

John Holt Rice

John Holt Rice was born 15 October 1836 in Farmville, Prince Edward, Virginia, the only child of John Holt Rice and Judith Ann Woodson Allen. On the 1850 census, John is living with his parents in Ray, Missouri.¹ By 1870, John was an office clerk living in Hamilton, White Pine, Nevada.² Hamilton was a mining boom town of 12,000. It had almost 100 saloons, several breweries, 60 general stores, theaters, dance halls, skating rinks, and other businesses. Close to 200 mining companies were operating in the area. Within two years, it went into decline and the miners and businessmen moved elsewhere.

He spent some time on the Pacific coast³ and may have lived in Stanislaus, California, in 1867.⁴

In 1874, William and O. P. Sherwood assigned their holdings in Lincoln, Nevada, to John Rice as trustee. They owed considerable sums of money⁵ to more than twenty creditors. One of their creditors was the Wells Fargo Company, a mortgage of \$30,000, which had been outstanding since 1874.⁶ Their properties included the steam engines at Clover Valley, Wilson Creek, and Utah sawmills. Other salable goods included 100,000 board feet of sawed logs, 55 yoke of oxen, 28 head of horses and mules, and 20 different types of wagons. John sold the mill properties to Wells Fargo for \$20,000.⁷

In 1875, John was an accountant, living with E Thompson in Lincoln, Nevada.⁸ By 1876, John had moved to Silver Reef, Washington, Utah, where he built a two-story building of mortared adobe brick and cut rock, with a full basement and wooden floors, on Main Street. This building housed the Leeds Banking Company, where John served as cashier for several years.⁹ He also had requested a “couple of Mormon teams” to dispatch to his “palatial residence in Toquerville” where he intended to go soon.¹⁰

The bank building was used for a time as a makeshift jail. When US marshals moved in on warring union leaders, the space was too small for the number arrested, so a line was drawn around the building and anyone venturing across it was threatened with being shot. The Miners Union members were transferred to Beaver, where they were tried for riot, conspiracy, and false imprisonment. Thirteen of the members were sentenced to imprisonment; three were bailed out, while ten were sent to the Utah Territorial Penitentiary.¹¹

Unfortunately, the Rice bank building was burned down in the great fire of May 1879.¹² Mr. and Mrs. Colbath had a private home in the John H. Rice bank building in 1934.¹³ The original building was completely restored in 1991.

John also built the Wells Fargo and Company building, which still stands in Silver Reef today. At the time, it was touted as one of the finest structures of its kind in southern Utah.¹⁴ William Stirling sold an

¹ United States Census, 1850.

² United States Census, 1870.

³ *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.*

⁴ California Voter Registrations, 1867.

⁵ Lincoln County Miscellaneous Records Book C 1:149-178.

⁶ Lincoln County Book of Deeds, Book O:45-50.

⁷ Nevada Archaeologist, 1996, Vol 14, p. 64.

⁸ Nevada State Census, 1875.

⁹ Adolphus Rennie Whitehead Journal; United States Census, 1880; *The Banker's Almanac and Register*, 1880, p. 191; *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 1880, Vol 29-30, p. 411; *Memories of Silver Reef*, in *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Vol 3, No 4, pp. 99-118.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 48.

¹¹ *Silver, Sinners and Saints*, by Proctor and Shirts, 1991, pp. 151-154.

¹² *Ghost Towns of the Mountain West*, by Philip Varney, 2010, p. 243; *From the Ground Up*, by Colleen K Whitley, 2006, p. 290.

¹³ *Memories of Silver Reef*, in *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Vol 3, No 4, 1934, p. 104.

entire block of land to John H Rice in 1878. John later sold it to Thomas Judd; later it became the location of the Leeds Tithing Office.¹⁵

John Rice and the McGrady brothers owned the Stormont, Last Chance and Duffin mines, as well as a ten-stamp mill about five miles south of Silver Reef on the Virgin River. It was run by water-power generated by an American turbine wheel of 170 horse-power. The mill produced one bar of bullion per day, and produced, under the new management, a total of 115 bars of fine silver.¹⁶

In 1880, John married Susan Eunice Spencer at Silver Reef, Washington, Utah, as her third husband. They had three children. He was a banker and a Wells Fargo agent in Silver Reef.¹⁷ He reported that “the mines of the Sandstone District never showed larger ore-reserves than at the present time. ... Silver Reef shows greater signs of permanent prosperity now than any other period of its history”.¹⁸

About this time, the populace of Silver Reef was interested in getting a public school. John was on the original board of trustees that arranged for the school building and a teacher. At one point, John used his private funds to make up a shortfall in the school board budget. He served as a trustee until February 1883.¹⁹

