

Phineas Wolcott Cook Conversion Story

(Excerpts from Phineas Wolcott Cook's Journal. To make it a little easier to read, limited sentence punctuation has been added in a few places. Spelling and grammar have not been changed in order to preserve the character. An unabridged, unedited version can be found at <http://www.cookfamily.org/journal/>).

Summer 1838 - 19 years old.

After father scolded me for wasteing my time so foolishly I felt as though I would try to make up lost time so I took a sythe and went down in the meadow and mowed and was gone 1 hour and cut 1 acre of grass of about 1 ton to the acre and father came down and said he wanted me to go and help George Murray get in some wheat. This was about 3 oclock in the afternoon, I accordingly went and got in 2 loads of wheat and 3 loads of barley and pitched it on and off and it was 9 oclock in the evening and my clothes ware drenched in sweat from top to bottom. I went home and went to bed and I layed in agony all night but made no noise, in the morning they called me to breakfast but I could not get up, and it was soon discovered that I was sick so that the 3rd day I was helpless, the Doctor was sent for immediatly and he began to give me calomel dose after dose once in two hours trying to saterate me but could not, thus I continued for 9 days helpless and senseless. The neighbors came in all thought that I was about to leave them. My legs became cold and lifeless to my body 3 times. All hope was lost, at last they sent for the priest who came and sit down by me and asked me if I was ready to die, I told him I did not care. I had as soon die as not. Death was no terrors to me, for I was past fear. He asked me if I did not feel conserved for my souls salvation. I told him I did not know that I did. At this momment in comes the doctor who walked as fast as he could out and in back and forth and the priest whose name was Calvin Clank took the hint and left and after was invited not to doctor the soul while he was attending to the body.

This was the 2nd time that I had my right mind and this was on the ninth day. When all was still again in the room thare appeared someone in the room. He stood some distance from me at the oposite side of the room. He asked me in a still small voice if I would like to serve the Lord. I told him I would, he asked me again if I would serve him if I knew the right way. I told him I would, and then he disappeared and I soon began to get better so that in three days I walked down into the field whare Father and Darius was pulling flax and when they saw me coming Darius cries out, go back and get your coffin for you look as though you had come from the grave. Father was glad but yet none of us thought to ascribe the glory to God at that time but I continued to get better so that in 4 or 5 days I was able to do a good many things to help take care of the rest...

January 1840 - 20 years old

About a week or 10 days after our wedding a meeting commenced at Gull Corners under the direction of the Methodist and Congregationalists which lasted 6 weeks night and day. And in remembrance of my covenant to serve the Lord if I could find the right way, I attended vary steady hoping to get religion, after a while they invited me to go forward to the anxious seat to be prayed for telling me that this was the way to be converted. I determined not to neglect anything on my part, so I went and they prayed for me as hard as they could, and after they got through they asked me with the rest if I did not feel my soul converted, I told them I felt about as common, then they told me if I would continue to come to the anxious seat every night that at length I should be converted. After I had been forward several times and finding that I felt no change they began to loose all hopes of me. But finely as a last resort they told me if I would take up my cross and pray that the victory would be gaind. This to be sure was rather hard before so many people but being in the habit of praying from my childhood I had no trouble, I truly felt the spirit of the Lord resting upon me as I ended and arose but being questioned as to my feelings about arriseing on my feet to bear testomony, I answerd that I felt vary well but did not know that I had anything to testify to. Then they told me that if I would join the church that no doubt I should be a Christian. I told them I could not tell which one to join thare was so many. But they said that made no differance as all ware on the way to heaven ownly their was a little differance in the disipline but I could take my chois. I told them that if I could find a church that could heal the sick as they did in old times that would be

the one for me. "Oh: they that would be miracles, they are done away with the death of the ancient apostles. They were ownly given to establish the church. Since that time they ware not kneeded." This rather discouraged me for I had read in the Bible that the Lord changed not that his coarse was one eternal round and could hardly give up that what they said was true. After much reasoning and counciling I made up my mind to join the Methodist partly because my wife belonged to them in the east and partly because they took common men and made preachers of them and then I thought they ware as near right as any so about the 12th day of May at a 3 days meeting held at Gull Mill I presented myself for membership with my wife and was received on 6 months probation. I continued to investigate the different creeds and read many discussions with universalists and others and in conversation with my methodist brethren I spoke at all times as I felt sometimes they found fault with me because I wanted a more liberal salvation for the family of man. I could not believe the Lord had made a part to be saved and a great part to be damned to all eternity, for this would come in contact with the saying that nothing was made in vain. At length I grew more firm in the faith and as they perceived it they sent one of their most prominent men to labor with me. We talked a long time and at last he gave me up for lost. In this conversation he was many times put to his witts end to carry his point, and he gave it up and said he should report me to the church. I told him he might for as long as we could not agree I thought it was better for us to be apart; and they might take my name off as soon as they chose...

