

# William Rees Palmer

William Rees Palmer was born 7 May 1877 in Cedar City, Iron, Utah Territory. He was the sixth of eight children of Richard Palmer and Johanna Thomas. In 1880, he was living with his parents in Cedar City.<sup>1</sup> From 1897-1900, he went on an LDS mission to the Indian Territory (renamed Southwestern States Mission in 1898—including Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, Texas).<sup>2</sup> On the 1900 census, he was a harness maker, living with his parents in Cedar City, Iron, Utah.<sup>3</sup> He was described as of medium height, medium build, with blue eyes and brown hair. His right eye had been burned by lye at age eight, with its sight destroyed.<sup>4</sup>

William married Kate Vilate Isom in 1901 in St George.<sup>5</sup> They had eight children, three of whom died young. By 1909, he was serving as the Iron County assessor.<sup>6</sup> On the 1910 census, he was a bookkeeper in a store, living with Kate and three children in Cedar City.<sup>7</sup> In 1916, he gave the dedicatory prayer for the laying of the cornerstone of the Parowan Tabernacle.<sup>8</sup> In 1917, he was the president of the PTA<sup>9</sup> and began serving as a councilman in Iron County.<sup>10</sup> He worked as a secretary and cashier for the Iron Commercial and Savings Bank, a new bank in Cedar City.<sup>11</sup>

On the 1920 census, he was a bank cashier, living with Kate and five children in Cedar City.<sup>12</sup> He was politically active as a Republican delegate.<sup>13</sup> In 1927, he was made an official member of the Piute Indian Tribe, receiving the tribal name of “Tuculin”, meaning “our friend”.<sup>14</sup> He brought national and international attention to Utah through his work among the Piute Indians. He was perhaps the greatest living authority on the history and legends of the Piutes.<sup>15</sup>

In 1930, he was a mercantile store manager, living with Kate and five children in Cedar City.<sup>16</sup> In 1933, he was reappointed to the Utah State Historical Society<sup>17</sup> and appointed to the National Recovery Administration (NRA) board of directors for Iron, Washington, and Beaver Counties.<sup>18</sup> He was the county chairman of the relief work done under the Civil Works Administration (CWA).<sup>19</sup> He

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> Early Mormon Missionary Database; Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

<sup>3</sup> United States Census, 1900.

<sup>4</sup> US WWI Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918.

<sup>5</sup> Utah Marriages, 1887-1935; Utah County Marriages, 1887-1940; Utah Select County Marriages, 1887-1937; Utah Select Marriages, 1887-1966.

<sup>6</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 2 January 1909, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> United States Census, 1910.

<sup>8</sup> Iron County Record, 25 August 1916, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Iron County Record, 14 December 1917, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Iron County Record, 19 October 1917, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> US WWI Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918; Iron County Record, 2 February 1918, p. 1..

<sup>12</sup> United States Census, 1920.

<sup>13</sup> Iron County Record, 27 August 1920, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 4 March 1960, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> *Familysearch.org*

<sup>16</sup> United States Census, 1930.

<sup>17</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 9 March 1933, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 4 September 1933, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 7 January 1934, p. 44.

spoke at the placement of the marker honoring the founders of the original Cedar Fort and explained the construction of the old fort from maps and historical data in his possession.<sup>20</sup>

In 1938 he was serving as president of the Parowan Stake, and detailed plans to construct temple cottages in connection with the St George Temple to provide housing facilities for temple workers. He was very proud that this was able to be done “using our own means of financing, the church is not participating”.<sup>21</sup>

He spent a lifetime studying the customs of the Piute Indians and was considered one of the nation’s foremost authorities on this tribe. In more than half a century he amassed a collection of Indian artifacts valued at more than \$20,000 (now housed at the William R Palmer Museum built by the Iron County School District).<sup>22</sup> In 1939, he was made an honorary chieftain of the Shivwits branch of the Piute Indian Tribe (Salt Lake Tribune, 11 December 1939, p. 1).

