

SEVIAH CUNNINGHAM EGBERT HUNTSMAN

Seviah Cunningham, daughter of Charles Peter and Sarah (Stevens) Cunningham, was born on October 16, 1829, in Woodstock, Ontario, Canada.



Seviah Cunningham
Egbert Huntsman

Early Years In Migration. Her early years were spent with her father and other members of her family where each shared in the hardships and persecution of the Saints. Her father was born on June 10, 1788. It appears that the family joined the Church in Oxford, Ontario, Canada. Her mother died there in 1837 when Seviah was still very young. Her father married again in 1838 and their family gathered with the Saints who were then living in Missouri. Along with the other Saints they were persecuted and robbed, had their crops plundered, their homes burned, and were driven from Jackson Co. to Caldwell, Co., Missouri, and finally under the Governor's extermination order, out of the state to Illinois, where they settled in Nauvoo. [It appears that the Cunningham family may have first gone to Michigan, where a son, Charles Peter, Jr., was born in about 1840. Charles Peter (Sr.) is listed as one of the Seventies in Nauvoo. Another surviving son of this family was born on the plains in Iowa in 1848.]

An Early Marriage and Life On the Plains. At the age of seventeen while Seviah lived in Nauvoo, she met and married on April 1, 1846, Robert Cowden Egbert. The two had been married for only a short time when the Saints were driven out of the city. Her father tried to convince her to stay in the area, but

she decided to go with her husband to the West. They crossed the Mississippi River and traveled westward under great difficulty and suffering to Winter Quarters near Council Bluffs, Iowa. While camped there a call came for 500 men to fight in the war with Mexico. Her husband left for Leavenworth, Kansas, on July 20, 1846. Seviah, a bride of only 3½ mo., was left to be cared for by family, friends, and the Church—basically left to her own resources. She was very lonely.

Lonesomeness and Uncertainty. In the spring of 1848, when the Saints again started to get ready to move westward, she decided go with them driving her own team. She had never heard a word from Robert, nor did she know whether he was dead or alive. Robert's brother, Joseph,



Robert C. Egbert

helped her yoke her oxen and she drove her own ox team all the way across the plains. President Francis Marion Lyman was then just a little boy and he traveled with his parents right near to her wagon. He helped her yoke and unyoke her oxen and tend to them and her brother-in-law Joseph Egbert drove her cow and calf. As she was traveling along over the dusty roads there was no sound but the creaking of the wagon and the grating of the wheels against the hard ground and the brush. She was so lonely and wished so much to know where her husband was and if she would ever see him again. She became so wrought up over his absence that she shed tears as she traveled along. Suddenly she looked up and saw a man coming from the opposite direction. Very strange, she thought, as they knew of no human beings, except

Indians, for hundreds of miles. As he drew near she tried to hide her face in her sun bonnet. The road was very narrow—he could hardly turn out to let the wagon pass for the high brush on both sides of the road. When he turned out, however, he stopped by the wagon and inquired if this was Robert Egbert’s wife. She said, “Yes!” She supposed it must have been a messenger from California, someone who had seen her husband. He said, “Here is a letter from him to you.” She took it and found it was written in his own handwriting. It said that he was well and that he would meet her at the head of the Sweetwater. After reading the letter she looked up to see if the man was still in sight. She stopped and asked her brother-in-law Joseph, if he had seen the man, that she wished to inquire further about her husband. Joseph had not even seen him, even though he had never left the road and the wagon trail being so narrow someone else could hardly have left it. She thought it very strange and tucked the letter carefully away in the front of her basque. Later on she intended to read the letter again, but it was nowhere to be found.

Together Again. Seviah rejoiced; her spirit was buoyed up; she did not shed any more tears. The Saints finally arrived at the head of the Sweetwater in Wyoming, where they stopped to pitch camp once more. She was elated to be there and looked hard to see Robert. He was there, but he was not expecting to see her; he had supposed that she would be waiting for him to come after her back in Council Bluffs. As he looked over the immigrants’ teams and outfits, he came across one particular ox team that he thought he recognized. He thought it looked like his own, but not being sure he scrutinized it more carefully. He looked around discretely as he did not want those in the wagon to think him impolite. Still, he got a pretty good look in the wagon. Whom should he discover, but his young wife, Seviah? Was he ever surprised?

He told her that he was on his way back to get her. She told him about the letter she had received from him. He apologized that he had never written a letter, nor had he had any chance to send one. They marveled together over this strange experience. She always declared that it must have been one of the three Nephites who had written and given her the letter, for the strange thing about it was that he had indeed met her there at the head of the Sweetwater.

