Title: **1847-history-george-burnham-DUP-04**
Provenance:

Category: **Document**
Person: **Joseph Barker**
Date:

Family histories from the DUP (Daughters of the Utah Pioneers)

A SHORT SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF

George Franklin Burnham, son of, James Lewis Burnham

George Franklin Burnham, son of James Lewis Burnham and Mary Ann Huntly, was born October 26, 1839, in Montelona, McHenry County Illinois. In 1843 he moved with his parents to Nauvoo, Ill. and was living there when the Prophet Joseph Smith met his tragic death in 1844.

The James Lewis Burnham family consisted at this time of four small children, Luther Clinton, Wallace Kendall, George Franklin, the youngest a little girl, (Maria Antonette) who died in 1844. James Lewis Burnham, the father, was ill with a lung infection, but he labored in quarrying rock for the Nauvoo Temple as long as his failing strength would allow. He died at the age of 32 year, on October 8, 1845. Four days later Mary Ann, a child of great promise was born and the young mother cuddled the baby to her heart with courage took up the burden of caring for her four children.

In February 1847, the great exodus from Nauvoo began but George Franklin's mother had no way of moving with her small children and struggled on there until they were finally driven out by the threat of extermination. The widow traded her city property for a wagon and borrowed a yoke of oxen and then with her children and what few belongings she could take along set out for winter quarters arriving there late in the fall where they remained for a while. In 1848, the widow made arrangements for her two sons, Wallace and George, to go on to the Utah Valley with Daniel Woods. They traveled in Heber C. Kimball's company. George and his brother Wallace walked all the way across the plains and drove loose stock to pay for their board. When crossing the streams they would grab on to an animal's tail and hold on for dear life until they reached the opposite bank then they would have to walk until their wet clothing had dried on their bodies. When they reached the Valley, they located at Bountiful. In 1852, the mother and sister joined her boys; she had struggled all this time to get to Utah. How happy their reunion was, it was a great time of rejoicing for all: mother, sister and sons.

- - - - - - - - - - - - END OF PAGE 1 - - - - - - - - - - - -

George worked with his brother to make a home for their mother and sister, they helped in building roads, bridges, and getting out timber for building houses and any odd job they could find. The hardships that he had suffered in his trip across the plains and the years in the Valley separated from his mother, made George very sympathetic with families who were trying to cross the plains and he made several trips east with wagon and ox team to help the poor and needy. Although the mode of travel was slow and burdensome, it was comfortable as compared to the first trip to Utah, and often his great thanksgiving was poured forth in song for like his father he was a beautiful singer. Like his father, too, he was tall and straight, black hair, and heavy black eyebrows, his eyes were a very dark blue, and he wore a beard even in his younger days. George Franklin always insisted that he had injured his voice in driving ox teams, but anyone who heard him sing could not detect anything wrong with his fine baritone voice. He could read

music as easily as he could read a printed page, he once played in the Cache Valley band and led a choir most of his life. For some years he made his home in Richmond, Utah, and it was there that he married his first wife, Sarah Marinda Smith. To them were born twelve children. On June 26, 1881, he took a second wife, Betsy Barnett of Richmond. They were married in the Old Endowment House, Salt Lake City. Betsy had five children, two boys and three girls. Her first two little girls died in Richmond as very small children. Later George took a third wife, Emma Jane Stevens, and they had three children. In the year 1884, he was called by Church Authorities to take his families and move south and help settle the country. He settled his wife Sarah and her family in Mancos, Colorado, and his wife Betsy in Fruitland, New Mexico. This pioneering in new country brought great hardships on his families as well as himself. In Fruitland, there was the ever present danger of Indians, the Navajo Tribe was separated from whites only by the San Juan river, and greatly outnumbered them but they had no serious trouble with them. In time, the Indians came to feel very friendly toward the Mormon people and it was not unusualin winter months to have from two to four Indians sleeping before George's fireplace in the front room.

George had charge of the choir in the ward and choir practice was held in his home the small church did not have an organ, but that didn't worry him with his tuning fork he could get the pitch and he taught the tune of songs to the choir members by

- - - - - - - - - - - - - END OF PAGE 2 - - - - - - - - - - - - -

the reliable method of Do-Ra-Me. His wife Betsy was a help to him in this work, for she too, was a good singer and read music readily. George was a true man of the soil, he took pleasure in wrestling a living for himself and families from the good earth. It was as if the fertility of the soil took root in his very soul. He was never so happy as when clearing new land, building irrigation ditches, and following plows as it turned up the soft loamy furrows. His farm at Fruitland was a good one, and going easy, too easy, for his pioneer nature, so in 1893, he moved to a new settlement on the banks of the La Plata river east of Fruitland. He was set apart as the Presiding Elder of the Jackson Branch, and it flourished and grew in numbers for several years. Later the farmers found by experience that shortage of irrigation water was a threat to the farmers and banded together to build a reservoir to hold the excess water in the spring for later use, but building the storage was a hard task for the horses must be fed for the work as well as their families and it took time needed in farming. Men began to give way to discouragement and moved away to seek greener pastures elsewhere. But George Burnham was not a quitter; he and his sons labored long and weary hours on the project. He was still living at Jackson struggling for the fulfillment of his faith in that fertile valley when he met an accidental death, September 15, 1901. He was killed in Macos, Colorado by falling off a wagon loaded with timber, it was thought that the wagon had passed over his body, but he was alone when it happened so no one ever knew the exact detail of how death came to him. He was buried in Mancos by the side of his son Abinidi Sylvester (Ben) first son of his wife Betsy, who was shot fatally in a coal mine strike in Telluride, Colorado, July 4, 1901. George Franklin was one of the strong and fearless souls who were born for the days in which they lived. A pioneer by nature who was strong enough to overcome difficulties and in a way conquer nature and its resources, but because of his quiet and humble nature, many of his good works went unsung and unappreciated by the majority of his fellowmen. He was loyal and true to his church all the days of his life he filled each calling without fuss or much speech. No one ever heard him speak aught against his neighbor—he did not speak unless he had something to give to life at anytime. When he was thrown upon the mercies of the world at an early age he learned to live within himself and that along with his continued pioneering left a mark of reticence upon his fine sensitive nature. He worked hard

- - - - - - - - - - - - - END OF PAGE 3 - - - - - - - - - - - - -

all his life and knew only the small comforts he so justly earned. To his posterity he left an untar-

nished name to carry on.

This sketch was written by Lucy S. Burnham, wife of Roy Barnett Burnham, who was the son of George F. Burnham.