

History of  
**RACHEL DIBLEY WHEELER FREE**  
as told by herself

I was born in Beaver, Beaver County, Utah, on January 31, 1886. I was the oldest child of James Bivens and Rachel Talmage Wheeler. There wasn't a doctor but a midwife when I was born. When I was born Mother had been cooking and doing for the other boys who came from England with them, but quit when she had me to care for.

I don't remember much about the house, but there must have been four rooms. Dad worked in the Woolen Mills in Beaver until they closed down. They bought some property and must have had cows, because I remember an old red and white cow with horrible long horns bringing mother through a fence. The milk would go one way and the bucket the other, and mother would go through the fence. Mother had never done anything with animals until she came to America. She had such chubby hands. I don't know why she didn't get some man to milk the cow. I was always afraid mother would never make it through the fence and get away from the cow. I guess Dad was away hunting work.

I guess I was sixteen months old when the folks moved out to the Sulphur Beds. Esther was born out there (December 13, 1888). But before Esther was born mother was peeling apples. I would take the peelings and drop them down to an old cow that was there. I had on a pretty little red pleated dress. Mother said, "Now you be careful because she could catch you on her horns." And almost before I knew it the old cow had caught me on her horns and kept tossing to get me off and then dumped me in a pile of rocks. I lit on my ankles in a way that it must have bent them, and I couldn't walk. Mother was able to take care of me until I was able to walk. (Cows have such beautiful soft brown eyes, but they always look so wicked to me.)

I don't know just how long we stayed there before we moved back to Beaver when it closed down out at the Sulphur Beds. Dad went back to farming. He bought some cattle and pigs and chickens. They must have stayed with the farming until Esther was past two years old. The men helped each other. But there wasn't much money. They took a very

active part in church work, Father in the choir and band and playing for dances, taking part in home dramatics and going to night school.

Quite a few of the men from Beaver went to Pioche to work, so Father decided to go to work there too as he could work at the machine shop. Before Father went to Pioche, Mother and Father went to Manti and went through the temple (February 5, 1890). I can remember a woman dress in white giving Esther and me some raisins to eat while we were in a room waiting for them.

Then my baby brother was born which made my parents very happy. I was about five and a half years old. Mother would milk the cow, and I'd rock the baby in the cradle while she did. I could see her through the window and many times I saw her barely get through the bars before the cow would hit them. This frightened me so I've always been afraid of cows.

While Father was gone to Pioche my baby brother took sick with cholera phantom. Nearly every family lost one or two children. Everything passed out of them, blood and all. The doctor kept telling Mother he would give her plenty of time to call Dad, but he passed away (November 1893) before Dad got there. Of course, they had to come by team and wagon.

There was a young girl who was going to stay with Mother all night. She said as she was coming that she saw this big white bird up on the chimney. She had to come through the block. Mother was sitting in the chair with the baby in her arms and when the baby got so bad she sent the girl for the doctor. And sent for Father. Mother held the baby in her arms.

The doctor said, "Oh Rachel, lay the little fellow on the bed and let him pass on," but she wouldn't lay him down. I guess they took him from her when he died.

Esther and I were in the bed in the next room. The door was open to the room where Mother and the baby were. I could see a bright white light come and go over our bed and then go in the other room and circle around the room. I was only seven and too old to be superstitious. It has haunted me all my life.

When Dad came home Mother had never shed a tear. She had bought the material for his clothes and made the other preparations. He

was a cute little fellow and was eleven months old. They were very much broken up over his death. Dad said he would never be separated from his family again, so we just left everything except personal belongings and went with Dad to Pioche.

The trip from Beaver to Pioche took three days. It was hot in the wagon. The coyotes howled so, I was afraid.

Dad finally sold the property and water rights and so on in Beaver. He bought us a nice home in Pioche. They needed mechanics in Pioche and Dad worked twelve hours a day, so we saw very little of him there. He was gone in the morning before we were up; we did have supper with him, but he often had a meeting at night.

Dad was teaching a lot of the boys band. He always had a good band in Pioche. He taught everyone else, but couldn't teach his own children. He was a good singer and also took parts in dramatics. He love to sing comic songs and act them out. He had brought a stove pipe hat from England with him which he used very much. He enjoyed making people laugh and was very popular.

