PHINEAS IN MICHIGAN



Becca Groberg | Elise Jackson | Crista Vance



To our posterity, so they can know where they've come from.

Becca's children: Ryker, Adelaide, Parker, and Jensen
Elise's children: Max, Maverick, Beverly, and Harvey
Crista's children: Ruby, Greta, Bridget, Todd and Zackary

Phineas recorded his memories in his journal, which the Phineas Wolcott Cook Family Organization has since published. The stories in this book were taken directly from his journals. For more information on Phineas and Ann Eliza Cook please visit CookFamily.org

PHINEAS IN MICHIGAN



Written and Illustrated by
Elise Jackson, Crista Vance, and Becca Groberg



Phineas's route from Goshen, Connecticut to Gull Pairie, Michigan


PART ONE
Journey to Michigan



August 28, 1836, Goshen, Connecticut

Mother made her best cake for me and let me lick the spoon. I'm 17 now–a man, she says. "Phineas! Now that you're a man, you'll be expected to do more work." I already do the work of a grown man. I spend most mornings in the fields with Father.



Lately, my parents have seemed tense. I overheard them talking about Uncle Moses. Father said, “He’s like a vulture, waiting for us to fail.” When I asked, he admitted, “Moses wants our land, son. And the worst part is, he may just get it.” I hope he doesn’t, but I know things have been tough. Goshen is our home. Our family has lived here for generations. I hope we can hang onto it.



October 2, 1836

It's happened. A deep sadness has settled over our farm. Father sold our farm to Uncle Moses. The town calls him a hero, but I disagree. He has long wanted this land. He claims he is helping us by taking on our **debts**, but we are left without a home. Too many folks have claimed land, just to let it sit till it made them money. They call it **Land Speculation**. It has made everything cost too much; father could not keep up.

October 3, 1836

My brother-in-law Salmon found a newspaper in town today that read:

This opportunity is too good to pass up. In Michigan territories land is practically being given away! Father and Salmon plan to leave soon. I'll follow when I can.





December 6, 1836

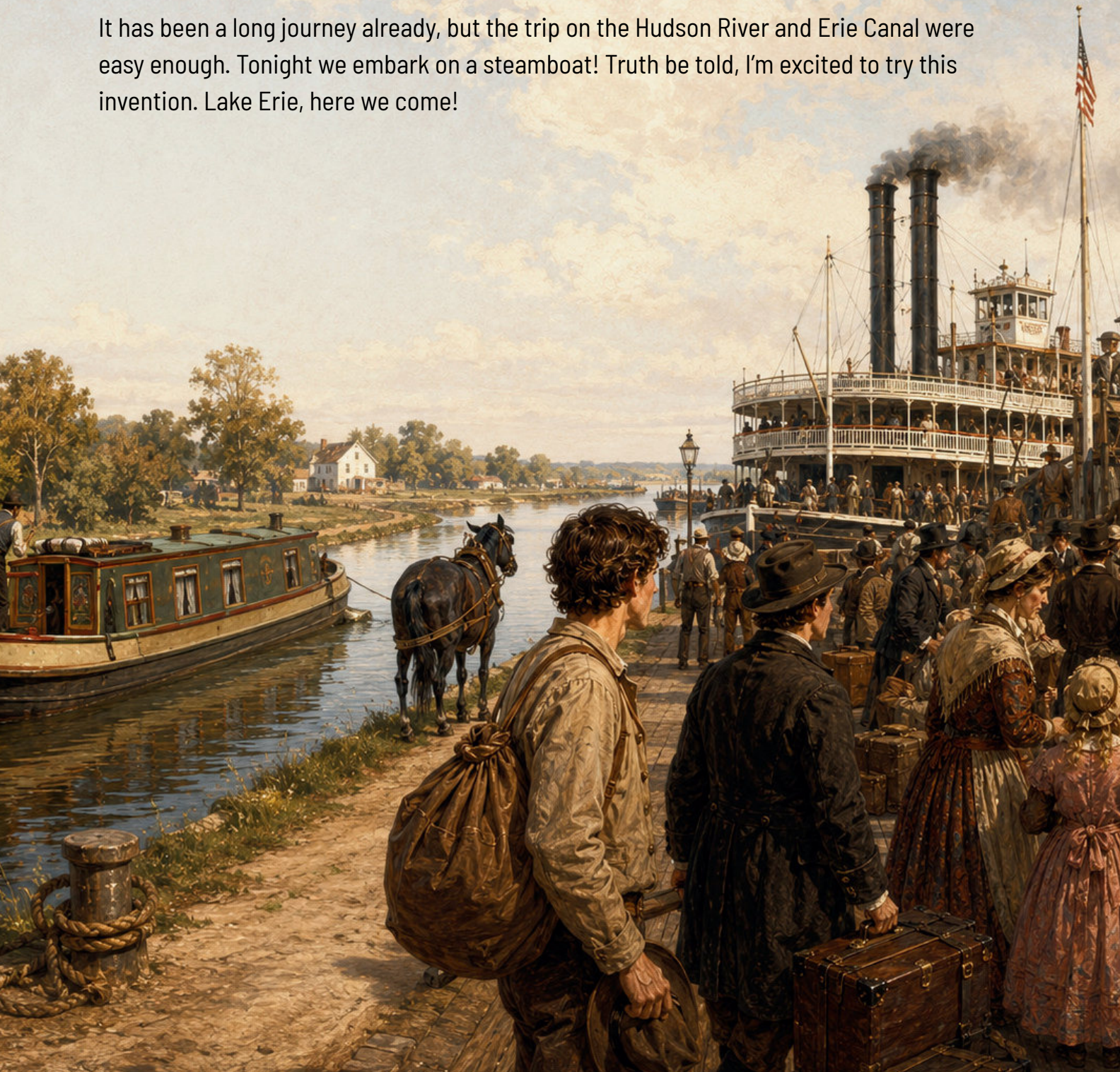
I received word from home–Uncle Moses forced Mother to move. I don't understand how he could treat his own family so harshly.



September 12, 1837

My other brother, Daniel, and I are leaving for Michigan to meet up with Father. I didn't have the money to make the journey, so I borrowed $36 from Mother to afford the trip. This should cover the cost of the ferries, the steamboat and the train to Adrian. We'll have to walk the last leg of the journey. I'll pay Mother back as soon as I can.

It has been a long journey already, but the trip on the Hudson River and Erie Canal were easy enough. Tonight we embark on a steamboat! Truth be told, I'm excited to try this invention. Lake Erie, here we come!





September 15, 1837

My enthusiasm for such a journey was a bit naive. We should arrive in Toledo in two days' time, but the captain said that the tempestuous waves have set us back a day. My stomach is in protest, but I will endure.

