

GEORGE Q. CANNON

1827 - 1901

The subject of this sketch was born in Liverpool, England, January 11, 1827, the eldest son of George and Ann Quayle Cannon. His parents were both natives of the Isle of Man, an island lying in the Irish Sea midway between England, Scotland and Ireland. It is a little known fact that his middle name, "Quayle," so prominent in the names of his descendants, was assumed by George Cannon during the Gold Rush days in California where there was another George Cannon also panning for the precious metal.

The Cannon family in Liverpool was converted in 1840 to the LDS Church by John Taylor who had married Leonora Cannon, sister of George, in Canada. They almost immediately began dreaming and planning on coming to America and joining their fellow religionists there. The family left Liverpool on a sailing vessel September 17, 1842 and arrived in New Orleans, at the mouth of the Mississippi River nearly two months later, November 11, 1842. All but one that is. Their mother, Ann Quayle Cannon, had died October 28 and was buried at sea. The widower, with six children ranging from fifteen to two years of age continued to go up the great river to Nauvoo, Illinois.

Of the next trials and tribulations of the family generally there is little need here to speak. Every pioneer family in Utah can tell similar stories of hardship, persecution and death. George Q. went into the home of his "Uncle Taylor," learned the art of printing and came to Utah with John Taylor's pioneer company in October 1847. Like other young men he "broke" and trained the steers which he drove across the plains and hunted for food en route.

For the next several years his principal occupation was that of missionary. He first, however, was sent to California in 1849 to dig for gold, not for himself, but for the use and benefit of the people in Utah. This was an uncertain and hazardous employment and he soon went to work in a trading store at fifty dollars a day. It was from California that he was sent as a missionary to the Sandwich Islands, now our sister state of Hawaii.

From this time to the day of his death, missionary and church activities took a major part of his time. He became an apostle in 1860 and was a trusted friend and associate of Brigham Young. His prominence in the church and affairs of the territory of Utah once led President Young to say, during some of the church's problems with the national government, that next to himself, George Q. Cannon was the most feared and respected member of the church. When President Young died in 1877 it was George Q. Cannon, one of the junior apostles, who conducted the funeral services. He became first counselor to President John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff and Lorenzo Snow, the three church leaders following Brigham Young. He was apostle and counselor in the LDS Church, therefore, forty-one of his seventy-four years.

In 1872 he was elected to Congress as the delegate from Utah Territory. He served approximately ten years, although every election was challenged by the defeated candidate. During all of this time he was assailed with criticism of the most vituperative kind from the press, pulpit and platform because of the religious beliefs of the great majority of the people whom he represented. The pressure on Congress became so great that in 1882 he was denied his seat. During this period he made such an impression on Congressman Joseph G. Cannon of Illinois - no relation - that when the famous speaker gave his farewell address to Congress nearly forty years later, he mentioned George Q. Cannon as one of the outstanding congressmen when he, himself, was first elected.

In addition to his church and political activities George Q. Cannon was active in all those fields that develop in a pioneer community. In 1866 he took over the Deseret Evening News, then a weekly newspaper. Two years later he made it a daily and he and his family have continued an association with this journal to the present day. He also founded the magazine called the Juvenile Instructor, continuing as its owner and publisher for thirty years when it was turned over to the church which continues its publication today.

When the economy of the area began to change from agricultural to industrial and commercial, George Q. Cannon was again in positions of prominence. The coming of the railroad in 1869 and the discovery of valuable mining deposits ended Utah's isolation. The Utah Central Railway connecting Salt Lake City with the Trans-continental Line was started immediately and he was one of the organizers and a director. When the ZCMI was incorporated he was one of the original directors. The production of beet sugar had been tried very early in Utah's history without success. It was attempted again successfully in the 1880's. George Q. Cannon was one of the promoters and sponsors of the industry this time and served for many years as president of the Utah company which still means so much to our agricultural well being. He was president of the first electric power company, one time president of the Trans-Mississippi Congress, a director of the Union Pacific Railroad, chancellor of the University of Deseret (original name of the University of Utah). Over the years he was director or officer of many other commercial and industrial organizations.

One of these, and tremendously important to the future development of the commonwealth, was the Zions Savings Bank and Trust Company, incorporated August 6, 1873. George Q. Cannon was an original director and vice president. He remained active and prominent in its operations for the rest of his life. It is interesting to note that his granddaughter, Margaret Cannon Clayton, now over eighty years of age, is the holder of the oldest outstanding passbook of Zions First National Bank.

There are no persons living today who remember this man as he was in his prime.

The English novelist, Charles Dickens, met him in London about 1864. In his book, The Uncommercial Traveler, Dickens describes a visit to an emigrant ship and his interview with the Mormon agent, who was George Q. Cannon. He says the agent was a "compactly-made handsome man in black, rather short, with rich brown hair and beard, and clear bright eyes. . . A man with a frank, open manner and unshrinking look; withal, a man of great quickness." Most of us in these days, one hundred years later, are inclined to think of the founders of our state as we see them in pictures taken late in life. Our pioneer ancestors were mostly young and vigorous. They had to be in order to survive the strenuous life on the frontier.

George Q. Cannon did his share of pioneering from the day he first started across the plains in 1847. He helped "tame the desert," brought education and culture to his people, and developed financial and industrial enterprises which remain as monuments to his life and career. He lived to see the social and political settlement of the problems with which he had contended for so many years, and the granting of statehood to Utah in 1896. He died in Monterey, California, April 12, 1901.

This was George Quayle Cannon, a leader among men in every field of activity which engaged his attention, talents and devotion.

Written by David W. Cannon