It was sure nice when he got so he only had to work eight hours a day. We always looked forward to getting his lunch pail to see what he had left in it. Many of the men that worked with him and boarded at the restaurant would give him fruit or something else that they thought we would like so we were always anxious to see what it was.

On my sixth birthday, Mother gave me a birthday party and invited a lot of children. We had home made ice cream and cake. I started to school in the fall, but the winter before there was a bad epidemic of diptheria and so many children died. I had it real bad. Mother never went to bed for sixteen nights, just stayed with me most of the time. She kept Esther in the back part of the house and she didn't get it. When I got over it I had St. Vitas Dance. I couldn't walk or feed myself, and I was very nervous for a long time.

At the 4th of July celebration I was Goddess of Night. I had a black dress all covered with stars and wore a crown. We rode on a wagon all decorated up and went all over town. The band led the parade. The next 4th of July both Esther and I were on a float with a lot of other girls. We were all dressed in white and a wide ribbon of blue that went over our

shoulders and fastened at our waist, with the name of a state on it in gold. Mine was Delaware, can't remember what Esther's was.

I liked school very much and I learned easily. When spring came we children used to go up on the hill among the rocks and make play houses. The trail was real steep up a cliff of rocks; then there were some nice places for our houses and lots of wild flowers. One day when the bell rang we were all running to get down, and there were a lot of larger kids there too, and they pushed the small ones, and I went over the cliff and landed in a lot of big rocks by a spring. It broke my arm, and I was badly bruised. In August my sister Cassie was born (August 16, 1892).

There were four grades taught in one room(1st thru 4th), and four grades taught in another room (5th thru 8th). I remember a teacher, Kate Courtney, who was so hard on Esther. She would make me go out of the room, and I would sit outside and cry. She would try to send me home and say there is no need for me to punish your sister and have you sit out here. She was always just lovely to me, but cross to Esther and many of the others although Esther was always better looking than I and full of fun.

We would have Spelling Bees on Friday afternoons and choose sides. There would be two of the older ones who would be the Captains, and they would keep choosing until they had chosen everyone in the room. I was nearly always one of the second ones chosen. I was often the only one left standing at the end of the bee. On Friday afternoon when parents would come to the school, some of the kids would sing and some play the organ, and I was always called on to read. I never missed a time. I was a good reader and had a good voice and LOVED to read. This was in the upper grades after we returned from California.

Dad got interested in a kind of venetian blind with some other men, and they decided to take it to San Francisco and have it displayed at the Fair. Mother had got \$1,000 from Miss Dibley when she died. Mother and Dad saved some money, and against Mother's wishes they sold our home, and we went to San Francisco. First when we got there we lived quite close to the ocean. The fleas nearly ate Mother up. I can remember her sitting on a chair with her feet in a tub of water. We got a house farther away and the fleas didn't bother us.

The other man, Joe, hired a secretary. He and Dad took turns staying at the show. Dad woke one morning to find he had no money left. Joe had got away with it all and married the secretary. Mother had a necklace with English silver coins that she had gotten when she was in England. Dad took all those coins even though they had holes in them and used them for street car fare.

Dad hunted for work for quite some time and finally got on at the ship docks working on repairing a ship. As he had not done any hard work for quite some time, he sure suffered with blistered hands. Mother became quite ill, could hardly get around and knew if she could just get back to the mountains she would be all right. So Dad began making preparations to move back to Pioche. He had to borrow the money to do it. But as soon as we began to get close to the mountains Mother got much better, and we were all happy to get back to Pioche. Not long after we got back my brother, Jimmie was born (September 26, 1894).

Esther and I went to school and I love it. Dad decided to build a mill and a house for us at Highland when I was about eight. He hired two or three men to help. We lived up at the old Brewery while they were building the house and the mill. We stayed there about three years. We had a lot of fun at Highland - ran wild like Indians. Then we moved down to the house. Dad ran the mill. I helped at the mill, used a rake to take slime off the water to keep it running through. Dad called me his "right hand man." How that mill clomped, very noisy. Dad had five stamps in the mill. He had his own assay office. Jimmy was a baby when we moved out there. We stayed til after Leah was born in December (December 14, 1896). It was the hardest winter we had out there. Lots of snow, deep and cold. The mill wasn't too much of a success, so we moved back to Pioche.