September 17, 1837

Land cannot come soon enough. Even a small storm can move these waters with a great force, but we are in a storm with a relentless gale; it seems to threaten us with destruction. What I thought was seasickness has become much more. I am afraid I'm affected by the ague and fever. If we make it to land and I can overcome this affliction, it will be thanks to the almighty.





September 18, 1837

Land. I have never appreciated solid ground as much as I did today. The Lord brought us to the town of Toledo. My body is aching with tremors and a fever. But I think the worst of it is over.

September 19, 1837

I was still feverish this morning as we boarded the brand-new Kalamazoo steam train. We traveled from Toledo to Adrian, Michigan. Our things were left five miles from Adrian by the return cars. Daniel went to fetch help while I stayed behind with his wife and kids. He went to his brother-in-law's home for a team. When Daniel didn't return by sundown, worry set in. Daniel's wife, Helen, and their two daughters were really starting to worry; the country was new and nearly all swamp. We began to wonder if he'd end up getting stuck in the unforgiving mud.

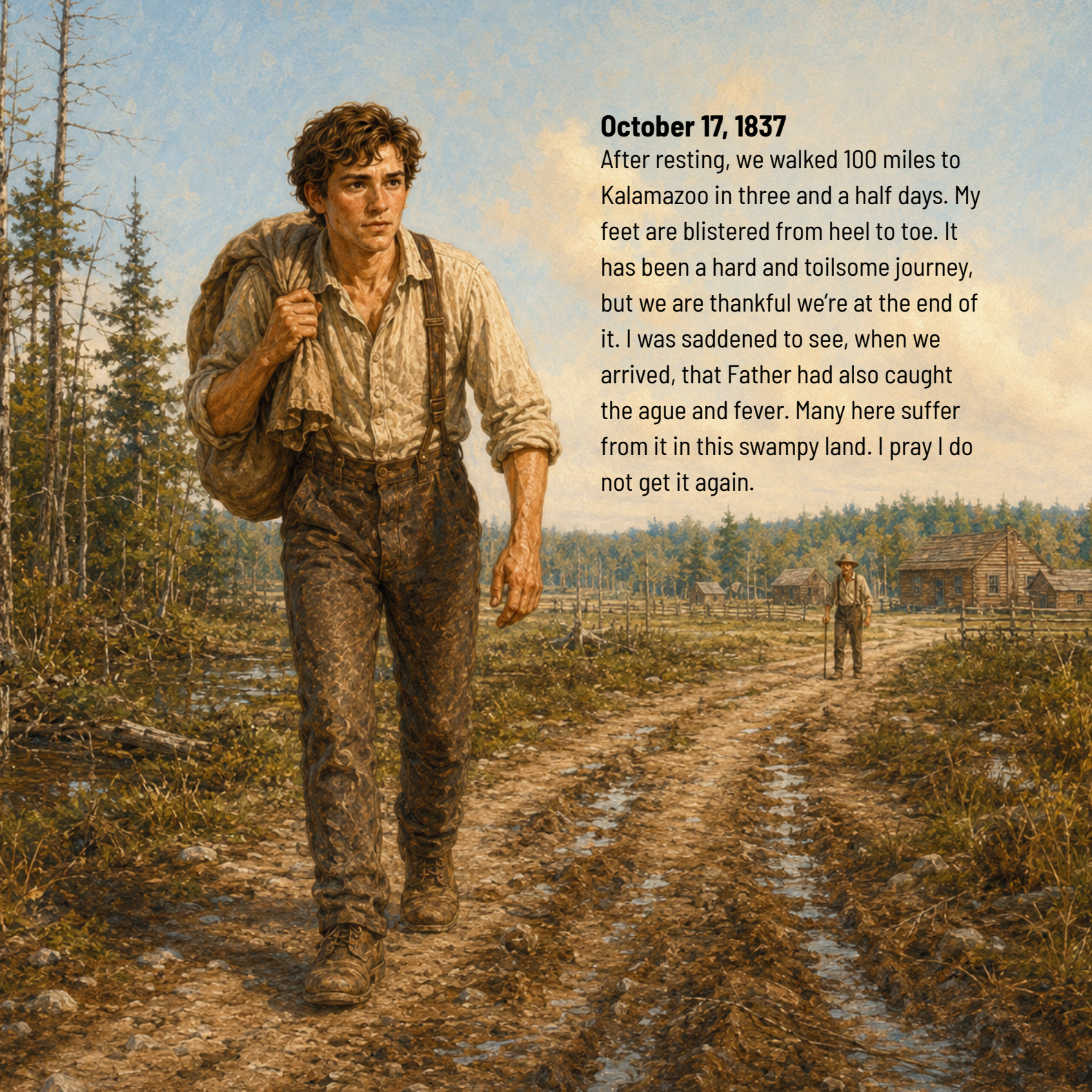


September 20, 1837

I started along the railroad toward Tecumseh, where I was told Helen's brother could be found. I hated leaving her and her daughters, Miriah and Mary, but there was no other choice. It was a fine road to travel on foot; the flat rails being laid down for about 2 miles. The path turned to swamp–logs laid across mud and water. I slipped and struggled for miles, scraping my legs. The worse the path got, the more sure I was that Daniel was lost or stuck in this awful excuse of a road.



I traveled down these muddy logs for two more miles when at last, the path became sturdier. I saw a light in the distance. I walked towards it and discovered it was a small home. I knocked and asked if they knew where the King's residence was and to my great relief it was only a mile away. I got directions and continued, arriving at his house around 10 o'clock. It took me two and a half hours to walk five miles! To my relief, Daniel had already left with the team to get his family and our things.



October 17, 1837

After resting, we walked 100 miles to Kalamazoo in three and a half days. My feet are blistered from heel to toe. It has been a hard and toilsome journey, but we are thankful we're at the end of it. I was saddened to see, when we arrived, that Father had also caught the ague and fever. Many here suffer from it in this swampy land. I pray I do not get it again.



December 2, 1837

I've found work making bedsteads for $10 a month. I've already been able to repay Mother. Hopefully it will help her travel here when Father has made a home for them. I take pride in this work. Shaping wood into something useful brings me a sense of purpose—and hope for what lies ahead.

PART TWO

Ann Eliza





March 28, 1838

I set out to find my fortune at the edge of Gull Lake. I was just a lad of eighteen, and I hired myself out to Mr. Henry Howland for fifteen dollars a month with room and board. My job was simple: swing the axe until my arms grew weary! But while I was busy with the thwack-thwack of the woodpile, I met the master's daughter, Ann Eliza. She was only fifteen, with a smile as bright as a prairie lily. As grueling as this work may prove, seeing her face will make the days far more enjoyable.



