

ST. JOHN, SILAS, born in New York City, April 21, 1835.

Son of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Married (1) \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_, on  
\_\_\_\_\_, 18\_\_\_\_\_.

Children, Curtis, Mayne and Sylvia.

Married (2) Mrs. Mary Imogene (Hyde) Rogers (1847-1922) at Niagara Falls,  
New York, May 30, 1896.

The following account of how he came to Arizona is abstracted from  
the Tucson Citizen of September 18, 1897:

Col. Silas St. John, whose first advent in Tucson was in October, 1857, in company with Captain "Big Feet" Wallace, establishing the San Diego and San Antonio mail line, under the Birch contract, the pioneer transcontinental mail, is again in the city. He is a pleasant spoken gentleman and full of reminiscences of the past.

The following year, in 1858, Col. St. John returned in company with Buckley, De Ruyther and Brainard, stringing the line under the Butterfield contract, which was merged into the Overland Mail Co.

In September of that year while at Dragoon springs with three companions, Col. St. John was attacked by a party of Sonoranians. His companions, James Lang of Kentucky, William Cunningham of Iowa and James Hughes of Watertown, New York, were all killed. Col. St. John lost his left arm, but held the situation, losing none of the stock or property of the company, which was the object of the attack.

The American Journal of Medical Sciences, for October, 1859, published an article by B.J.D. Irwin, the Post Surgeon at Fort Buchanan, entitled "Amputation at the Shoulder-Joint" which began as follows:

On the 16th of September, 1858, I was requested to visit one of the stations of the Southern Overland Mail Company, where a number of men were reported to have been dangerously wounded. I set out at once, and arrived at the place early the next morning, after a smart ride of one hundred and fifteen miles (from Fort Buchanan), but found that three of the four wounded men had already died. The history of the survivor, Silas St. John, a strong, robust, healthy young man, at 24, a native of New York City, was as follows:

He, with three Americans and three Mexicans, was engaged in keeping the mail station. On the evening of the 8th, one of the latter was placed on guard, and the remainder of the party retired to rest for the night; about midnight the Mexicans arose, and with axes and a large hammer attempted to murder their sleeping companions. St. John awoke, and hearing blows given, was in the act of springing from his bed when he received a terrible blow from an axe, which almost severed his left arm from his body, followed quickly by another that cut the fleshy part of the same arm in a shocking manner; this was succeeded by another stroke that cut through the anterior external portion of the right thigh, a short distance below the joint. By this time he succeeded in grasping his pistol, and having fired at the desperate assassins, they fled and were seen no more.

One of the unfortunate victims who slept outside of the deer of the rude shed never awoke; another, with his face and head frightfully chopped and mangled, lived in great agony until the evening of the next day; while a third, whose head was almost cloven in two, the brain continually oozing from the shattered skull, lingered until the sixth day, during which time his frenzied craving for water to quench his burning thirst was of the most heart-rending character.

On the evening of the next day (September 15), the mail stage came by and found St. John, the only survivor of his party, alone in a rude hovel in the wilderness, without food or water, unable to move; his wounds undressed, stiffened, and full of leathsome maggots; his companions had died one by one a horrible death, and lastly, to add to the horrors of his suffering, the hungry wolves and ravens came and banquetted upon the putrefying corpse of one of his dead companions which lay but a few feet from his desolate bed. The mental and physical sufferings which he endured are marvellous to think of. Yet he never complained nor flinched for a moment. Calm and resigned, he bore his torments with the fortitude of a martyr.

In modern medical practice maggots are often used to sterilize wounds and what probably saved his life was that his wounds were fly-blown; the article concludes:

During the night of the 23d he arrived at the fort, having travelled in a common wagon sixty miles over a rough road during the two preceding days; and, as he was weak and fatigued, half a grain of sulphate of morphia was given him, and he was placed in a comfortable bed. XXXXX On the 24th day after the operation he was walking about, and in less than six weeks he started for the Eastern States, restored to perfect health.

Appointed early in 1859 as Special Agent for the Pima and Maricopa Indians and served during the time when the boundaries of the Gila River Reservation was surveyed by Andrew B. Gray; he took the first census of the two

tribes showing 3770 Pimas and 472 Maricopas; arranged for a meeting with the tribal leaders at which Lieutenant Sylvester Howry, in recognition of their aid and cooperation in maintaining peaceful relations with the Americans, announced that the Indians would receive a substantial gift of axes, shovels, picks, cycles, cloth and other articles; when these supplies were delivered he saw that they were properly distributed among the Indians and Lieutenant Howry said of him:

It gives me great pleasure to commend the judicious management of these people by Mr. St. John during his brief residence among them. He seemed to have gained their respect and confidence to a degree hardly to be expected.

He was in Cochise County in 1881 at the time of the Tombstone silver boom; returned to Arizona in the fall of 1897 to investigate the possibility of establishing an agricultural colony in the Sulphur Spring Valley by sinking artesian wells; it was stated at that time that he "has had wide experience in irrigation in Colorado and California"; was in Phoenix about 1905 and in Prescott in 1910; appointed to a position at the Arizona Pioneers Home in January, 1911.

Died at San Diego, California, September 15, 1919, aged 84; buried, Mount Hope Cemetery, San Diego, where a memorial gravestone was placed by gift of Benjamin P. Cheney, May 16, 1942.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1859, pp. 351, 353-360.  
 Parish, T.B. - History of Arizona, Phoenix, 1915, Vol. 2, pp. 1-10.  
 McGlintock, J.H. - Arizona, The Youngest State, Chicago, 1916, pp. 270, 272.  
 DeLong, S.R. - History of Arizona, S.F., 1903, p. 22.  
 Lang, W.B. - The First Overland Mail, 1940, pp. 54, 79.  
 Baer, W.B. - Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery, July, 1931.  
 American Journal of the Medical Sciences, October, 1859, pp. 350-353.  
 The San Diego Union, September 21, 1919, April 11, 1922 and May 17, 1942,  
 p. 3-C (Portrait).  
 The Los Angeles Star, March 26, 1859  
 The Arizona Star, Tucson, January 24, 1911, p. 2, c. 2.  
 The Arizona Citizen, Tucson, February 26, 1881, p. 4, c. 2; September 18,  
 p. 4, c. 2-5; September 20, 1897, p. 4, c. 4;  
 Letter from his step-daughter, Belle Rogers Deersbach (Mrs. George J.)  
 of Sandusky, Ohio.

## WANTED

Obituaries in Arizona newspapers and any references to him in the indexes.

*no reference found of death,  
 attached item found in clipping  
 file with no date, and search  
 through Prescott Courier files  
 located date of item.*