

Lafayette Guymon

Born: 19 September 1840 at Bear Creek, Illinois

Died: 1933 in Toadlena, New Mexico

Married: (1) Margaret Mortensen in 1861
(2) Phebe Madora Perkins

Father: James Guymon

Mother: Mary Ann Couch Guymon

Childhood Years

Lafayette Guymon was born 19 September 1840 in Bear Creek, Illinois, about twenty-five miles from Nauvoo. His parents, James Guymon and Mary Ann Couch, were the parents of five children, Lafayette being the oldest. They had been introduced to the Latter-Day Saint religion while living in Hancock County, Illinois. After their conversion, James journeyed back to his parents' home in Tennessee so he could share the joy he felt in his new found religion with them. Soon his parents, (Thomas and Sarah Davis Guymon), brother, and three sisters were likewise all converted to Mormonism, and went to live in Illinois and eventually to Utah with the Saints.

One day when Lafayette was a young boy, he was walking near the Mississippi River with his father when they heard a steamboat coming up the river. His father asked Lafayette if he wanted to go and see the boat, which of course he was very excited to do. As they hurried to the riverbank, they came upon another man, who stopped and spoke with Lafayette's father for a few minutes. The man put his hand upon Lafayette's head and inquired of James, "Is this your little boy?" Only afterwards did Lafayette learn who the man was – the Prophet Joseph Smith. It was a brief encounter, but something Lafayette remembered all his life. Sadly, however, he also remembered the day the Prophet was murdered as the day his father came home and cried bitterly, "as if his heart would break."¹

Lafayette's family sold their farm in Illinois for two yoke of oxen and an old wagon when it came time for the Saints to leave Nauvoo. Reportedly, the same farm sold again ten years later for ten thousand dollars. From the deck of a flatboat they left Nauvoo behind them, and journeyed in their wagon first to Mt. Pisgah and then to Council Bluffs, Iowa, in terrible mud. It took them days to even go a few miles in the paralyzing mud. They stayed in Council Bluffs for two years and planted crops for the pioneers who would come after them. Unfortunately, during their stay there, two of Lafayette's sisters died of canker.

Also during these years, the Mormon Battalion was organized in response to the U.S. government's need for troops to help fight in the Mexican War. Over five hundred men Latter-Day Saint men were enlisted in the regiment and marched over two-thousand miles to San Diego, California. Lafayette's father was unable to enlist, however, due to an injured leg. Instead, he provided a man named William Lickenlooker, who he had hired to drive one of his wagons, with the necessary supplies and equipment to go in his

place. Eventually, Lafayette's family moved on from Council Bluffs to Canesville for a brief period of time. It was here that Lafayette was baptized a member of the Church.

Shortly thereafter, Lafayette had an experience with his family that laid the foundations of his testimony of the Church. His family had just begun their westward trek from Canesville to Salt Lake City when his father's mother became seriously ill with cholera. Believing she was close to death, Lafayette's father gathered their family around her inside the wagon and gave her a priesthood blessing. Miraculously, she was "instantly healed."²

Settling in Utah

Lafayette's family traveled to Utah in the Willard Richard company. They had three yoke of oxen, cows and a pig that they took along. Much to their chagrin, the pig froze to death when the family was only about a hundred miles from Salt Lake City due to an early winter snowstorm in the mountains. About this time, Lafayette's father became sick with typhoid fever; he continued to suffer from it through most of the following winter. Their wagon train arrived in the Salt Lake valley 9 October 1849. Lafayette's family, including his father's third wife and her son, (a little boy named Brigham who died during the winter), spent the winter months living together in a one-room "pole house." Amazingly, Lafayette was the only one in the household who did not fall ill.

That spring the family rented a farm in the Little Cottonwood area. There they saved their grain fields from hoards of crickets by driving them into the irrigation ditch with brooms. Next they moved to American Fork and a couple of years after that bought a farm in Springville. They were not there long, however, when they were called to settle in Parowan. They were not as lucky with grasshoppers in Parowan as they had been with crickets in Cottonwood. The grasshoppers completely destroyed their crops and the family was on the point of starvation. Fortunately, they were able to purchase some stored grain from a neighbor that lasted them through the winter and provided seed for the following spring.

When Lafayette was a young man of eighteen years of age, he was called to be part of the White Mountain Mission. This mission was unique in purpose: those called to it were given the assignment to find and prepare a place in the mountains where the local Latter-Day Saints could fall back into if the U.S. Army, under General Johnston, were to pass through. Relations between the U.S. government and the Latter-Day Saints were strained at that time, and the Saints living in Utah were wary of Johnston's Army. For Lafayette, it was a sobering time.

Marriage and Family

At age twenty-one, Lafayette met and married Margaret Mortensen, a Danish girl living in Parowan.³ They had seven children in their thirteen years together before Margaret died of heart trouble at the age of only thirty-four. Prior to her passing, she and Lafayette had already buried one child and endured the anxiety of another who was spared from spinal meningitis only to be discovered deaf from the disease. For

Lafayette, these heartbreaking experiences of loss were sad shadows of more losses to come.

