

Arthur B Cort and the Silver Reef Presbyterian Church

Arthur B Cort was born 30 May 1852 in Monongahela City, Washington, Pennsylvania. He was the youngest of seven children of Jacob Cort and Jane Mary Carson. Arthur's father died the next year, but his mother never remarried. In 1860, Jane and five children were living in Reynolds, Lee, Illinois.¹ In 1870 they were living in Dement, Ogle, Illinois.²

Arthur attended theological school and petitioned to be ordained in 1879.³ His license was recommended to be granted and he was ordained to the ministry by the Chicago Presbytery at the annual meeting. After a successful questioning period, the whole of the presbytery laid their hands on the kneeling candidate, and the moderator was voice for the ordination. When Arthur arose, all gave him the right hand of fellowship and one of the reverends gave him the charge.⁴

Arthur and his brother William, also a minister, headed west (probably by train) to serve as evangelists in Southern Utah. Their mission was to "save the Mormons from their misguided and degenerate ways".⁵ On the 1880 census, Arthur and William are living in St George, Washington, Utah.⁶ Arthur opened a school in the First Ward in October that year and preached the gospel. The school was poorly patronized and no pupils came regularly, so it was moved to Third Ward a month later. Within a month fourteen pupils were enrolled with an average attendance of ten.⁷

Arthur helped several Protestant women begin schools, including Anna Stevenson in St. George, Virginia Dickey in Washington City, and Fannie Burke in Toquerville. The Presbyterians hoped that the Mormons would send their children to the schools and then would gradually move back into mainline Christianity. It was a creative strategy; however, although some Mormons sent their children to the schools and took advantage of the fine opportunity, hardly any changed their religion.⁸

In 1881, a "bevy of beauty and brains" known as the "Immortal Fourteen" came to Salt Lake City. This group of fourteen young ladies were to be school at the Collegiate Institute (now known as Westminster College). It was said that they entertained more thought of matrimony than pedagogy. About half of the young ladies married quickly.⁹ And thus it was that Arthur married Nellie Eugenia Bartlett about 1882 in Utah Territory. They had two daughters.¹⁰

Arthur was described as "a vigorous, active man who pushed things". He purchased the present mission-house in St George and enlarged it. He went to Washington City and purchased the old John D Lee home and fitted it up for a mission-house.¹¹ He preached in St George, Washington City, Silver Reef and Toquerville for eleven months. He had 100 people in communion, with 65 attending Sunday School.¹²

¹ United States Census, 1860.

² United States Census, 1870.

³ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 April 1879, p. 9.

⁴ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 April 1880, p. 12; *The Inter Ocean* [Chicago, Illinois], 14 April 1880, p. 2; 15 April 1880, p. 8.

⁵ [Religious Expression](#).

⁶ United States Census, 1880.

⁷ *The Church Review*, 1895, Vol 4, Issue 1, p. 47.

⁸ [Religious Diversity in Utah's Dixie](#).

⁹ *Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 September 1891, p. 3.

¹⁰ [Familysearch.org](#)

¹¹ *The Church Review*, 1895, Vol 4, Issue 1, p. 47.

¹² Reports of the Boards, 1881, Vol 6, p. 759.

Arthur taught and preached in St George from 1882 to 1885.¹³ He performed marriages in Silver Reef, such as the marriage of John Thompson of Silver Reef and Kate Rigby of Salt Lake City. In 1885, Arthur and his wife went to Cincinnati, where he served as a delegate from the Utah Presbytery to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church.¹⁴ Arthur served as a deputy registration officer for St George precinct in 1883¹⁵ and as a municipal election judge for St George in 1884 and 1886.¹⁶

In 1888, Arthur was again listed as minister at Silver Reef, with 14 church elders and 95 Sunday School men.¹⁷ Shortly after, he moved his family to Sherman, Washington, and in 1889 opened his Cortland Academy and Business College. He was principal and his wife assisted him. It was not a financial success and ceased to exist in 1892.¹⁸