We started to scholl again and Cassie was old enough to go too. Dad worked at the machine shop at the Number One Mine. He had leased the mill to some men. While there he got very ill. When they brought him home he was unconscious and was very sick for a long time. I went to school one half of a day and stayed with Dad the other half. We had to feed him and do everything for him as he couldn't do anything himself. When he started finally to get well, he would lay on the edge of the bed and swing his arm until he could get him arm working. The Odd Fellow

Lodge members were very good to come and help with him. They brought a big bath tub and would put him in that. Then he went to Fay, a mine out of Pioche.

My sister Juanita was born July 7, 1900. All of us had whooping cough in the summer. It was awful. It was another hard winter - so cold all the water froze. Everyone had to go to the tanks to get water, and they carried it on sleds. We lived close to the tanks so it wasn't bad. Nita was about two and half year old when we moved back to Highland. That is where we lived the rest of the time. Priscilla was born July 24, 1903.

I was about fifteen when I went to Pioche to live with Mrs. Sawyer. She was supposed to help me with my schoolwork. I open my books once. I helped Mrs. Sawyer with her babies and worked hard for \$10 a month. I also worked at the Ida May Mine where I helped Mrs. Murphy. I waited on tables, made lunches and washed dishes. At sixteen years I started working for some friends of ours named Carmen. I was working for her when I met Wen Free. Then I didn't see him again til I was twenty. A Chinaman came from Salt Lake and taught me a lot about cooking.

Father took a contract for new ore and hired thirty men. Esther and I did most of the cooking for three shifts. Esther made the bread and pies and I did most else. I don't know how we had the nerve to do it, two girls only about sixteen and seventeen. We \$20 a month.

When the contract ended we went home and started a school out at Highland just for the five of us. I sure did hate it - no competition or anything. It never had the fascination. I always wanted to be head of the class, but I was in a class all by myself. We only had it for three months in the summer and had to learn what the rest did in nine months. I quit in the seventh grade.

When I was working for Carmen's, Wen was working with his brother Joe out at the Ida May Mine, and they came to Pioche for the Christmas holidays. I was at Garrisons with five or six other young folks; we had been popping corn and had strung popcorn and cranberries to decorate the tree and had mints and candy. Laura was passing the candy when Joe and Wen came. When she passed it to Wen he took it from her and passed around with it; when anyone went to take some he would go to the next one.

I was sitting in a corner in the far side of the room. When he came to me I said I didn't care for any, thinking he would apss on as I was kind of afraid of him. He seemed so sure of himself and so different from anyone else I had ever met. And I was pretty self conscious. He gave the candy to the next person and sat down by me which bothered me very much. He kept moving his chair closer to me til he had me penned in the corner. I said, "If you don't stop I am going to move from her!" He said, "Do you know what would happen if you did that? You would land right on my kjnees and get kissed." I didn't stop to think but jumped up to get away. And did land on his knees and got kissed. Of course, the crowd all took it as a joke and got a big kick out of it which embarrassed me very much. He held my hands so I couldn't slap him.

Finally the crowd all left but Wen and Joe. Laura proposed that we go to her aunt's and see how their tree looked. Before this Mrs. Garrison showed a piece of handiwork I had given her for Christmas, and Wen said when he looked at it, "Won't it be wonderful when we have a home of our own to have work like that in it?" I just didn't know how to take him. When we went to get our coats, I made Laura promise she wouldn't let them know but what I was staying at her place. We went down in Chinatown and to their boss's house. And then to the aunt's place. We had a nice time.

When we got back to the house, and they were about ready to leave, Wen said, "Let's see, there is a dance tomorrow evening and you are going with me." I said, "I already have a partner." He said to just tell him to go bump his head because you are going with me. Well I did go to the dance with him and had a lovely time. Everyone seemed to like him. When he took me home he said, "How come you let me think you were staying at Garrison's?" I can't remember what I said; he put me inside the gate and closed it. Then he said, "Don't you think you ought to kiss me good night?" I said, "No!" And so we parted.

