Irene Churchill Cook

Irene Churchill Cook, daughter of Jonathan Churchill III and Sarah Burgess was born 14 Feb 1786 in Litchfield, Litchfield County, Connecticut. We know only a little about her from records that have survived, but more from her son Phineas Wolcott Cook's journal. Phineas tells us that her mother died when Irene was an infant. Irene had 2 sisters: Polly and Lucy. Polly married Phineas Sr.'s brother Amasa – sisters marrying brothers! She had one son with Amasa. Lucy had a scary incident in her life that Phineas Jr. recounts in his journal.

> *She was never married. She used to work in the paper mill at a place called West, and she was dark complexion (her) being marked caused by her mother being frightened by an Indian who lay in wait for her as she went to milk. When she saw him he had his tomahawk raised in his hand ready to throw at her. She screamed and ran for the house which was not far, and she reached it before he could overtake her. Mother told me that Aunt Lucy had the exact image of the Indian on her side, tomahawk and all, just as she first saw him. The rest of her body was very white except her face and neck which were quite dark. She was a good woman.*

Irene also had 2 brothers: Josiah and Leman. They moved to New York State.

After Irene's mother Sarah died, her father Jonathan married a woman named Comfort Woodcock. Sarah and Jonathan had 3 children: one son and two daughters, Daniel and Abby (Nabby) and Emily (Patty Emily). Phinaes Jr. told us about this family.

> *Daniel was never married but used to roam from place to place. He was rather slack and sometimes used to drink too much which made him ugly.*
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> *Abby was never married. She was very handsome. She was courted by a young man who made great pretentions to love. He did all he could to overcome her, until at last he gave her Spanish flies or love powder and by this means she was overcome. When she came again to herself, she became deranged in mind finding her character lost and being abandoned by him. She entirely lost her reason. Father sent her to the insane hospital, but it did her no good. Father kept her for 2 or 3 years; and finding she got no better, having a large family, he applied to the selectmen of the town for help. So, they took her and took care of her where she still remains.*
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> *Now may the Lord Almighty avenge her of her wrongs and reward her for all her trouble and losses. My prayer is that such men may reap a just reward for such abominable acts. I say, may they howl and weep until justice shall have its just demand, for she became one of the most wretched and miserable creatures I ever saw. My heart is filled with pity for her, for she was one of the most amiable of her sex as handsome as a doll, white as snow. Her hair was as black as a raven and her eyes a beautiful black. She used to work in the woolen factory and was very industrious.*

> *Emily was married to a man by the name of David Tousey Taylor. They were living in Watertown, Connecticut the last I knew of them.*

Irene and Phineas Cook Sr. were married in 1806 in Litchfield County, Connecticut.

Irene's father, along with his second wife and 2 of her children, came to live with Irene and Phineas Sr. and their family in Connecticut around the time her brother in law, Amasa Cook died. Jonathan also lent the family money to try to save their farm which they could not maintain once Amasa had died. Irene's father lived with her family until his death.

After their farm in Goshen failed, Phineas moved to Richland, Michigan with 2 of his sons to begin a new life. Irene followed the following year with another son and 2 daughters. Her son and husband had built her a sturdy home in the new wilderness.

Phineas reports doing a great deal of work to prepare a home and furnishings for his mother. But he also recounts that his mother urged him to move out and live on his own.

In his diary, Phineas Jr. portrays his mother as being completely opposed to his joining with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and certainly opposed to his moving to be with them, although he notes that she agreed with the religious sentiments when she first heard them.

> *At the usual hour they came home much taken up with the sermon, and indeed it seemed as though they could not satisfy themselves with any language they had. Father said he was always a Mormon but never knew what the devil to call it. "So was I," says mother.*

Irene urged Phineas to listen to the Mormon missionaries, as did his father and wife, Ann Eliza. Finally, Phineas went to listen on the 4th occasion of the missionaries preaching. Although initially impressed, it took Phineas a while to decide to join the Church. At this point, his mother was not at all encouraging.

> *Father and Mother began to think I should become a convert to their faith, as they could not hear anything from me but (religion) from day to day. They could see me reading every odd moment, and Mother said the next thing would be, if they did not put a stop to it, I should be off with their (church) and that would be the last of me.*

It seems that Irene may have liked the religious ideas, but following through with them, formalizing her beliefs and making lifestyle changes were not in her plans.

Not at all happy that her son was moving to join with the Mormons, Irene took every measure she could to try to dissuade him from going. She tried to persuade Ann Eliza to talk Phineas out of the move. And she made their lives unpleasant as they tried to prepare materially for their move. When they went to leave, Ann Eliza and Phineas found that Irene and Phineas' father had taken their wheat that they planned to take on their journey, mixed it with theirs, and had it all

ground into flour, essentially making it impossible to take any on their journey. At the last minute, Irene relented and gave them a bag of flour as she watched them leave her forever. She thought their move would kill Phineas' father. Phineas said this about his mother, encapsulating her effect on his life:

> *Mother was an industrious woman and always for going ahead to make money, so much so that it was hard for her to treat her family as they should be, but still she taught everybody that came to dwell with her how to be industrious and prudent. She was very saving and prudent in all her business and taught her children to be the same. I told her she had many years to live, and that she would yet see the day she would be glad that I was a Mormon.*

Following the death of Phineas Sr. not much is known about Irene's life. Phineas Jr. and Ann Eliza had moved west to be with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Irene remarried a man named Forbes prior to 1850 when she deeded land to her children as "Irene Forbes." She died Jan 3, 1870 in Richland at age 84 and is buried there in the Prairie Home Cemetery next to Phineas Cook Sr.