Colonizing the West. The party arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in the fall of 1848. President Brigham Young sent Robert and Seviah to help settle Provo in Utah Co., Utah. They lived there and became quite comfortable, having built themselves a house and made a home in which at least one of their children was born. [Her father, his third wife, Mary Ann Williams, and two Cunningham half brothers were also living in Utah Co., Utah, in 1850.] But this would be the last child born there. In the spring of 1851 President Young called the family to accompany Apostles Charles C. Rich and Amasa Lyman in making a settlement in San Bernadino, California. The Egberts were so happy in Provo that they dreaded the call to leave everything and go again into the wilderness to make yet another new home. Still, being obedient to the authority of the Church they gathered up their few belongings, provided themselves the necessary equipment, and left with a company of Saints on March 21, 1851. The company consisted of about 150 wagons.

A Desert Journey. Several missionaries going to the Pacific Mission accompanied them on their journey, among them Parley P. Pratt. In his journal dated at Summit Creek, Sunday, April 20, 1851, he wrote, “All met in a general assembly to worship God and to edify one another, being joined by the people for the first we had a good time. The Spirit was poured out upon us. George A. Smith

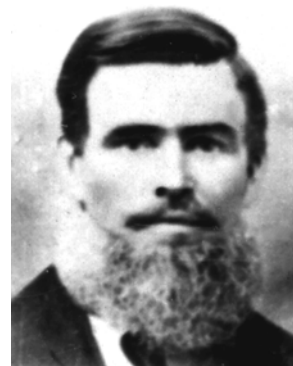
and others spoke with power in the spirit and testimony of Jesus, rebuking iniquity, worldly mindedness, unbelief, profanity, and all manner of iniquity, and exhorting the people to obey the commandments of the Lord in all righteousness.” He mentioned their arrival in Red Creek (St. George) and their enjoyment when they met and ate with the Saints who had already settled there. He also describes the desert and their hardship in crossing it. “In this desert we had traveled without much intermission two days and two nights, during which we had no feed nor water, except that which we carried with us, and the Salt Springs and the Bitter Springs and a little dry feed to refresh upon after this toil, women and children, young and old, and old men walked on foot day and night. It was certainly the hardest time I ever saw, but we cried unto God, and in the name of Jesus Christ asked Him to strengthen us and our teams and he did so in a miraculous manner, and we were saved from the horrors of the desert.”

Opposition From Neighbors. The company arrived in San Bernadino, California, in the latter part of June 1851. Elders Rich and Lyman purchased the Lugo Ranch, 30 square miles of land located a short distance below Cayon Pass. They divided it into farms which were in turn purchased by the colonists. Seviah and her family prospered after going through the hardships of settling in a new country and setting up a new home. In December, 1857, one of the colonists, J. Riley Morse, rode southward post haste from Sacramento with the news that two hundred mountain vigilantes were on their way to run the Mormons out of California. Not wishing to fight and not willing to subject their families to abuse, about four hundred of the San Bernardino settlers returned to Southern Utah. [Charles Peter Cunningham’s family was one of those that remained in San Bernadino, where he raised ten children and died in 1880.]

Conquering the Desert in Deseret.

Robert’s family was among those returning to Utah. Seviah’s father with a young wife, and her brother, who had accompanied them to San Bernadino remained there. This time the Egberts settled in Fillmore and in Deseret, Millard Co., Utah. Here they started again to conquer the desert and make it “blossom as the rose.” They lived there for some time going through many hardships. They remained active in the Church and true to their testimony of the truth of the restored Gospel. Robert spoke in a meeting on November 1, 1863, at which time he mentioned his death—that his time for departure had come. That night he went home, was taken sick, and died November 2, 1863.

Alone Again. Robert’s death left Seviah



Isaiah Huntsman

with an young family of seven children and another on the way. Her trials did not cease. Yet, she remained firm in the faith and in her testimony of the Gospel. Through prayer the LORD b l e s s e d a n d comforted her in her tribulations. In 1868

she married Isaiah Huntsman as a plural wife and moved with him to Wellsville, Cache Co., Utah. By him she had one more child, Louisa Huntsman, in 1869. She let some of Robert’s Egbert relatives living in Kaysville, Davis Co., and also in Salt Lake Co., take in some of her sons to work for them in exchange for schooling with room and board. She worried about their welfare, but was unable to provide for them on her own. She had a separate household apart of Isaiah, as he had other families to provide for and died in 1878.

Experiences Molded Seviah’s Character.

Seviah eventually moved to Kaysville, then

Draper and also Union in Salt Lake Co. After her daughter, Sarah Catherine, married William Joseph Despain, she went to live in Granite, Salt Lake Co. He gave her a piece of land on which he built her a house. She never tired of telling of the many experiences she had lived through. She told of being a seamstress, having made men's suits and other attire, for which she had even corded and spun the yarn and woven the cloth. She still had a loom on which she made rugs and carpets. She would also make buckskin gloves for men. In fact she did about anything she could get to do to earn her own living. She loved children deeply and did not spare any means she had to make them comfortable.

Seviah always sustained the authorities of the Church and spoke very highly of the prophets Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. She took a keen interest in finding her progenitors and doing the temple work for them. She died in Granite on April 27, 1913.