

Randolph Wilson Fife



Randolph Wilson Fife was the fifth child and fourth son born to Elizabeth Stewart and William Wilson Fife. He was born on the 25th of February 1892 in Ogden, Weber County, Utah. He was a very shy and tenderhearted child. His father was a great architect and a good provider, but had suffered a blow on the head from a falling brick and all the family money and savings had been depleted trying to help him recuperate. William W. Fife died the 31 of August, 1897, at the age of 40, leaving his wife, Elizabeth, 36, and 7 children; Will, 14, Isaac, 12, Leland, 10, Iretta, 8, Randolph, 5, Walter, 3, and Joseph, 10 months. Elizabeth was a wonderful mother and a good manager, but it was a great struggle to get by. They had their home but all their resources were gone, so the children did what they could to support the family. At five years old Randolph would go on his horse, Prince, to sell milk for 5¢ a quart to the neighbors. He also assisted in delivering coal to the neighbors. The boys helped all they could by working for their uncles and taking wheat, fruit and vegetables for pay. Their uncle, Valasco Farr was a great help as he had a farm and needed workers from time to time.



Randolph loved and missed his father though he didn't remember him too well. His father was ill most of Randolph's life. Randolph had all the childhood diseases as his older brothers and sister would get them at school. The older brothers would also tease Randolph quite a bit and perhaps this made him shy, though he was always cheerful.

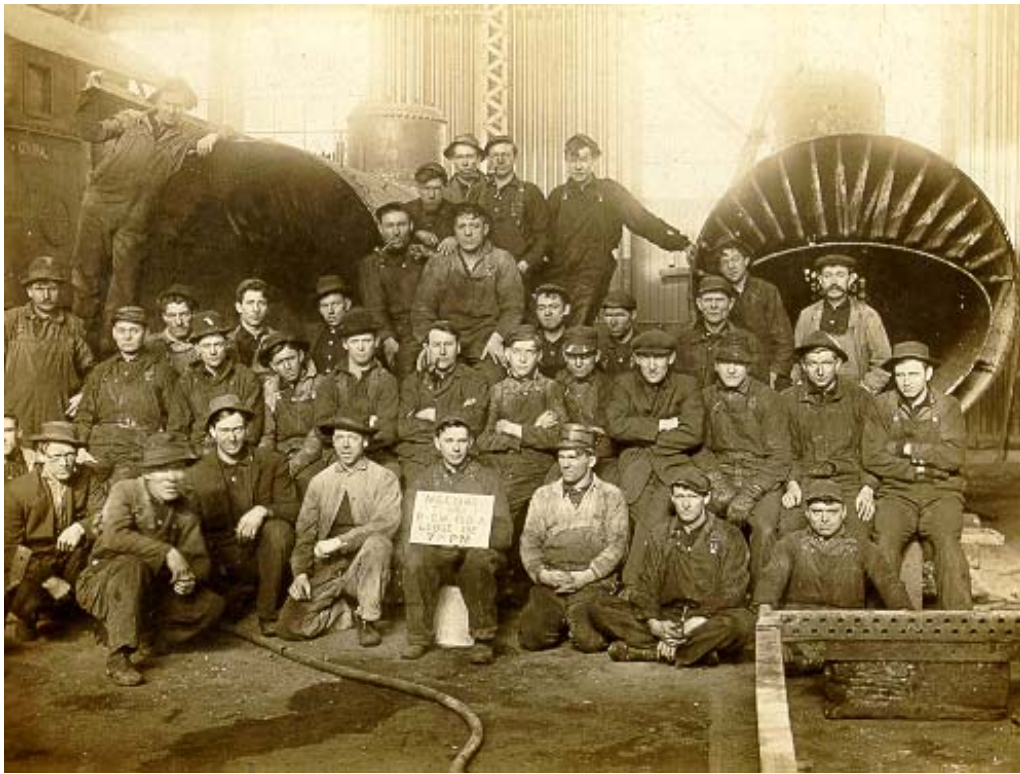
Will convinced his mother that they could better their circumstances by getting sheep and herding them in the spring in the foothills and in the summer up on the hills above Ogden Valley. Randolph had the job of tending the sheep. This interfered greatly with his schooling as he would have to start school over a month late and leave school early in the spring to care for the sheep. It put him behind his age in school, so when he was in school he was one of the oldest and largest pupils. It made him feel like a dunce, but he knew it was important to be educated and kept going until he was in the eighth grade.