I now return to my own history, from the time I left the methodist I determined to have no more to do with the differant sects of religion but I resolved to do the best I could and I thought if there was any heaven I should be as apt to find it as any of them for I thought as long as I had the strongest arguments that I was safe but when I found any that could introduce a better creed than mine I was bound to embrace it. From this I became settled in my feelings awaiting anxiously for some one that could tell me the true way which I did not find for some years after which will be written in its time,...

Summer 1844 - almost 25 years old.

I worked for father in law the summer most of the time, some of the time at home and some of the time at Kalamazoo. I helped him build a barn. The 14th day of September Daniel W. died. We burried him at or a little east of Rowlands Mills in Henry Shermans field, his wife is cousin to my wife. In the month of July when I was in Kalamzoo at work on Whitcombs Mill the news came in on the Waybill by the mail coach that Joe Smith was killd by a mob in Carthage Illinois, the news had quite an effect on the people and every one had something to say about the matter. Some said he was an imposter and it was a good thing for the world and some one thing and some another, at this time considerable was said about the doctrine of the Mormons but nobody seemd to say anything good about it, but reports said that there was men around that ware Mormon preachers who ware electionering for Joe Smith as a candidate for the Presidents chair at Washington and they ware at Kal--- at the time of his death, about this time I hurd that Eliza my oldest sister had become a Mormon. She had belonged to them a year or so. This caused me to think that she had turned fool or crazy, I did no know which. This fall father was quite unwell again and he came after me to go home and help him get in his crops and get wood and make preperations for winter so I went after his oxen and waggon to move up with Ann Eliza and my things, and Eliza was thare and she began to talk to me about Mormonism but I ownly laughed at her and told her to quit her talking and send one of her preachers and that would be the end of controvercy for my motto was that the one that was the best at proving their position was bound to win, and if he had more proof than I he was nearest right, and I was bound by my former resolution to embrace it, and if I could produse more scriptural argument than he he must yield to me, or I should consider him dishonest. So she said she would send them to preach to me. Sais I, thats right for I have not had a chance for an argument on religion for some time, and I should be glad to have a chance to thrash them and make them haul in their long horns...

December 1845 - 26 years old

In December the news came that there would be a Mormon meeting in the school house across the road, and I was invited to attend. My answer was: I do not wish to hear any more sectarianism for I had had enough of them, and I had rather hear the devil and I thought that would be something new.

Father and mother and Ann Eliza went, and I went and carried Harriet the baby as far as the door and then turned and went home and kept house, till they returned. At the usual hour they come home much taken up with the sermon, and indeed it seemed as though they could not satisfy themselves with any language they had, Father said he was always a mormon but never knew what the devil to call it, so was I said mother, Well said I, I think you must be poor off for names. I don't think it would take me long to find a name for it, this rather vexed them and they said no more about it. At that time there was another meeting appointed to come off in a week and as the time came on they began to talk to me about going to hear them, but I utterly refused to have anything to do with them in any shape whatever. At last father and mother said so much to me, and Ann Eliza by her persuasion, at last I concluded to go for arguments sake so the forth lecture I made preparations to attend. I picked out a book and thought I had a pencil but when I came to look for it I could not find it, and I started out to the neighbors to borrow one but I did not get one but I finally went into father Orr's and asked him for one for said I, I am going to mormon meeting, and I want to take notes for I intend to give them Jesse, he said he had none, I told him I had been all round but could not get any,

There were two strangers sitting by the fire and one said that he had a pencil he would lend me for he was going to meeting and after it was over I could return it, so I thanked him and took it and started

