

The Story of Stephen Peabody Meacham: Fact Vs Fiction

With a grain of salt, we read that Stephen Peabody Meacham left his family behind in the middle of the night, to get away from the LDS church, and to leave his family behind, and to never see his family again. Ha ha ha Wrong. A lot of B S to sale newspapers back in New York. My belief is that a country largely against the Mormons back then, just ate up that story. Hook, line and sinker. The only truth in the New York newspaper story where Stephen Peabody Meacham is concerned, is the account by the friends that knew and took him in. The account about how he lived and died after returning to New York, may well be true.

The person's mentioned that left the Mormon's to come home to New York left at different times.. Well these stories are all wrapped together for the selling of News papers. In fact, each one of them Mr. Mead and family, the wife of Norman Meacham and Stephen Meacham left the Mormons on their own accord. Stephen Peabody, didn't really leave because of the Mormons. He just walked back to New York, from Iowa. He was very sadden from the death of his wife Dolly. He and Dolly were living with his oldest son Stephen Alonzo and family for about two years. when Dolly passed away in 1852. Stephen Peabody Meacham started walking back to New York some time later. By Jerry R. Smith: (PS: Stephen Peabody Meacham and family were already Mormon's and in Illinois by 1840 census, and not as the newspaper story stated as leaving New York in the spring of 1844.)

A TRUE STORY

The best written statement regarding Stephen Peabody Meacham and his wife Dorothy Maria (Dolly) Ransom is from Mary M. Harris, oldest daughter of Stephen Alonzo Meacham, the oldest son of Stephen Peabody and Dolly. "Well do I remember the last time I saw poor old Grandpa: It was after he and Grandma had lived with us for about two years while we lived on a farm on the little Mosquito, where Grandma died in the summer of 1852. Grandpa had grieved so much over the death of Grandma and was so lonely that it was not unusual for him to go away and be gone for several days at a time without letting father or mother know where he was. So it was nothing new when, one day, when he got angry at mother for slapping one of the children and slapped her, as he said, "to let you know how it feels."then he tied some of his clothes in a little bundle and with that hanging on his ax handle and thrown over his shoulder he walked away. When several days had passed and he did not come back, father went over to my uncle's to see why he was staying away so long. Well, he had not been to uncle's nor to my aunt's so they began to look for him but we never saw him again and did not hear from him till after the war (the Civil War) when we got word that he had gone back to his old home in New York. Poor old Grandpa! Who knows how much he must have suffered."

Excerpt from EARLY HISTORY OF THE TOWN HOPKINTON: History of East Village (Nicholville) and vicinity. Diaries of Elisha Risdon and Artem, p. 165-6:

The Mormons in Hopkinton. They were not in town to settle and live and would not have been permitted to do so, especially with their plural wives. The faith of the people in the justice, fairness and decency of one wife and one mother in a family had been too long inculcated and was too ardently believed to permit any such practice to establish itself in their midst. They came only to proselyte and to get converts to leave home and join them in their Mormon settlement in Nauvoo, Illinois. I suppose the reason they came to this town was due to the fact that Joseph Smith, the founder of the faith, and Joseph Meacham, one of the apotles who came, both had distant relations in Hopkinton and vicinity. The book of the Mormons, or Mormon Bible as it is called, did not appear in print till 1830. It was first printed by E. B. Grandin at Palmyra, N. Y. On the title-page of the first edition Joseph Smith, Jr., was credited with being the "author and proprietor." In subsequent editions this was changed to "translated by Joseph Smith, Jr." When a lad of only eighteen he claimed that the hiding place of this work or Bible written on thin sheets of gold plate and buried in the earth on the hillside not far distant from his home was revealed to him in a vision or dream. He was an illiterate youth and his family not well regarded. After long abasement of himself to make his spirit clean and pure, an angel led him to the plates. These he translated to an amanuensis

