The Historical and Familial Context of Benjamin Franklin Riter, 1859-1925

Ian Keller
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports

Part of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports/1144

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Plan B and other Reports by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.
THE HISTORICAL AND FAMILIAL CONTEXT OF
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN RITER, 1859-1925

by

Ian Keller

a plan B paper submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

Approved

______________________  _________________________
Lawrence Culver        Doris McGonagill
Major Professor        Committee Member

______________________  _________________________
Robert Parson          Mark R. McLellan, Ph.D.
Committee Member       Vice President for Research
                        and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2017
Benjamin Franklin Riter was born in Salt Lake City on 31 August 1859.\(^1\) His parents had traveled to Utah in 1847 as part of the Latter-day Saint migration.\(^2\) He worked with doctors and druggists in his youth, and grew up to be the manager of a small chain of drug stores. The Riter Brothers Drug Company was incorporated in Logan in 1891 and remained in business at least until 1918. The pharmacy operated five stores: two in Utah, at Garland and Logan, and three in Idaho, at Preston, Montpelier, and Franklin. They kept prescription records, which were pasted into four large ledgers, and are now held in Utah State University’s Special Collections and Archives. The available ledgers cover 1903-1904, 1905-1907, 1913-1914, and 1915-1918.\(^3\) This was a family business. Benjamin Franklin Riter was the manager, his brother William Wollerton Riter was the president, and another brother, Samuel Wollerton Riter, was the secretary and treasurer.\(^4\)

Most of the prescriptions included in the Riter Brothers’ ledgers are handwritten on the company's own stationary, blue papers about the size of three-by-five cards. The recipe, dosage, and instructions for taking the medication were handwritten on the papers, and the papers were signed by the prescribing physician. Pharmacists then initialed the


\(^4\) *R.L. Polk & Co’s Logan City and Cache County Directory* (Salt Lake City: R. L. Polk, 1904), 144.
papers and stamped them with a five-digit consecutive order number. Dates were sometimes stamped onto the prescription note. The patient’s name was not usually recorded, though other pharmacies, such as Logan’s “Co-Operative Grocery and Drug Company” included a field for the patient’s name on their prescription slips. The handwriting is not easy to read, and the task is made harder if one is not familiar with contemporary terms for local pharmaceutical ingredients. However, the records are rich and offer multiple possibilities for analysis.\(^5\)

This investigation began as a much larger project, and intended to center around the Riter prescription records. To begin the work, it was clear that something needed to be known about the family, about medical practice, and about local developments. There was a need for context. As research continued, the messiness, complexity, and interconnectivity of this context became increasingly apparent. What follows is a much smaller study, a stepping-stone to help future scholars more easily make sense of Benjamin’s context. Secondary sources regarding turn-of-the-century changes in medicine, changes in Utah, and local medical culture are given. The bulk of the primary work comes from obituaries archived in *Utah Digital Newspapers* and is an interwoven examination of Benjamin Riter’s immediate family and their surprising social and business connections. Two business associates are also included. The hope is to offer a guide to resources and a baseline of knowledge to create a more useable past, a past more amenable to being translated into narrative and argument.

Benjamin lived through a time of significant change for Utah, including the move to monogamy, the Church’s loss of assets, the breaking of Utah’s theocracy, and other

\(^5\) Utah State University Special Collections and Archives, USU Coll MSS 224 Book 1.
pains of integration with the Union. Utah’s growing population brought further change. Medicine also changed during these years. Pasteur and Koch made major breakthroughs and germ theory became well-known. Surgery advanced, through anesthesia and through antiseptic measures. By studying Benjamin Riter, we can see how these changes affected (or did not affect) a frontier pharmacist. By placing him within his context, we can better understand both him and his world. The relationship between Benjamin Riter, his medical world, and his world generally covers many fields, including medicine, folk medicine, social history, and medical history. This creates a complicated interplay of diverse fields, making Benjamin’s pharmaceutical work an unusually difficult topic of study. One is unlikely to possess training in all the relevant areas. Placing him in his historical context may be critical to creating a useable past from which future scholars can construct their own narratives and studies.

The narrative then shifts to Benjamin Riter’s personal and family connections, looking at his training and apprenticeship, his acquisition of business partners and capital, and his place in society as child of LDS pioneers. This takes the form of several interwoven biographies, including Benjamin’s father and mother, Levi and Rebecca, three of his siblings, William, Samuel, and Ann Elizabeth, an early employer, George Hoyt, and a business partner, Dr. Oliver C. Ormsby. Most of the material for these biographies comes from obituaries obtained through Utah Digital Newspapers.

It was within this society that Benjamin built his pharmaceutical fiefdom. Through him we see a remarkable degree of social connection, with links to the Quorum

---


of Twelve and Brigham Young’s brother and nephew. We also see him turn to his family for investment capital, and we see the training and employment that prepared him to manage Riter Brothers Pharmacy.

Changes in Medicine

This was an era of great names in medicine, including Louis Pasteur (1822-95) and Robert Koch (1843-1910), both of whom are associated with germ theory. Through their work, “by the 1890s ... the principle of the germ theory had been integrated into medical textbooks.”