Two years after Margaret's death, Lafayette married Phebe Perkins, who was still a teenager at the time. In spite of her youth, Phebe did her best to be a good mother to Lafayette's six remaining children. Not long after she and Lafayette were married, however, death claimed the life of eleven-year-old Mary. Like her mother, Margaret, who she was buried beside, Mary died of heart trouble on the way home from visiting a doctor about her condition.⁴ Not long after that, Phebe lost twin girls at birth. It was also a difficult time for the family financially as they struggled to prosper. Yet even with all these trials, Lafayette and Phebe clung to their faith and made the journey to Saint George with their family so they could be sealed together in the temple there.

Moving to Colorado by way of Hole-in –the-Rock

In 1879, Lafayette and Phebe decided to move to Colorado in the hopes of improving their financial security. They met up with the Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers as they started out along their way. Some of their experiences along the trip included being caught in a box canyon just as heavy rains filled it with water all the up the sides of the wagon and threatened to wash them all away. At other times, the lack of water they experienced was a serious hardship. They spent many hours searching for "water tanks," or puddles of water that collected in bowl-shaped rock formations. Once, Lafayette narrowly escaped disaster when he slipped down into an egg-shaped water tank. He grasped a small bush or branch as he fell and was prevented from injury.

In later years, Lafayette recalled crossing the Colorado River as perhaps his most anxious moment along the way. He said that "it was perhaps the first time in his life that he would have handed the reigns to anyone else" when he saw the rock road sloping down the rushing river.⁵ The river was swollen from the rains and carried a lot of logs and other dangerous debris. To have enough time to reach the opposite shore and not be caught in the fast moving current of the unruly river, the wagons were loaded onto the raft further upstream and the men rowed with all their strength to safely time their landing. When his wagon, provisions and family were finally ferried safely across the torrent, Lafayette thought he was "the most thankful that lived."⁶

Continuing on to Colorado

After the wagon train finally reached Bluff, Lafayette and his family worked for three months gathering provisions and preparing to journey on to Colorado. When they arrived in Mancos, they had little food and only their wagons, blankets and clothing with which to start a new life. A kind man let them obtain food and supplies from George Bowers' store on his personal credit account there. Lafayette did some freighting and work for Mr. Bower in payment and the men became lifelong friends.

As Lafayette journeyed up to the mountains one day for some wood, his deaf son, James, pointed to some land and said it would make a nice place for a farm. Lafayette agreed, and there the family made their home. The next spring they dug an irrigation

ditch and began planting. They were surrounded by good friends in those early years of settlement who did much to help them get established.

But the heartache of loss was never far from them. Phebe gave birth to little boy who lived three months before passing away from whooping cough. As she watched his little grave being dug on a nearby hill, and heard the howling of coyotes in the distance, Phebe's heart ached. Then, in the fall of 1884, she noticed that Lafayette's eleven-year-old son, Heber, always seemed tired. About a week later Lafayette and Heber went out to pick beans. After about an hour's time, Lafayette found the boy asleep in one of the bean rows. Later that day, Lafayette wrote in his journal about the experience:

"I said, 'Well Heber, are you going to get lazy and leave everything for Pa to do?' I was sorry as soon as I had said it and asked him to forgive me and to go on in the house and lay down on the bed. He just looked sad and said, 'It's all right, Pa. I guess I am lazy—only I feel so tired all the time.' He didn't get up any more that day."⁷

It was soon confirmed that Heber was suffering from diabetes. His lack of energy was caused by his body's inability to process the sugars and starches found in everyday foods. There was no cure or remedy for the disease at the time, a fact Lafayette greatly lamented. "Oh dear God," he wrote in his journal two months later, "*I wish the doctors were smarter* and could discover something to cure this awful disease. They will some day, but it will be too late to save my little boy."⁸ For nearly four months Lafayette and Phebe watched as the disease slowly overcame Heber. Throughout the ordeal, Lafayette recorded the bitterness of his feelings and the bravery of little Heber.

"*January 15th* – Today after all the rest had gone to bed, I was sitting with Heber all quiet and each thinking his own thoughts when suddenly he asked me, 'Pa, are you sure Ma will be there to meet me when I go?' With me feeling so blue and sad and wondering if God has anything to do with a little boy's suffering like this, it was hard for me to tell him I was sure his mother would meet him, but after I sat and thought a minute, I know she will. It's just got to be that way. Then I told him the story my mother told me long ago about how Jesus said he was going to prepare a home for us over there and I just know he would have a nice place for a good little boy."⁹

Five days later, Heber died. All Lafayette could bring himself to write that day was "Heber died today at 12:30. It is over, thank God." He only made two more entries in his journal in the following days. Reading back over what he had written in the previous four months, Lafayette decided it was better not to write anymore at all. It was just too sad. "I'll let God keep the records," he ended.¹⁰

In spite of all their sadness, however, the Guymon family enjoyed much happiness together in Mancos. At Christmastime, in particular, the spirit of the season made their home a warm and inviting place. It was also a home filled with music throughout the

years. Lafayette was a fiddle player. He often played for local get-togethers and dances, bringing home more than two thousand dollars before he lost track.

