

Walter C. Lyman

Born: 1 October 1863; Fillmore, Millard County, Utah

Died: 19 July 1942; Moab, Utah

Married: (1) Sylvia Ann Lovell; 4 October 1883

(2) Elizabeth Finlinson; 16 December 1891

(3) Lucy Halls Lyman; 30 September 1904

(4) Leah Lerene Brown; 4 April 1929

Father: Amasa Mason Lyman

Mother: Caroline Ely Partridge

Pioneer Heritage and Early Life

Walter Clisbee Lyman was born 1 October 1863 to Amasa Mason Lyman and Caroline Lyman. Amasa Mason and Caroline were converts to the LDS religion and were among the settlers that immigrated from Nauvoo, Illinois, to Utah. Amasa Mason Lyman was a member of the LDS Twelve Apostles for many years (before being excommunicated and then reinstated), and Caroline, one of his polygamist wives, was the daughter of Edward Partridge, the first Presiding Bishop of the LDS Church. After arriving in Utah, Amasa Mason and Caroline were some of the first settlers to inhabit Southern Utah. It was there, in Millard County, that Walter was born.

During his youth Walter gained a firm testimony of the Latter-day Saint religion and a conviction that he would help build up the Utah Territory. Margery Hurst Lyman, Walter's granddaughter, recorded that Walter was a "spiritual minded boy . . . evidenced by the fact that when just ten years old he read the entire Book of Mormon in one sitting, save to eat a bit of food and to stretch his long legs."ⁱ During his youth Walter also had firm impressions that he would one day serve a mission in Southeast Utah.

Hole-In-The-Rock

Walter was sixteen years old when Brigham Young called several families to settle the San Juan country. Although Walter was young, he was allowed to accompany his brother, Platte DeAlton Lyman. The group left in October 1879, expecting that the journey would take about sixty days. The harsh environment and nearly impossible task of taking wagons through crevices and cliffs slowed the expedition considerably. The sixty-day expedition turned into a long, six-month ordeal. Walter and his brothers settled for a time in a city called Bluff, named for the imposing bluffs surrounding the valley. Walter spent the next two years there, helping to dig irrigation ditches, raising crops, and bringing freight in from neighboring states. During this time, Walter ventured north on a hunting trip to a place called White Mesa. Walter was immediately taken with the place and had a strong feeling that he would eventually return there to establish a city.

Business Ventures

In 1881, Walter left Bluff and returned to Oak City. Two years later he married sixteen-year-old Sylvia Lovell in the Salt Lake City Endowment House. After returning from Bluff, Walter and his brothers went into the lumber business. They bought a steam

sawmill in Salt Lake City and set it up back home in Oak City. Unfortunately, a fire consumed their expensive sawmill and the brothers had to go into serious debt to buy another one. After the second sawmill was destroyed by fire, the brothers moved to Salt Lake City to work for the machine company to pay off their debts.

Walter and Sylvia lived in Salt Lake City together for five years while paying off their debts. The couple eventually had three children: two boys and one girl, the latter of which passed away not long after her birth. In 1889, at the age of only twenty-three, Sylvia also passed away, and two years later Walter married Elizabeth Finlinson in Manti, Utah. After Walter paid off his debts he opened his own business called the Utah Implement Company, which sold farm and industrial machinery.

“Father of Blanding”

In September 1897, Walter returned to the San Juan with his brother Jody to visit their brother Platte, who was living in Bluff. While there, Walter and his brother-in-law, Kumen Jones, journeyed again to the White Mesa area in the Blue Mountains. The region was considered by most to be uninhabitable due to lack of viable water sources. But Walter came to believe otherwise. He recorded: “As we came onto the mesa, I was given the impression that there could be a town established there, and saw in vision the exact place on which it should be built.”ⁱⁱ Walter and Jody returned to the spot later with primitive surveying equipment and determined that streams could be rerouted to the mesa. Walter immediately fell in love with White Mesa, calling his first night there “among the sweetest and most desirable influences that ever filled my soul.”ⁱⁱⁱ That night Walter recorded seeing a large and developed city in a vision. Walter believed that the city would be an “educational and cultural center especially for the Lamanites.”^{iv} Walter also saw that the city would feature a temple that would be built for the benefit of the Indians. From then on, Walter was devoted to the cause of building up White Mesa.

