

Susannah “Susan” Smith (Wife of Orson B Adams)

Susannah “Susan” Smith was born 30 May 1819¹ in Grayson, Kentucky. She was the only child of Anthony Smith and Sarah Mahurin. Her father died at age 21, shortly before she was born. Her mother remarried Dr. Priddy Meeks (who sired nineteen children between his three wives) and took her home to be a stepmother to his four children.²

The family moved to Illinois, about sixty miles from Vandalia, in 1833. They built a house and raised stock and a garden, but things soon went terribly wrong. They bought a farm on the Illinois River about six miles above Meridocia. Susan’s stepsister died of whooping cough, and her stepfather blamed the doctors. He soon began visiting the sick and relieving them with roots and herbs.

Susan’s mother had been sick for two years, and the doctors had exhausted their skills. While visiting his brother-in-law, Sarah’s stepfather met James Miller, and learned Thomsonian medicine from him and books. The Thomsonian System was to cleanse the body with lobelia and enemas, take cayenne pepper internally, with hot pads and steam cabinet baths externally, and take doses of herbs. He was able to cure his wife this way.³

Susan married Orson Bennett Adams in 1836 in Illinois. They lost two daughters at birth, adopted a baby son in 1844, and had a third daughter nine years later. The family moved to Schyler, Illinois, and were living in Brown, Illinois, on the 1840 census.⁴ This was the year the family joined the Mormon Church and moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, where Orson helped build the Mormon temple. There was a bit of a family scandal in 1846 when Susan’s stepfather forged her husband’s name on a land deed and tried to pass it off to his brother Elisha.⁵

Susan and her family were one of the first to cross the Missouri River when the Mormon exodus started. When volunteers were asked to join the Mormon Battalion to fight in the Mexican War, Orson was the second man who volunteered to go.⁶ Susan accompanied him⁷ as a laundress and nurse (remember she had been raised in the home of a doctor). Their little boy was left with Susan’s parents to continue crossing the plains to the Salt Lake Valley.⁸

Orson became a sergeant of the Sick Detachment of Company C,⁹ and Susan accompanied him. The detachment spent the winter of 1846-1847 at Pueblo, Colorado. Then, in company with some Saints from Mississippi, they departed 24 May 1847 and arrived in the valley 29 July 1847.¹⁰ The following September, Susan was reunited with her mother and baby.¹¹

Orson built a home on Mill Creek, Salt Lake, Utah Territory. In the second summer of the settlement the crickets came and food was scarce. The soldiers’ wages were almost exhausted, and they had nothing but the supplies left in their wagon. They spent \$50 for 100 pounds of flour and 100 pounds of

¹ Utah Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Database, 1847-1868.

² *Familysearch.org*: Priddy Weeks.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ United States Census, 1840.

⁵ Illinois Miscellaneous Court Records, 1825-1858.

⁶ From Kirtland to Salt Lake City, by James A. Little, p. 56.

⁷ The Life, Times and Family of Orson Pratt Brown.

⁸ Utah Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Database, 1847-1868.

⁹ History of Utah, by Orson F. Whitney, Vol 1, p. 255.

¹⁰ Utah Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Database, 1847-1868.

¹¹ *Find-a-grave.com*

“shorts”.¹² Shorts is a very coarsely ground wheat bran, sometimes known as unbolted flour. It needed to be sifted to remove impurities.

One morning in 1849, Orson came in and announced he was going to the States for supplies. He asked for enough food for his first lunch, and trusted his gun kind providence for the rest of the trip. It was probably on the trip back that he drove a wagon and was a “captain of ten” with the Samuel Gully and Orson Spencer Company.¹³

While Orson was away on his trip, Chief Walker and some of his Indian braves had taken too much “fire water” and were tearing around the Mill Creek homestead. Susan sat in the door of her home all day with a gun across her knees and the children in the room behind her (they had also taken in two orphaned children).¹⁴