From 1890 to 1899, Arthur was assigned to multiple stations in Washington (state).¹⁹ He was also president of the Cortland Academy in Sherman, Washington, in 1897 (the city of Cortland was named after him).²⁰ In 1898, he was involved in conducting multi-denominational revival meetings with a Methodist Episcopalian pastor and a minister from the Free Methodist church of Olympia.²¹

In the 1900 census, Arthur and family are living in South Bend City, Pacific, Washington.²² In 1910, he and his wife are living in Dry Creek, Howell, Missouri.²³ Arthur continues to work as an evangelical minister in Missouri.²⁴ By 1920, they are in Black Creek, Shelby, Missouri.²⁵ In 1930, they are living in Oliver, Taney, Missouri, with Nellie's widowed sister.²⁶ Arthur died 19 February 1933 in Hollister, Taney, Missouri. Nellie lived with her brother; she died in 1951.²⁷

¹³ Presbyterian Monthly Record, 18812, Vol 33, p. 227; Minutes of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1883, Vol 7, Part 2, p. 761; Utah Gazetteer and Directory, 1884, p. 210; Annual Report of the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1885, Vol 15, p. 113.

¹⁴ *Salt Lake Evening Democrat*, 11 May 1895, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Salt Lake Herald*, 3 June 1883, p. 10.

¹⁶ *Salt Lake Herald*, 23 January 1884, p. 8; 30 July 1884, p. 8; 23 January 1886, p. 8.

¹⁷ Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1888, Vol 11, p. 580.

¹⁸ An Illustrated History of the Big Bend Country, by R F Steele, 1904, pp. 210-211.

¹⁹ Annual Report of the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1890, p. 116; Reports of the Boards, Presbyterian Church in the USA General Assembly, 1893, Issue 23, p. 133; The Church at Home and Abroad, 1898, Vols 23-24, p. 155; *San Juan Islander* [Friday Harbor, Washington], 1 June 1899, p. 3.

²⁰ American College and Public School Directory, 1897, p. 97.

²¹ *The Islander* [Friday Harbor, Washington], 20 January 1898, p. 3.

²² United States Census, 1900.

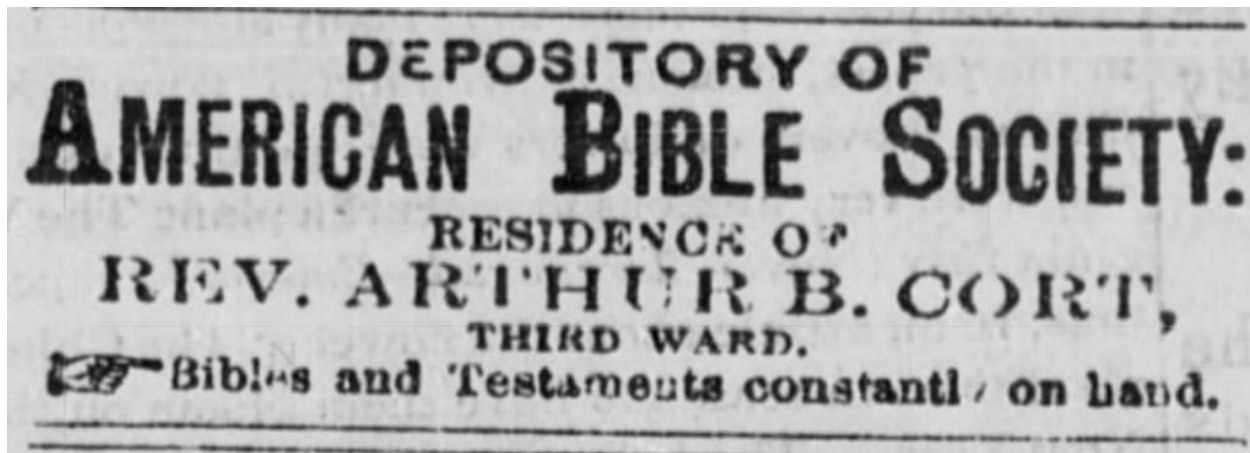
²³ United States Census, 1910.