May 4, 1838

Father has urged me to extend this proposal so we could have someone keep the house for us. It didn't take much convincing on his part. Today, I was so bold as to ask Henry for Ann Eliza's hand in marriage. As she is only 15, he agreed but told us we must wait till Ann Eliza is older. My heart is full of excitement, even if I am to wait till she is older.



June 2, 1838

Today was my last day on Howland farm. Unfortunately, it ended with me being unable to continue working for anyone. I was hewing lumber and struck the side of my knee with a broad axe. I am anxious to get back to work, but Salmon, my brother-in-law, has allowed me to stay with them to recover until I can work again, but I will pay them in labor once I am recovered.

Ann Eliza held my hand as they wrapped my leg and stopped the bleeding. Her touch thrilled me. I hope she will visit while I am stuck in bed.



July 6, 1838

I am finally able to get back to work. Ann Eliza did come by a few times, making the recovery much more enjoyable. I feel weak, but I am anxious to pay my brother-in-law back for the care he has given me. Salmon has left the farm in my father's care. He has moved to Barry County. I get up early to prepare breakfast for five men. The housework is done by 9 o'clock, then I'm out in the fields working on the farm till dinner, then back to the fields until 5 when I make supper.

We've received word that Mother, Darius, Mary Ann and Harriet will join us soon. It will be a great help to have them keep house so I can stay longer in the fields with Father. There is so much work that needs to be done. I scarcely lay down at night before sleep overtakes me.



July 12, 1838

Mother, Mary Ann, Harriet and Darius have finally arrived! I have worked so hard in hopes of getting a permanent home for my family. Mother took one look at me, tsked and sat me down to eat more than my share at supper. “Phineas! You are too thin; you need to eat!” Mother demanded. I had been eating, but the work had been long and grueling, with scarcely a moment to rest. It was especially tough so soon after my injury.

The moments I do get to rest, I head to the Howland's to see Ann Eliza. Father can't seem to make up his mind whether he wants me to spend time courting her or working on the farm. Since Mother is here, it will be harder to claim the urgency in my visits to Ann Eliza.

July 21, 1838

Every Sunday, I walk three-and-a-half miles through the thick, dark forest to visit my sweetheart. But those woods were not for the faint of heart! They were filled with savage wolves that loved to chase a man until his boots barely touched the dirt. More than once, a traveler found himself perched high in a tree branch while the wolves howled below! To keep my toes safe from those snapping teeth, I would stay overnight at the Howlands' and walk home only when the Monday sun was high and bright.



These overnight visits made Father even grumpier. “Phineas!” he’d scold on Monday mornings. “You’re too young to be thinking of a wife! And you should be home working, not hiding from wolves in a neighbor’s loft!”



I haven’t hid in a loft, but he seemed to equate it to the story of the fiddler who was traveling to play for a dance party, but before he arrived, he heard the wolves coming from all directions. He ran into a log house, climbed up to the beams and played to the wolves. Once all the wolves were in the house, he climbed out from the window, shut them all in and shot them through the cracks!

It was a bit confusing for me to determine whether I should listen to the version of Father who had urged me along before Mother arrived, or the one who seems only content to see me out in the fields.

July 30, 1838

I visited with Ann Eliza today. When I came home after supper, Father once again scolded me about how I am too young and distracted and need to focus more on my work. When I reminded him that it was he who'd persuaded me to court Ann Eliza, he scoffed! Now that Mother is here, my lengthy betrothal seems a nuisance to Father, but I will not give up. Nor will I skip the opportunities to visit Ann Eliza. I am doing enough work for three men. Seeing Ann Eliza makes the tiring days more bearable.



August 1st, 1838

I tried to prove to him that I could manage it all by grabbing a scythe to cut an acre of grass. After an hour, Father found me and told me he wanted me to help George Murray plant wheat. I worked with George from three to nine. When I got home, I was drenched in sweat. At first, I thought it was just from the labors of the day, but I lay in agony all night. When they called me to breakfast, I could not move. By the third day, I was completely helpless. They ran to grab the doctor.


I spent the next eight days in a haze, barely conscious. I could scarcely feel my legs, which greatly terrified me. I quickly believed I was not long for this world. Neighbors even came to say their goodbyes. I sent a neighbor to fetch Ann Eliza. At first, she was shy about visiting a young man's bedside, but her heart won out. For nine days, I didn't even know my own name, but Ann Eliza never left me.

One night, she caught the hired nurse fast asleep while a cloud of hungry mosquitoes buzzed around my head! Ann Eliza wouldn't have it. She woke my sister Mary Ann, and together those two brave girls sent the sleepy helper packing. They stayed awake all night, shooing away the flies and cooling my fever until I finally opened my eyes.

Before long, they sent for a priest. He sat down by me and asked me if I was ready to die. I was too sick to care. He then asked me if I was concerned for my soul's salvation. I was grateful when the doctor finally asked him to leave with the advice to, "not doctor the soul while the doctor was attending to the body."



When my mind was clear, on the ninth day, someone appeared in my room. The man stood some distance from me at the opposite side of the room. In a still small voice he asked,