Pasteur’s work with microorganisms led him to the development of pasteurization, which slows the rate at which milk spoils. Pasteur also developed a vaccine for anthrax, which he unveiled when he invited journalists to a farm to witness a public test. Perhaps his most famous achievement was the development of a rabies vaccine. Pasteur’s “rabies treatment created international acclaim, with patients coming to Paris from all over Europe to receive the course of injections.” He successfully inoculated a patient infected with rabies in 1885.

---


9 Ibid., 104.

10 Ibid., 99–100.

11 Ibid., 101.

Robert Koch also worked with anthrax, and figured out its life cycle. In addition, he made advancements in the relationship between bacteria and wound infections. He also identified “the causative organisms of the most important disease of the 19th century, tuberculosis (1882), and of the most anxiety-provoking, cholera (1884).”

There were other developments, including two major ones in surgery. Anesthesia, provided through chloroform and ether, began to be used in the 1840s. In 1867, Joseph Lister used carbolic dressings as antiseptic bandages for surgery. Making Benjamin Riter’s records more accessible makes it more possible for future scholars to analyze how a peripheral location like Cache Valley responded (or did not respond) to changes in medical knowledge at European and East Coast centers.

Changes in Utah

There were changes in Utah as well, especially as the territory dealt with the process of becoming a state and integrating politically and culturally with the union. Thomas Alexander’s *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930* is largely dedicated to explaining those changes. Alexander wastes no time in getting to these transformations. He argues that the LDS people had built a community that conjoined Church and state, politics, the economy, and society into one whole. ... The Protestant majority in the United States responded with a series of laws, court tests, and political activities designed to break the back of the Mormon community and reshape it in the image of the remainder of the United States that was essentially a Protestant establishment. These culminated in the passage of the Edmunds (1882) and Edmunds-Tucker (1887) acts, which disfranchised all polygamists, took control of Utah’s Mormon-dominated public school system, abolished the territorial militia, disfranchised Utah women,

---


14 Ibid., 108–9.
provided for imprisonment of those practicing plural marriage, and confiscated virtually all the Church's secular property.\textsuperscript{15}

Alexander’s language is stark and makes it clear that he sees these actions by the United States as aggressive and anti-LDS, and that the degree of change was extreme. The LDS Church lost a huge amount of money and took on significant debt.\textsuperscript{16} Integrating into the U.S. political process was fraught and “created enormous tension.”\textsuperscript{17} Moses Thatcher, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, found himself on the wrong side of some of this change. He lost his place in the Twelve and was nearly excommunicated.\textsuperscript{18} Giving up polygamy was also a major challenge, and although it faded out, it took some time before the new monogamy stuck. Numerous LDS officials acted contrary to the new monogamous directive.\textsuperscript{19} Of particular interest for medicine was the new prominence of the Word of Wisdom, the LDS injunction against the consumption of tea, coffee, liquor, and tobacco.\textsuperscript{20}

In addition to these changes, it is worth remembering Frederick Jackson Turner’s remarks on the closing of the U.S. frontier, which he made in 1893 at a Chicago meeting of the American Historical Association. Turner based his idea on the 1890 census, which said that unsettled territory was broken up by many settlements and that there was no


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 3–4.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 6–7.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 8–10.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 11. See also chapter 13, “The Adoption of a New Interpretation of the Word of Wisdom,” 273-87.
longer a clear frontier. A glance at Utah’s numbers shows that in 1850 the Utah Territory had a population of 11,380. In 1860, a year after Benjamin’s birth, the territory’s population stood at 40,273. By 1890 that had risen to 210,779 and by 1930 it was 507,847. There were undoubtedly more people in Utah, with all the attendant changes that accompany growth.

**Thomsonianism**

One of the changes that was relevant both to Utah and medicine was Thomsonianism. Thomsonianism was a nineteenth century herbal-medicine movement which had a significant influence on LDS folk (and professional) medicine. Samuel Thomson, the founder, was born into a New Hampshire farm family and thought that disease was caused by the loss of body heat. The human body was analogous to a steam engine; the stomach was the boiler. Medicines should “increase the internal heat, remove all obstruction to the system, restore the digestive powers of the stomach and produce a natural perspiration.” Puking and peppering--lobelia to open up the system and cayenne pepper to rekindle the body's heat--formed the basis of Thomson's therapy. He completed his medical arsenal with additional herbs and distinctive vapor baths, which earned Thomsonians the sobriquet ‘steam doctors.’

---


An illustration of a vapor bath (labeled “Croup Remedy”) appears in Bonnie Thompson’s *Folklore in the Bear Lake Valley* along with the following description:

> When they had the old round bathtubs, a person with croup or a cold would be relieved if he would sit in the tub of hot water to which a half cup of baking soda had been added. A blanket would then be wrapped over him so it made sort of a tent, coming down over the outside of the tub. A good sweat would be induced. Then the ill person would be taken out of the tub and wrapped in a woolen blanket for a second sweat.²⁴

Although the folk cure is not specifically named as part of Thomsonian practice, the use of steam and repeated sweats makes it seem likely that this Bear Lake cure has links to Thomsonianism.