²⁴ *Christian Thought*, 1917, Vol 17, p. 969; *The Christian Workers Magazine*, 1917, Vol 17, p. 969.

²⁵ United States Census, 1920.

²⁶ United States Census, 1930.

²⁷ *Familysearch.org*



(Image from *The Union* [St George, Utah], various issues in 1881)

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT SILVER REEF

The first Presbyterian congregation in Utah was organized in Corinne, Box Elder, Utah Territory in 1870. The next congregations were organized in Salt Lake City and Alto in 1873. The Presbyterian influence expanded through churches and especially schools, with a better education than that available in private Mormon schools of the time. The premier school was Wasatch Academy in Mt Pleasant; another was The Salt Lake Collegiate Institute (now Westminster College).²⁸

In 1876, Silver Reef had five saloons, Catholic and Presbyterian churches, mining offices, a union hall, jail, hotel, restaurant, printing office, IOOF and Good Fellows Lodges, and Chinese businesses listed on the plat.²⁹ There was a Catholic church building, but the Presbyterians met in Citizen's Hall.

In 1880, Reverend Arthur B. Cort of Chicago came to St. George with the intention of building a church and conducting a school. He was not received warmly by the local people who were defending their belief in polygamy against the federal government. But Reverend Cort helped several Protestant women begin schools, including Anna Stevenson in St. George, Virginia Dickey in Washington City, and Fannie Burke in Toquerville. The Presbyterians hoped that the Mormons would send their children to the schools and then would gradually move back into mainline Christianity. However, although some Mormons sent their children to the schools and took advantage of the fine education, very few changed their religion.³⁰

Citizen's Hall (or Rice Hall) was the educational, religious and social center of Silver Reef. It provided for school on the weekdays, and political rallies, theatricals and concerts on the nights and weekends. It was here that itinerant and semi-permanent preachers taught and spoke at church and other meetings.

²⁸ A History of the Presbyterian Church in Utah, by George K. Davies, 1947; Presbyterian Panorama: One Hundred and Fifty Years of National Missions History, Clifford M. Drury, 1952.

²⁹ Silver Reef Mining District Revisited, by Proctor and Brimhall, 1966, p. 159.

³⁰ [Religious Diversity in Utah's Dixie.](#)

Reverend Edwin N. Murphy³¹ served as resident Presbyterian minister at Silver Reef and preached at Toquerville every two weeks from 1881-1883. He then left to take charge of other mission work.³² Services were held in the Citizens Hall on Saturday, and the *Silver Reef Miner* reported attendance was very large, with some services having standing-room only.³³ Reverend D. U. McMillan was an itinerant preacher preached at Citizen's Hall and sold inexpensive editions of the New Testament. Reverend Smith preached in Rice Hall.³⁴

Many of the school teachers at Silver Reef were sent from the Presbytery of Utah:³⁵

Miss Rose Hartwell	1883-1884
Professor A. J. Geyer	1886-1888
Mrs A. J. Geyer	1886-1888
Mr M. Burney	1887-1888
Miss Della R. Lewis	1888-1889

In 1888, Silver Reef was still listed as a congregation of the Presbyterian Church. That year, contributions were recorded as \$10 to the Home Mission and \$8 to the Sunday School.³⁶ The congregation continued on the books of the Synod of Utah until 1893.³⁷

³¹ Record of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1881, Vols. 32-33, p. 227.

³² The Church Review, 1895, Vol 4, Issue 1, p. 45; Minutes of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1882, Vol 7, Part 1, p. 268; Minutes of the United Presbyterian Church I the USA, 1883, Vol 7, Part 2, p. 761.

³³ [Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church: Presbyterians in Southern Utah](#).

³⁴ Silver, Sinners and Saints, by Proctor and Shirts, 1991, p. 93.

³⁵ [Teachers of Presbyterian Schools in Utah and Idaho](#), by Fred Burton, 2006.

³⁶ Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1888, p. 97.

³⁷ Reports of the Missionary and Benevolent Boards and Committees to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 1893, p. 482.