

Orrin Porter Rockwell

June 28, 1813 – June 9, 1878

Orrin Porter Rockwell was a figure of the Wild West period of American History, a Mormon Danite, and a law man in the Utah Territory. He was nicknamed **Old Port** and labeled “The Destroying Angel of Mormondom”. During his lifetime he was as famous and controversial. He was the bodyguard and personal friend of Joseph Smith, the founder of the Latter Day Saints movement.

Orrin Porter Rockwell was born June 28, 1813 in Belchertown, Hampshire County, Massachusetts to Orrin and Sarah Rockwell, neighbors to the Smith family. Porter Rockwell was eight years younger than Joseph Smith. When Smith was publishing the Book of Mormon, Rockwell would work by picking berries at night and hauling wood into town in order to help pay for the publishing.

At 16 years old, Porter Rockwell was baptized into Church of Christ in Fayette, Western New York in 1830. The date of Porter’s baptism has been associated with the day the church was organized, April 6th, more recent access to original documents suggests a date of June 9th. Porter Rockwell has been named the youngest member of the first group to be baptized into the church. He married Luana Beebe on February 2, 1832 and was endowed in the Nauvoo Temple on January 5, 1846. He served as a loyal personal bodyguard to both Joseph Smith and later Brigham Young.

Porter Rockwell had the distinction of being the subject of a direct prophecy by Joseph Smith. After spending eight months in jail on charges of attempting to assassinate former Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs who signed Executive Order known as the “Extermination Order” evicting Mormons from Missouri by violent and deadly means. Porter Rockwell traveled to Nauvoo, where he appeared unannounced at a Christmas party at Joseph Smith’s home. When his identity was confirmed, Joseph was moved to say, “I prophesy, in the name of the Lord, that you Orrin Porter Rockwell as long as you remain loyal and true to the faith, need fear no enemy. He was told do not cut your hair and no bullet or blade can harm you. He did at one time cut his hair. Upon hearing of a widow who was balding from typhoid fever, he gave up his famous long hair to make the woman a wig. The recipient of the hair was Agnes Coolbrith Smith Pickett, widow of Joseph Smith’s brother, Don Carlos.

He was also reputed to have killed many men as a gunfighter, as a religious enforcer, and Deputy United States Marshal. It is said that Porter Rockwell once told a crowd “I never killed anyone who didn’t need Killing”.

Porter Rockwell had four wives but was never a polygamist.

Following the death of Joseph Smith, Porter Rockwell followed Brigham Young and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) to Utah. Porter Rockwell was appointed as deputy marshal of Great Salt Lake City and remained a peace officer until his death. He was known for his endurance, loyalty and relentlessness.

Porter Rockwell operated a Hot Springs Hotel and Brewery at the southern end of the Salt Lake Valley, in an area known as “Point of the Mountain.”

Porter Rockwell died in Salt Lake City, Utah Territory, of natural causes on June 9, 1878. He was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery.

Grave Location is as follows: **Plot – C, Block – 5, Lot – 9, Grave – 1, Tier – E**. At the time of his death, Porter Rockwell had been a member of the LDS Church longer than anyone living. His epitaph reads, “He was brave and loyal to his faith. True to the Prophet Joseph Smith, a promise that was made to him by the prophet. Through obedience it was fulfilled. At Porter Rockwell’s funeral, apostle and future church president Joseph F. Smith spoke and said “They say he was a murderer; if he was he was the friend of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, and he was faithful to them, and he has gone to Heaven.”