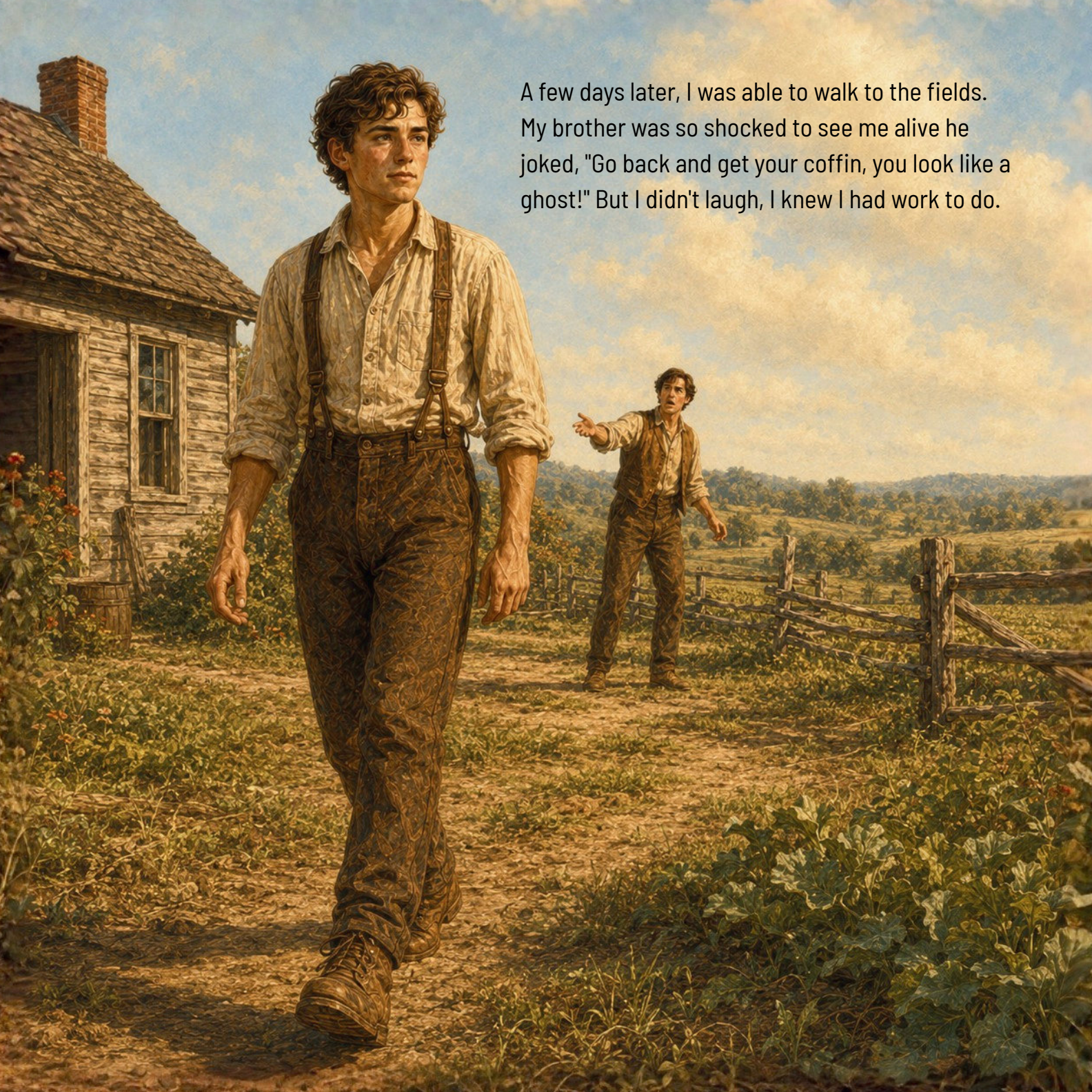
“Phineas, would you like to serve the Lord?”*

“I would,”* I replied.

“Would you serve the Lord if you knew the right way?”*

"I would,"* I promised again.

In that very moment, the sickness began to lift from my body.



A few days later, I was able to walk to the fields. My brother was so shocked to see me alive he joked, "Go back and get your coffin, you look like a ghost!" But I didn't laugh, I knew I had work to do.

PART THREE

The Bear and the Boars





Father and I were occupied with the deconstruction of an old, soot-caked chimney on our Gull Prairie farm when the quiet was broken by a frantic cry from across the way. Our neighbor, Mr. Judson, came charging toward us, waving his arms in a fit of alarm. "*BEEEEAAAR*!" he hollered. "*There is a BEAR is among the pigs*!"



The shock was such that I dropped my hammer with a clatter, and Father abandoned his bricks instantly. Father, though 52 years of age, moved with the haste of a younger man, seizing the great carving knife from the kitchen. Mother, not to be outdone at 53, armed herself with a sturdy broom, intent on apparently sweeping the beast from our lands.



At the gate, Mother stood her ground to keep watch over the homestead.
"*You go, Phineas! Save the pigs*!" she urged, waving her broom like a soldier's pike.
We raced toward the commotion, where it seemed the entire neighborhood had already mobilized.

George Murray was there, calling for his brave dog, Beve. David Hamburg arrived wielding a knobby club, practicing his swings in the air—*Whack*! *Whack*!—while Mr. Woodruff looked on in terror as the bear trespassed upon his own yard.

The beast was a great, black, grumpy thing, clearly frustrated that his search for a pork dinner had turned into a public spectacle.



The bear attempted an escape over a fence, but finding himself surrounded, he thundered across Woodruff's lot. No one could hear anything over the loud yelping from the dog and roaring from the bear. The bear tried to scale the barn, but the dogs were too nimble. In a desperate scramble, he leaped right over the heads of the men and hounds alike. It was a most ridiculous sight—neighbors sprinting in every direction, some waving ox whips and others brandishing tall stalks of corn. And of course Mother with her broom, ready at the gate in case the bear dared face her wrath.



Finally, the bear ascended a sturdy tree, climbing until he was well out of reach. We stood at the base, catching our breath. In all of Gull Prairie, there were but two firearms to be found: a **rifle** for distance and a **shotgun** for shooting a close target. The man with the rifle took aim, but the crowd shouted him down.



"HOLD ON! You might miss the bear and hit a person!"