In the summer of 1881, the Stormont mill and mine should have been in full active operation. However, company managers advised a month delay. During this time, the paper currency in camp was principally checks of John Rice, written on a Salt Lake bank. When that bank refused to honor the checks, a panic ensued. John was duly embarrassed and candidly admitted his present inability to provide for his paper. He said that “his assets were ample, and liabilities would all be met within a reasonable time, and if not involved in suits at law, his financial trouble would soon be overcome. His creditors and neighbors, having great confidence in his honesty and integrity, accept his explanation and in good faith bide their time and lay away the checks”.²⁰

In 1882, the bank was rumored to be closed,²¹ and John was mining in Tombstone, Arizona. In 1882, he was appointed to the committee to represent Tombstone at the Denver Exposition.²² This industrial exposition focused on displays of minerals and mining equipment.²³ That same year, John was nominated to the ticket for the Iowa Greenback Convention.²⁴ The Greenback Party was active between 1874 and 1889, fielding presidential tickets three times. Their name referred to the non-gold backed paper money commonly known as “greenbacks”. The party opposed the deflationary lowering of prices paid to producers entailed by a return to a bullion-based monetary system, the policy favored by the dominant Republican Party. Continued use of unbacked currency, it was believed, would better foster business and assist farmers by raising prices and making debts easier to pay.²⁵

On 10 December 1885, John wrote a letter to the Salt Lake Herald newspaper about the Indian troubles in Arizona Territory, detailing the murder of a Danish boy whom he had worked with

¹⁴ A Historical Study of Silver Reef: Southern Utah Mining Town, ty Alfred Bleak Stucki, 1966, p. 37.

¹⁵ Washington County Historical Society website.

¹⁶ *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 1879, Vol 27, p. 115.

¹⁷ United States Census, 1880.

¹⁸ *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 1880, Vol 29-30, p. 411.

¹⁹ Minutes of the Silver Reef School Board.

²⁰ *Salt Lake Herald*, 8 June 1881, p. 7.

²¹ The Bankers Magazine and Statistical Register, 1882, Vol 36, p. 73.

²² *Tombstone Weekly Epitaph*, 10 June 1882, p. 2.

²³ The Profile, by Pam Marquez, 2015.

²⁴ *Tombstone Weekly Epitaph*, 10 June 1882, p. 2.

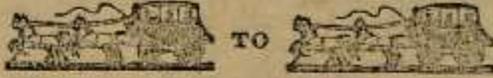
²⁵ Wikipedia.

previously.²⁶ At the time, he was in the best of health, but died suddenly two days later. John's brother-in-law, Daniel S. Spencer, received a dispatch from F. L. Moore, a merchant of Tombstone, Arizona. It read: "John H Rice died this morning. Requested his remains to be sent to Salt Lake. What shall we do?" Mr Spencer gave instructions to send the body to Salt Lake City, where it would be interred beside his wife (she died in 1882). John left two small children who were living in Salt Lake City.²⁷

John's obituary called him "one of the best known among the big-hearted miners of Nevada and Utah. ... Business misfortunes brought on mainly through his open-handed generosity and great-heartedness, ended his career in Silver Reef".²⁸ The flag of the Ancient Order of United Workmen floated at half-mast in respect to his memory Special meeting of the Tombstone Lodge No. 3 was called to make arrangements for his funeral. His body was embalmed and sent to relatives in Salt Lake City, the Wells Fargo Company handled the transportation free of charge.²⁹

DAILY STAGE LINE
.... FROM

SILVER REEF

 TO 

Milford and Pioche

Connecting with tri-weekly lines to
Hot Creek, Tybo, Belmont, Morey,
Grantsville and Candelaria,

And half-daily lines to
Hamilton, Cherry Creek and Eureka.

FARE:

From Silver Reef to Cedar City.....	\$ 5
From Silver Reef to Milford.....	12
From Silver Reef to Beaver.....	12
From Silver Reef to Pioche.....	15
From Silver Reef to Eureka.....	45

JOHN H. RICE, Agent.

GILMER, SALISBURY & CO.
Proprietors.

John H Rice, agent (Image from *The Silver Reef Miner*,
5 November 1881; 9 September 1882; 30 September 1882)

²⁶ *Salt Lake Herald*, 10 December 1885, p. 8.

²⁷ *Salt Lake Herald*, 12 December 1885.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *The Daily Tombstone*, 12 December 1885, p. 3.



Leeds Banking Company check image provided courtesy Silver Reef - Wells Fargo Museum
THRP Silver Reef - Wells Fargo Museum Collection



Leeds Banking Company check image provided courtesy Silver Reef - Wells Fargo Museum
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Leeds Banking Company checks, dated March and April 1881, signed by cashier John H Rice
(Image from [Treasure House Relics Project](#))