I didn't see him again til the 22nd of April. Esther was going with Ed Deck, and Dad had promised us we could go to the dance. We got up early and went to find the horses. We walked and hunted til about 4:30 pm when we found them away up in the mountains. When we got them almost home they ran over the hill as hard as they could go, and we were so tired we couldn't go after them so we stayed home. The next day

Wen got a team and buggy and came out home. We had a nice time. He just seemed to take it for granted that I belonged to him. I didn't see him again till the 4th of July when we went to a dance and sat on Garrison's porch and watched the sun come up.

I was home most of the summer, and went to work at Middleton's in September. Wen was working in Pioche and would come to see me every day, but never stayed long; just seemed like he came to see if I was still there.

We planned on being married on his birthday, the 11th of December, but Mother was very sick so I stayed home to help take care of her. We were married on the 25th of December 1906. I was twenty, almost twenty-one; Wen was thirty-two. Wen shook so he could hardly put the ring on my finger. And in all the years I have known him this is the only time I have ever seen him afraid. He often told me that he knew the first time he saw me that he would marry me.

In ten months my first baby was born but did not live. He was so tiny. We had planned on him so much; he was such a pretty little thing.

Wen worked in Pioche. Wen sold his property in Salt Lake, bought a house in Pioche, and Wenlock (August 18, 1909) and Darell (February 7, 1911) were born there. Wen worked at assessment for a lot of companies, he did a lot of hunting.

Wen was driving a wagon near Pioche with a heavy load. He put his foot out to pull on the rope to secure the load and the rope broke. Wen was very agile and did a back flip to get out of the fall, but he landed across a hole and broke his back. We went to Salt Lake then. Five or six doctors said he had TB of the spine and had only a short time to live. He was in a cast for five or six months. He was miserable. One day he said he could stand it no longer. He got his brother, Joe, to cut the cast off. Joe said the only thing I can see that we can do is to go to a chiropractor. The doctor came and examined Wen and said he could do nothing. He went out and walked to the gate, then he turned and came back. The doctor had them sign a paper absolving him from responsibility. Then for about six times he came back and very carefully pushed Wen's vertebrae back together. Apparently the spinal column was intact because within six weeks Wen was up and working. I couldn't imagine why he was so

discouraged and blue. I said, "God wouldn't take you away from me with these two little kiddies." Wen's folks were real good to me.

We went to Snake Creek Tunnel. We lived in a tent between two streams. Wen was there to run the compressor while the mine ran. I was scared. Wen's first shift was at night. I just prayed I would live through the night so I could go back to Salt Lake. In the morning it was all sunshiny. Squirrels would run in and out and take the bread. The two little boys loved it. Snake Creek Tunnel is up in the canyon above Midway, Utah. I never saw such a beautiful canyon, the columbine and the fern grew up so high. Joe Free and Mr. Ed Tylor had the contract to run the tunnel through to tap the Park City Mine to drain the water out of it. Mr. Taylor taught at the University. He was an engineer and a stone cutter.

After the mine closed down we were there all alone as watchmen in those mountains - oh, the snow and the skiing! We were so happy. Wen had to go down as far as Midway every day and drag a tree behind the horse, had to put snowshoes on the horse, to keep the road open so we could get to Midway and back and to Heber to get our provisions. There were fourteen feet of snow. It just mashed one of the buildings right down (the commissary) and sent the pool table right through the door. My how the snow did come down. Just like feathers.

If the horse ever got off the trail he would go right out of sight, but he was a wise horse. He had worked in the mine. We had Wenlock and Darell. Wen made such a nice pair of skiis for himself (when he sold them he got \$25 for them, a lot of money then). He also made skiis for the boys and I. Why, we even had to use them to get out to the toilet. Wen could really ride those skiis - just like a bird flying over those hills, and he kept them so shiny and nice. Wen never did anything but what he did it so well. He had been such a good and fancy ice skater, and I guess that helps when it comes to skiing. I don't know how many times he sprained his ankle when he was skiing up there.