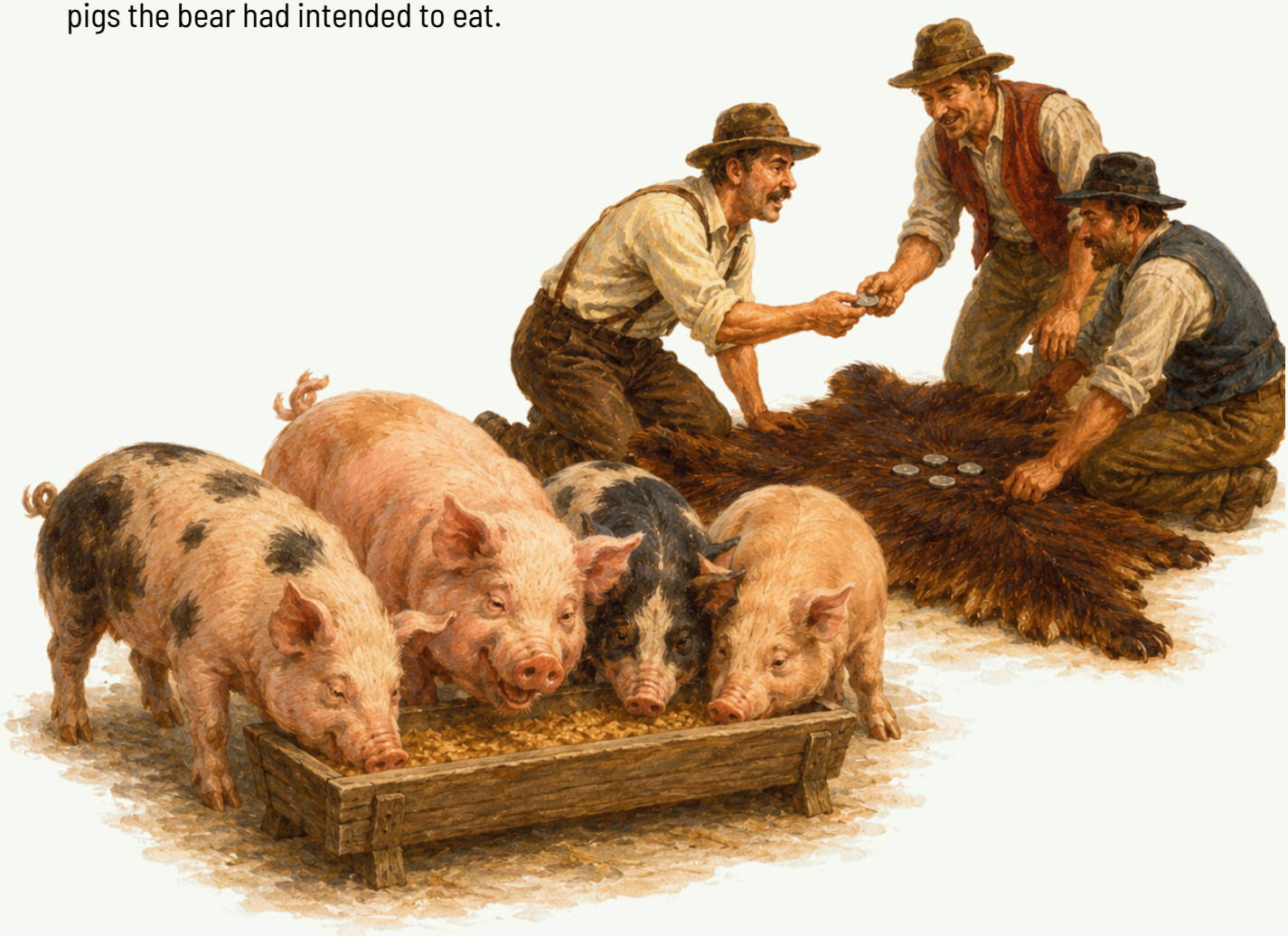


A quick huddle was held among the elder neighbors to ensure this situation was handled seriously. They determined that Esquire Hooker, a man of high standing, should take the shotgun, as it was known to “shoot ball first rate” (which means he had very good aim). A wide circle was formed to prevent any further escape.

Silence fell over the prairie. Esquire Hooker adjusted his spectacles, took a slow, deliberate aim, and—BOOM! With a heavy thump, the bear fell. A great cheer went up; the pigs were saved and the peace restored.



Upon inspection, the creature was found to be wretchedly thin—so poor and stringy that no man desired the meat. In a turn of irony, the meat was chopped and fed to the very pigs the bear had intended to eat.









The hide remained a point of contention among the twelve men who assisted in the hunt. George Murray, wanting a trophy for his dog Beve, offered to buy out the others. **"***I'll buy your share for 50 cents!*" he proposed.
Given the scarcity of coin, all eleven neighbors agreed and pocketed their silver.

September 10, 1839 The excitement of the bear has faded into the labor of the season. Once the harvest was in, Father and I hired a man named Johnson to assist with the clearing. He is a formidable worker and keeps a fine, shiny racehorse. For two months, we worked as a team—*Chop, chop, chop*!—until twenty acres were cleared for the spring planting. The work was grueling, but the land is ready, the pigs are fat, and I have a tale worth telling.



PART FOUR

The Missing Dessert





October 16, 1839

I began to do extra work to save for our life together. I even earned myself a fine new suit of clothes by making nineteen butter churns!



New Year's Day, 1840

I am finally married to Ann Eliza! We shared the wedding with her twin sister, Ann Maria, and her fiancé, Washington Heath.

The fiddle played and we danced until two o'clock in the morning! After all of that dancing, the guests grew hungry once again.

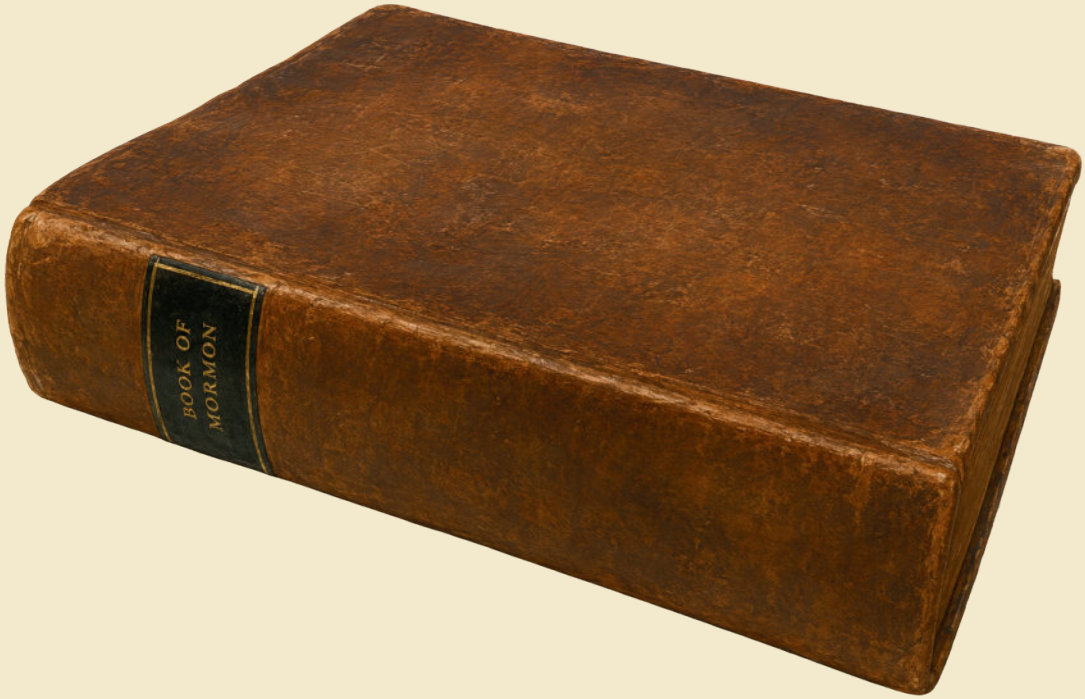
We went to get the wedding cake and pies from the kitchen, but they were gone! We soon realized that my brother Darius and his fiancée "heisted" nearly half a bushel of wedding cake and pies from the kitchen! They disappeared into the night with their pockets full of treats. I was told he was miffed that his invitation had come late. It seems his vengeance was sweet.





PART FIVE

Finding His Faith



September 30, 1844

Our sweet Daniel has left us at just two years of age. He has suffered from a series of **fits** in his short little life. With Ann Eliza, little Charlotte and precious Harriet, we mourned our sweet boy.





October 21, 1844

Ann Eliza and I have been searching for a church that felt like home since we were married. I wanted to find a place where people were healed by faith, just like the old stories in the Bible. Many people told me, "Oh, those miracles don't happen anymore!" but I didn't believe them. I know the Great Creator doesn't change.