Henry Plenk’s article on medicine in the Utah History Encyclopedia states that Thomsonians were the only healers available to the Saints during the first decades after their arrival in the Salt Lake valley. Plenk also writes that “others followed the maxim of ‘puke ‘em, sweat ‘em, purge ‘em,’” which sounds quite similar to the above descriptions of Thomsonianism.²⁵ Claire Noall, in her article “Superstitions, Customs, and Prescriptions of Mormon Midwives,” provides specific evidence for Thomsonian’s

---

²⁴ Bonnie Shirley Thompson, *Folklore in the Bear Lake Valley* (Salt Lake City: Granite Publishing, 1972), 94–5. Thompson cites “Shirley, personal interview, April 28, 1971.” Given her middle name of Shirley, it is likely that Thompson interviewed a relative. Readers should know that although *Folklore in the Bear Lake Valley* does not list a middle name for Thompson, both the Utah State University and Worldcat online entries for Thompson’s book list Shirley as her middle name (accessed 24 February 2017).

presence. She writes that Dr. Priddy Meeks was “a self-taught Thomsonian,”\textsuperscript{26} and she notes that Dr. Willard Richards held a Thomsonian patent while his brother, Levi Richards was both a Thomsonian and Joseph Smith's physician. Indeed, Noall states that “one of the reasons for the fanatical adherence to Thomsonian practice among the early Mormon people was that many followers of the Church came from New England, where the system flourished.”\textsuperscript{27}

These ideas of steam and herbal medicine were present in Benjamin Riter’s social and medical worlds.

**Family Matters**

It is already clear that family played an important role in Benjamin's professional life, and, as we shall see, he came from a powerful and well-connected family. The strength of his family, their financial wealth, and their social connections were probably major contributors to his business venture.

Dean L. May’s *Three Frontiers* offers an interesting framework for viewing farm communities in the West. May studied three valleys, Willamette, Utah, and Boise. He describes two continuums, a social continuum of close-knit Willamette families through Utah family and broader community groups to fragmentary Boise isolation and a resource


\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 108. Information on the Drs. Richards is also located here. Readers may also be interested in a list of medicinal herbs (p. 110) provided by Mrs. Ellen Meeks Hoyt, daughter of Priddy and Mary Jane McCleve Meeks (relationships explained on p. 109).
use continuum of a conservationist and sustainability-oriented Willamette through a Utah middle ground to a short-sighted, commercial, and modern Boise. The Riters fit within this model, but somewhat oddly. They appear to have been a moderately close family; taking on brothers as partners requires a certain ability to work together. The family’s multiple ties to LDS leadership makes it clear that the Riters had substantial community connections as well. This fits with the Utah model, though it may lean towards the Willamette. Regarding management of wealth, both William and Samuel, as detailed below, worked as bankers. Riter Brothers had five branches. This level of commercialization suggests the Boise model, but it may instead be indicative of the Riters’ elite or aristocratic status. Perhaps these kinds of banking and commercial activities were simply part and parcel of how a well-to-do family conducted their business affairs.

What follows is a close examination of key members of Benjamin’s immediate family, their business activities, and their social connections. Two pharmacists that Benjamin worked with, Hoyt and Ormsby, are also included.

**Rebecca and Levi**

Samuel and William came to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847 with their mother, Rebecca Wollerton Dilworth Riter, father, Levi Evans Riter, and sister, Ann Elizabeth Riter. The family traveled with the Jedediah M. Grant/Joseph B. Noble Company.29

---


29 “Levi Evans Riter - Pioneer Overland Travels.”
Benjamin was born twelve years later, on August 31, 1859. The Riter family traveled from Pennsylvania. Levi was born January 1, 1805 in Chester County, Pennsylvania and Rebecca Wollerton Dilworth was born 3 August 1815 in the same county.

The Riters were probably a family of middle-class standing. Levi’s April 15, 1877 obituary (he had at least two) states that “[h]e was a member of the Masonic fraternity.” Levi was also a fence viewer in Salt Lake City. Merriam-Webster defines a fence-viewer as “a local official who administers the fence laws (as by inspection of new fence and settlement of disputes arising from trepass [sic] by livestock that have escaped enclosure).” In the course of his duties Levi Riter may also have dealt with disputes over property lines and water rights.

---

30 Benjamin Franklin Riter, Aug. 31, 1859 -- July 21, 1925, Gravestone, plot B40 18_8, Logan City Cemetery, Utah, 1925.


The Riters were well-connected in LDS pioneer society. Levi’s obituary in the *Deseret News* noted that he was a counselor to Bishop S.A. Woolley “of late years.” Samuel Amos Woolley (1825-1900) was the youngest child of John Woolley and Rachel Dilworth. Their eldest was Edwin Dilworth Woolley (1807-1881), the subject of Leonard Arrington’s biography *From Quaker to Latter-Day Saint: Bishop Edwin D. Woolley.* Arrington calls Edwin a “‘middle wagon’ man in Mormon history--a man who was neither in the very front with the greatest leaders, nor in the last group of followers whose primary prerogative was to demonstrate faith in the policies of those at their head. ... His name is mentioned over and over again in diaries, minutes, and journal histories kept by Mormon leaders.” Edwin held numerous important positions (which Arrington lists), and “the Prophet Joseph Smith often visited the Woolley home.” The point here is that Edwin was closely linked to numerous top LDS leaders. Levi Riter, serving as a counselor to Edwin’s younger brother Samuel, was behind Edwin but still within the ‘middle wagons’. Incidentally, Edwin was also “a native of West Chester, Chester

