

Alva Benson (Dwelling #664)

The 1850 U. S. Census listed Alva “Alvin” Benson as a millwright. He was born December 13, 1799 in De Ruyter, Onondaga County, New York to Benjamin Lewis and Keziah Messenger Benson. When his family moved to Indiana, he met and married Cynthia Vail on August 11, 1820 in Jeffersonville, Clark County. Cynthia was born to Gamiel and Lucy Manning Vail on February 28, 1801 in Palmer, Saratoga County, New York.



Alva and Cynthia had two children while living in Rockville, Jackson County, Indiana, David and William. William only lived one year.

Alva was a builder of sawmills. This occupation made it necessary for the family to move frequently. The couple’s first daughter, Keziah, was born in 1825 and then James was born in 1828.

In 1832, the couple joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. They joined the Saints in Clay County, Missouri in 1836. It was here that another son, Ammon, was born. During raids by Missouri mobs, Ammon passed away. By September of 1839, the family was driven out of Missouri. They went to live with Cynthia’s brother, Gamaliel, in McLain County, Illinois. They remained there for five years. Their last two children, Cynthia and George Gamaliel were born there. According to FamilySearch.org, George Gamaliel died in September of 1846 when they reached Pottawattamie County, Iowa.

An article in *The Frontier Guardian* placed Alva in Big Pigeon. From an 1849 newspaper, “The Roads in Pottawattamie County are so completely blockaded by fences that there is hardly room enough left for a passage to Heaven. It is proposed that a committee of three persons be appointed one from Carterville, one from Kanesville, and one from Big Pigeon, to examine and determine the most feasible route for a public road leading from the prairie south of Carterville through the latter place, passing through or near Kanesville and extending up the Tabernacle hollow to Little and Big Pigeon. Joseph Kelley, of Carterville, Henry Miller, of Kanesville, and Alvah Benson of Big Pigeon are appointed that committee by a number of citizens from all these places. This is destined to be one of the great thoroughfares throu (sic) this county and calls for energetic measures in relation to it; and this committee are the very men to enter into such measures; and after the work is done, the commissioners will probably sanction it. But it requires to be opened sooner than it can be done by petition. We expect that every public-spirited man will be on hand, up and doing while it is called today.” (31)

The 1850 U. S. Census listed “Alvin”, age 50; Cynthia, age 48; Lucy, age 18; Moroni, age 17; Alvira, age 11; and, Cynthia, age 8. The 1851 Iowa State Census added another child, Polly E., age 13. Living next door was David Benson (Dwelling #662), their oldest son, with his wife, Elsa Ann Curtis and their 6-month daughter, Phoebe. Elsa was the daughter of Uriah and Phoebe Martin Curtis. Two other children born to David and Elsa were probably born in Big Pigeon.

The Benson family stayed in Big Pigeon for five years. They came west with the Uriah Curtis Company which left Kanesville on June 28, 1852 and arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on

September 29, 1852. There were about 260 people in the company and 50 wagons. Uriah Curtis was not only the father-in-law of David Benson, but it was he and one of the missionaries that converted the Benson family.

Alva and Cynthia and their family settled in Springville, Utah County, Utah Territory. They lived there a year and were called to Iron County to assist in establishing a settlement and building flour and sawmills. This would become Cedar City.

Alva moved his family back to Springville in 1859, then to Ogden, and finally to Cache Valley. He helped establish the settlement of Hyrum. Cynthia died in November of 1877 and Alva died there in 1882 at the age of 83. Both are buried in the Hyrum City Cemetery, Hyrum, Cache County, Utah.