

Life sketch of Peter Gose Litz



Redacted by Tyler Jarvis from
A.J. Simmonds, Sam Lower, Oka Litz Lower, and other sources

Early life

Peter Gose Litz was born the eighth of nine children to Leonard Litz and Julia Ann Gose on April 25, 1802 in Cripple Creek, Wythe County, Virginia. The name Gose appears to be an anglicized version of the German name Goß, (pronounced Gohss).

As a boy, Peter worked on his father's and uncles' farms. Peter's mother died when he was fifteen years old, and he lived for the next few years with his maternal uncles, John and Peter Gose. He was lucky to get a good primary education, which he later augmented by self-study.

Shortly before his twenty-second birthday, on April 8, 1824, he married his first cousin, Sarah Gose, in Burke's Garden. Her father, Steven Gose, and his mother, Julia Ann Gose, were siblings. Peter was a farmer, and their first home in Burke's Garden, Tazewell County was a rude log cabin.

Peter Gose Litz was religiously active. He, along with James Meek, agreed to secure the iron and make the nails, hinges, hooks, and steeples for the Burke's Garden Lutheran church in 1826. Apparently, this was the first church in Burke's Garden. He and Sarah were also two of the seven charter members of the Presbyterian Church in Burke's Garden.

Peter and Sarah also started the Litz School in the Beartown area of Burke's Garden. It was one of the first schools in Burke' Garden and was open to all who wanted to use it. Later, when the Mormon elders were having trouble finding a place to speak, he let them use the school.

Hard work, thrift, and a good bit of luck enabled Peter to expand and develop his holdings until he became one of Tazewell County's large land holders and slave holders, ultimately owning more than 1,000 acres of land.

Family

Peter and Sarah had the following children, all born in Burke's Garden, Tazewell County, Virginia.

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| 1. Martha | 25 Dec 1825 |
| 2. Margaret | 17 Jul 1827 |
| 3. Elizabeth Spangler | 12 May 1829 |
| 4. Tomas Fowler | 9 Oct 1833 |
| 5. John Tiffany | 18 Apr 1835 |
| 6. William Sawyers | 23 Apr 1837 |
| 7. Mary B. | about 1838 |
| 8. Mary Rebecca (Romans?) | 30 Oct 1839 |
| 9. Sophronia | 27 Oct 1841 |
| 10. Unnamed | about 1843 |

Peter and Sarah had supposedly had brought a foster child into their home to raise as their own. The fact that Mary Rebecca is listed as possibly having an additional name of Romans may indicate that Mary Rebecca was that child.

Sarah died on May 16, 1860, and a year and a half later Peter married the widow Mary Ellen Aker Cline (September 3, 1861). He was named guardian of her two children William Gordon Cline (age 4) and James M, Cline (age 1). She was a Lutheran, but expressed a willingness to move to Utah. After the war (the American Civil War), many of the colonel's children and grandchildren moved to Utah. But the Colonel lived at his home in Burke's Garden until his death on April 3, 1880.

One of the family's slaves was a woman Peter bought when she was 15 years old. She lived with the family for 40 years and was called "Aunt Jenny." She was entrusted with the care and raising of the children. If any of the family was sick, she would take care of him as if he were her own child. When a child would cry in the night, she was at his bedside as quickly as the child's own mother. Including her own children, she raised and cared for 22 children. The family had much affection for her. Later in his life, Peter's son William Sawyers Litz could not speak of her without tears. After the death of Sarah in 1860, she oversaw the household until Peter remarried. However, his second wife, Mary Ellen Cline, prevailed upon Peter to sell Aunt Jenny.

Mormonism

Jedediah Grant (father of Heber J. Grant) came to Burke's Garden Virginia as a missionary in 1840. Sarah was baptized by Jedediah Grant and was supposedly the first person to join the church in Virginia. Peter was supposedly the first male to join the church in Virginia.

Oka Litz Lower related the story of Peter's conversion as follows:

When Jedediah Grant talked to Peter Gose Litz on Mormonism, when he went to the Southern States Mission, he told brother Grant that he would not believe Mormonism was true unless the Angel Moroni would appear to him.

So one night in a dream or what you want to call it, the Angel Moroni did appear to Peter Gose Litz and told him that the church was the true one. On the following morning his daughter...[apparently a foster child] said, "You had a visitor last night didn't you, Father?" Peter asked, "How do you know?" She answered that she had the same visitor, and she was to act as a witness that she had seen him.

It was soon after that, that Great Grandfather was baptized and was set apart to help promulgate the Gospel in the Southern States.¹

Peter and his wife Sarah were very active in supporting the missionary effort of the Mormon Church. She housed, fed, and washed for missionaries most of her married life. Their home was always open to them and she served them tirelessly. Their home was also used for church meetings.

Peter was branch president of the Burke's Garden branch from some time before 18 August 1844 until 31 August 1845. He was called again to serve as branch president on 20 July 1857.

The *Southern Star*² records: "Colonel Peter Gose Litz told Elders Benson and Cowley that he well remembered that Elder Grant read to them in manuscript the prophecy of Joseph Smith respecting the war of the rebellion that took place more than 20 years after Elder Grant read the revelation to the people of Tazewell County, Virginia. They derided the prophecy, but lived to see its verification."

The *Southern States mission Journal*³ also records the following: "Written in letters of blood and tears, this aged veteran, Peter Litz, also testified that he received the evidence of the truth of the Book of Mormon by the appearance of a heavenly messenger who commanded him to "Doubt no more."

¹ Undated letter from Oka Litz Lower to "Paul F."

² *Southern Star*, Vol 1:50 (Jan 1879) 145.

³ *Southern States mission Journal*, LDS Church Historian Collection, Church Office Building SLC UT.

Military Service

It is not clear when Peter first joined the military, but in June 1823, when he was 21, his company recommended Peter to the governor "as a fit person to the office of ensign."

In November 1829, at the age of 27, he was recommended for the position of captain in the 1st Battalion, 112th Regiment. Shortly before the Civil War, Peter was elevated to the position of colonel. The day he received his commission he returned home and greeted his wife, "Sally, you can kiss a colonel!"

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Colonel Peter was placed in command of the Home Guard for the western Virginia counties. He was additionally charged with the training of troops for the Confederate armies.

His two sons, John Tiffany and William Sawyers, entered the war in 1863. William Sayers contracted typhoid fever and was paroled to go home shortly after the war ended. John Tiffany was a prisoner of war at Camp Chase, Ohio, and was released two months after the war ended.

References

1. A.J. Simmonds. *Life sketch of Colonel Peter Gose Litz*. Logan, Utah. 7 June 1964.
2. Samuel S. Lower, *Peter Gose Litz and wife, Sarah Gose: ancestors, descendants and history*. Plain City, Utah. 1996.
3. Undated letter from Oka Litz Lower to "Paul F."