---


38 Arrington, *From Quaker to Latter-Day Saint*, ix.

39 Ibid., xii.

40 Arrington, citing Diary of Catherine Mehring Woolley, MS, Church Archives, November 16, 1848, gives a quotation which mentions a wedding held at a Mr. Riter’s
County, Pennsylvania,” the same county where Levi and Rebecca were born, and Edwin and Rebecca were first cousins.\(^\text{41}\)

Funeral notices for Levi and Rebecca mention additional elite contacts. Levi passed away on 13 April, 1877.\(^\text{42}\) The 17 April 1877 *Salt Lake Herald* described Levi’s funeral service and stated that “[r]emarks sulogisti of the deceased, consolatory to the relatives and exhortative to the friends, were made by President Joseph Young and Elders George Teasdale and Isaac Groo.”\(^\text{43}\)

Brigham Young had an older brother named Joseph, and the President Joseph Young mentioned here is likely that brother. Joseph was “one of the First Seven Presidents of Seventies from 1835 to 1881.” He died July 16, 1881, so he would have been alive to speak at Levi’s funeral.\(^\text{44}\)

---


\(^\text{42}\) “Levi Evans Riter, Findagrave.com.”


Teasdale and Groo were also major figures. Teasdale was “one of the Twelve Apostles since 1882.” He held numerous religious appointments, including having charge of the Scottish mission (1859-61), charge of Brigham Young’s merchandise store (1862-8), charge of the General Tithing Store (1867-8), a mission to England (1868), and president of the European Mission (1887-1890). In addition, Teasdale was involved with Z.C.M.I. and the Southern Utah Railroad.45

Isaac Groo was ordained a Seventy (1855) and a High Priest (1856).46 He served as president of the Australasian mission (1875-6) and like Levi he served as a counselor to S.A. Woolley. He was on the Salt Lake City council (1858-1866), was elected as city recorder (1860), was watermaster of Salt Lake City (1859-64), street supervisor of Salt Lake City (1859-64), regent of the University of Deseret, and a lieutenant-colonel in the Nauvoo Legion. Groo also worked as a foreman for John M. Woolley. They were engaged in a lumber business in Little Cottonwood Canyon.47

As impressive as Levi’s funeral speakers were, Rebecca may have outdone him. She passed away on Christmas Eve, 1894, presumably in Logan, as according to the Logan Journal, she “had been visiting with her sons Samuel W. and Ben F. Riter for

45 Ibid., 1:144–47. Closing dates for Brigham Young’s merchandising store and the General Tithing Store are tentative; the author assumes those duties ended when Teasdale went to England on mission work.

46 The offices of Seventy and High Priest fall under the Melchizedek priesthood, and are open to male members of the LDS Church. The office of Seventy should not be confused with membership in the Council of Seventy. The Council of Seventy is one of the governing bodies of the LDS Church, and its membership is far more exclusive.

some time.”48 Her funeral was held on December 27th,49 almost certainly in Salt Lake City, since her remains were taken to Salt Lake for interment [sic] this morning and were accompanied by her five sons S. W., W. W., L. W., John D. and B. F. Riter, and her daughter Mrs. Seymour B. Young of Salt Lake.”50 A correction (the funeral was to be held in the Ninth ward, not the Nineteenth) in the Salt Lake Herald mentions that “[i]t is expected that President Joseph F. Smith will deliver the chief discourse” at Rebecca’s funeral.51 While it is possible that Joseph F. Smith did the unexpected and did not attend, it is reasonably likely that he delivered the chief discourse. Brigham Young ordained Joseph as an apostle in 1866. It was not until 17 October 1901, after Lorenzo Snow’s death, that Joseph became the LDS Church’s sixth president.52

This is all to say that when Benjamin was born, he had some uncommon advantages. Perhaps of wealth, and certainly of social connection.

---


50 “Local Points.”

51 “Correction.”

52 The Encyclopedia of Mormonism, s. v. “Joseph F. Smith,” by Bruce A. Van Orden, accessed March 12, 2016, http://eom.byu.edu/. It is possible that the speaker was Joseph F. Smith’s son, Joseph Fielding Smith. However, the son would only have been eighteen at the time.
William Wollerton Riter

William’s remarkable success may in part have been due to these family advantages. William “was born in Chester county, Pennsylvania, on September 4, 1938 [sic].”53 He was nine when his family arrived in Utah in September of 1847. There was schooling available, and “he was educated in the public schools and the University of Deseret. ... He served as a cavalryman in militia expeditions against the Indians [sic] in 1858. He went on two missions to Europe, spending most of his time in Germany and Switzerland.”54 William married twice, first to Susan Denton in March of 1871 in New