When he was near 12 years old Randolph and Will were in the mountains above Ogden Valley with the sheep when Will decided to go into Ogden for provisions and to see his girlfriend, Dorothy. He left Randolph alone, telling him he would be back. Randolph tended to his chores hoping Will would hurry back. It was getting dusk so he began to settle the sheep down for the night when something spooked them and they all ran away. Even though he feared it must have been a bear that caused them to run, he tried to herd them back together, but was unable to do it alone. It was dark by then so Randolph started the 15 mile walk home. He feared walking through Ogden Canyon at night. After midnight he arrived at home, a frightened, tired, hungry boy. His mother was upset that Will had left him up there alone and sent Will back to find the sheep. Randolph rested for a day then returned to his job of tending the sheep. When Will married he sold the sheep, built a new home, and started a feed and grain business. Randolph never cared much for sheep after that.

Their home was next to a candy shop and the boys would watch and from time to time help out. Randolph became an excellent candy maker, using a pinch of this and that to make caramels filled with nuts.

In those days the lights had to be turned on by using a switch near the globe as there were no switches on the wall. Once Randolph had been out and it had become very late, in fact, it was about 2 a.m. He went into the house through the back door as quietly as possible. He stepped softly to the center of the room and reached his hand up to turn on the light and found another hand up there. He nearly fell in his tracks, when the light went on and there stood his mother.

At age 17 Randolph, like two of his older brothers, went to work at the Union Pacific Railroad shops. He needed the work to support his mother since his older brothers were now married. He told them he was 21 and as he seemed well matured there were no questions asked. He learned the boilermakers trade and became the chief breadwinner of the family caring for his mother and two younger brothers who were in school. Randolph would hand all of his wages to his mother, keeping only a dollar or two when he needed it. These sacrifices left him with one work suit and one Sunday suit. There was no money for luxuries.



REF – Middle row to the right

Later when his mother was bedridden, Randolph cared for her, not only because he wanted to, but because he was so gentle. Randolph was the only one she allowed to move or touch her. When she died in 1920 all of her children gathered at the home. It came time to go through her things and each child took different gifts they had given their mother. Randolph felt so badly because he had no gift to take back. He wept to think that he had never given his mother a lovely gift. He didn't realize that he had no money for gifts because all his earnings went to support her and the boys. He had given her all he had. Randolph's feelings were always close to the surface and if something touched his heart he was unashamed to show his emotions through a tear or two. It was said of him that he was never able to complete his testimony when bearing it, as he would be overcome with things so dear to his heart.

In the early 1900's a Jewish land company from New York saw the tall sagebrush that grew in the fertile land north of Wells, Nevada. They bought large amounts, sectioned it off for farm sites, and offered them as homesteads. A railroad line was connected to Wells and a big hotel and high school were built to accommodate the influx of homesteaders. Through their promotions nearly 1500 people were drawn to settle in that area. A dam was built across Bishop Creek to provide irrigation water, but because of the high altitude there was often a short growing season. The town that sprung up in this area came to be known as Metropolis, Nevada.





Randolph Wilson Fife at Metropolis

Will Fife sold his feed and grain business in Ogden and moved to Metropolis. He had a section of land, 160 acres, and if he lived on it for three years, improving the land and building a permanent structure, the land would be his. He also began a feed and grain business there. He asked Randolph to come out in the summers and help on the dry farm. Randolph would work in the Union Pacific shops in the winter and on Will's dry farm in the summer. Thinking it might be a good thing for him also, at the age of 21, Randolph went with a number farther out, to a place called Taber Creek. There he took up 160 acres. He had learned to plaster as he was working on the Metropolis high school and was promoted from hod carrier to plasterer when some of the workers left because they were tired of the desert life. Randolph built a two-room house on the section he was homesteading, plastering the interior and shingling the exterior.



At Saltair – Randolph and Mabel front right couple