But he was not the only one in the family who loved music. Phebe raised turkeys in order to earn enough money to buy an organ. She took music lessons and in turn taught all her girls how to play as well. Her daughter Clara wrote that “the joy that organ brought into our home and the difference it made in our lives, words could never express.”¹¹ One winter, the family watched as their beloved home burned down. But out of the flames came Lafayette, pulling the organ to safety.

A Time of Spiritual Testing

While Lafayette and his family lived in Mancos, he and Phebe became acquainted with some folks of more education and refinement. These friends began influencing Lafayette and Phebe in ways that made them question the authenticity of their Mormon faith. Yet even as he did so, a restlessness grew inside Lafayette. Finally it took him to the mountains in prayer one day. He returned feeling that the Lord had answered his prayers and confirmed in his mind the truthfulness of the Latter-Day Saint faith. He never strayed again from it.

New Mexico

Phebe began to have health problems which she sought medical help for in places as far away as Michigan and New Mexico. Eventually she found that her health improved in the warmer and drier climate of the San Juan. With much sadness, Lafayette sold his beloved Mancos farm and moved his family to Kirtland, New Mexico so Phebe’s quality of life would be better. Life in New Mexico was much more of a financial struggle for the family. Phebe’s medical bills had already drained much of their financial reserves, but in Kirtland farming was no way to make a living. Phebe worked at the Post Office and a small store and Lafayette tended to stagecoach horses in the stables in order to earn extra money.

Nevertheless, the family was still blessed with good friends and neighbors who strengthened them in their faith. Though they missed Mancos, they were still happy. They lived there for ten years before Phebe’s health began to decline once again. Lafayette decided to move his family to Provo, Utah, where his remaining daughters could attend Brigham Young University.

Sunset Years

Life in Provo created a lot of new and interesting opportunities for Lafayette’s family. They had greater access to educational and cultural experiences that expanded their enjoyments in life. Gradually their remaining children grew to adulthood and started families of their own. At first this was a lonely transition for Lafayette and Phebe, who had been consumed by family life for so many years, but after a while they became busy with other endeavors. Phebe served as the Primary President for many years, and Lafayette was the custodian for the Provo Fifth Ward.

Phebe eventually became ill again, and passed away 6 July 1922. Lafayette missed her greatly. To ease his loneliness he became actively involved in genealogy and temple work. At one point, he submitted 666 names to the temple for ordinances. He performed the vicarious ordinance work for as many of these individuals as he could before his health also began to fail.

He spent the last few years of his life living with his daughters – first Clara and then Lucy. It was at Lucy's home in New Mexico that he finally passed away at the age of ninety-four. He was buried beside Phebe in the Springville Cemetery.

As a tribute to her father, Clara penned these words:

My Father

As I look back o'er the years
Of your long and checkered life,
With all its joys and sorrows
Happiness and strife.
I cannot help but wonder
If somewhere on a scroll
These things have been recorded
And in future will unroll.
When life's great book is opened
And we come to give account—
I'm sure on life's great balance sheet
Your credits up will mount
For you gave your life in service
To your family and your God
And many came to love you,
While on this earth you trod.
You have been my inspiration
By your life of upward striving,
That the ills of life can be o'er come
By straight and honest living.
You give us courage to climb up
And meet our trials today,
That life is very much worth while,
Though thorns beset our way.¹²

*Researched and written for the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation by:
C.S. M. Jones LLC, Family Heritage Consulting.*

¹ Boyer, Clara G. "Biography of Lafayette Guymon," 1, presented by Winnie Guymon of Camp Sunflower, Daughters of Utah Pioneers, as found in Kurt Jay Christensen, "Pioneer Trek Journal 1997," available at LDS Church History Library. This biography of Lafayette Guymon is almost identical to a biography of him and his first wife, Margaret Mortensen, published in the history "They Answered the Call: A History of Minersville, Utah," (Second Edition, 1997, Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers; 1962 Copyright, Minersville Centennial Committee). This biography contains more information about Lafayette's first wife, and covers little of his life after her death.

² Boyer, 3.

³ "They Answered the Call," A 101. Margaret was disowned by her family for a time following her conversion to the Church when she was a young woman in Denmark. Eventually her father's heart was softened and he bought her eight head of cattle that she drove across the plains. She and her nine-year-old sister, were part of the Martin Handcart Company; her sister died in the winter snows in Wyoming.

⁴ There is a discrepancy in Mary's age at time of death in the two sources, "They Answered the Call" and the Daughters of Utah Pioneers biography written by Clara Boyer. One states Mary died at one year of age, and the other relates the story of her passing on her way home from a doctor's visit at age eleven. Based on other evidence that Phebe was Lafayette's wife at the time of Mary's death, Clara Boyer's portrayal of her death is presented here.

⁵ Boyer, 5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bloomfield, Lucy G. with Kate B. Carter, ed., "From the Journal of Lafayette Guymon," in *Treasures of Pioneer History*, vol. 5, Salt Lake City, Utah: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1956, 70.

⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁹ Ibid., 72-73.

¹⁰ Ibid., 73.

¹¹ Boyer, 7.

¹² Boyer, 11-12.