

ALPHA LOADER JACQUES



BABY: born on the trek, August 27, 1856, near Florence, Nebraska
Martin Handcart Company

Alpha Loader Jacques was born on the plains at Cutler's Park, Nebraska, on August 27, 1856. He was with his sister, Flora; parents, John and Zilpah Jacques; and his mother's family, the Loaders. These two families were blessed with many spiritual manifestations during their travels with the Martin handcart company. Alpha's father was a great writer and biographer. Among other things, he has given us the Hymns, "Softly Beams the Sacred Dawning" and "Oh, Say What Is Truth." Alpha survived this trek, but his 1-year-old sister, Flora, did not. She died just one week before the family reached the Salt Lake Valley.

The following are some experiences recorded concerning the time of Alpha's birth by his aunt, Patience Loader:

"That night [of Alpha's birth], my sister, Zilpah Jacques, was confined at twelve o'clock and my sister, Tamar, was very sick with mountain fever. My sister got through her confinement quite well ... The next morning we got ready to start. The captain came to our tent and told us to be ready to start as soon as we could get ready. There lay my sister, Zilpah, on the ground ... She was lying on some quilts in one corner of the tent and my sister, Tamar, was lying on quilts in the other corner of the tent, neither of the poor things able to move. Captain Martin said, 'Put them up on the wagon,' as there was a wagon for the sick who were unable to walk. I asked, 'Can one of us ride with them to take care of them?' He said, 'No, they will have to take care of themselves.' Then I said, 'They will not go. We will stay here for a day or two and take care of our two sick sisters.'

"So we were left there all alone as the company started about seven o'clock that morning. When night came, my poor father and my brother-in-law, John Jacques, had to be up all night to make a big fire to keep the wolves away from us. I never heard such a terrible howling of wolves in my life as we experienced that lonesome night. We were all glad to see daylight ... Brother Joseph A. Young [came] on horseback riding at great speed to our camp to see what was the cause of the big fire. They had watched the light all night ... When he came into the tent and saw my sister with her new born babe lying on the ground on some quilts he was overcome with sympathy. The tears ran down his cheeks. Then he blessed my sister and tried to comfort and cheer her by saying, 'Well, Sister Jacques, I suppose you will name your boy 'Handcart,' having been born under such circumstances?' 'No,' she said, 'I will want a prettier name than that for him.' ...

"[In starting on our journey again the next day] we packed our handcart, struck our tent, packed it on my handcart, then lay my sister, Tamar, on that, then Brother Jacques packed his cart, then lay my sister and her two children on the cart. We tied the tent poles alongside of the cart. Our cooking utensils we tied under the cart ... This was very hard on my poor sick father after having to be up all night, no rest or sleep. But it surely did prove that God was with us for my dear father seemed better that day than he had been for weeks past. Surely God gave him new strength that day for we traveled twenty-two miles before we overtook the company.

"[While traveling to catch up to the handcart company] we were overtaken by a Brother William Cluff who had ridden out from Florence after Brother Joseph A. Young had returned from our camp and told them who it was that had made the fire. He fetched a rope with him and tied it to our handcart and then to the pomel of his saddle and gave us a rest ... I was very thankful, more on account of my dear sick father than for us girls because we were young and healthy in those days. [Alpha's Grandfather Loader died on the plains one month later.]

"[Brother Cluff, who had to return to his camp at Florence] had hardly left us when five great Indians came out of a cave in the mountains and got on their horses and came to meet us. They were all painted and naked except for breech cloth, had their tommyhawks and hatchets, bows and arrows. They stopped us in the road and talked but we could not understand them. When they saw our sick and my sister with her new born babe, they moved out of the road and motioned for us to go on. I think this was as near to being killed by the Indians as I wish to be. They were quite impudent in their manners to us and made fun of us pulling the handcart. We were somewhat afraid of them and I dare say they could see that. At the time, we put our faith and trust in God, our Father, that he would take care of us and not let those Indians hurt us. I know it was nothing but the power of God that saved us from those Indians that day."

Perhaps few people have this much drama in their entire lives, let alone a newborn babe in the first few days of his life. Alpha grew to manhood and married his first cousin, Amy Eliza Ricks, the daughter of his Aunt Tamar Loader Ricks. They became the parents of fourteen children. Alpha died December 12, 1945, in Sugar City, Idaho. He was 89 years old.

Sources: *Life history and writings of John Jaques including a diary of the Martin Handcart Company*, by Stella Jaques Bell, 1978; Sandra Ailey Petree, *Recollections of Past Days: The Autobiography of Patience Loader Rozsa Archer*, 2006, All USU Press Publications, Book 37. Some excerpts available at Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website.