October 26, 1844

Today, my sister, Eliza, told me about a new group called the Mormons. I think she is mad! She would not relent in how earnest she was about her newfound religion.

To satisfy her, I said, "*That's right for I have not had a chance for an argument on religion for some time, and I should be glad to have a chance to thrash them and make them haul in their long horns.*"* I fully intend on using this interaction to prove to her the errors of her ways.



December 1, 1844

There is to be a Mormon meeting in the schoolhouse across the road. Though I told Eliza I would use this opportunity to prove her wrong, I did not have time to waste listening to more heresy.



December 8, 1844

Father, Mother, and Ann Eliza have come home from the Mormon meeting.

Father said, *"I was always Mormon, but knew not what to call it."*

I had to scoff when mother replied, *"So was I."*

"Well," I replied, *"I think you must be poor off for names. I don't think it would take me long to find a name for it."* They were not pleased with my response.



January 20, 1845

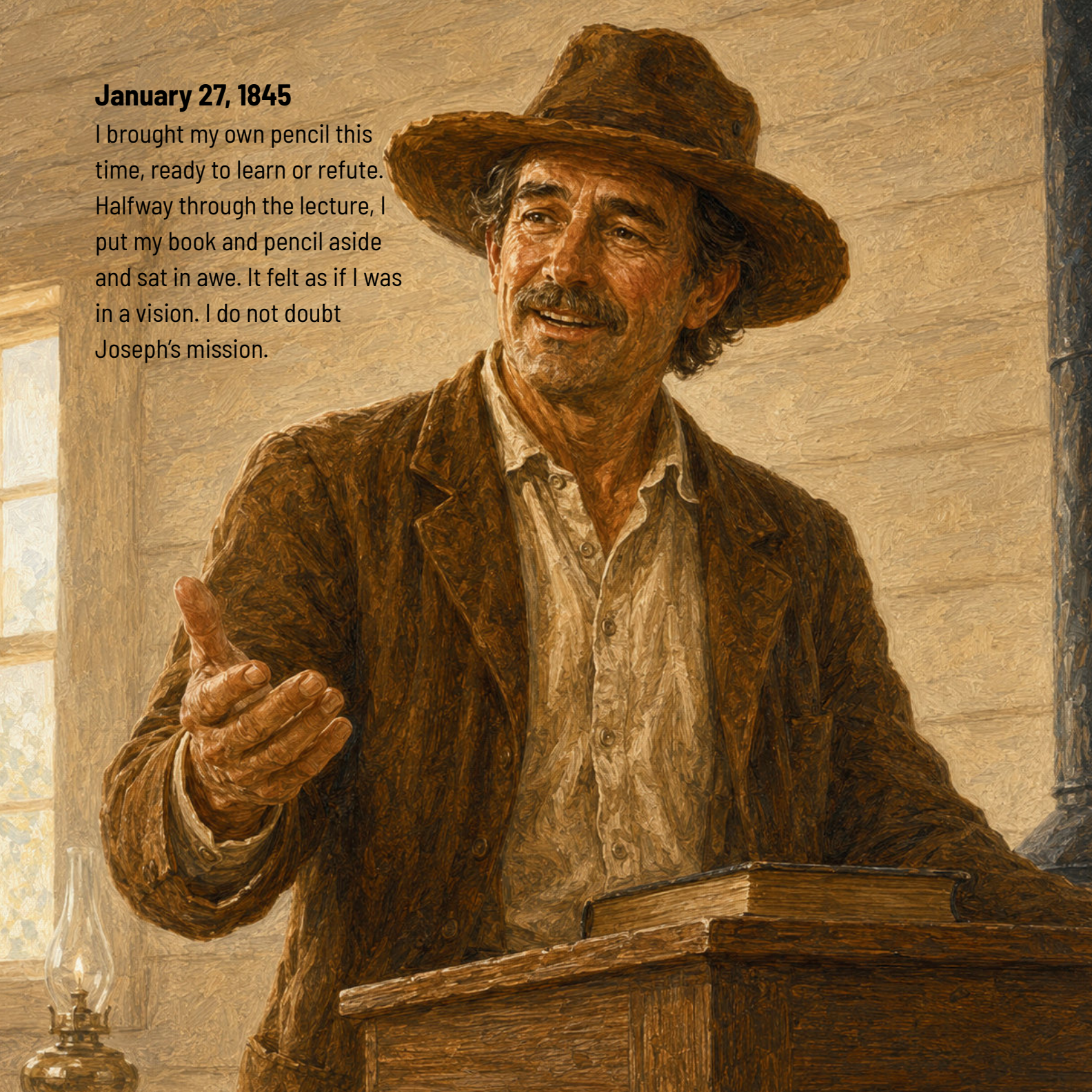
Father and Mother have worn me down. I am bringing a book and pencil to this meeting to take notes and prove to them they are wrong and then at last, this will be the end of this Mormon talk. When I got to the meeting, I could not find my pencil. I was certain I had placed it in my book. I asked to borrow one from those attending. A man by the fire said he had one and would let me borrow it. I sat in the very front desk where I could look the preacher fair in the face and write down all of his errors. I was sure to find them in abundance.

I was surprised when the stranger who lent me his pencil was the one who gave the sermon. He looked at me as though I was some greater sinner. I was determined to catch him in heresy.

After two and a half hours, I sat speechless. As I listened, my heart began to melt. I could not say a single word against the sermon. I wanted to unload my questions afterward, but the preacher had to leave. I had to wait until the next meeting to hear more. I knew what he said was true and could not be refuted by any testimony. It seemed that truth had prevailed, especially over me.