54 “William W. Riter Is Called Beyond,” January 27, 1922; There are two additional pieces which readers may wish to be aware of. First: “William W. Riter Is Called Beyond,” Mt. Pleasant Pyramid, January 20, 1922, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=9038118&q=Riter&page=1&rows=50&fd=title_t%2Cpaper_t%2Cdate_tdt%2Ctype_t&sort=date_tdt+asc&gallery=0&facet_paper=%22Mt.+Pleasant+Pyramid%22&year_t=1922#t_9038118 This piece is nearly identical to the Telegram’s “... Answers Death’s Summons” and the Record’s “… is called Beyond”; Second: “William Wollerton Riter,” Salt Lake Telegram, January 18, 1922, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=18105986&q=Riter&page=1&rows=50&fd=title_t%2Cpaper_t%2Cdate_tdt%2Ctype_t&sort= date_tdt+asc&gallery=0&facet_paper=%22Salt+Lake+Telegram%22&year_t=1922#t_18105986 This second piece is more of a eulogy and generally lacks specific information, though it is full of admiration. There are doubtless many more news articles that could be mentioned; this is only a small selection.
York; they had three children before she passed away in 1880. His second marriage was to Priscilla Jennings, in April 1883 in Salt Lake. They had six children.\textsuperscript{55} One of the children, William D. Riter, is listed as “assistant attorney general at Washington, D.C.” as of William’s death.\textsuperscript{56}

His public and business success appears extraordinary. Politically, “he served in the Utah territorial legislature from 1886 to 1888,” “was twice speaker of the Utah house of representatives,” and “was a member of the Salt Lake City council for eight years.”\textsuperscript{57} “He was chairman of the board of regents of the University of Utah at the time of his death.”\textsuperscript{58}

He was involved with rail, as “one of the founders of the present streetcar system [presumably in Salt Lake City] and one time general superintendent of the Utah division of the Union Pacific railway.”\textsuperscript{59} Indeed, according to the paper, “The Union Pacific folders still carry a small town named in his honor.”\textsuperscript{60} He was further listed as “one of the

\textsuperscript{55} “William W. Riter Is Called Beyond,” January 27, 1922.


\textsuperscript{57} “William W. Riter Is Called Beyond,” January 27, 1922.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
builders of the Salt Lake & Western railway; the Utah & Nevada railroad and the road to Stockton and Tooele.\[sic\].”\(^{61}\)

However, William’s business interests extended beyond rail. He was, of course, “one of the founders and owners of Riter Brothers Drug Company.”\(^{62}\) In addition, “he founded and constructed the Garfield Beach and Amusement company in 1885,” “was a director of what was then known as the Rocky Mountain Bell Telephone company,” and appears to have been vice president of “the Oregon Lumber company, the Utah Hotel company and a director in many other corporations.”\(^{63}\)

Finance and banking was yet another key area in William’s professional life. He was “vice president of the Ogden Savings bank” and “the First National bank of Rexburg.”\(^{64}\) At the close of his life, he was “president of the Deseret Savings bank and vice president of the Deseret National bank.”\(^{65}\) William also lent his expertise to the LDS Church, serving as “one of the chief financial advisors of the church for many years.”\(^{66}\)

He died “at L.D.S. hospital at Salt Lake, at 6:55 o’clock Tuesday morning, following a severe illness of almost three months. Death was due to a complication of diseases resulting from old age.”\(^{67}\) The date was 17 January 1922\(^{68}\) and William was

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.

\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Ibid.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.

\(^{66}\) “William Wollerton Riter Answers Death’s Summons.”

\(^{67}\) “William W. Riter Is Called Beyond,” January 27, 1922.
eighty-three. As with his parents, the LDS elite ushered William into the next world. The funeral was quite an affair: “hundreds of students of the University of Utah and almost the entire faculty of that institution were in attendance, the university being closed all day.” There was an honor guard, composed primarily of Deans, and the pallbearers included “Frank R. Snow and James H. Moyle, representing the Seventies quorum of the L. D. S. church” with six additional pallbearers representing the University board of regents and various banks. A petition for letters of administration valued William’s estate at two-hundred thousand dollars, or, in todays terms, almost three

---

68 “Death Certificate for William Wollerton Riter.”


70 “Funeral Services for Riter to Be at Assembly Hall,” Salt Lake Telegram, January 18, 1922, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=18105897&q=Riter&page=1&rows=50&fd=title_t%2Cpaper_t%2Cdate_t%2Ctype_t&sort=date_tdt+asc&gallery=0&facet_paper=%22Salt+Lake+Telegram%22&year_t=1922#t_18105897.

71 “Honor Is Given to Departed Pioneer,” Salt Lake Telegram, January 19, 1922, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=18106408&q=Riter&page=1&rows=50&fd=title_t%2Cpaper_t%2Cdate_t%2Ctype_t&sort=date_tdt+asc&gallery=0&facet_paper=%22Salt+Lake+Telegram%22&year_t=1922#t_18106408.

72 Ibid. The article also includes details on the funeral procession.

73 “Petition Places Riter Estate at $200,000 in Value,” Salt Lake Telegram, February 6, 1922, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=18112653&q=Riter&page=1&rows=50&fd=title_t%2Cpaper_t%2Cdate_t%2Ctype_t&sort=date_tdt+asc&gallery=0&facet_paper=%22Salt+Lake+Telegram%22&year_t=1922#t_18112653 This value appears to represent only the value of the primary residence, its furnishings, and the land it occupied. It may
This was a powerful man to have in the family, and a heavy-weight financier for Benjamin’s pharmaceutical venture.

**Samuel W. Riter**

Samuel’s career was quieter than that of his brother William, though it was still impressive. The *Logan Republican* noted that “he had a strong mind and will and might have been honored in public ways but was retired and cared not for glories.” Samuel was born in Chester county, Pennsylvania and accompanied his family to Salt Lake in 1847. He was born on September 20th, 1835, and died February 7, 1908, at the age of 72. Miss Alice Jolley of Franklin, Idaho married Samuel in 1894, and they had five

---


sons. Alice and the five sons all survived Samuel, and, according to the *Logan Republican*, were “well provided for in a financial way.”

