

William Tecumseh Barbee

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William Tecumseh Barbee was born December 1831 in Greencastle, Warren, Kentucky. He was the youngest child of Elias Barbee and Mary H Durham. His father remarried when William was ten years old and then had five more children. In 1840 the family lived in Green, Kentucky. In 1850 and 1860, the family was living and farming in Weston, Platte, Missouri.¹ William served during the Civil War at age 28 as a private in the First Missouri Cavalry (Confederate).²

In October 1869, William was the mining recorder for the Clifton Mining District (near Tooele).³ The next year he was engaged in mining in Tintic, Utah.⁴ At the Ophir District, he discovered and located the Silveropolis and Silver Chief claims.⁵ He served on the committee that prepared a code of mining laws for that district.⁶ In 1874, he built himself a prospecting cabin.⁷ Eventually, he sold the Silveropolis mine to the Walker Brothers for \$27,000.⁸

In 1874, Elijah Thomas sent a sample of horn silver to the Walker Brothers in Salt Lake City. They dispatched William and two others to the Harrisburg Mining District, arriving June 1875.⁹ William became enthused when he found silver “even in petrified wood” and a “piece of petrification onto which the native silver was sticking like globules of pine gum”¹⁰. He located 22 claims on Tecumseh Ridge (named for his middle name¹¹) and hurried to Salt Lake City for supplies. Returning, he established Bonanza City,¹² with a race track¹³, assay office, blacksmith shop, sampling works, boarding house and several wick-a-ups; he even planned a miner’s supply store.¹⁴ But the land William offered for sale in the new town was expensive, so a tent city arose nearby, called the Rockpile. When a rush ensued, the Rockpile became Silver Reef City, which enclosed Bonanza City.¹⁵

When William announced his discovery of silver in the sandstone of southern Utah, he got nothing but derision in Salt Lake City.¹⁶ However, his letters were published in the Salt Lake Tribune, and the

¹ United States Census, 1850, 1860.

² Missouri, Civil War Service Records of Confederate Soldiers.

³ Agency History for the Clifton Mining District.

⁴ *Salt Lake Herald*, 28 March 1896, p. 3.

⁵ *Salt Lake Herald*, 28 March 1896, p. 3; US Geological Survey Professional Paper, 1920, p. 586; Ore Deposits of Utah, 1920, Issues 11-112, p. 586.

⁶ Census Reports Tenth Census, 1880, Vol 14, p. 651.

⁷ *Salt Lake Herald*, 21 August 1887, p. 3.

⁸ *Salt Lake Herald*, 28 March 1896, p. 3.

⁹ Utah Historical Quarterly, 1934, Vol 3, No 4, p. 106; Abundance from the Earth: The Beginnings of Commercial Mining in Utah, by Leonard J Arrington, p. 215.

¹⁰ *The Mining Review*, 30 June 1903.

¹¹ Or named for an Indian chief? Transactions of the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers, 1881, Vol 9, p. 30.

¹² The WPA Guide to Utah: The Beehive State, 2013.

¹³ Silver, Sinners and Saints, by Paul Dean Proctor and Morris A Shirts, p. 43.

¹⁴ Utah Historical Quarterly, 1934, Vol 3, No 4, p. 107.

¹⁵ Ghost Towns of the Mountain West, by Philip Varney, p. 242.

¹⁶ *Salt Lake Herald*, 27 March 1898, p. 5.

boom was on.¹⁷ The area was called the Harrisburg District, covering an area of five square miles. The recorder's book showed 640 locations, probably only 150 claims were actually owned.¹⁸

William was shipping nearly 20 tons of rich paying ore every 24 hours.¹⁹ By April 1876, 33.5 tons of ore had been shipped to Salt Lake City and Pioche, which assayed from \$350 to \$750 per ton.²⁰ William himself had netted over \$40,000 by October 1876.²¹ Things were going so well financially in the area that Apostle Erastus Snow prayed God's blessing on "Brother" Barbee for opening up the mines.²²

In 1879 William appointed a committee of three to ask Father Scanlon, the Catholic priest, if he would establish and conduct a hospital for the benefit of the people. Father Scanlon agreed but said the sisters would conduct the hospital provided the each of the employees of the mills and mines would pay \$1 a month to the hospital. The hospital was completed and ready for occupancy on 1 June 1879, and five sisters of the Holy Cross reached town in July 1879.²³