In 1940, he was a historical research for Mormon church, living with Kate, two children, and sister-in-law.<sup>23</sup> He served as director<sup>24</sup> of the Utah Historical Society in 1945 and was appointed as archivist for the society in 1947. Although this post had been created years before, it had never been filled. He toured the state of Utah and collected or recorded historical source materials.<sup>25</sup> He lectured widely and wrote several books, including “Piute Indian Legends”.<sup>26</sup> In 1952, he was awarded an honorary doctorate of humanity from Utah State Agricultural College (now Utah State University).<sup>27</sup>

Kate died in 1953 in Cedar City and was buried there. William died of a heart attack at home while sleeping on 1 March 1960 in Cedar City and is buried beside her.<sup>28</sup> The William R Palmer cabin, built in 1929, is still standing near the Kolob Canyon Visitors Center.<sup>29</sup>

NOTE: my mother knew William and went to school with his grandchildren. She remembers that William, her father, and another man went in together on some property by Navajo Lake. She and her siblings worked on the property, but never vacationed there. She thinks her father sold his portion.

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<sup>20</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 2 July 1933, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Ogden Standard-Examiner, 8 October 1938, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 2 March 1960, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> United States Census, 1940.

<sup>24</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 5 November 1945, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Ogden Standard-Examiner, 15 June 1947, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 13 June 1948, p. 94.

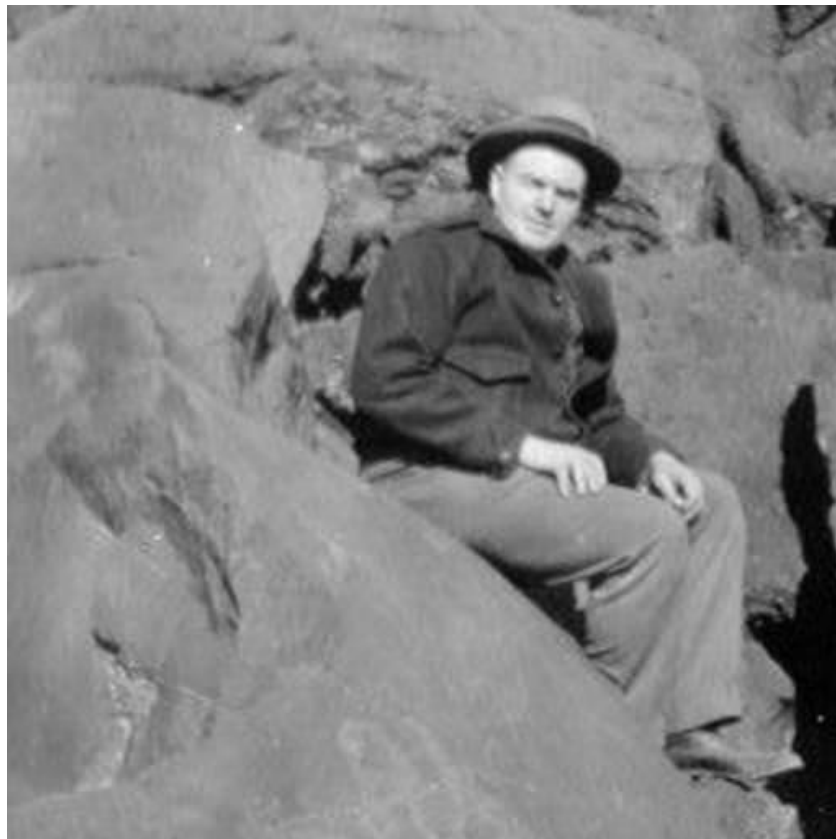
<sup>27</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, 10 June 1952, p. 5; 2 March 1960, p. 6; 9 June 1952, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Utah Death Certificates, 1904-1964; Utah Death and Military Death Certificates, 1904-1961.

<sup>29</sup> *wchsutah.org*



William and Vilate Palmer with their four sons in Logan, Utah, 1952  
(image from the Digital Public Library of America).



Bill Palmer looking for petroglyphs near Pintura (image from [wchsutah.org](http://wchsutah.org))



William R Palmer examining early plows used in the settlement of Toquerville, Utah (image from *Familysearch.org*)



William Rees Palmer received an honorary doctorate from Utah State Agricultural College in Logan, Utah (image from SUU Digital Library)



William Rees Palmer (images from *Ancestry.com*)

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