He was a member of an 1857 company of handcart missionaries bound for Europe and Canada. The missionaries drew their carts “loaded with their provisions and necessary clothing, bedding, etc., from Salt Lake City to the Missouri river.” He served in the Union cavalry restoring mail and telegraph lines between the Missouri river and San Francisco from May 1, 1862 to March 22, 1863. Samuel also served in the Utah militia in 1866 in the Black Hawk war. Professionally, “he was a member of the firm of Riter Bros. and was a director of the Thatcher Bros. Bank.”

Samuel’s funeral in the tabernacle (presumably in Logan) was more modest than that of his parents or brother William. However, “the opening prayer was offered by President Seymour B. Young” (Samuel’s brother-in-law) and “the speakers were Elders John E. Carlisle, L. L. Cardon and A. G. Barber of Logan, Elder John Henry Smith of the quorum of the apostles.”

---


79 “Samuel Riter Drops Dead.”

80 “Funeral of Sam’l W. Riter” The *Deseret Evening News* incorrectly gives Samuel’s age as 73.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 “Samuel Riter Drops Dead.”

84 “Funeral of Sam’l W. Riter.”
Even the reserved brother was still a bank director whose funeral was attended by an LDS president and an LDS apostle. In his brothers, Benjamin had two well-connected and powerful business partners.

Ann Elizabeth Riter Young and Seymour Bicknell Young

Ann was born June 3, 1847, in Florence, Nebraska while her family made the journey to Salt Lake. She outlived her husband, Seymour B. Young, and died January 19, 1926 at the age of 78.

Seymour was born October 3, 1837 in Kirkland, Ohio, to Jane Bicknell and Joseph Young. He studied medicine at the University of New York, graduating in 1874, and was a founder of the Utah State Medical society. Ann Elizabeth and Seymour


86 “Mrs. A. E. R. Young Obsequies Friday.”

87 “Death Certificate for Ann Elizabeth Riter Young”; see also “Ann Elizabeth Riter Young,” Findagrave.com, accessed March 31, 2017, https://findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=20752123 The website includes a copy of an additional obituary. However, the additional obituary does not add much new information.


89 “Dr. Seymour B. Young, Pioneer and Leader in L. D. S. Church, Dies after Ten Days’ Illness,” Salt Lake Telegram, December 15, 1924, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=16022475&q=%28Mrs.+Ann+E+Young+Utah+Pioneer+Dies%29+AND+year_t%3A%281924%29&page=1&rows=25&fd=title_t%2Cpaper_t%2Cdate_tdt%2Ctype_t&sort=date_tdt+asc&gallery=0#t_16022475.
married in 1867, and seventeen years later, in 1884, Abbie C. Wells also married
Seymour. At his time of death there were ten surviving children from the first marriage,
and one from the second. Like Ann Elizabeth, Abbie also outlived Seymour.90

He was “senior president of the first council of seventies and president of all the
seventies of the [LDS] church.”91 Dr. Young served two missions, both to Great Britain,
in 1857 and 1870.92 Like Samuel,93 he served in the Union military during the Civil War,
protecting mail and telegraph lines west of the Missouri river. He served from 1862 until
March of 1863.94 His military service also included fighting against Native Americans:
“In the winter of 1863-64 he saw service against the Digger Utes in Tooele county and
Cedar mountains and in 1866 was in the expedition to Sanpete and Sevier counties in the
Black Hawk war of Utah.”95 Samuel is also mentioned as serving in the Black Hawk
war.96

Additionally, the Salt Lake Telegram mentions that he served as “city health
officer for several years”97 and an "Official Directory" in the 1877 Salt Lake Herald lists

90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 “Funeral of Sam’l W. Riter.”
94 “Dr. Seymour B. Young, Pioneer and Leader.”
95 Ibid.
96 “Funeral of Sam’l W. Riter.”
97 “Dr. Seymour B. Young, Pioneer and Leader.”
him as “Quarantine and City Physician.” Seymour seems like a useful in-law for a young pharmacist to have.

**George W. Hoyt**

Benjamin had useful professional contacts as well as helpful family and in-laws. In 1878, Benjamin went to Cheyenne Wyoming where he worked for George W. Hoyt. Hoyt had arrived in Cheyenne only two years before, in 1876. Hoyt was young, only about 26 at the time. He had traveled from New England, and came to Wyoming as a member of the United States army hospital corps. Squatters had arrived on the site of Cheyenne in 1867, only nine years before Hoyt, and so the *Cheyenne State Leader* was right to call Hoyt a “pioneer” and a “trailblazer.”

Hoyt was successful as a druggist, with the *State Leader* saying that “for a score of years he was one of the leading druggists.” Hoyt also became wealthy:

Mr. Hoyt amassed a considerable fortune through his business acumen and wise investments. His property interests in Cheyenne are large, and include residence...

---

98 “Official Directory.”


103 “Hoyt, Pioneer, Dies”; “Hoyt Is Buried.”

