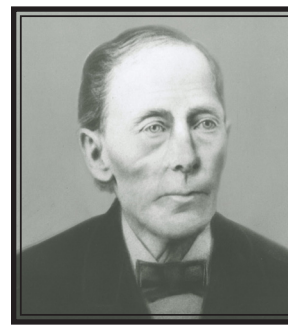


CYRUS HUBBARD WHEELOCK

Born: about 1813

Age: 43

Chaplain of the main rescue party



In 1856, Cyrus was returning from his third mission to England. He had served as a counselor to mission President Franklin D. Richards part of that time. After completing their duties in England, Cyrus, President Richards, and other returning missionaries left Liverpool on July 26, 1856, having arranged emigration matters for over 3,000 Saints that season. They reached Florence, Nebraska, in time to assist the Martin handcart company and two rear wagon trains, Hodgett and Hunt, on their journey. On September 2, 1856, Cyrus wrote a letter to Elder James Little in England that tells what was happening in Florence:

Dear Brother—I almost steal a few moments from our busy labour to partially redeem a promise I made to you when we shook hands at our last parting on the steamer—to write to you on our arrival in the States. Time compels me to be brief. ... The Lord blessed and prospered us on our way on every hand, and filled our souls with increased joy as we passed through the ranks of the ungodly unharmed, realizing all the way that the blessings and prophecy of President Pratt were fulfilled upon us. ... We are preparing to leave [Florence] to-morrow, and all hands are up to their eyes in business. ... I am perched upon a box trying to write a line to brother James. The dust like snow is flying in my face, which refuses to keep clean with a half dozen washings a-day. ... We arrived at this point on the 21st of August, having been, as you will observe, twenty-six days on our journey from Liverpool.¹ At New York we spent twenty-four hours with Elders [John] Taylor, George A. Smith, and others. At Chicago we were detained twelve hours waiting for a train. At St. Louis business kept us thirty-six hours. At the latter place we were joined by brother Spencer, who accompanied us to this place, where we had the privilege of shaking hands with our beloved brethren Elders W.H. Kimball, G.D. Grant, J. Ferguson, J.D.T. McAllister, and others who have been labouring incessantly in getting off the Saints.² All our hearts were made glad in beholding each other again after a separation of a few months.

In less than an hour after our arrival on the campground, we laid by our fine cloth[es], and mentally and physically engaged in practical “Mormonism,” in assisting to complete the organization of the hand-cart and wagon companies for their journey over the Plains. The presence of brothers Franklin, Spencer, and my humble self among them seemed like the magic of heaven. Their spirits and bodies seemed almost instantly refreshed, and when we passed up and down the lines we were met with those hearty greetings that none but Saints know how to give and appreciate. All were in good spirits, and generally in good health, and full of confidence that they should reach the mountains in season to escape the severe storms. We had several excellent meetings with them while fitting them out. I have never seen more union among the Saints anywhere than is manifested in the hand-cart companies. And hundreds bear record of the truth of the words of President Young, wherein he promised them increasing strength by the way.

The last hand-cart company, under the Presidency of Elder Edward Martin, left here on the 25th of August, and the last wagon company of Saints left this day, under the Presidency of Elder John A. Hunt; the rest of the companies are well out on the Plains. I have conversed with the Captain of a party returning from California; he met all the companies, and reports them in a flourishing condition, and the feed all the way the best that he had seen it for years.

Elder E[rastus] Snow, who is now with us, reports Elder A[braham] O. Smoot’s company as far advanced as the head of Grand Island, rather heavily loaded but having excellent teams. Elder [William] Walker with ten wagons, loaded principally with the surplus luggage of the Saints, has not yet arrived here from Iowa City. When last heard from he was 70 miles from this place. Brother J[oseph] A. Young has been despatched to visit him, and inquire into his circumstances; his further course will be determined by brother Snow on his arrival at this point. It is feared he will be too late to proceed with safety.³ ...

