

## GEORGE AND SARAH PRINCE

### British Settlers in Africa and America

George Alvin Haws. 1991.

In the spring of 1841 a young British family bid farewell to their loved ones and boarded a ship for the 7000 mile voyage to a new home. They were to become settlers on the frontier of Cape Colony, in what is now South Africa. Queen Victoria of England was offering land grants and money for ship fare to people who qualified and were willing to help build up the African Colony.<sup>1</sup>

George was 25 years old and his wife, Sarah (Bowman) Prince, was 22. They were married on October 10, 1837. Their first child, Francis William was born about nine months later, on July 16, 1838. Serious sicknesses were much more common then, and many babies did not survive. Sadly, Francis William died only a month short of his first birthday.<sup>2</sup>

Often the same name was re-used within a family in those days. When another son was born to George and Sarah in July, 1840, he also was named Francis, but with no middle name. The group traveling to a new home far across the world consisted of George, Sarah, Francis and George's 18 year old, unmarried brother, John.<sup>1,3</sup>

It must have been very difficult for widow Mary Prince to say goodbye to her sons, George and John, and George's young family. Another son, Richard Junior, had died in 1834 at the age of 16, and Mary's husband, Richard, died in 1835. She had eight other children. At least five of them were still living in 1841.

Sarah's mother, Sophia Hammond, had passed away in 1832, and her father, Francis, in 1839. Three of her brothers had died in their infancy and the fourth when he was 15. Two or maybe all three of Sarah's sisters were still living, to bid farewell from the shores of England.<sup>2</sup>

The colony in Africa was not new, nor entirely British. In fact, the first colonizers were Dutch, in 1652. In that year the Dutch East India Shipping Company built the "Fort de Goede Hoop" on the cape. But the fort was simply a port of call for the ships. Settlement did not extend much beyond it for the rest of the 1600's.

Around the turn of the century the governor of the colony encouraged settlers to come from Holland and take grants of land. The Dutch were joined by Huguenots (French Protestants), Germans and Swedes, who sought freedom from religious persecution. By 1707 there were 1500 "free burghers" (homesteaders). The colonists were served by a local population of Negro slaves.

Great Britain gradually overtook Holland in the late 1700's. But the Napoleon Wars of the 1780's and '90's swept Dutch ships from the seas, and in 1795 the French took control of Holland. Britain, then, seized the Dutch colony in Africa as enemy territory. British control of Cape Colony was ratified in 1814 when

the Napoleonic Wars ended. Then Dutch and English settlements spread further north and east. <sup>4,5</sup>

Twenty seven years later found the Princes in the Atlantic, on a voyage that lasted 115 days.<sup>1</sup> Francis celebrated his first birthday on the ship. One wonders if he was learning to walk while bobbing up and down over the waves. That would certainly be an interesting and challenging experience for a little tyke!

When they left England it was spring. When they arrived, probably at Port Elizabeth (see the map on the last page), it was winter. That is because the seasons on the southern hemisphere are opposite those in the north. Cape Colony is about the same distance from the equator as Arizona and New Mexico, though, and the winters there are mild, much milder than those in England.

The colony was different from England in other ways, too. For example, most areas were drier, receiving less than 25 inches of precipitation a year. Usually the sky was sunny.<sup>7</sup> Exotic wildlife roamed the broad grasslands. There were beautiful sable antelopes and impalas and mighty elephants and lions. Some of the animals must have looked quite peculiar to the British folks. There were zebras, which looked like striped horses, and funny-looking babboons. The big, long-legged ostriches were peculiar-looking over-sized birds that couldn't fly. Closer to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, dense forests were home for various types of monkeys and colorful birds.