Steps had to be made from the house up on the snow to get to the outhouse and then back from the top of the snow down to the outhouse. The snow was so high there was just a little light coming through the tops of the windows. I finally got on the skiis Wen made for me. I could stand and go forward a little, but I couldn't stop. I had to sit down to stop. It wore out my skirts - sitting in the snow.

A letter written September 11, 1913, by Rachel to her brother in Pioche stated: "We've just got through building a room and a cellar on our place, and Wen put the lights in yesterday so we are real comfortable."

This winter was so wonderful because we were together and were all well. Wen made skis and put them under a big box . We would wrap the boys all up in blankets and put them in the box and take them to the top of the hill and let them go down, and was it ever fun for them. They thought it was the best ever. Wen made a little teepee tent like the Indians have. After the snow had hardened they could play out on the hard snow. They had a little red table and chairs. The soft snow would make whirl puffs of snow. I had just told the boys to come or a whirlwind would come and take the hair right off their heads. Just then a whirlwind came and took their little tent right up in the air and set it down farther over. Wenlock came running to the house holding his hair with both hands.

Some days we couldn't get outside and Wen would chin himself and turn himself right over and around the bar. He surely kept himself in shape. He would insist that I do it too, but it was so hard for me. We moved the pool table over into the big dining room, and Wen and I learned to be expert pool players. Wen took Rene (his sister) and I up there awhile back to the mine and you couldn't see that there had ever been a thing there. The floods had just washed out everything. That winter was so wonderful. We were just completely happy.

We moved to Pioche. Wen worked at Highland Queen where he struck ore. He and my Dad did good for awhile till all pinched out. Wen went to Salt Lake and met a friend who helped him get a job at Newhouse, Utah. That is where Lory was born. We moved back to Salt Lake in time for another hard winter. Wen was a carpenter; he put the big windows in the college there.

We lived with Wen's sister Rene, her husband Wren, and Grandma Annie Hicks Free. She thought all of Wen's boys were the most wonderful ones in the family.

Then Wen got a job to go as a boss of a mine that was losing money up at Leadore, Idaho in 1918. In Leadore we had picnics and a

good time. We worked there two years and the mine made good money off Wen. Then they laid Wen off, lost money and shut down.

Lory writes the following: Mother made the children feel happy. She would read to us and do things for us. In the winter we boys would hurry with our chores, get huge piles of wood, help get dinner, eat, clean up and then we would start the lantern and all get around the pot-bellied stove and Mother would read. Dad was as excited as we were. We talked and laughed. We read Peck's Bad Boys, The Mine with the Iron Door, The Voice of Johnny Winter and lots of Kerwood and Zane Gray books. Mom and I were baptized in Leadore, August 1924, at the Bohannon Hot Springs.

Wen worked as sheriff for two years in Leadore. He did hay, mowing and raking and the three boys helped. He also did blacksmithing. Rae was born there. She was six years old when we left, Lory was thirteen.

We moved back to Pioche in 1928-29, and Wen worked down at a mill in Pioche. Darell did odd jobs; Wenlock worked too. Then the Depression came. Wen and Darell both married. Wen and Jean lived here with us. Wen, Wenlock, and Lory worked in the Salt Lake Pioche Mine. We were so in debt during the depression. They worked on this mine seven years. They finally did strike ore and made big money on the Salt Lake Pioche Mine. Darell went in with them. Once more than thirty men worked there. They made a lot of money. They all got homes out of it.

This is the end of Rachel's writing. She lived the rest of her years in the home built for her in Panaca. She had a large and lovely flower garden and did many hours of beautiful handiwork for her family and friends. She fell and broke her hip in March 1966, but was able to make a complete recovery. She so loved to have her family come to see her, and she made everyone feel so welcome in her home. September 8, 1955, she was sealed to her husband and three of her children in the St. George Temple. This same day, her grandson, Joseph Carl Free, Wenlock's oldest son, was married.

She often stated that she wanted to be useful as long as she lived, having the use of her eyes and hands. This hope came to pass. She lived alone

(her son, Darell and family lived next door to her) until she was taken to the hospital, where she passed away a short while later. .

