

Warren's Formative Years in "The Burned-Over District"

ASA DOUGLAS REYNOLDS - Family Group Record

Asa Douglas Reynolds

Birth: 30 Nov 1787 in Pittstown, Rensselaer, New York.
Death: 11 Apr 1835 in Avon, Livingston, New York.
Parents: Jeremiah Reynolds & Elizabeth Daggett



Betsy Artlip

Birth: 2 Oct 1788 in Glenville, Schenectady, New York.
Death: 27 Sep 1843 in Rose, Oakland, Michigan.
Parents: Christopher Artlip & Eva Ostrander



Marriage: 17 Jun 1805 in Glenville, Schenectady, New York.

CHILDREN	SEX	BIRTH	SPOUSE	MARRIAGE	DEATH
Eliza Reynolds	F	12 Sep 1806 in Glenville, Schenectady, New York.	Isaiah Butler	1844 in Michigan	23 Nov 1831 in Avon, Livingston, New York, USA
Levi H. Reynolds	M	2 Jun 1808 in Glenville, Schenectady, New York.	Irena C. Kenyonson	1 Sep 1835 in Avon, Livingston, New York, USA	9 Jun 1885 in Milan, Washtenaw, Michigan, USA
Asa Reynolds	M	25 Nov 1810 in Glenville, Schenectady, New York, USA	Mary Polly Gage	28 Jan 1847 in , Genesee, Michigan, USA	9 Sept 1888 in Fenton, Genesee, Michigan, USA
Amanda Reynolds	F	27 Dec 1812 in Glenville, Schenectady, New York, USA	Samuel Blakesley Chapel	6 Mar 1831 in Avon, Livingston, New York, USA	3 Jan 1906 in Grand Blanc, Genesee, Michigan, USA
Sarah Ann Reynolds	F	11 Oct 1815 in Glenville, Schenectady, New York, USA			16 Jun 1839 in Michigan, United States
Caroline Reynolds	F	30 Apr 1819 in Avon, Livingston, New York, USA	Joseph N. Merrill	3 Jun 1836 in Of Avon, Livingston, New York, USA	12 Feb 1837 in Pontiac, Oakland, Michigan, USA
Esther Reynolds	F	1 May 1821 in Avon, Livingston, New York, USA	Benjamin Graham		11 June 1902 in Hubbardston, Ionia, Michigan
Warren Ford Reynolds	M	7 Jun 1823 in Avon, Livingston, New York, USA	Christina McNeil	28 Jun 1857 in Salt Lake City, Salt Lake, Utah, USA	10 Jul 1900 in South Cottonwood, Salt Lake, Utah, USA
William Reynolds	M	25 Sep 1826 in Avon, Livingston, New York, USA	Calista Climena Carver	21 May 1851 in Clinton, Lenawee, Michigan, USA	5 December 1886 in Hubbardston, Ionia, Michigan, USA
Maria Elizabeth Reynolds	F	30 Jun 1828 in Avon, Livingston, New York, USA	Horace Fuller Parsons	14 May 1860	18 Jul 1900 in Saline, Washtenaw, Michigan, USA
Charles Douglas Reynolds	M	29 Dec 1831 in Avon, Livingston, New York, USA	Melvina E. Hovey	about 1856 in Michigan	14 Jul 1854 in Rose, Oakland, Michigan, USA

Note: In the above record only the second wives are shown for Asa and Warren Ford Reynolds. Missing are Sarah Lurvey, first wife of Asa, and Edna Merrell, first wife of Warren Ford. Also missing is George Whitehouse, first husband of Esther Reynolds.

When Warren grew from boy to man his Reynolds family line had been on American soil for 200 years. Indeed five generations of his Reynolds ancestors had been helping to write the story of our young country. Since the early 1600's when John Reynolds, of Ipswich, took Sarah Chesterfield to wife just before emigrating from England to Watertown, Massachusetts, the Reynolds family line had uprooted four times in a continuous succession of moves, as hopes and dreams of a better life were pursued in the westward expansion of the country. Always, the family had carefully dressed their Christian beliefs and remained active in their church. In Avon, they were members of the Avon Baptist Church.