A daughter, Mary Ann, graced the Prince home in June, 1843. She was born at Grahamstown, an important and well established settlement not far from Port Elizabeth.<sup>2</sup> From May, 1846 to May, 1858, Richard, William, Sophia, George, Susannah and Sarah Ann were born. Their birthplace is listed as Green Point or Elephant Hooks.<sup>2</sup> The latter may have been another name for Cape Town.<sup>8</sup>

One account, though, says the family settled far inland.<sup>9</sup> A likely area of settlement may have been the "Great Karroo" or the "Little Karroo," somewhere between Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. The karroos are semi-arid inland plateaus with isolated ironstone hills, called "kopjes." The surrounding flat landscape is dominated by scattered "karroo" bushes. These two foot tall shrubs sustain sheep when, under drought conditions, grass and other plants have dried up.<sup>10</sup>

The Princes established a sheep ranch, probably quite successfully, as many others in the colony had done. They probably had native servants, or hired hands, including a "mammy" (to help Sarah in the house).<sup>1</sup> Slavery, though, had been abolished from Cape Colony in 1833.<sup>5</sup>

As the boys grew old enough, they helped their dad care for the sheep. They herded them to pasture and water, and watched for wild animals that might hurt them. Francis also learned the tanner trade (making leather from animal skins). He worked for a tanner, away from home, for a time.<sup>6</sup>



We know little about the children's schooling, except that they learned much from their mother. Being around Dutch settlers, the children were exposed to the "Boer" language (a Dutch dialect). George is reported to have said he was afraid Francis would never be able to speak English fluently.<sup>6</sup>

While a few natives worked on the Prince ranch, other natives, whose homeland had been intruded upon by the Europeans, roamed the countryside. Some stole livestock and squatted on land claimed by the settlers.<sup>4</sup> Famines, probably caused by droughts, only made the problem worse. During one famine, many of the Princes' sheep were stolen.<sup>1</sup>

Sarah must have been very frightened by the threat of natives harming her family. While Francis was still a baby she feared so much for his life, that she often hid him in a pile of laundry under her bed.<sup>6</sup>

Six "Frontier Wars," conflicts between the Europeans and the natives, took place before the arrival of the Princes. The seventh occurred in 1846 and 1847, and the eighth in 1850.<sup>4</sup> George and his brother, John, joined the latter two wars, fighting in defense of the settlers and the British government. George is said to have earned medals and promotions for his valiant service.<sup>8</sup> John, after surviving the major conflicts, was killed in a raid in October, 1851.<sup>2</sup>

The death of his brother must have weighed heavily on George's mind, prompting deep thoughts about the eternal nature of mankind. It probably helped prepare him for a remarkable heavenly manifestation that he received in about 1852. One account says he was on a journey with his Negro helpers, to get supplies at the Cape. It states:

"One evening at the end of a hard day's travel as he was making his rounds to see that everything was all right for the night, someone called him by the name of 'George.' He turned and beheld a personage clothed in a long white robe, who told him that the Gospel had been restored and would be brought to him by two men, warning him to heed their teachings and accept them. He was told that he would know the men immediately upon seeing them."<sup>9</sup>

George instructed his family that "Some day two strangers will come to see us. They will be men of God, and will have a message for us."<sup>6</sup>

On the 23rd of May, 1853, an elder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, President Jesse Haven, stood on a slope overlooking Cape Town. He was there with his companions, William Holmes Walker and Leonard I. Smith, to dedicate the land for missionary work. In doing so, President Haven foretold, "Many of the honest in heart will rejoice in the everlasting gospel."<sup>11</sup>

Sometime later, as George and Sarah were sitting in the shade

of their house, two men approached on the pathway. George arose, announcing to his wife, "Sarah, these are the two men," and went forward to greet the servants of God.<sup>9</sup>

The elders made their home with the Prince family while teaching the Gospel in that vicinity. The Prince family were among their first converts.<sup>9</sup>

In general, though, harsh conditions and opposition resulted in slow progress for the missionaries.<sup>11</sup> One evening, while Elders Haven, Walker and Smith were with the family, a messenger brought word that a mob was gathering to hurt or kill the elders. Young Francis, who was about 15 years old at the time, was hurriedly sent to guide the elders into the hills. George stayed to watch over his family. Francis knew the trails and hiding places well. He fled with the missionaries into the hills and did not return home till the next evening. His courage had saved the elders.<sup>6</sup>

Today the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is well established in South Africa. There are many members, beautiful chapels, and a temple. In America, descendants of George and Sarah Prince, and other South African immigrants, are among the many who "rejoice in the everlasting Gospel," brought to the colony nearly 140 years ago.