After spending ten days on the mesa, he and Jody found good soil for farming and timber for sawmills. Walter returned to Bluff and organized the White Mesa Canal Company, complete with investors and capital. The company was charged with taking the water from nearby Johnson Creek and channeling it to White Mesa. This was no easy task: the water would have to be taken through the mountains via a tunnel. This technical, and often dangerous work, would take sustained effort by Bluff settlers. Although many residents were hesitant at first, Walter’s leadership convinced them that the tunnel was necessary. Characteristically, Walter threw himself into the work of building up Blanding. During this time, in 1895 and 1896, Walter served in the state legislature and did his best there to promote the settlement. After returning briefly to Salt Lake City to acquire implements and supplies, Walter began work on the canal in November 1897.

For several months Walter worked ceaselessly on the canal. Then he received word that his son, who was living in Salt Lake City, was in poor health. Walter quickly made his way to Salt Lake City. While he was there he asked himself, “What have you done in the thirty-four years you have been on earth to assist in building up the Church and Kingdom of God?”^v Soon after, Walter was called to serve a mission to the Northern

States. After returning home in April 1901, he was subsequently called to preside over the Northern States Mission. He served in that capacity for ten months before receiving an honorable release and returned home to Utah. Walter returned to the San Juan and was called to be the local stake president, presiding over multiple congregations in the area.

Despite these added church responsibilities, Walter continued to work on the canal as time allowed. In 1903 the ditch was completed and farmers began planting crops in White Mesa. Soon, the area was surveyed formally, and the town was named Grayson. (Later it was changed to Blanding). Walter continued to play a significant role in the area, even after it was established as a town. He was always eager to help new settlers get started, and consistently put other's welfare over his own. In addition to farming and livestock ventures, Walter was heavily involved in the San Juan Irrigation Company. By 1917 Walter's efforts had seen success: Blanding had grown to include roads, schools and other improvements. At the end of his life, Walter recounted: "Blanding in all its phases of development has been the great project of my life. I have often told my wife that if, in the past eternities, I had any part in planning this world of ours, this little spot in San Juan was the place I had built, and I love it."^{vi}

Later Life

As the years wore on, the Lyman family experienced some setbacks in Blanding. In 1916 Elizabeth passed away, and in 1919 Walter's frame house was destroyed by fire. Previous to Elizabeth's passing, Walter had taken an additional wife, Lucy Halls Lyman, in September 1904. Three children were born to this union, though one baby died shortly after birth. Lucy was a kind person with many talents, including music and cooking. She enjoyed reading and desired her children to obtain a good education – the price of which she knew Walter could not afford to pay. As a result, Walter and Lucy eventually divorced, although on friendly terms. After her death in 1922, Walter had Lucy sealed to him in the Salt Lake Temple. Walter was then alone for a few years until he married Leah Brown in Salt Lake City in 1929. Leah was a supportive wife and companion, and known for her love of the scriptures.

Walter spent the last years of his life continuing to build Blanding. These later years were spent promoting colonization and mining. Walter Lyman passed away 19 July 1943 in Moab, Utah, and was buried in the Blanding City cemetery. He had spent his life serving his family, church and community. In the words of his fourth wife, Leah, one of Walter's defining characteristics was "his interest in the progress of every project for the benefit of mankind, both in the community and nation."^{vii}

*Researched and written for the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation by:
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ⁱ Margery Hurst Lyman. "Margery Hurst Lyman Talk, April 22, 1979. Unpublished Manuscript from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

ⁱⁱ Lyman Family History vol. 2, 168, as quoted in *Blanding City Centennial Family Histories. Volume II, 1905-2005*, (Yorba Linda, CA: Shumway Family Publishing, 2005), 973.

ⁱⁱⁱ Albert R. Lyman, *The Edge of the Cedars* (New York: Carlton Press, 1966), 61, as quoted in *Blanding City Centennial Family Histories. Volume II, 1905-2005*, (Yorba Linda, CA: Shumway Family Publishing, 2005), 973.

^{iv} *Blanding City Centennial Family Histories*, 973.

^v *Ibid.*

^{vi} Albert R. Lyman, 121.

^{vii} Leah Lyman, *Sketch of the Life of Walter Clisbee Lyman*, as quoted in *Blanding City Centennial Family Histories*, 976.