

Decision at Gull Corners

By Janet S. Porter

The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook
pp. 36-39, using his own words

CHARACTERS (6: 3 males, 2 females, narrator)

PWC (Phineas Wolcott Cook)

Ann Eliza (his wife)

Phineas Cook Sr. (his father)

Irene (Churchill Cook (his mother)

Salmon (Salmon Hall, brother-in-law of PWC)

Narrator

Narrator: Beginning in 1837 when he moved from Goshen, Connecticut at the age of seventeen, Phineas Wolcott Cook lived in Richland, Michigan. Soon his whole family was in Michigan on land recently opened for settlement. In 1840 he married Ann Eliza Howland, and in 1845 they were converted and baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the fall of that year Phineas was informed by one of the missionaries he should gather with the saints to their city Nauvoo, Illinois. All winter he worked to find a way to manage his meager resources to go to Zion. Early in May of 1846 he was ready.

(PWC and his father walk onstage)

Phineas Sr. I see, son, you have come back from wintering at the Howlands with a brand new wagon.

PWC: Yes, and a fine wagon, if I say so myself. *(He could hold up the picture)*

Phineas Sr. No doubt your father-in-law Henry Howland helped you find the means to buy the wood as well as the fittings for those fine metal wheels. He is a man of sufficient means to help his family.

PWC: He did let me stay with him, Father, and he provided the resources, but only if I promised to build a wagon for him. I worked very hard all winter for this wagon.

Phineas Sr. And I also see you have a fine new white cover for that wagon.

PWC: Ann Eliza made that at the home of the Halls. My sister Eliza helped her on a very large loom. That is what she was doing after she moved out of your house with the children this winter.

Father: I'm not surprised Salmon and Eliza Hall helped your wife. They are members of your new church too. I suppose you Mormons stick together.

PWC: They helped Ann Eliza, but Salmon has decided not to stay with the church. He has big plans and wants to run for office in Michigan.

Phineas Sr. And, my son, I see you recently acquired four fine oxen.

PWC: Really it's a miracle, father. Salmon told me he would give me a team of four oxen. Then he changed his mind the last minute and gave me only two.

Phineas Sr. A pity.

PWC: I would not have had a complete team for my new wagon, but my uncle was inspired to come last month. He presented me two oxen for a late wedding gift.

Phineas Sr. Yes...bless his heart. Now you seem to be ready to go somewhere. I see you have been keeping in my barn a water keg, some tools, and quite a store of wheat.

PWC: I did store that wheat from last summer's harvest. It was my own share of the wheat from the farm, which I saved purposely to have for this year.

Phineas Sr. Well, I want you to know, son, that the wheat is not yours after all. I have taken it from the barn along with your water keg and tools. I also took the money you had saved. You live in my house and it all belongs to me. Now let's see if you can go off with those Mormons!

PWC: What? You took my food and my money? We'll starve! Ann Eliza, come here. My father is so opposed to our going with the saints, he has taken all we own, including our wheat and our money.

Ann Eliza: *(She comes in from the side)* Oh, Father Cook, we have worked so hard. Please don't take away what we need to keep our family alive.

Phineas Sr. I feel I have no choice. I once thought the Mormons had the truth, but have since come to disbelieve everything they said. This is the only way I can protect my son and his family from their lies.

PWC: But Pa, we have prayed and fasted, and we know Joseph Smith restored the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth for this last time. I always knew Christ's church existed *somewhere*. You know I was searching for years. We have such strong testimonies, we simply have to gather with the saints. Please don't try to stop us from doing what our conscience tells us is right.

Phineas Sr. Here comes Salmon Hall. Maybe he can persuade you to stay.

Salmon: Why, Phineas, your wagon is ready, but it is almost empty. Surely you're not ready to leave with an empty wagon.

PWC: Almost all I had planned to carry in the wagon has been taken from me.

Ann Eliza: Well, at least we still have our clothes. I'll go get the clothes and bedding, and we'll be ready to leave.

Phineas Sr. You mean you still plan to leave us? How can you think of going with no food or money to sustain you and your children?

PWC: I don't know what we'll do; but, Pa, I have a strong feeling I should gather with the church. The spirit has whispered to me for many months it's the right thing to

do. If I don't have what I need, I feel certain God will provide. The urging is too strong for me to ignore. I am determined nothing will stop me.

Ann Eliza: And I feel the same way. We have prayed many months to do the right thing, and cannot turn back. We feel certain we know this is God's will.

Irene: *(She comes in and stands with hands on her hips)* What's this? The wagon is being loaded with your clothes and goods after all? I thought you were intent on dissuading him, Phineas.

Phineas Sr. I *was* intent on keeping him here, but he was *more intent* on gathering with his saints. I cannot stop him.