The Princes and other converts made plans to emigrate to the Latter-Day Saint communities in America. The first of the Princes to go was probably Richard. According to the files of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, he left his home in 1856, at the tender age of ten. It is believed that he traveled with Elder William Walker.<sup>9</sup>

George and Sarah sold their property and traveled to Port Elizabeth to board the ship for the voyage to America. Courageously, they disbanded their sheep ranch and said goodbye to the only home their children remembered. They knew full well the difficulty of a voyage northwest across the Atlantic. But this time a difficult land journey across the vast American continent awaited them as well. Their conversion to the Church and their faith in God must have been very strong indeed!

On arriving in Port Elizabeth, they learned that they had missed their intended ship by one day. They had to wait a very long time, probably weeks or months, for another.<sup>1,12</sup> Finally George and Sarah, with seven children ranging in age from nineteen to nearly two years, boarded the "Alacrity." The passage list included the Robert Bodily family and other converts, thirty in all.\* It was early in 1860, nearly nineteen years after the arrival of the Prince family in Africa.\*\*<sup>3</sup> The following account of their journey comes

\*It is not known whether the thirty included the Prince family.

\*\*Other dates listed are 1859<sup>1, 12</sup> and 1855.<sup>6</sup> This date (1860) seems consistent with related events, while the others do not.



from "A Tribute to Sophia Prince Cooper:"<sup>1</sup>

"The two mothers, Sarah Bowman Prince and Jane Pittam Bodily, were expecting babies. They sailed from Port Elizabeth around to Cape Town, then over toward the North Isle of St. Helena. Sarah Bodily gave birth to a baby girl 12 April (named Lucy Matilda Bodily) on the boat. It was necessary to spend some time on the island for the mother's recovery. . .

"The mother Sarah Bowman Prince was very ill while crossing the ocean, and the care of the children fell on the shoulders of father George Prince. Sarah Ann was less than two years of age.

"Their journey was no easy one as the sailboat was slow and they lost their way in the winds and storms. They rationed their food and water since the trip took longer than anticipated. After three long months they landed in Boston, Massachusetts, weary, tired, bedraggled, and sick. . .

"Preparations were now made for the long trip across the plains. One day while on the way to Winter Quarters" (Iowa), "their party was surrounded by soldiers whose captain wanted to know if they sympathized with the cause of the North or South. Elder Joseph R. Humphreys, who was in charge, replied, 'We are immigrants and have not formed an opinion on the subject of slavery.' Some of the soldiers wanted to kill them, but when the officer in charge heard they were going west, he let them go, remarking that 'the Indians would kill them anyway.'

"In July, 1860, they left Florence, Nebraska with the last company of Saints to cross the plains that season, under the leadership of Captain William Budge. In this company were 400 persons, 55 wagons, 215 oxen and 75 cows. It was a long hard trip. Mother Sarah Prince continued in poor health and had to ride while the children walked. When the journey was a little more than half over across the plains, she gave birth to twins, which they had to leave buried hundreds of miles out on the prairies. Sophia" (nine years old at the time) "never lost the fear of the Indians.

"They arrived in Salt Lake, Utah Territory, 5 Oct 1860, in time for conference." (General Conference of the Church.) "They were greeted with wide open arms, many befriending them by inviting them into their homes to rest and have some good cooked meals. Sarah Prince was still very weak and ill."

The family lived for two years in Kaysville, near Salt Lake City, where their last child, Lucy Naomi, was born.<sup>13, 2</sup> On July 5, 1862, George and Sarah were sealed for all eternity in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City.<sup>2, 13</sup> In the fall of 1862 the family moved to southern Utah. After staying briefly in Washington, they settled in the little town of Middleton. <sup>1, 13</sup>

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Line of Descent

{ George Prince and Sarah Bowman  
{ Sophia Prince and Mendis Diego Cooper  
{ John Henry Cooper and Gertrude Luveda Clevenger  
{ Ruth Maxine Cooper and Kato Devar Haws