

CATHERINE SNYDER

1828 - October 23, 1891



Historical Profile

Catherine Snyder was born in 1828 in Mathias, Virginia to her father Charles Snyder (38 years old) and her mother Catherine Halterman (39 years old) as the eighth of 9 children Catherine's older siblings were James (17), Elizabeth (14), Nimrod (12), Sarah (10), Rebecca (8) William (4) and John (3). While a toddler Catherine lived through the Second Great Awakening, a Protestant revival movement prompted by deteriorating religious excitement and a lack of faithful devotion in the United States, numerous preachers traveled the country and gave lectures to crowds assembled in large camp meetings to rekindle faith among Americans. This new-found religious fervor produced thousands of new members in existing churches and also formed the foundation of new denominations such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which Catherine would later join.

When Catherine was 2 years old, her little brother John passed away, and the youngest child of her parents, Isaac was born into the family in 1830. The following

year, on 10 April 1831 her future husband David Young Whitmer was born in the same community. The Whitmers had immigrated from Switzerland in the early 1800s. The year of his birth Nat Turner led a slave rebellion in Virginia that had a severe backlash with heavy consequences for the black community. White reaction was swift and harsh, and militias killed many innocent free blacks and black slaves as well as those directly involved in the rebellions. The Virginian legislature passed laws restricting the rights of free black members of the community: they were excluded from bearing arms, serving in the militia, gaining education, and assembling in groups.

Prior to becoming a state, the Virginia Colony, where Catherine had been raised, became the wealthiest and most populated colony in North America dominated by rich planters who were also highly religious. Anglican views eventually gave way to more popular Baptist, Methodist and other Protestant persuasions. During the first half of the 19th century, tobacco prices declined and tobacco lands lost much of their fertility. Planters adopted

mixed farming, with an emphasis on wheat and livestock, which required less labor. In Catherine's toddler years railroads began to be built throughout Virginia hauling coal from the mines, as well as moving produce throughout the country.

Sometime around her 20th year of age Catherine married David Young Whitmer in Hardy, Virginia. He was a man of large stature, being more than six feet tall. He is reported to have had a fierce temper and was feared by his enemies. They had grown up in the same community but David was 2-3 years younger than Catherine. They began their family and bore their first daughter, Selestine named after one of the two Whitmers who immigrated from Thurgau, Switzerland, on 9 August 1850. Communication increased tremendously during this time period as hand written letters delivered by horseback gave way to postal systems using telegraph, railroads, and steam-powered ships to deliver communications.

They made their home, a two-story, wood-shingled, wood-sided house, on a farm near the town of Mathias, in what was known as the Cove near the West Virginia border. It was a very beautiful country up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. There were 200 or 300 acres, only about 30 of which were tillable, the rest on mountain slopes, which furnished good pasture for cattle, sheep and hogs.

Sparkling creeks ran down the mountains and across the meadows. Along these creeks grew wild apples, which were made into cider and apple butter in the fall. Wild sweet cherries, huckleberries, blackberries, and red and black raspberries also were plentiful. On the mountain slope grew pine trees, oaks, hickory, chestnut and maple trees. The maples furnished maple sugar and syrup.

In the 1850's the underground railroad was working in full force to secretly transport escaped Southern slaves into free Northern states. At this same time,

Uncle Tom's Cabin was released, causing a firestorm of controversy that would eventually escalate into war.

On 8 July 1853 another daughter, Mary was born to their growing family. Then the following year their first son, Abraham Abner was born on 16 August 1854. Then on 6 May 1856 another son, Benjamin Franklin, our ancestor, was born.

The following year a devastating economic recession known as the Panic of 1857 rocked the entire world as the boom of the railroad industry and the gold rush in the 1800s led to an inevitable bust. Mines dried up and overstretched railroad companies collapsed causing more than 5000 American businesses to fold and leading to the unemployment of thousands. At this time Catherine welcomed a daughter Barbara Virginia into the family on 16 October 1857. Then two years later, a third son and sixth child David Grant was born on 15 January 1859.

Sadly, the next year, Catherine said goodbye to both of her parents as they both passed away in 1860. The record says that her mother Catherine Halterman died before 1860 at age 71 and then her father Charles Snyder died after 1860 at age 70. Her brother Nimrod also died this year at the age of 44.

In 1861 tensions were building toward an inevitable Civil War between the Northern States and the Southern States. Virginia was the largest state joining the Confederate States of America in 1861. It became the major theater of the war.

During the Civil War, Catherine's husband David was called to fight on the side of the Confederacy. During the final battle of Winchester, Virginia, he was shot and wounded in the chest and left on the battlefield by the retreating Confederate Army, he was put in an improvised hospital by the Union soldiers who captured him. On the third day, he escaped from the hospital with over \$100,000 Confederate currency stolen from the hospital desk drawer as he escaped.

Unluckily, the confederate dollar became less than three cents on the dollar after losing the war. After escaping the hospital, David and his accomplice traveled at night and hid out in the brush at daytime. They arrived some two months later at the Cove, footsore and fevered from their wounds. They had to go immediately into hiding until the Civil War was over. David never fully recovered from his wound as the heavy rifle ball was lodged in the lung tissue and whenever he strenuously exerted himself, it caused hemorrhage in the lung causing him to cough up blood. Henry Jackson, Catherine's youngest son was born on 22 April 1862. In 1864 a final daughter was born to Catherine but didn't survive birth and wasn't named. Catherine had no more children.

Two years after Virginia seceded from the Northern states, Unionists in western Virginia rallied enough support to break off from Virginia, form their own state, and join the Union efforts in the North. In 1863 Catherine's hometown became part of the state of West Virginia. Virginia's economy was devastated in the war and disrupted with the infrastructure (such as railroads) in ruins; many plantations burned out; and large numbers of refugees without jobs, food or supplies beyond rations provided by the Union Army.

Although the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 brought an end to slavery and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution made slavery illegal, the country remained divided as racism fuelled violence and hatred toward blacks and whites alike. The decade of the 1860's was very unsettling and full of discrimination. In 1865 Catherine and David would learn that President Lincoln had been assassinated following the end of the Civil War.

About twenty years later in 1883, Catherine's husband was cutting oats with a hand scythe, when he started hemorrhaging from his old war wound. He walked towards the house and evidently became weak because he sat down leaning himself against an apple tree near the house and there died as the blood filled his lungs. He died on 20 August 1883. The following year Catherine's brother Bill died. Then three years later her sister Rebecca died in 1887.

Catherine Snyder was a devout Baptist until she joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1888, 5 years after the death of her husband. David never joined a church but was reported to have said that none of them seemed right to him but someday, when he heard the right one preached, he'd recognize it and join it. He and his son Benjamin were great readers of the Bible. Benjamin was the first to join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day saints and felt like it was everything his father was looking for.

Catherine died on 23 October 1891 at the age of 63. She was preceded in death by her parents, all of her siblings, and her husband of 34 years. She was survived by her children including: Selestine (41), Mary (38), Abraham (37), Benjamin (35), Barbara (34), David (32), and Henry (29) and their families.

