George Albert Smith (commonly known as George A. Smith to distinguish him from his grandson (George Albert Smith, the prophet, of the same name) was an early leader in the Latter-day Saint movement and served in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and as a member of the church’s First Presidency (counselor to Brigham Young).

Smith was born in Potsdam, St. Lawrence County, New York, the son of John Smith and Clarissa Lyman, and a nephew of Joseph Smith, Sr. In September 1832, at the age of fifteen, George A. Smith was baptized into the new Church founded by his cousin, Joseph Smith, Jr. The following year, John Smith and his family moved to Kirtland, Ohio, the headquarters of the Church. There Smith met his cousin, Joseph Smith, Jr. for the first time. In 1838, he moved with his parents and a large body of church members to the state of Missouri.

**CHURCH SERVICE**

In the spring of 1834, the sixteen year old George A. accompanied a group of Latter-day Saints on a 2000 mile march to Missouri and back to Ohio. This trip, known as Zion’s Camp, was intended to bring aid to suffering members of the church in Missouri. He served as a missionary to the eastern states, traveling and preaching during the summers of 1835, 1836, and 1837, while attending school during each winter.

Smith was ordained a Seventy in the priesthood on March 1, 1835, by Joseph Smith, Jr. On April 26, 1839, at the age of 21, George A. Smith was ordained an Apostle and he became a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church. Future President of the Church, Wilford Woodruff was also ordained as an apostle on the same day. The two men replaced former Apostles Thomas B. March, who had apostatized, and Orson Hyde, who had been disfellowshipped and removed from his position.

After Joseph Smith, Jr.’s death and the relocation of the LDS Church to Utah, Smith led a company of 118 volunteers and about 30 families to establish a colony near the Little Salt Lake in Iron County. They arrived at Centre Creek, 265 miles from Salt Lake City, on January 13, 1851. Under direction from the General Assembly of Deseret, the group organized the political entity of Iron County and elected Smith as chief justice. During the
winter of 1859-1851, the settlers constructed a fort enclosing homes, a meeting house to serve for meetings, a school, and a watch tower. They named their community Parowan (Utah). Smith taught school during the first winter. He later served as a member of Utah’s territorial legislature.

In 1868, George A. was called to replace Heber C. Kimball as First Counselor in the First Presidency under Church President Brigham Young. Smith served in this position until his death on September 1, 1875. He was interred at the Salt Lake City Cemetery. Smith’s first wife, Bathsheba W. Bigler Smith, served as general president of the LDS Relief Society from 1901 to 1910. A son, John Henry Smith, also served as an Apostle and a member of the First Presidency. George A. Smith’s grandson and namesake, George Albert Smith also became an Apostle and later served as the eighth President of the Church. Smith was also the eighth official Church Historian of the Church between 1854 and 1871.

**THE UTAH WAR**

During the hurried series of actions Brigham Young and LDS Church leaders initiated on learning of the eminent arrival of U.S. troops into Utah Territory, Smith left Salt Lake City to visit southern Utah communities. Scholars have asserted that Smith’s tour, speeches, and personal actions contributed to the fear and tension in these communities, and influenced the decision to attack and destroy the Baker-Fancher emigrant train near Mountain Meadows, Utah. This event was later known as the Mountain Meadow massacre.

Leaving on August 3, 1857, Smith arrived at Parowan on August 8, 1857 and on August 15, 1857, he set off on a tour of the local military district manned by the Utah militia known as the Nauvoo Legion, led by Stake President-Colonel W. H. Dame. Although Smith’s rank in the Legion was simply a private, one Parowan resident understood that part of the purpose of Apostle Smith’s trip was represent the church leadership and to organize the regiment, inspect the troops, and provide instructions. During the tour, Smith gave military speeches and counseled Mormons that they should prepare to “…touch fire to their homes, and hide themselves in the mountains, and to defend their country to the very last extremity.” Smith instructed church members to stockpile grain, and not to sell it to emigrants or use it for animal feed.

In addition to Parowan, Smith’s tour included visits to Cedar City and Santa Clara. The group stopped at Mountain Meadows to eat dinner on August 20 with a group of resident missionaries. Smith addressed a group of Indians in Santa Clara, counseling them that “the Americans” were approaching with a large army, and were a threat to the Indians as well as the Mormons. Riding in a wagon afterwards, John D. Lee said he warned Smith that the Indians would likely attack emigrant trains, and that Mormons were anxious to avenge the blood of the prophets, and according to Lee, Smith seemed pleased, and said “he had had a long talk with Major Haight on the same subject.”

Isaac C. Haight, LDS stake president of Cedar City, and second in military command under Dame, met with Smith again on August 21. Haight told Smith he had heard reports that 600 troops were already approaching Cedar City from the East, and that if the rumors were true, Haight would have to act without waiting for instructions from Salt Lake City. Smith agreed, and “admired his grit”. Smith later said he was uncomfortable, perhaps “on account of my extreme timidity”, because some of the militia members were eager that “their enemies might come and give them a chance to fight and take vengeance for the cruelties that had been inflicted upon us in the States”, such as the Haun’s Mill massacre.

On the way back to Salt Lake City, Smith was accompanied by a party including Jacob Hamblin of Santa Clara, a newly appointed Mormon missionary to the Natives in the
region who also ran a federally funded ‘Indian farm’ next to Mountain Meadows. Also traveling north with the Smith party were several Native chiefs of the southern Utah Territory (these chiefs included, Ammon, Kanosh, Tutsegabit, and Youngwids).

On August 25, 1857, Smith’s group camped next to the Baker-Fancher party, headed opposite direction, at Corn Creek (now Kanosh, Utah). Smith later said he had no knowledge of the Baker-Francher party prior to meeting them on the trail. When the Baker-Francher party inquired about places to stop for water and grazing, Hamblin directed them to Mountain Meadows, near the ‘Indian farm’ there, a regular stopover on the Old Spanish Trail.

**PLURAL MARRIAGE**

Like many Mormon leaders in the nineteenth century, George A. Smith practiced plural marriage. Known for his somewhat bombastic speaking style, Smith once said, “We breathe the free air, we have the best looking men and handsomest women, and if they (non-mormons) envy us our position, well they may, for they are a poor, narrow-minded, pinch-backed race of men, who chain themselves down to the law of monogamy, and live all their days under the dominion of one wife. They ought to be ashamed of such conduct and the still fouler channel which flows from their practices; and it is not to be wondered at that they should envy those who so much better understand the social relations.” (Journal of Discourses, vol. 3, p. 291)

In addition to his first wife, Bathsheba Wilson Bigler, Smith married Lucy Smith, Nancy Clement, Sarah Ann Libby, Hannah Marie Libby, and Susan E. West. His wives bore him twenty children, eleven of whom were still living when Smith died.

**ST. GEORGE, UTAH**

In the 1850’s, President Brigham Young founded the city of St. George, Utah as a cotton mission. This is how the town became known at “Utah’s Dixie”. This was done as an attempt to make the church members self-sufficient. The cotton growing endeavor was not profitable enough to compete with the markets in the southeastern states, so it was eventually abandoned. The more than 300 Mormon families who came to the area must have enjoyed the warm climate because even though the cotton crops were discontinued, they decided to stay. In 1861, Brigham Young decided to name the city “Saint George,” in honor of George A. Smith, who had served and labored in southern Utah in the 1850’s.