104 “Hoyt, Pioneer, Dies.”
properties, the Hoyt block and holdings in the Plains hotel and the Capitol Avenue Theater. Based on Hoyt’s recently-made will, the *State Leader* believed that his “estate will probably approximate $100,000 in value,” or almost 2.1 million in 2017 dollars. Other explanations are certainly possible, but these descriptions of Hoyt’s wealth suggest that pharmacy could be a lucrative occupation for a young man in a frontier town.

However, Hoyt’s success was not only financial. He held multiple public offices and was a member of various social organizations. He was postmaster from 1897 to 1914, a commissioner for Laramie county for “a long term of years,” and a state senator from 1893 to 1895, during which time he served as President of the Senate. Hoyt belonged to three lodges, the Elk, Knights of Pythias, and Masonic, and was a member of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church. In addition, his pallbearers included representatives from “the Industrial Club,” “the bankers,” and “the business interests.” Hoyt passed away on Thursday, April 19, 1917, and in addition to articles in the *Cheyenne State Leader*, *The National Association of Retail Druggists Journal* carried a brief obituary.

---

105 Ibid.

106 “Hoyt Is Buried”; “Inflation Calculator.”

107 “Hoyt, Pioneer, Dies”; “State of Wyoming Legislature,” accessed April 1, 2015, http://legisweb.state.wy.us/LegislatorSummary/LegDetail.aspx?Source=H&LegID=1177. The *State Leader* says Hoyt served from 1893 to 1897, but the Senate website lists his tenure as 1893 to 1895. I have deferred to the Senate website.

108 “Hoyt, Pioneer, Dies.”

109 “Hoyt Is Buried.”

During the time he worked for Hoyt, Benjamin Riter could have been inspired by Hoyt’s example and could have developed and observed some of the skills necessary to replicate Hoyt’s success for himself.

Dr. Oliver C. Ormsby

Dr. Ormsby was another of Benjamin’s professional contacts. Ormsby was a Pennsylvania native, arriving in Salt Lake in 1861. In addition to his Logan drug store, he had opened stores in Manti and Brigham City. He served a mission to Great Britain and was also “superintendent of Sunday schools in Cache stake.” At his time of death, Ormsby was 72 and was living in Rexburg, Idaho. He served as County Physician of Madison County, Idaho, a position he held until his death. His funeral proceedings,

111 “Dr. Oliver C Ormsby Succumbs in Idaho,” Salt Lake Herald, October 27, 1916, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=10040446&q=%28%28Ormsby%29+AND+year_t%3A%281916%29%29&page=2&rows=25&fd=title_t%2Cpaper_t%2Cdate_tdt%2Ctype_t&sort=date_tdt+asc&gallery=0#t_10040446.

112 Ibid.

113 “Former Salt Laker Dies in Gem State,” Salt Lake Tribune, October 27, 1916, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=14686351&q=%28%28Ormsby%29+AND+year_t%3A%281916%29%29&page=2&rows=25&fd=title_t%2Cpaper_t%2Cdate_tdt%2Ctype_t&sort=date_tdt+asc&gallery=0#t_14686351.

114 “Funeral Held for Dr. Ormsby in This City,” Logan Republican, October 31, 1916, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=4822071&q=%28%28Ormsby%29+AND+year_t%3A%281916%29%29&page=2&rows=25&fd=title_t%2Cpaper_t%2Cdate_tdt%2Ctype_t&sort=date_tdt+asc&gallery=0#t_4822071.
held in Logan, featured local notables such as Elder John T. Caine, Bishop C. W. Nibley, and Elder James A. Langton.115

Benjamin Franklin Riter

Benjamin Franklin Riter was born August 31, 1859 to Rebecca Wollerton Dilworth Riter and Levi Evans Riter.116 He died 21 July, 1925, at the age of 65.117 His parents came to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847 with the Jedediah M. Grant -- Joseph B. Noble company.118 Benjamin went to William E. Reger’s private school and also the Seraph Young school. He attended the University of Deseret and Francis Marion Bishop educated him in chemistry and physics.119

In addition to his schooling, Benjamin Riter’s early employment prepared him for pharmaceutical work. A Salt Lake Telegram article gives a list: at 14, Benjamin worked as an office boy for “Drs. J.M. and F.D. Benedict, prominent Long Island physicians who practiced here in the early days.” Three years later, in 1876, Benjamin worked for

115 Ibid.; Joel E. Ricks and Everett L. Cooley, assoc. ed., The History of a Valley (Logan, Utah: Cache Valley Centennial Commission, 1956), Caine 485 (index), Nibley 176, and Apperly 351. There are three John T. Caine’s listed. The author does not know which was involved in Ormsby’s funeral, but the family is well-known locally, through such institutions as the Marie Eccles Caine Foundation -- Russell Family and Utah State University’s Caine College of the Arts.

116 Benjamin Franklin Riter, Aug. 31, 1859 -- July 21, 1925, Gravestone, plot B40 18_8, Logan City Cemetery; “Death Claims B. F. Riter”; “Death Certificate for Benjamin Franklin Riter”. Where accounts have varied the author has deferred to the life dates given on Benjamin Riter’s gravestone.

117 “Death Certificate for Benjamin Franklin Riter.”

118 “Rebecca Wollerton Dilworth Riter - Pioneer Overland Travels.”

