

HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT CALL SLIP

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Charles Henry Wilcken - Desereted from Johnston's Army in 1957 and was baptized in December of that year.

Filed a mission for the church in 1971-73

January 1885 went on the underground with L. John Nuttal, H.C. Barrell and President John Taylor. (p. 8)

July 1889, Charlie entered upon what would probably turn out to be the most ambitious business project of his life. With the bacing of Mormon Church leaders a number of men organized the Deseret and Salt lake Agricultural and Manufacturing Company. Charlie was elected on one of the trustees. Other principles included the First Presidency, John QW. and Abraham H. Cannon, B.Y. Hampton, and others. Their plan was to build a dam on the Sevier River to provide irrigation water for thousands of acres of land in Sevier County. The project would ultimately be plagued with problems severe enough to thwart its complet fruition.

(17) Charlie was named a Patriarch by Joseph F. Smith April 13, 1911. He lived o8ut his days as a guide on Temple Square and died in a SL Hospital on April 9, 1915.

Time does not permit an examination of Charlie's home and family life, his two failed marriage s, his various employments, his carerr as an unsuccessful real estate speculator, the nature and value of his published writings (of which there are several).

Much of the biographic information concerning Wilcken's family background was extracted from several unpublished manuscripts prepared by some of his descendants; these include Amy Wildken Pratt Romney, "Stories from the Life of Charles Henry Wilcken, 1974, USHS collection; "History of Caroline Christine Eliza Reiche Wilcken," 1945 USHS collection; and "Sketch of Dora W. Pratt," n.d., HSHS collection. These accounts based as they presdumably are, on family oral tradition, contain numeroous factual errors (discovered by recent research); they are used guardedly in the present paper.

Charlie himself provided some general backgroundinformation fifty years after his desertion. "Eighteen Hundred Fifty-Seven, "Young, Woman's Journal, nos. 9 and 11 (1907) pp. 393-97 and 495-96.

Additional biographic information was obtained from Charli Charlie's obituary (DNW April 10, 1915)

His enlistment recordd described CVharlie as six feet one inch in height with grey eyes and brown hair and fair complexi complexion.

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Charles Henry Wilcken was born in Echorst, a small village in Holstein, Germany, on October 5, 1830.1 Apprenticed to a miller whose trade he apparently mastered, he later distinguished himself as a soldier in a battle with Danish forces over control of the Schleswig- Holstein provinces and was decorated with the Iron Cross by the [p.309] Prussian King, Frederick William IV. Wilcken's military prowess was also noticed by the Danish king, Frederick VII, who let it be known that he wished to conscript the hero. But young Wilcken apparently had other ideas. After consulting with family and friends and collecting whatever cash was available, he left Echorst for South America to try to find an older brother who had emigrated several years earlier. In Liverpool he somehow managed to board the wrong ship and found himself, several weeks later, in New York.

Running short of cash and possibly suffering from a physical ailment, Wilcken listened to the pitch of a recruiting officer who was enlisting men to go to the western desert to put down a tribe of rebellious "Indians" called Mormons.2 Upon his enlistment he was sent to Fort Leavenworth for training and ultimately assigned to Capt. John Wolcott Phelps of the Fourth Artillery Battalion that became part of Johnston's Army.

Charles H. Wilcken in his Prussian uniform. Photograph of a painting in the Deseret News, December 21, 1912.

Marching westward with the army in the summer and fall of 1857, Wilcken, in the early days of his twenty-seventh year, made a momentous decision, faced a close brush with death, and changed his life [p.310] forever. During the afternoon of October 7, 1857, he deserted and headed west. Within a few days he was captured by one of the Mormon defenders, Jonathan Ellis Layne, who had been out rabbit hunting. As Layne described it:

Just then I heard a slight noise at my right hand. I did not turn my head, but drew my gun around toward the noise and there stood a large soldier. [I] dropped the muzzle of my gun and pointed it directly at his heart, he threw up his hands and said "Don't shoot, I am unarmed." I told him to come up to me still holding my gun pointing at him, and he surrendered himself to me. Layne confirmed the absence of weapons and then . . . with the big soldier went to the camp. While going he offered to exchange clothing with me as he was afraid if he was caught with the soldiers clothing on he would certainly be shot. I did not wish to swap with him, but when we came to the camp he soon got rid of his soldiers clothing. I turned the prisoner over to Porter Rockwell. . . .3 Layne gave half of his cooked rabbit to Wilcken.