I went with my book and candle and placed myself in front of the desk where I could look the preacher fair in the face determined that not a word should escape for I was bent on putting down errors if I could find any, which I had no doubt of doing and that in abundance. When meeting was in and it was time to open, the 2 strangers appeared of which I had borrowed the pencil, one of them opened the meeting by singing and prayer, his name I afterwards found to be Edward M. Webb. After meeting was opened, the one that handed me the pencil, arose and placing his eyes intently on me as though he thought that I was the ownly hardened sinner there was to fear or contend with (And surely I thought from his appearance that I was more than a match for him) And after collecting (as it appeared to me) all his powers he slowly began, he said his remarks would be confined to the fall of the church, or the setting up of anti-Christ surely thought I that's something new He proceeded and quoted many passages of the old and new testaments not forgetting his watcher who was sitting over against him for he did not presume to quote a word from the scripture without seemingly consulting his feeling or mine concerning how it might be received for the passage was clearly pointed out, book chapter and verse and then a pause until I had written it down. He in this way continued about 2-1/2 hours. When he was done he gave liberty for anyone to speak that wished. All of a sudden all eyes were fixed on me as though they thought that I was on hand with any amount of argument to put down any and everything that he had said, but they looked in vain, I was satisfied I could say nothing for I knew that what he had said was true and could not be refuted by any testimony that I had, for it was as I had always told them that truth would prevail and it had surely done so at this time especially over me. After meeting was over they came to me privately and asked me why I did not silence him by arising and telling him the truth of the matter as it was (not thinking but I could put him down as I had done others at former times) I answered the man has told us the truth and it was not my province to raise my voice against it and should not do it for if they could not understand it I could, and if I was to attempt it, myself would be put to silence and shame and I thought it was better to give up the matter at once. I handed him his pencil and thanked him for the use of it and asked him to go home with me but he declined saying that he had a previous engagement. Then I tried to engage him the next time but this they also declined so I had no chance to ask them any questions but had to content myself with what I had already heard. After this I did not blame father for saying he was always a mormon but did not know what to call it, but it was not exactly so with me, for I had not yet heard enough to convince me that Joseph Smith was a prophet sent from God, The next meeting I had my own pencil I placed myself in the same position as before but when his lecture was about half done I dropped my pencil and book onto the floor (as as they said) sat with my mouth open, at least I will say my attention was all taken up and I thought after it was over as though I had been wrapped in a vision. From this time on I have never doubted the truth of Joseph's mission

When Eliza heard that I had been to hear the Mormons for fear that the truth was not thoroughly planted within me, she sent me all the books and papers she had and I began to read and kept it up till I had read all that I could find concerning the matter, father and mother began to think that I should become a convert to their faith as they could not hear anything from me but mormanism from day to day, they could see me reading every odd moment, and mother said the next thing would be (if they did not put a stop to it) I should be off with the mormans and that would be the last of me. Father did not say as much as mother did against my reading but he did not say anything to encourage me in it, sometimes when he would hear mother say a great deal about it and oppose me so strongly he would drink too much whiskey and then he would come down on me the hardest kind, finely I became tired of their abuse, and I went away into the woods and prayed that father might become changed in his course or be taken out of the way, for I thought for me to always live in that way was more than I could endure for I had covenanted to serve the Lord and it would be impossible for me to do it under such circumstances.

After I had freed my mind before the Lord I went home, and found father quite sick with a disease called the shingles. It came out on his right breast and side. He sent forthwith after the Doctor. He soon came and said that if he could not stop them from going round his body they would kill him for when they met in the pith of his stomach they would strike in and they could not be got out again. He continued in this way 2 or 3 days and I saw they were gradually moving round him, and I began to think that I had done wrong, and finding he grew worse and worse I began to fear that I should be the cause of his death or that I might have been unwise, and his blood might be required at my hands, after I had reflected sincerely I concluded to go and ask the Lord to forgive me for my folly in not bearing more and with more patients so I started for the woods where I had been before, And there I prayed that the Lord would bear with my weakness and heal my father, after confessing my sins and asking forgiveness I retraced my steps I went directly to the house and asked Ann Eliza if father was any better. She told me he appeared better. His breaking out was nearly all gone and his pain was gone. Then I knew that the Lord had heard me and had forgiven me for which I felt to lift my soul to God in gratitude for his abundant mercies unto me. In two days he was well.

After this when I wanted to read I kept out of sight in day time, and when I went to bed and the house was still I would get up and light a candle and set it on the stand beside the bed and lie in bed and read until from 12 to 3 o'clock and no one but myself and Ann Eliza knew anything about it. About this time I was harrowing the land that we had hired broken up for wheat, the field was long and the weather was warm, and we had but one yoke of oxen, and they could not go more than once or twice around without stopping to rest, at the stopping place there was a hollow stump in which I kept the book of mormon, and while the oxen were resting I would go and get it and read. In this way I read book of mormon and the voice of warning and no one knew anything about it but myself. The two sermons which David Savage preached was all that I had an opportunity of hearing. They had been called home in consequence of the death of Joseph. In the branch of the church at Comstock about ten miles from where I lived there was a conference called to be held the 7th and 8th of September and all the saints were invited to attend. When the time came Salmon & Eliza Hall came down and stopped for me and Ann Eliza to go with them, So we got ready and went, we attended the meeting Sat. 7th and Sunday We went down to the Kalamazoo river and was baptised and Eliza ever thoughtful had brought a change of clothes for us. We then returned to the schoolhouse and was confirmed under the hands of Edward M. Webb and Crandle Dunn. After meeting we went home. Darius and Mary Ann was there and a great enquiry was made to know if we had been baptised. finely they found it out some way but I did not know how, as there was several men with their wives that lived in Barry County that had been to meeting. They had watched us to see if we took any clothes with us when we went away and they thought to themselves that we did not calculate to be baptized. But when they found out that it was really so then they had ample opportunity to display their tact and talents in refuting the principles I had embraced or at least they done their best to do so. But the more they said the stronger I felt and the more I felt to maintain it.