sitting on the other side of a curtain which shielded the plates from contamination. An elder of the Mormon faith by the name of Appleton and an apostle by the name of Joseph Meacham came to Hopkinton in the winter of 1843, and began their evangelistic work. Mr. Meacham was a distant relation of the large family by that name then and still living in Hopkinton and vicinity. He went west at an early date and becoming a convert to Mormonism no doubt felt that he could do most successful work proselyting among his numerous relations. The late Royal Smith of Nicholville was a cousin of Joseph, the founder of Mormonism, but he took no stock in his cousin, at least in his doctrines, and the coming of an apostle direct from Joseph had no influence upon him. Reaching town they at once set to work in the way of seeking converts, holding meetings here and there, preaching, exhorting and expounding their doctrines. The most of their meetings were held in what is now the red schoolhouse on the road from Nicholville the Dickinson Centre, the block schoolhouse above Nicholville, near the residence of R. F. Fisk, and in the schoolhouse, long since gone, that stood just east of Joel Goodell's. They succeeded in arousing considerable interest and feeling in their doctrines and gained quite a number of converts. Several were baptized in the new faith at Dickinson. In the following spring they picked up their converts, rigged out several wagons with canopy tops after the prairie schooner fashion and started for the then Mecca of Mormonism, Nauvoo, Illinois. Those who accompanied them at this time, as near as can now be learned, were Hiram Mead, wife and two daughters, Norman Meacham and wife, Stephen Meacham, wife and some seven or eight children, all daughters but one or possibly two, George Haskell and wife, Joseph Meacham, a relative of the apostle, and Polly and Susan Moses. The party was considerably augmented by additions at Russell, N. Y., and at various points in western New York. After a long and tedious journey they reached their destination, but to most, if not all of them it did not prove the haven of rest and peace which they had anticipated. Mr. Hiram Mead was quite a prominent man in town and owned or held the west part of the farm of Samuel Goodell, the buildings on which have disappeared. After living with the Mormons for a time quite a number of the party were sick and disgusted of the whole business and sought to leave them and return home, but they found that it was much easier to join the Mormons than to disassociate themselves. Apostasy was a high offence to a Mormon and merited death from his view point. Others who had been brought in from different sections felt as they did, and in their efforts to get away found it not only troublesome but a little dangerous. The trouble and fate of others in their efforts to escape made those who had gone from this locality wary in their movements to return. The Mormons at Nauvoo, where they had settled in 1838, having been driven out of Missouri, constituted a settlement of between fifteen and twenty thousand people, and it must be conceded were a thrifty, orderly and prosperous community. Joseph Smith was mayor of the town, and his adherents filled all the offices. And yet, sparsely settled as was that country then and powerful as were the Mormons, the Gentiles succeeded in having Joseph and his brother Hiram arrested and thrown into prison at Carthage, Missouri. Hearing that the governor of the state was disposed to let them escape, a mob broke into the jail and shot them to death, June 27, 1844. It was reported and understood here that Norman Meacham's apostasy and efforts to get away cost him his life. Mr. Mead and family, the wife of Norman Meacham and Stephen Meacham only of his family succeeded in getting away, returning to this locality a sadder and wiser people. Mr. Mead finally settled on Water Street below Nicholville, where he lived many years, moving to Parishville, where he died a faithful and consistent member of the Methodist Church several years ago. No one of that little band is now alive, so far as is known, to tell the story of their pilgrimage and sad experience in a new faith. Stephen Meacham on his return was a poor, disconsolate, broken-hearted man. The Mormons held his wife, five daughters and one or two sons as I remember, and he never saw them again. His father, Thomas, was the most noted hunter in all this section. Stephen, having a fondness for hunting, became a recluse and took to the woods for a home. His camp was several miles southeast of Parishville village and only a mile or so from the mouth of Stony Brook. Here he had a "kennel" about five feet high, seven feet long and four wide, made by driving poles into the ground for a habitation. The roof was of poles and bark. The opening was at one end, close to which he built his fire. The entire house was used as a bed, except that he kept his packages of food and old clothes which people gave him in the corners. The bed, when I saw it on a fishing trip in June, 1862, with Calvin Cutler as a guide, was a mass of worn, old clothing a foot or more in depth. When a garment got too badly worn to wear he would lay it under him. The bed was much hollowed by his weight, rising on either side. We could not find that he had any blanket or covering. Possibly he had hidden these in the woods while away. He was a great hunter, also, till his eyesight got too poor and he too infirm. There was a small clearing in which he tried to raise a few potatoes, but with poor success. He was not at home when we called and I was very sorry. Poor old man! Even as a boy I used to pity him. He came to my father's for

years regularly every two or three months with an axe and a pack hung upon it on his back. My mother saved all the odds and ends for him. His hair and beard were long and white and his face sad and disconsolate, giving him the look of a patriarch, which maybe he was. Life was one eternal wail for his wife and children. My sister Alice when a little girl would comb his hair, chat with and wait on him, which greatly diverted and pleased him. He called her his "little Queene," and longed to reach her home when he came to die. A year or so before his death he heard from a son in California through the assistance of my father, and got a little help. How he longed to go to him! In the winter of 1869, when out on one of his trips he took sick at A.B. Cutting's in Parishville, which was one of his stopping places, where he died February 27. The snow was deep and the kind, gentle, sad old man had taken his last tramp. How fortunate that he reached so generous and hospitable a home in which to die! When the band of Mormon converts left Hopkinton for Nauvoo the small dog of Mr. Mead followed them some four hundred miles into the state of Ohio, the constant companion by day, faithful sentinel at night and a general favorite of all. Tiring of the journey for some reason, perhaps not having been fully converted, or perhaps having a premonition of the trouble in store for the party, he stole away, abandoned the party in disgust and retraced his steps, surprising as it may seem, to Hopkinton, N. Y. Weeks after the departure of the party the dog came to the home of Mr. Henderson, a neighbor of Mr. Mead's, footsore and emaciated. They knew him and took him in and cared for him. On the return of Mr. Mead and family the following year, no one greeted them more warmly and affectionately than did this little red dog. In his journey back he could read no signs, make no inquiries as to the right road to Buffalo., to Syracuse, to Watertown, to Hopkinton, and yet most men, selfish in their reasoning ability, only allow the dog the cheap faculty called instinct. I am indebted to an article in the Courier and Freeman and January, 1900, written by E. A. Wood of Nicholville, for quite a portion of the information contained in the foregoing article.(Note: By Jerry R. Smith. The true story with-in this story, is how Stephen Peabody Meacham lived his life after returning to New York, and how he died. This is the story of my 4th great grandfather. God Bless and rest his dear sole."

1840 Census: Springfield, Sangamon County, Illinois Stephen Mecham 1 Male under 5. (Hyrum born 1838) 2 Males bet 5 to 10. Henry Pierpont born 1834 and Roswell born 1836.) 2 Males bet 10 to 15. Lafayette born 1829, and George born 1832.) 1 Male bet 15 to 20. Erastus Darwin born 1826 1 Male bet 40 to 50. Stephen Peabody born 1797 1 Female bet 30 to 40. Dorothy Maria (Ransom) born 1801 (Note: Also on same page is Joseph Mecham, Lewis Mecham and a Jersana Mecham.)