandma "Willie", touched by the show of love from her husband and inspired by the exquisite loveliness of the flower, renewed her effort and remained to do the work at hand.

Richard was so impressed by the story that he began looking into the possibility of telling the story in a life-size bronze statue. Similar sculptures telling the story of early pioneers: Daniel D. McArthur, William Carter, Erastus Snow, Robert Gardner, and Juanita Brooks are currently placed near the Tabernacle in downtown St. George. Richard approached Jerry Anderson to get his ideas on how this story might best be told in a bronze sculpture. Jerry came up with a couple of sketches.



After discussing the project with others, it was suggested that this sculpture featuring Wilhelmina Cannon should be created with the idea of honoring pioneer women and the hardships and struggles they dealt with on a daily basis. The concept was presented to the St. George Mayor and City Council and Washington County Commissioners. All were supportive of the idea.

A MONUMENT TO HONOR PIONEER WOMEN

The Sego Lilly Story

Wilhelmina Logan Mousley was born Oct. 11, 1840 in the state of Delaware where she spent her youth. In February of 1859 she met and married David H. Cannon. She was eighteen years of age and David was twenty. The young couple was anxious to begin their married life. However, the following fall he left on a mission to England. After he returned in 1861 the newlyweds began to establish a home in Salt Lake. Having been educated in the Eastern United States, Wilhelmina was a rather sophisticated young woman. Although she found Salt Lake very different from the East, she was happy to establish a home there.

In October of 1861 David, along with 309 other families, was called by Brigham Young to move to St. George to establish the Cotton Mission. When David approached her she was not sure what lay ahead, but with his enthusiasm she determined she would leave Salt Lake and help to establish a community now St. George. When the settlers arrived they built dug out huts in the hillsides until more permanent housing could be established. Wilhelmina, the sensitive, tenderly reared young woman from Delaware did her best to bear the harsh hardships of Utah's desert with few complaints. However, in her heart she yearned for the beauty of the life she had given up to come to a desolate place where her dirt floor hut left much to be desired. One day, at her wits end, she challenged her husband, David, to show her one single thing about their present location that was beautiful or she could not be satisfied to remain and would return to Salt Lake. He prayed fervently and diligently searched for the one thing that might be the key to restoring his wife's happiness and sense of contentment. One day as he looked down an embankment, he saw the most beautiful flower he had ever seen. A beautiful Sego Lilly grew not far away. He went down the hill and picked the flower, but on his return slipped and fell down the hill injuring his leg. Unable to walk, he remained there until he was found that evening--still grasping the beautiful flower. When he was carried back to his home his wife, Wilhelmina, concerned for his injury, but was greatly touched by her husband's act of love in securing this thing of such beauty for her. Inspired by the exquisite loveliness of the flower she renewed her effort and remained to do the work at hand to help settle this desert wasteland that became St. George.

Years later when Utah achieved statehood the Sego Lilly became Utah's state flower.

This monument is being established to honor the pioneer women who sacrificed so much to settle this area, but also the beautiful flower that inspired them. Today, the sego lily is still found and is a testament of the beauty that can be seen throughout the Southern valleys.

The next concern was where this monument should be placed. Richard had suggested to the city manager and mayor that it be displayed next to the new City office building currently under construction at the corner of Main Street and 100 South.

On Wednesday, July 10, 2024, Richard met with John Willis, city manager and his assistant Marc Mortenson. At that meeting Richard was told that it had been decided that the monument would be placed in the plaza of the new city office building, That was an exciting moment. Richard then informed Marc and John that Jerry Anderson had been working for the past several months on the figure of David Cannon and he showed them some pictures of the clay model under construction.

Financing

Next problem is how to raise the money for the mold and ultimate casting and placement of the two figures that told the Sege Lily story and the challenges of the great pioneer women that settled St. George in those early founding years. Initial cost estimates were \$115,000. Most of the financing will come from descendants of David and Wilhelmina, but other donations will come from those interested in preserving this history and challenges faced by early settlers. State historical organizations are also being approached.

Meetings have been held with the Washington County Historical Society and they are very supportive of the project. Funds collected will be received by the Washington County Historical Society, a 501 (c) (3) charitable organization. Funding is anticipated to be completed by the end of 2024 so that the life-sized statue will be ready for placement when the new city office complex is dedicated.

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