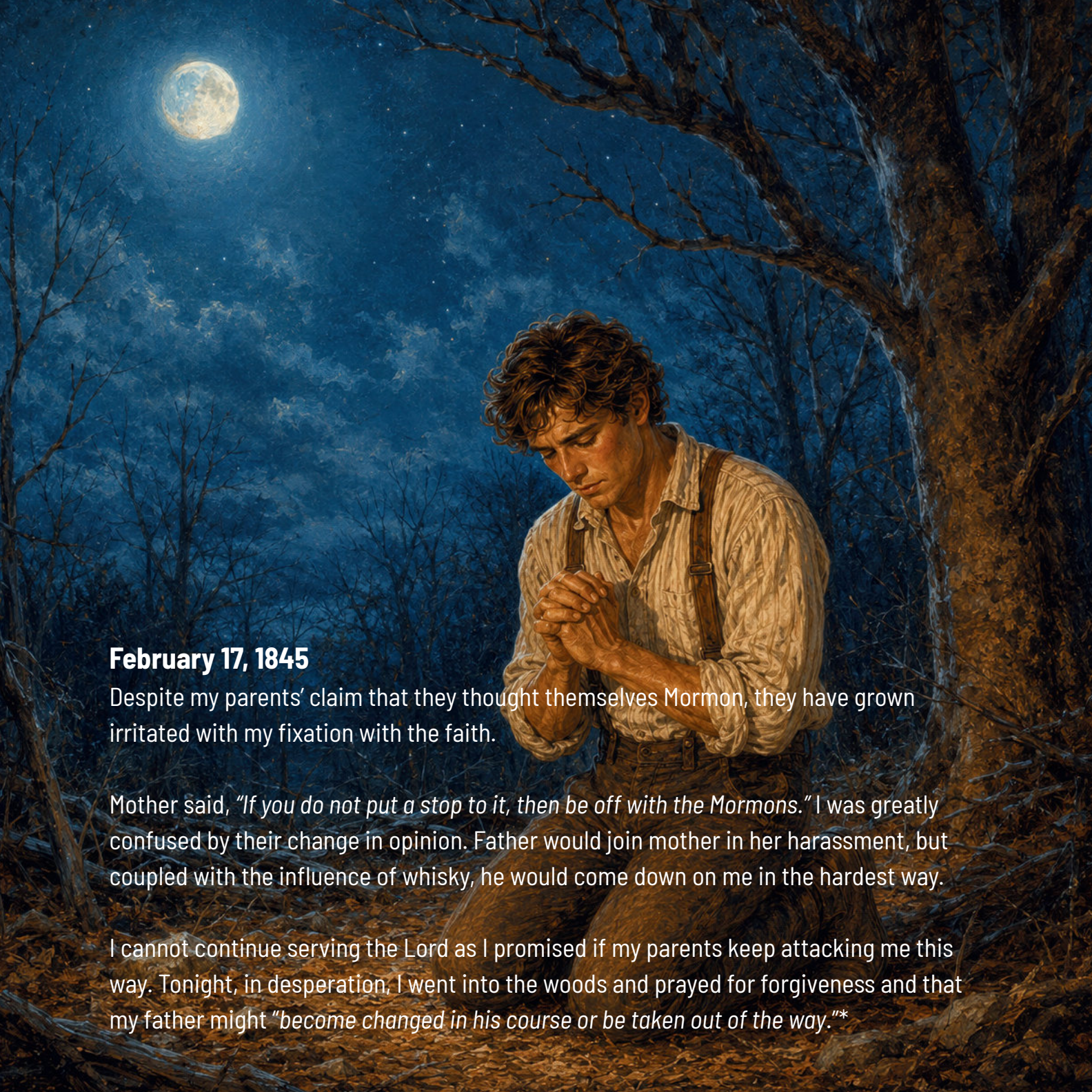
Neighbors who'd heard I was there to refute them asked me why I did not speak up. "I cannot. They have spoken the truth."

I am not yet convinced to become Mormon, but I am interested in hearing more.



January 27, 1845

I brought my own pencil this time, ready to learn or refute. Halfway through the lecture, I put my book and pencil aside and sat in awe. It felt as if I was in a vision. I do not doubt Joseph's mission.



February 17, 1845

Despite my parents' claim that they thought themselves Mormon, they have grown irritated with my fixation with the faith.

Mother said, *"If you do not put a stop to it, then be off with the Mormons."* I was greatly confused by their change in opinion. Father would join mother in her harassment, but coupled with the influence of whisky, he would come down on me in the hardest way.

I cannot continue serving the Lord as I promised if my parents keep attacking me this way. Tonight, in desperation, I went into the woods and prayed for forgiveness and that my father might "*become changed in his course or be taken out of the way.*"*



February 20, 1845

I am afraid God answered that prayer in the worst way. Father is very sick with shingles. Realizing I had perhaps sinned in my request, I prayed yet again, this time asking for him to be made well.

Again, God answered me; in just two days, my father recovered. I knew that the Lord had forgiven me.

February 30, 1845

To keep the peace at home, I became a "Secret Reader." I read my Book of Mormon from midnight to 3:00 a.m. when everyone was asleep. During the day while I was out plowing the long, muddy fields with my oxen, I hid my Book of Mormon inside a hollow tree stump. Every time the oxen stopped to rest, I would run to the stump, read a few pages, and hide it again before anyone saw me.





April 2, 1845

With tensions high, we decided it would be best to move with our little ones into a tiny room—just seven feet by twelve.



September 7, 1845

I haven't been able to attend any more meetings until today. A couple fellow saints found us on their way to a conference, they brought us with them and Ann Eliza and I were baptized in the Kalamazoo River of the city Comstock. Then we went up to the schoolhouse and were confirmed as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Many people tried to dissuade me from my faith. They thought they could argue and convince me that my new beliefs were false. The more they said, the stronger I felt and the more I felt to maintain it.

My sweet wife, Ann Eliza, was faithful from the start. She knew right away that this church was true. If it weren't for her, I might never have attended that first meeting.

December 4, 1845

It is time to move West to find a home with other believers. But I am very poor. I don't have a wagon or a team of oxen to pull it. My mother said, "You'll never leave! You don't have a cent to your name."

*"I told her the God that I served was rich, for the earth was his, and the fullness thereof. And I had no fears but what I should get away. Inasmuch as I [had] done the best I could, the Lord was bound to open the way for me and he surely would do it."** Ann Eliza was not deterred by my mother. She was firm in her faith.



December 7, 1845

Maybe I shouldn't have spoken so boldly. Father took the wheat I've been preparing and saving for our journey and mixed it in with his. He thinks doing so will keep us here. We will press on in our preparations.



December 16, 1845

Wouldn't you know it? Just when it seemed impossible, a relative from Canada drove into my yard. For no apparent reason, he left behind two big, strong oxen. I immediately set to work building a wagon with my own hands. Ann Eliza has been sewing a wagon cover for many months. We will be able to leave soon!

*Phineas' wagon ended up being used by Brigham Young as he arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. It is displayed at the Daughter of the Utah Pioneers Museum in Salt Lake City, Utah.



May 22, 1846

We leave Gull Prairie tomorrow! I guess my parents realize they can't keep us here. Father added some bags of flour to our wagon and handed me some money for the journey. Our prayers have been answered.