When the express came that fall, it brought a message from Orson that she could expect him home if his team would hold out. In September 1859¹⁵, Susan and her 14-year old son took a wagon and oxen to go find him.¹⁶ They were unable to manage the animals, so they never unyoked them from the wagon, and for two nights the animals slept in their traces. At the end of their third day, they met Orson and his exhausted team.¹⁷

In 1850, the family was living in Iron County, Utah Territory, where Orson was an engineer¹⁸ and Susan had been set apart as a midwife. She spent much of her time among the sick.¹⁹ In the winter of 1851, the family took their cattle and goods in response to call to settle on Little Salt Lake, a colony known as Parowan.²⁰ On the way from Beaver they had to cross a ledge where the wagons and an old brass cannon had to be lowered with ropes. The first two companies made it over the cliff and went on to make camp. The third company was still laboring over the ledge. Late in the evening, the first two camps were roused by a volley from the cannon and several rapid rifle shots. To the startled colonists it could mean but one thing -- Indians. They rushed out into the snow and found Company Three celebrating the safe descent from the ledge and the arrival into the valley.²¹

They camped on the south side of the river until a fort was built. After a short time at the fort, they moved to Red Creek and took up a homestead. “Times were hard in those first years at Parowan” said son John Adams. “The beaver built dams in the creek and shut off the water supply. The men would go in the day and clear them out and in the night the beaver would put them in again. The wheat was beginning to head but it was burning. The people held a meeting and prayed for relief. That night it snowed about twelve inches. The people were disheartened. They had water but the wheat all lay flat. During the day the sun came out and melted the snow. The wheat straightened up and they had a good crop.”²²

On the 1856 territorial census, the family was living in Paragonah, Iron, Utah Territory,²³ where Orson ran a sawmill. He also served a mission to the Spring Valley in the White Mountains of Nevada,

¹² Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

¹³ William Clayton’s Journal, 1921, p. 10; Journeys in the Wilderness, in Historical Record, Vol. 8, p. 885.

¹⁴ Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

¹⁵ Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel 1847-1868.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

¹⁸ United States Census, 1850.

¹⁹ *Find-a-grave.com*

²⁰ Saga of Three Towns, by Marietta M Mariger, 1951, p. 12.

²¹ Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

²² Ibid.

²³ Utah Territorial Census, 1856.

leaving Susan to take care of the children.²⁴ After his return, he married Charlotte Elizabeth Gingell in the home of his Susan's stepfather, Priddy Meeks. This home was used as an endowment house before the St George Temple was built. Orson and Charlotte had two children, then she left him and remarried in Wyoming. He may have had up to five additional wives in polygamy, but no additional children are known.²⁵

In 1860, the family was farming in Red Creek, Iron, Utah Territory.²⁶ In 1861, they were called to settle at the confluence of Leeds and Quail Creeks, where nine families built a new settlement called Harrisburg. A small sandstone masonry house was built in 1863 for the family, and it is still standing today. The family lived in this house until the early 1890s.²⁷

Susan was again left to care for the children when the Blackhawk war broke out in 1865, as Orson was asked to go back to Parowan to help defend the stock.²⁸ In 1869, he became presiding elder of Harrisburg, and in 1874, he became treasurer of the Leeds Ward United Order.²⁹ He then served again as presiding elder from 1876 to 1891 when meetings in Harrisburg were discontinued and people then attended meetings in Leeds.³⁰

On the 1870 and 1880 censuses, they were still living in their beautiful stone home in Harrisburg.³¹ Susan died there in 1892 and was buried in Leeds. Orson moved to Leeds to live with a daughter and died there in 1901.

²⁴ Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

²⁵ *Familysearch.org*

²⁶ United States Census, 1860.

²⁷ Orson Adams House and Harrisburg Utah.

²⁸ Sketch of the Life of John Smith Page Adams.

²⁹ *Saga of Three Towns*, by Marietta M Mariger, 1951, p. 10.

³⁰ *Saga of Three Towns*, by Marietta M Mariger, 1951, p. 11.

³¹ United States Census, 1880.



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