

ASA SMITH HAWLEY

Born: 1835 Canada

Age: 21

Rescuer



Asa Hawley showed his commitment to the rescue efforts as did the other rescuers who were required to leave parents, wives and children. It is recorded that Asa's wife questioned, "Asa, when will you be back?" Asa replied, "I do not know, but, little girl, rest assured that when I have performed my duty I will gladly return to my little wife."

Asa belonged to the Utah County Militia. His group was called out several weeks after the first rescue call was made on October 5, 1856. Captain Grant, leader of the first rescue party had "waited in exasperation," but it took a great deal of time and effort for these companies to reach them. In confusion, and without clear direction, some wagons had even turned back to the Valley, only to be met by messengers who turned them back around again. The roads in places were nearly impassable. Asa said that they encountered snow in crossing Big Mountain that was "up to the tops of our wagon bows." He said it reminded him of Bonaparte crossing the Alps. "We ploughed our way through and went on." Some of Asa's companions had their feet badly frozen and had to be left on the Weber, Bear, and Yellow rivers to recuperate. Later, Asa wrote that these boys made it all up on the way back. They were fresh and strong and "took hold with a will, which relieved us very much."

It wasn't until the 18th of November that Asa's group of men were informed by an advance team from Captain Grant's rescue party, that the Martin handcart company would arrive at handcar Asa's current camp during the night. (This was in the vicinity of South Pass.) Hosea Stout wrote, "Several teams were dispatched to meet them and help them in. Soon they began to come in, some in wagons, some on horses, some on foot, while some had to be led or carried on the backs of men." This new relief was just in time for the Martin Company, especially those still walking.

Asa also recorded his experience in helping the Martin Company: "We had given up our wagons to them. After arranging their beds as well as we could when bedtime had come, we would carry them to our wagons. After seeing them to bed, we would close the wagon covers thus shutting out all the cold possible. Thus we would leave them for the night. Then shoveling away the snow we would lay our scanty blankets down for a little rest, then up in the morning a long time before daylight we would build a big fire and prepare breakfast. When all was about ready we would arouse our passengers, again repeating that which we had done the day before. When we were all seated we would again pass them their food. Breakfast over, all was now a hurry and bustle to be off. ... We again loaded them into our wagons and traveled on. This was repeated night and morning all the way."

John Jacques of the Martin Company wrote: "The meeting of the emigrants with relatives, acquaintances, and friends ... was very solemnly impressive. Some were so affected that they could scarcely speak, but would look at each other until the sympathetic tears would force their unforbidden way. [They] were taken into the homes of their friends ... while they thawed the frost out of their limbs and recruited their health and strength. The new comers would eat and eat and eat until they were literally and perfectly ashamed of themselves, and then retire from the table hungry. It took a long time for an emigrant to fill up and reduce his appetite to its normal condition. It was a serious affliction upon those who had it, as well as upon their hospitable friends."

Sources: *Rescue of the 1856 Handcart Companies*, by Rebecca Bartholomew and Leonard J. Arrington, 1993; *Life History and Writings of John Jaques, Including a Diary of the Martin Handcart Company*, by Stella Jaques Bell, 1978.