

Neils Nisson 1841-1917

Neils Nisson was born on March 27, 1841 in Norre Hoe, Grdn-Rb, Denmark. He was christened Niels Nissen. The name was soon changed to Nisson but Neils is spelled both ways until relatively recent. The Washington City Historical Society does not have any recorded information about him except what is in *The Red Hills of November* by Andrew Karl Larson and oral histories by his descendants. He came to the United States in 1862 at the age of 19 or 20. He and his brother Hans came and started for Southern Utah. Hans stopped at Parowan for a short time. He did not like the cold weather in Parowan so he went south and was in Utah's Dixie for a short time and then went to Swans Lake, Idaho. Neils did not stop in Parowan and journeyed to Southern Utah and was here with his sister. His sister, Annie was married to Hans Peter Iverson and had come over several years prior to Neils coming. She had several children by the time he came to Washington. Neils boarded in the old Peter Neilson's Sr. home where Israel Neilson then lived. Neils was a farmer and owned property, about 60 acres, out in the Washington Fields. Israel helped Neils to obtain this property.



Neils Nisson had a peculiarity in his speech. He used the words "I suppose" in many of the thoughts or sentences he uttered. One day after working hard in the fields he sat down with the other men but he could not stand to be idle and he made this statement. *"I suppose we had get better to get together and weed the onions while we rest."* Even if he was setting down he wanted to be busy weeding the onions. 'I suppose he had to say "I suppose---." He was generous in his help to other people. It is said he helped to raise and feed six children of one of the Iverson girls while he raised six of his own. He married Pernella (Polly) Sandberg May 1, 1870 and they had eight children. Neils was 29 years old and Pernella was almost 17 when they were married in Washington, Utah. In the 1870 Washington census Neils is listed as Neils Nissen and wife Parnelin. The spelling is not always accurate in census.

The home located on the northwest corner of Main Street and 100 North was known as the Neils Nisson home. This certainly was not his first residence since he purchased this home and lot from Marcus and Magdalena Funk in May 1889 for \$400.00. It remained in the Nisson family until 1923 when Neil's widow sold it to Levi Neilson. The home still stands today (2002) but has been changed considerably. The fired clay brick was added in the 1900s. The original home was probably built by Lewis Allen and modified by Markus Funk. It started out as a one room home and now has seven rooms. The earliest record shows that Neils owned lots 1 and 4 in block 3 as recorded in the 1873 property ownership records. These lots were on the west side of first east between third and fourth south. His name is spelled Niels Nissen on this record. No doubt he had some kind of residence or home at this location before he obtained the home on Main Street, but the original home was destroyed several years ago.

He married Pernella (Polly) Sandberg, a daughter of Swen Sandberg, on May 1 1870 and they had eight children. One of their children was Willard O. Nisson who was noted as an excellent musician and school teacher and educator. Quoting from Utah's

Dixie Birthplace one reads: *“He was born March 27, 1841, and died from exposure on January 3, 1917. He had a bad cold, but insisted on going irrigating. He no doubt died of pneumonia. He was married on May 1, 1870, to Pernella Sandberg, and they had eight children plus some adopted ones.”* He is buried in the Washington City Cemetery as well as Pernella..

Neils was active in deciding to build the Pile Dam that was to solve the problem of building dams on the Rio Virgin River. He seconded the motion by John P. Chidester to find information about obtaining and the cost of the timber to be used as the piles on this dam. On January 7, 1889 he was elected as a director by the stock holders of the Washington Field Canal Company. This was during the time that the pile dam was being built. It was thought that this dam would conquer the Rio Virgin. Quoting Charles W. Seegmiller in 1945 when he was approaching his 103 birthday he said, *“Well, we finished it, looked at it with satisfaction, and said, ‘Now there is a dam that will last; we have mastered the river at last!’”* Two floods came down the river in December 1889 and completely destroyed the dam. Neils, spelled Niels Nisson with Isaac C. Macfarlane were appointed to retrieve as much of the property washed down the river as possible. The population of Washington City went from around 600 people to around 300 almost over night. Neils remained and kept on farming.

Neils owned one of four “Studebaker Buggy” that were in the area. It was “hot stuff” which must give some indication of his statues. To have one of these buggies one had to be “well off” compared to the general populous.

This is all that the Society knows about Neils Nisson.