May 23, 1846

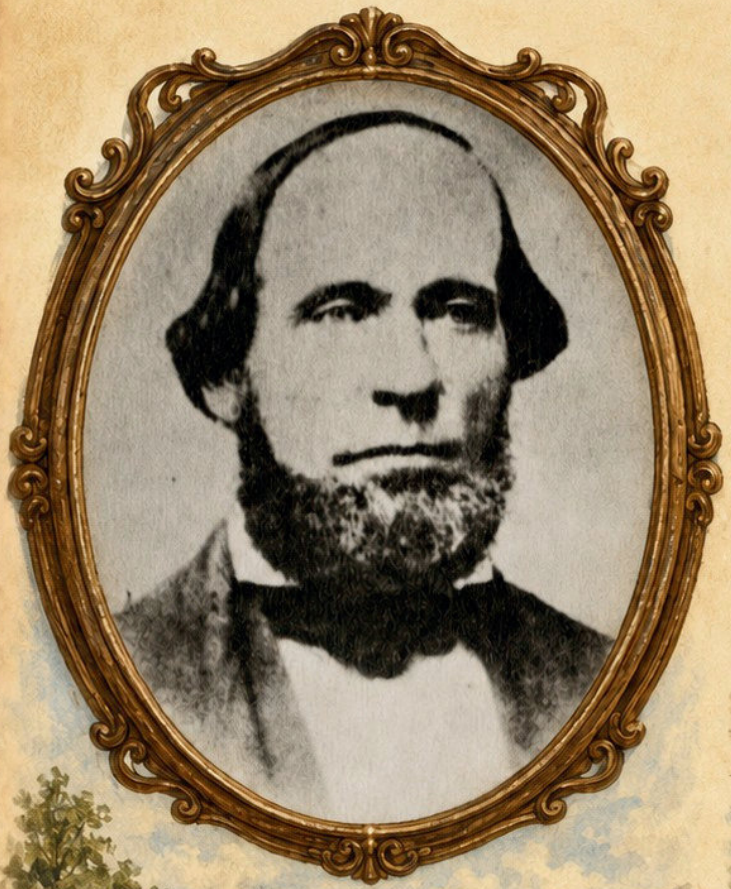
With our little ones in tow, we're packed up and ready to leave. Some neighbors shouted mean things as we pulled away, but I just held the reins tight. I've kept my promise. I've found the "*Right Way*," I have my family by my side, and with my two miracle oxen leading the way, we've left the Michigan woods and we move toward our bright, new future.

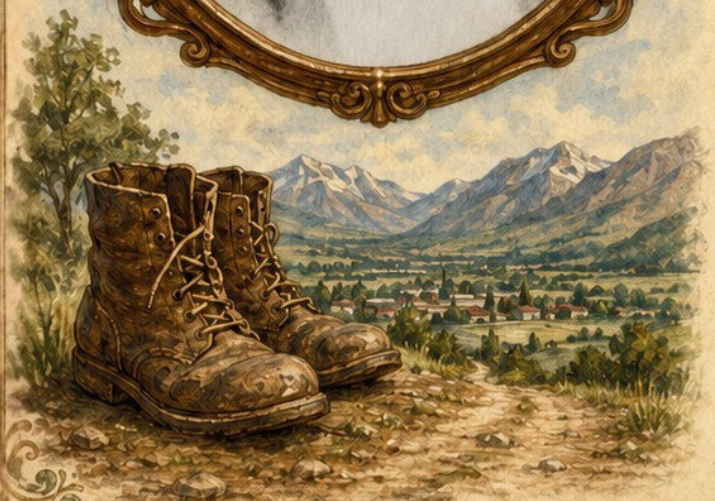
Cooks and Howlands in Michigan



Phineas Wolcott Cook

A Real Pioneer Builder and Man of Faith





Quick Facts



- **Birth:** August 28, 1819, in Goshen, Connecticut
- **Death:** July 24, 1900, in Afton, Wyoming
- **Family:** Husband to four wives (Ann Eliza, Amanda, Catherine, and Johanna) and father to 28 children
- **Trade:** Master builder, carpenter, millwright, and surveyor

Key Life Milestones



The 100-Mile Walk (1837): At age 18, he walked 100 miles on foot to find his father's camp in Michigan, arriving with feet blistered "from heel to toe".



Spiritual Awakening (1838): While near death from illness, he heard a "still small voice" ask if he would serve the Lord if shown the right way. He promised he would and recovered immediately.



The "Brigham Young Wagon" (1847): He built a sturdy wagon in Michigan and drove it to Winter Quarters. It was later used by Brigham Young and his family during the 1847 pioneer trek.



First Water Master (1853): Appointed by Brigham Young as Salt Lake City's first Water Master, he built a machine to bore logs into Utah's first water pipes.



City Founder (1857): Discovered a valley while searching for lost horses and founded the town of Goshen, Utah, naming it after his childhood home in Connecticut.

The Builder of Zion

How Phineas Built, Served, and Endured

Buildings He Helped Build



The Lion House & Beehive House:
Served as a foreman and carpenter on these famous Salt Lake City residences.



The Logan Temple:
Contributed finish carpentry work during its final stages of construction.



Mills Across the West:
Built the first gristmills in Manti (1850) and the Bear Lake Valley (Swan Creek, 1865).

Character & Faith



Honesty:
Known to follow a row of cabbages and count out every tenth one as tithing for the Church.



Integrity:
Frequently recorded in his journal his determination to "do the best I can" and to leave final judgments to the Lord, even when he felt wronged by others.



Resilience:
Survived the "Great Fire" at Lone Tree Ranch that destroyed his barns, sheds, and winter hay, leaving his family "the poorest of the poor," yet he saw the hand of the Lord in their survival.

A faithful pioneer and devoted ancestor, Phineas left a legacy of faith, service, and family that lives on in many descendants today.

Quotes with * are direct quotes from the journal of Phineas Wolcott Cook. To see his full journal go to CookFamily.org

Glossary

Debts- money owed to someone else.
Land Speculation- the buying of property in order to sell again to make money
Ague- a term for a fever, characterized by severe, recurring chills, shaking, and sweating.
Fits- a term for seizures or convulsions
Rifle- a long-barreled firearm fired from the shoulder
Shotgun- a long gun that shoots a shell filled with many tiny metal balls



Seventeen-year-old Phineas always thought he would spend his life on his family's cozy farm in Goshen, Connecticut. But when unfair debts force them off their land, his world is turned upside down. With rumors of cheap, open land out west, Phineas packs what little he has and sets off on a wild adventure to the rugged territory of Michigan.
The frontier is nothing like home. Alongside his brave family and his sweetheart, Ann Eliza, Phineas faces:

- Treacherous steamboat storms on Lake Erie.
- Deep, unforgiving mud swamps filled with snapping wolves.
- A sudden neighborhood chase after a grumpy black bear!

Faced with angry neighbors and a family that doesn't understand his new beliefs, Phineas must decide what he is willing to sacrifice for his faith. Will a midnight hiding spot in a tree stump, a handmade wagon, and a pair of miracle oxen be enough to lead his family to a bright new future?

Based on a true story, this inspiring journal chronicles one boy's journey through the wilderness to find his purpose, his family's freedom, and the "Right Way."

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https://cookfamily.org/