Warren's experiences from age 8 until his family moved to Michigan when he was thirteen had a great influence on his later life and his strong commitment to his religious beliefs. This period was a historic time in America; his Reynolds family experienced

momentous changes to its structure and social fabric; and his home in Livingston County was an epicenter of sorts for spiritual revival in the 1830s, so intense the region has since been known as "The Burned Over District."

In order to achieve a meaningful perspective for Warren's life on this matter we must borrow a few thoughts from insightful writers on the subject. One asked:

"What was it about Western New York in the 1800s that stirred the souls of men and women? Was it the isolation of the frontier that turned ordinary people into seers and mystics? Whatever the cause, the Genesee Country certainly had more than its share oftrue believers as wave after wave of religious revival spread across the region, thus earning it the name, "The Burned Over District."

Western New York became the birthplace of one of the world's great religions when Joseph Smith dug up the Book of Mormon on a hillside near Palmyra. Other beliefs started with equal fervor faded out after brief if sensational runs." ¹

Another writer gave us a striking summary of the matter when he said:

"This area was settled largely by people from New England and that "Western New York is heir to the Puritan vision of a perfect commonwealth, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. In the early 1800's, the region was swept like a prairie fire by the most powerful religious revival ever to hit America, leaving "the burnt-over district" in its wake.... It was the Erie Canal that transported these radical ideas to Western New York.... It was this mixture of Puritan idealism, industrial development, and immigration which has made New Yorkers so tolerant of, and open to, new ideas, and fostered a vision of America which we are still struggling to achieve: a society with equal opportunity for all, built on a shared sense of stewardship and social responsibility towards the community, and modeled on the early Roman Republic. The Erie Canal flows past cities with classical names: Rome, Utica, Syracuse. It still stands today to DeWitt Clinton's vision of the republic as commonwealth." ²

From at least one old typescript produced by a grandchild it appears that Warren sometimes told stories about his Avon home and its geographic proximity to the early events involving Joseph Smith and what is termed today, "The Restoration." His home at Avon was 28 miles from the Smith home at Palmyra and 12 miles from that of Brigham Young's home in Mendon. As a boy he was aware of the excitement caused

1 From website: westernny.com/history4.html

2 From website: docfilm.com/amerfilms/erie/indexF.htm?erie1.htm&down

by the coming of Mormonism to his region. Later, in his 1854 letter to his brother Asa he mentioned some of their Avon neighbors who became converts to the new American church. He remembered with fondness Abel Lamb from nearby Livonia, who was taught the gospel by Brigham Young and baptized by Joseph Smith. Abel was a school teacher just like Asa, and had married their close neighbor Almira, daughter of Daniel Merrill, the Revolutionary War soldier fifer and blacksmith; and he remembered the Redfield family with their ten children.

Some important insights can be drawn from this discussion. First, we know that some members of Warren's family were open to change regarding their religious loyalties, perhaps from the influence of the period;³ second, the anti-masonry movement that began in 1826 in western New York literally changed the face of local politics and peoples attitudes one to another and invaded the Avon Baptist Church forcing a decision on Asa D. that resulting in the loss of his church fellowship; thirdly, we know that Warren later stood alone as the sole member of his family to make a faith conversion to Mormonism and be baptized; and finally we know from his 1853-54 letters that he acquired a strong testimony, frequently voiced and shared with his siblings, that resulted and served him the remainder of his life.

The Turning Point

The records of the Avon Baptist Church document the separation that took place between the church and some members of Warren's family during this upheaval period.⁴ The case made by the church against Warren's Aunt Lorena and her husband Levi may well have been a determinant factor in their decision to remove to points further west. What is clear from their example is that this descendant line of the family, through the son Levi Jr., produced a progeny of Seventh Day Adventist followers and ministers who are actively faithful to this day.⁵ Similarly, the case made by the church against Asa D. because he would not renounce "freemasonry" likely strengthened his sons who removed to Michigan and functioned and died in the order. Of course there were other members of the family who went different ways, as previously noted, and in Warren's own words, his younger brother "Charles...got religion" shortly before he died.

By great-grandson Robert N. Reynolds

3 See Reynolds Family History, The Avon Baptist Church and Free Masonry, Robert N. Reynolds, 18 page PDF with digital images of church meeting notes and membership lists, September 26, 2009.

4 Ibid.

5 Cousin Glenn G. Reynolds M.D., personal conversations.