In the early morning hours of 23 June 1879, a pile of wood near a mill furnace caught fire and spread throughout the Barbee mill. The workers escaped but the building collapsed on the working mill stamps. William's (half-) brother Johnson attached a hose to the water tank and put 17,000 gallons of water on the fire in vain. The mill was reconstructed and completed in February 1880. A group of investors in New York City began talking about organizing a new mining company, and William accepted their buyout and left the area with his brother Johnson.²⁴

On the 1880 census William is living in Silver Reef, Washington, Utah, with his brother Johnson R Barbee.²⁵ They were both single miners, but that year William sold his Silver Reef properties for about \$75,000 and removed to Salt Lake City where he married²⁶ Alice Almira Gwinner Mosby as her second husband. He was 49 and she was 26 years old.

William was involved in a petition for the extension of the water mains along Third East in Salt Lake City in 1881. He provided a monetary advance towards the work with the requirement that all water users on the block had to pay their water rates to him instead of the city until the amount advanced was cancelled.²⁷ William and his brother Johnson evidently moved to the Winnemucca-Lovelock area of Nevada, where they acquired several claims. The area was named the Barbee District with a mill site and town named for them in the area.²⁸

William served multiple times on a grand jury in Salt Lake City for cases of cohabitation (polygamy) and other crimes between 1885-1895.²⁹

¹⁷ The WPA Guide to Utah: The Beehive State, 2013.

¹⁸ US Geological Survey Professional Paper, 1920, p. 565.

¹⁹ *Deseret News*, 15 October 187, p. 3.

²⁰ Utah Historical Quarterly, 1934, Vol 3, No 4, p. 108.

²¹ Utah Historical Quarterly, 1961, Vol 29, No 3, p. 283.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Intermountain Catholic*, 4 November 1899, p. 1.

²⁴ The Barbee & Walker Mine and Mill: A History, by Jonathon Alvey.

²⁵ Unites States Census, 1880.

²⁶ *Salt Lake Herald*, 28 March 1896, p. 3.

²⁷ *Salt Lake Herald*, 30 March 1881, p. 4; 19 September 1883, p. 5.

²⁸ Silver, Sinners and Saints: A History of Old Silver Reef, Utah, by Paul Dean Proctor and Morris A Shirts, p. 37.

²⁹ *Salt Lake Herald*, 23 September 1885, p. 9; 6 October 1885, p. 8; 22 December 1885, p. 1; 26 April 1886, p. 8; 2 May 1886, p. 12; 8 May 1886, p. 8; 11 April 1888, p. 5; 28 May 1895, p. 8; 9 October 1895, p. 5).

In 1890, William was on a prospecting trip that located ten claims in Juab County near Tintic, Utah.³⁰ The next year, he made a big strike on the Buckhorn in Ophir District³¹. Messrs Barnett and Lynch of McCornick's bank sent him out on a prospecting trip to the Deep Creek country. He arrived at Dugway and had good results there.³² He was one of the incorporators of Ophir Mining District and one of the committee members that framed its constitution and by-laws. He was a notary and a justice of the peace in Ophir and was usually referred to as Judge Barbee afterwards.

William died 24 March 1896 of heart failure in his tent at the Blue Bill Mining District in Vernon, Tooele, Utah. He was 64 years old.³³ His obituary described him as a "a gentleman of education and endowed with taste and refinement" and a "courteous gentleman, genial and pleasant to all he met, and he was never heard to murmur against his lot."³⁴ He had ups and downs, had sold mining claims for enormous amounts, but died without a cent.³⁵

His wife and all eight of his siblings survived him. His widow, Alice G Barbee, was living in Salt Lake City, Utah in 1899.³⁶ She died in there 1919.

Research by Elaine Young, Silver Reef Foundation historian, 2016

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³⁰ *Salt Lake Herald*, 6 March 1891, p. 7.

³¹ *Salt Lake Herald*, 3 May 1891, p. 8.

³² *Salt Lake Tribune*, 7 May 1891, p. 5.

³³ *The Deseret News*, 4 April 1896, p. 15.

³⁴ *Salt Lake Herald*, 28 March 1896, pp. 3, 5; *Engineering and Mining Journal*, Vol 61, p. 331.

³⁵ *The Deseret News*, 4 April 1896, p. 15.

³⁶ Salt Lake City, Utah, City Directory, 1899.