Several days later Wilcken arrived in Salt Lake City, accompanied by several sick Mormons and some one hundred fifty cattle that the Mormons had liberated from the army's stock herds. His presence was noted by a number of persons, including Hosea Stout: The deserter a long slab sided Dutchman reports that many of the soldiers would desert if they believed they would be well treated here, also that they were dissatisfied with their officers and that the officers were divided in their councils what to do.4 Unaware that an enduring friendship with this man would develop some years later, Wilford Woodruff also noted Wilcken's presence: The Brethren Came in from the East & brought in 153 head of Cattle. 3 teamsters & one deserter from the Army helped drive them in. The deserter reported that Neither Johnson nor Harney nor the Governor or Judges or any of the Territorial Officers had arrived at

the Army neither any females. He said the soldiers were only allowed 3 buiscuit 2 Cups of Coffee & a small piece of Beef per day that they were not half fed. They had 75 waggons burned & the Contents of 76. 2 waggons saved.5

[p.311] Wilcken's arrival brought the Mormons more hard information than they had had for some time. In addition to the severe conditions of the soldiers recorded by Woodruff, Hosea Stout noted something of the army's capability: "The deserter who passed yester laughed with the joy that he had the priviledge of passing here in peace for he said we could destory the enemies' whole army here in a short time."6

Placed in the care of Provo Bishop Elias Hicks Blackburn, Wilcken must have found his new environment congenial, for he was baptized into the Mormon faith in December 1857. Then, for more than two years he effectively dropped from sight. From the winter of 1857-58 to 1860 or 1861 he may well have been living in Heber Valley, probably in or near Center Creek. He had assisted R. T. Burton in organizing a militia unit in Heber, operated a grist mill, assisted in planning a July 4 celebration in Heber, and served as adjutant in the county militia commanded by Maj. John W. Witt.7

Thoroughly at home in his adopted land and religion, Wilcken was formally called to fill a mission for the church in 1869 but was delayed in fulfilling that assignment. One reason for the delay is obvious: he had deserted from the U.S. Army, and traveling across the country may have been a most unattractive prospect. Traveling to Germany, especially northern Germany near Denmark, may have been equally unattractive. Whatever the reason, his mission was delayed for nearly two years until after a curious document—believable if not precisely true—was written, signed, and attested to in Fillmore, Utah, on March 2, 1871:

I hereby certify that in the year 1857 I held a Commission of Colonel of the militia of the Territory of Utah, and in the fall of that year in the month of October was with said detachment in the vicinity of Ham's Fork in Said Territory, and that said detachment did there at that time arrest and take prisoner one Charles Wilkin a German (who was then a soldier in the U. S. Army in the command of Gen A. S. Johnson) and convey him to the Mormon Camp at Echo Canyon and there delivered him up to the Officer in Command at that place to be by him forwarded on to Salt Lake City. The document was signed by Thomas Callister and attested to by Hiram B. Clawson. Two months later to the day Wilcken left Salt Lake [p.312] City for New York where, on May 10, 1871, he and a company of Saints left for Europe on the ship Liverpool.8

After spending the summer in England, Wilcken "was assigned to labor as a traveling Elder in the Swiss and German mission under the direction of Bro. [Eduard] Schoenfeld" with whom he and Johannes Huber co-authored a forty-six-page pamphlet titled *Der Morrnonismus* (Bern, 1872). By the spring of 1873 Wilcken was back in England serving as president of the Birmingham mission. He was released from that office on June 3, 1873, and left the following day for Utah in charge of a company of 246 Saints on board the Nevada. Among the passengers were his brother August, his widowed mother Annie, and three nieces—Wilhelmine, Emily, and Christine Damke—orphaned daughters of his older sister Anna Catharina Christine Damke. Wilcken and his relatives arrived in Salt Lake City on June 26, 1873.9

He labored as a home missionary and earned a modest living working in the ZCMI produce department until November 1873 when he was engaged to operate "the lower B. Y. mill, on Canyon Creek [later called Liberty Park]." His family was nearly burned out within a week or so of moving to the mill and farm, but Wilcken persevered and by the end of the year his white flour was being praised in the local press.10