She died in the Caliente hospital at the age of 94, on October 21, 1980, and was buried in the Panaca Cemetery. Her passing coincided with the birth of a great granddaughter, Kara Marie Christensen, granddaughter of Wenlock's. She was preceded in death by her son Wenlock (April 1949), and her sweetheart Wen (October 23, 1953).

## Obituary of Wenlock Ammon Free October 1953

Wen as he was known by his friends was born in Salt Lake City on the 11th of December, 1873, the youngest child of Absalom Pennington and Annie Hicks Free. He had two brothers and four sisters. Two sisters survive him. His father died when he was eight years old. He spent his youth on the farm where his mother and brothers and sisters lived and had a happy childhood. He loved his mother devotedly always. He has told how he remembered sitting on his mother's knee watching the funeral of Brigham Young going by. He was very fond of horses and usually had a fine span. He was very fond of children, and his nephews and nieces and grandchildren adored him.

He tells of the time when State Street and Main Street in Salt Lake City consisted of a wagon track in the middle of the street with weeds and brush on each side. His father, a southern farmer, came to Salt Lake in 1849, and his mother came from England and crossed the plains in the Edward Martin Handcart Company, arriving in Salt Lake on the last day of November 1856.

Wen got his schooling in the Salt Lake schools and when seventeen years old went to work for the street car company operating some of the

early street cars of Salt Lake City. Then he learned the barber trade, but he didn't like it so he took up mining which he found so interesting that he made it his life's work. When twenty-one years old, he was foreman of a large mill with a great many men working under him. He could do anything around the mine, hoisting, blacksmithing and carpentering. He was an expert timberman. He was a hand driller and won in many contests. He like swimming and all kinds of sports. He once won a \$50 bet by chining himself ten times with one hand.

He came to Pioche in 1905 where he met Rachel Wheeler. They were married on Christmas Day 1906. They had three sons born in Pioche. The oldest died shortly after birth. Wen had his back broken and had to go to Salt Lake for treatment and was in a cast for some time. He was not expected to live, but when he was able to work again he went to work for his brother at the Snake Creek Tunnel above Midway and Heber in Utah. He spent one winter there as watchman; the snow was twelve feet deep that year. The family had many wonderful times skiing. Wen loved it and was very good at it. After leaving there the family came back to Pioche and stayed about one year. Wen then went to work at Newhouse, Utah at a large copper mill. While at Newhouse, a son, Lory, was born. From there they moved to Salt Lake, and he worked as a carpenter helping to build the University of Utah. The following spring he went to Leadore, Idaho to take charge of the Sunset Mine and mill. It was here the youngest child and only daughter was born. It was a wonderful country for hunting and fishing, but the winters were very cold, once being 50 below zero on Thanksgiving night. The family stayed there about thirteen years. Mr. Free served as deputy sheriff for four years in Lemhi county. In 1929 he moved his family back to Pioche and has remained in Lincoln county every since being very active in the mining business.

Mr. Free was industrious and honest. He had many severe illnesses and accidents in his life and periods of bad luck. There were times when the bills mounted and difficulties seemed insurmountable. After one such time, during the depression, when one of the family went into Mr. Earl Godbe to pay up the lingering bills, he watched while Mr. Godbe added up the bills owing by Wenlock A. Free, and noted that most of the bills of others were crossed out. He said, "Well, it looks like we're about the last

ones to pay our bill." Mr. Godbe said, "No, most of those bills were never paid, and never will be paid, so they were just crossed out, but I knew that Wen Free would pay his bills."

Mr. Free has had poor health for several years, but managed to enjoy life and do many odd jobs to help his family. But just about a year ago now, he had a severe case of pneumonia which left its mark on his already failing heart and body. About six weeks ago he became completely bedfast and after considerable suffering passed away at 7 am, October 23, 1953, at his home in Panaca.

He is survived by his widow Rachel Wheeler Free, two sons, Darell H. and Lorymore Free, a daughter Rachel Free Empie of Big Springs, Texas, two sisters, Ireme Young of Salt Lake City and Eleanor Jones of Los Angeles, six grandsons and four granddaughters. Two sons and one granddaughter preceded him in death.