

Biography of Lovina Syphus Whitney

Written by Clarice Whitney, grand-daughter, for the English Department of the Dixie Normal College during the winter of 1916-17. This project was sponsored by the Genealogical Committee of the St. George Stake Relief Society with Mrs. Josephine J. Miles as Chairman.

(Copied by Ella J. Seegmiller, County Historian of D.U.P. in April 1943)

Lovina Syphus Whitney was born August 31, 1854, at Sidney, New South Wales, Australia. Her father and mother, Luke and Christina Syphus were born in England and they both joined the Church of the Latter-day Saints while they were there. They had been members of the Episcopal Church, but Luke Syphus, at the age of twenty-five, and his wife at the age of twenty, joined the Mormon Church. During the gold-strike in Australia, they left their home in London, and journeyed over the sea to Australia, where Luke Syphus worked as a carpenter for several years.

Lovina was but two years of age when her parents left there and crossed the ocean to California. They landed in San Pedro and from there went to San Bernardino where they lived for seventeen months. The family was called to Utah by the authorities of the Church, so they had to leave their home and all their property and journey to Utah. This was a long and weary journey with ox teams. More than once they were molested by Indians. Lovina, who was three and a half years old, was taken by an Indian, but she was rescued by her father.

The family arrived in Cedar City, Utah, and here they lived in a dug-out for a year. They left Cedar and moved to Toquerville to raise cotton. Traveling by ox team was very slow and in those days there were no roads, so the people had much trouble in moving from one place to another. Lovina, although only a young girl, had to walk, as did the rest of the family, from Cedar to Toquerville, as the roads were too dangerous to permit them to ride. They resided at Toquerville for two years but left there because Mr. Syphus was needed at Santa Clara to help Jacob Hamblin build the fort and grist mill. Here Lovina, now six years of age, attended school, such as it was. She lived at Santa Clara for five years helping her parents make a living. There were many hardships to endure, but the worst calamity that befell the family and other settlers was the flood of '61, which washed away their homes and crops, leaving them in a destitute condition. The people moved to the place where the present town of Santa Clara stands, and here Lovina's father built many homes, some of which are still standing. Her father was called to Clover Valley to preside as Bishop, so they again had to leave their home and wend their way through the mountains to their new home. During their short stay of three years in Clover Valley, they were continually being bothered with the Indians. They finally became so bad, that the Saints were forced to leave there. Lovina and her parents did not return to Dixie, but went to Panaca, as they were called there to help build up that place. In Panaca, Lovina spent the latter part of her girlhood days. She attended district school there, and finished her education. Her father was a devoted worker in the Church, and he taught his children in the way of truth. Lovina was made first president of the Y.L.M.I.A. in Panaca and she was also president of the Relief Society and Primary Association for several years. In 1873 she was married to George B. Whitney, who had come to Panaca and joined the Church. She spent part of her married life in Mesquite,

Nevada, which was then being settled, but their home was washed away by floods, so they left there. After living in other places for several years, she finally came back to Dixie where she had spent most of her girlhood days. Here she has spent her life in rearing her family, still devoted to her religion, and spending a great deal of her time in laboring in the temple. During the first two years, I have been associated with my grandmother, Lovina Syphus Whitney, a great deal, and have found her to be a kind, lovable woman, and I have spent many happy hours, listening to her, as she related some of the hardships of her early life in Utah. She looks back upon those days with happiness for I am sure that she feels they were well spent and for a good purpose. She attends her religious meetings regularly and seems to gain a great deal of pleasure in doing so. I hope the remaining years of her life will be happy ones, and that nothing shall come into her life to bring her sorrow.