Irene: Well, then I'm going back into the house. He won't say goodbye to me. *(She turns and walks away, but stands in the doorway with arms folded across her chest, shaking her head as PWC makes the following statement:)*

PWC: Mother. I feel to say you have many years on this earth, and will yet live to be glad I am a Mormon. There, we're ready. I'll help you and the children into the wagon, Ann Eliza. Goodbye Father. I may not see you again in this life, so perhaps this will be our final goodbye until the next world.

Phineas Sr. You know nothing about those Mormons, and they may be a tough lot. I have no doubt you'll be back to winter, son. But nevertheless, here is \$5 of your money. And here is a bag with 50 pounds of the flour, which you can take. I'd hate you to starve on the way back when you find you can't make it.

PWC: I thank you, Pa. At least now I have \$22.50 to travel through Indiana and Illinois and build myself a new home. But now I have to leave. I'm afraid this may be the last time you will see me. I love you very much. Goodbye.

(Phineas Sr. and Irene leave)

Salmon: I'll walk with you to the Indiana Road at Gull Corners.

PWC: We're at the gate. Look, Mother refuses to look at us or wave goodbye. She's too angry.

Salmon: I actually thought to have been with you, Phineas.

PWC: We planned it together so long, I was very disappointed when you changed your mind.

Salmon: Yes, and your sister Eliza has been crying inconsolably all morning. She wants to gather with the saints too. Nothing I say will pacify her.

PWC: I feel as if I am saying goodbye to all that seems dear to me in the world, but the gospel now seems to be the only thing of any worth to me. I am determined to serve my God the rest of my days.

Salmon: We're out of Richland now. In half an hour we'll be at Gull Corners where you'll have to turn south onto the Indiana Road.

PWC: *(With a sigh)* Suddenly my spirits are heavy, and I am much tempted.

Salmon: I understand. You are starting for a country you know not, in a land of strangers where you shall have to stand alone. I was unable to face such a prospect. That's when I changed my mind about going.

PWC: I have experienced enough in this world to know it is full of snares and pits, and that the people I have enlisted with have a bad name. All things calculated to discourage me seem to be suddenly brought before me, and the powers of darkness are with me.

Salmon: Perhaps you should wait a few weeks. Go when you feel better.

Ann Eliza: And why would you feel better in a few weeks, Phineas? There is nothing to do but press forward and let the Lord guide us through this. We felt right about it for months, even after fasting and praying. Why would anything be different now, except that all power of Hell is raging against us?

Salmon: Here we are at Gull Corners.

PWC: Shake my hand, Salmon. I am tried, especially because you are like a brother to me, which gives me a double load to bear. God bless you Salmon, and all that you have from this time forth and forever.

Salmon: Goodbye my friend and brother.

PWC: See, now, we have turned onto the Indiana Road. Suddenly I feel the power of God resting upon me. All my heavy load has been lifted.

Ann Eliza: I can see you are growing lighter and lighter in spirit. You are quite as cheerful as before.

PWC: The dark clouds of despair broke away and the light of the spirit dawned on my mind the moment I parted company with Salmon and turned onto this road. Somehow until I made up my mind to be obedient to our inspiration, I was in darkness and misery. But the moment I had the courage to make that decision the spirit returned and confirmed the truth of our plan.

Ann Eliza: We must never forget this lesson. When once we have made a decision guided by the spirit, we must never turn back, not even if we're discouraged and unhappy. God will eventually confirm the rightness of our decision if we never waver and never give up.

PWC: Never give up.

Family Discussion

How was Phineas able to overcome the darkness and depression which had overtaken him?

What can each of us do when we feel discouraged and are afraid?

The Apostle Paul understood discouragement and persecution, as did Phineas Wolcott Cook. He understood how it feels to be inspired and know something is right, and then be crushed by trials and indecision. Addressing these issues, Paul wrote in Hebrews 10:32 and 35 a message of encouragement and faithfulness in times of trial:

"Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;

"Cast not away therefore your confidence."

Phineas had little experience in the church in May of 1846. He had never learned from a Sunday School teacher or bishop or general authority how to follow inspiration when discouragement clouds the mind. Remembering the answers to his prayers and his confidence in their decision, he was able to pass through his trial of indecision and move forward toward his goal. The worst thing would have been to hold back and do nothing because he wasn't certain.

Often we wish our Father in Heaven would just tell us what to do. We want to know from the beginning all the outcomes and options before making our decisions. But instead of becoming immobilized by confusion and by the fact that he felt no clear answer from the Lord about what to do, Phineas chose to act on the commitment he had felt in the past, and on the spiritual feelings that commitment had produced. He chose not to allow indecision to rule his thoughts.

PWC learned for himself that when we do the right thing, even in the face of discouragement and opposition, sometimes even with the feeling we're not sure we've made the right decision, when we use our agency to do what we had already decided would be the right thing to do, our "confidence will wax strong in the presence of God..." (*D&C 121:45*) Just going forward will prove the rightness of that decision.

What would Phineas say to us?

When you have prayed and pondered and fasted, and you feel right about what you should do, just do it. Time will confirm your decision.

