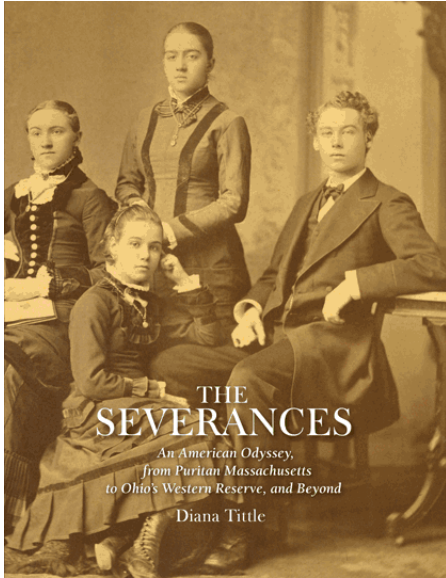


# JAMES SEYMOUR SEVERANCE



**1842-1936**

Born: Jul. 5, 1842 in Cleveland, OH

Died: Jan. 1936 in Los Angeles, CA

Appointment(s):

New England Freedmen's Aid Society  
(NEFAS)

Hilton Head, SC  
Apr. 1862

U.S. Dept. of Treasury – Special Agent  
Savannah, GA

Apr. 1865

James Seymour Severance, known as 'Seymour', was born July 5, 1842 in Cleveland, Ohio to Theodore Cardenio Severance (1814-1892) and Caroline Maria Seymour (1820-1910). His parents were among the founding pioneers of the Western Reserve and were very involved in social reform, including abolition and women's rights.<sup>1</sup> His mother, Caroline Maria Seymour, was a well-known figure wherever they lived. She was known in Los Angeles for establishing the first kindergarten, the first Unitarian Church, the first women's club and hosting lectures by abolitionists and literary figures.<sup>2</sup> By 1860, James had moved to Newton, Middlesex County, Massachusetts and in 1880 to San Francisco. By 1930 he was living in Los Angeles. James was a student at Harvard University when his father was appointed as Special Agent of the Treasury Department by US Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase to be the

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<sup>1</sup> Tittle, Diana. "Significant Others: The Defining Domestic Life of Caroline Maria Seymour Severance" in *California History*, Vol 88, No1, 2010, pp 30-52.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25763083>

- Emmett, Michael Edward. "Or this whole affair is a failure: a special treasury agent's view of the Port Royal Experiment in Port Royal, South Carolina, April to May 1862. Theses, Dissertations and Capstones, 2016. <http://mds.marshall.edu/etd/1028>, p 46 . (the most complete biography of James Seymour Severance available)

- Elwood-Aikers, Virginia. *Caroline Severance*. New York: Universe, 2010, p xiii, 24.

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Severance. A collection of online articles about CMS Severance. <http://uudb.org/articles/carolineseverance.html>.

# JAMES SEYMOUR SEVERANCE

Collector of Customs at Port Royal [Hilton Head] in 1862.<sup>3</sup> His father procured James a position on the staff of General Rufus Saxton in Beaufort, South Carolina.<sup>4</sup> James arrived aboard the 'Oriental' in April 1862 and initially assisted with distribution of supplies and as a clerk in the Commissary.<sup>5</sup> However, after assisting teachers in the classroom, James received an appointment by the New England Freedmen's Aid Society in April 1862 as a teacher to the freedmen in Hilton Head, South Carolina.<sup>6</sup> Almost from the time he arrived until December 1862, he was frequently ill from malaria.<sup>7</sup> He was still put in charge of abandoned property of the southern white planters who had fled in April 1863, a position which he maintained until June 1865.<sup>8</sup> He was still in South Carolina to join his parents for a flag-raising ceremony over Fort Sumter in April 1865. When James, as Superintendent of Eustis Plantation, saw the devastation of the land, the poor, starving, freedmen clothed in rags, he expressed his disappointment in the broken promises of the U.S. Government. He voiced his opinion about the highly praised Port Royal Experiment: "We may lament that it was ever lost [their confidence and respect] but that is the fact, and now it must be at any cost, or the whole affair is a failure."<sup>9</sup> He transferred briefly to Savannah, Georgia to work as an Agent for the U.S. Treasury Department, but returned home on August 22, 1865, where he first joined his father in a brokerage house in Boston.<sup>10</sup> On May 26, 1866, a claim was recorded in Boston: "James Severance, formerly of Hilton Head, South Carolina, filed a quit claim in consideration of fifteen hundred dollars paid to him by Sarah Sams of Beaufort to him for his land and property in Beaufort."<sup>11</sup>

In 1872, James, age 32 and his younger brother Mark, age 28 travelled to Santa Barbara, California on the Mexican border to purchase a ranch in partnership with their parents to raise sheep.<sup>12</sup> The plan fell through, but James remained in California and went to work for the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and was known by the nickname 'The Admiral'.<sup>13</sup> The San Francisco *Chronicle* published his obituary on January 26, 1936:

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<sup>3</sup> Caroline Seymour Severance Papers. Sacramento, CA: California State Library.

- Elwood-Aikers, p 46.

<sup>4</sup> Emmett, p 59.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p 56, 64.

<sup>6</sup> New England Freedmen's Aid Society. *Freedmen's Record*, Vol I, No 5, May 1862. "List of Teachers Appointed for Spring 1862".

- Emmett, p 80.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p 145.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p 80.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p 39, 78, 110159, 169, 178.

<sup>11</sup> Ancestry.com

<sup>12</sup> Emmett, p 124, 160.

<sup>13</sup> Emmett, 135, 159-161.

## JAMES SEYMOUR SEVERANCE

Word of the death of James Seymour Severance, 96 years of age, member of a pioneer San Francisco family and up to his death, the oldest living member of the University Club, was received here yesterday in a telegram to Mrs. Phillip Landsdale, a friend. Mr. Severance died in Los Angeles Friday. He had been suffering from heart trouble for several years. The flag at the University Club will fly at half-staff in honor of his memory. He was the son of Mme. Caroline M. Seymour Severance, who was known as the "mother of American women's clubs," having organized the first one in New England in 1855, which became the parent of the National Federation of Women's Clubs. During his business life here Mr. Severance was identified with the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and was known in later years as "the admiral." Funeral services will be held in Los Angeles tomorrow.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Saturday, Jan 26, 1936, p 67. <https://www.newspapers.com>.  
- Tittle, Diana, pp 51-52.