119 “Death Claims B. F. Riter”. No dates or years of attendance are given.
Taggart & Sons drug store. In 1878 Benjamin traveled to Cheyenne to work with the pharmacist George W. Hoyt.\textsuperscript{120} Benjamin was about 18 when he left to work for Hoyt, and Hoyt was only about 26 himself and had just arrived in Cheyenne two years earlier.\textsuperscript{121}

In 1880, Benjamin Riter entered into a partnership with Dr. O.C. Ormsby of Pioneer Drug company in Logan. The \textit{Salt Lake Telegram} claims this store had the distinction of “being the only one at that time between Ogden and Helena, Mont.”\textsuperscript{122} In 1885, Benjamin’s brother William bought Dr. Ormsby’s share and the company changed its name to Riter Brothers Drug company. Benjamin had three more brothers, and in 1898 they too joined the business.\textsuperscript{123} The \textit{Salt Lake Telegram} explains a multiple-location business, with the home office in Logan. The Utah branches in Smithfield, Richmond, and Garland, and the Idaho branch in Preston were still operating at the time of Benjamin Riter’s death in 1925. Riter Brothers had additional Idaho locations at Franklin and Montpelier but they had been closed earlier.\textsuperscript{124}

Benjamin Riter married two years after partnering with O.C. Ormsby. His spouse was Maria Corlett, a member of a prominent Wyoming family, whom Benjamin had met during his time in Cheyenne. They married on July 8, 1882.\textsuperscript{125} Maria Corlett outlived

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{121} “Hoyt, Pioneer, Dies.”  \\
\textsuperscript{122} “Death Claims B. F. Riter.”  \\
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{124} “Death Certificate for Benjamin Franklin Riter”; “Death Claims B. F. Riter.”  \\
\textsuperscript{125} Maria Inez Corlett, Oct. 12, 1859 -- May 12, 1932, Gravestone, plot B40 18_8, Logan City Cemetery, Utah, 1925. I have seen Maria’s last name spelled Corlett, Corlet,
Benjamin, along with four children: Miss Inez Riter, "Franklin Riter of Salt Lake City, William Corlett Riter of Los Angeles, and Randolph Bradley Riter of Sacramento, Cal." At least two of their children died young. Rebecca Katharine was born 7 March 1884 and died 17 January 1888, just a couple months before her fourth birthday. Arthur Corlett was born and died on 22 August 1892.

In addition to his drugstore, Benjamin Riter held a number of civic and professional positions.

He was one of the organizers and vice president of the Utah Pharmaceutical association, perfected at the old Knutsford hotel, April 5, 1892. He was president of the state board of pharmacy, from its organization in June, 1896 to January 1, 1911; a member of the Logan city council upon one occasion, and president of the Logan chamber of commerce in 1905. ... He was a member of the committee selected to pick the present site of the Utah Agricultural college, and a member of the first Logan telephone exchange ... He was a Republican, and one of the organizers on [sic] the party in northern Utah.

He was also a member of the Sons of the American Revolution. Interestingly, given that his parents were pioneers of '49 and that LDS presidents spoke at their funerals, Benjamin Riter’s funeral services were presided over by Rev. Harris Pillsbury of the

and Corlette. Her gravestone, located in the Logan City Cemetery beside Benjamin’s in plot B40 18_8, spells her name “Corlett,” and that is the spelling I will use here.


127 “Death Claims B. F. Riter.”

128 The children’s graves are located near their parents’ graves.

129 “Death Claims B. F. Riter.”

130 Ibid.
Presbyterian Church. Benjamin Riter was clearly an important local figure in pharmacy, and also in politics. His influence extended well beyond the confines of Riter Brothers.

**Conclusion**

Benjamin lived during a transitional time, both for medicine and for Utah. The particulars of his historical context, although only briefly explored here, are critical to any thorough understanding of his work at Riter Brothers. That work was a family business, and Benjamin’s family was unusually well-connected. An in-law, Seymour B. Young, was the city physician for Salt Lake and a nephew of Brigham Young. LDS presidents spoke at family funerals. His brothers Samuel and William had substantial banking activities. By illustrating these connections and describing and researching their archival materials, this guide offers a beginning point for future studies of Riter Brothers Pharmacy.

---

131 “Logan News” The *Ogden Standard Examiner* has spelled the Reverend’s name “Pllisbury.” The author has assumed this is a typo and used the spelling Pillsbury instead.
Bibliography

Logan City Cemetery

Merrill-Cazier Library, Special Collections and Archives

Newspapers

Utah Digital Newspapers
   Deseret Evening News
   Deseret News
   Iron County Record
   Logan Journal
   Logan Republican
   Mt. Pleasant Pyramid
   Ogden Standard Examiner
   Salt Lake Herald
   Salt Lake Telegram
   Salt Lake Tribune

Additional Newspaper and Journal
   Cheyenne State Leader
   The National Association of Retail Druggists Journal

Websites


Department of Justice (United States)

Findagrave.com This website was used primarily because it contains photographs of gravestones, which can be used to check the life dates and spellings for various individuals.

LDS.org

State of Wyoming Legislature

Utah State Archives and Records Service. This website was used to locate death certificates.
Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

Britannica Online Encyclopedia

The Encyclopedia of Mormonism


Merriam-Webster Online

Utah History Encyclopedia

Sources