That the Lord may greatly bless you ... is the prayer of your brother in the Gospel. CYRUS H. WHEELOCK.

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Several accounts mention the part Cyrus Wheelock played in the rescue:

Cyrus Wheelock could scarcely refrain from shedding tears, and he declared that he would willingly give his own life if that would save the lives of the emigrants. - *John Jacques, Martin company*

A man by the name of Cyrus Wheelock . . . carried some of the children across the [Sweetwater] river, even helped pull some of the handcarts by a rope fastened to his saddle. One time he had three little boys on his horse, one in front and two behind him. I was the last boy on that side of the river and tried to wade across. He told me to climb up behind the last boy behind his saddle, which I did. We crossed the river all right, then the horse leaped up the steep bank, and I slid off in the shallow water. I held on to the horse's tail and came out all right. - *Peter Howard McBride, Martin company*

Every morning and evening prayer meetings were called, at which addresses were made by the members of the rescuing and relief party, at one of which, a night or two before we left [Martin's Cove], Elder Cyrus H. Wheelock, who had just returned from a three-year mission to the British Isles, during which period he had become greatly attached to scores in our camp and company, offered a very remarkable prayer.

His heart and soul was filled with sorrow at our condition, as we had several in our camp yet that had to a certain extent lost their minds—since crossing the North Platte river, at least, they became like children and impersonal.

Raising his hands to heaven in a very impressive and appealing manner, his voice nearly stifled with emotion and grief, he prayed to the Father that if for any fault or weakness that he might have done or committed in his life and ministry, the progress of the members of our company that he loved dearer than his own life was impeded; that if through anything he had done or left undone he had caused or helped to cause, or bring about our present plight, that He would instantly remove him out of the way by death, and let the company go on without further loss, to the valleys of the mountains. It was touching and deep in its humility, and this brief digest will no doubt refresh the memories and reproduce the scene in that snowbound camp for many of our surviving comrades. - *Josiah Rogerson, Martin company*

One of the rescuers, 18-year-old Nathan Hunting, was under the direct leadership of Cyrus during the rescue. Nathan told about Elder Wheelock waking at 2:00 a.m. in a blizzard and being shown exactly where one of the stranded handcart companies was, and though Nathan's hands were "numb with cold, . . . he managed to hitch up the outfit and they started." Nathan also told of an incident on their return to Salt Lake City during a severe storm:

Bro. Wheelock knew they could not make it with the sick and weary, so he stopped and prayed, asking for help and that the course of the storm be changed. No sooner were they started again than the wind blew from their backs, cutting a path clear for them, and they went easily on into Salt Lake.

Nathan said he "never doubted the power of revelations nor the restoration after that night, [but had] no testimony before that time." Nathan served as a Bishop in the Church for nine years, with a testimony kindled by the example of Cyrus Wheelock.

Cyrus continued in faithfulness and at the end of his life was serving as a Patriarch in the Church. He wrote the words to Hymn 319, "Ye Elders of Israel." The hymn has been recorded by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The following is the first of three verses and the chorus:

Ye elders of Israel, come join now with me, And seek out the righteous where'er they may be,
In desert, on mountain, on land, or on sea, And bring them to Zion, the pure and the free.
O Babylon, O Babylon, we bid thee farewell; We're going to the mountains of Ephraim to dwell.

Sources: Olsen, Andrew D., *The Price We Paid*, 2006; Letter from Cyrus Wheelock to James A. Little, September 2, 1856, in *Millennial Star*, Oct. 25, 1856, 681-682; Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files, including "Life Timeline of Cyrus Hubbard Wheelock" by Rick Gillespie; "History of Cyrus Hibbard Wheelock" by Marian Maud Wheelock Tubbs, "Cyrus H. Wheelock" by Afton Cameron; Josiah Rogerson, "Martin's Handcart Company, 1856," *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, 24 November 1907.

¹Their travel on a steam ship took less than half the time of the sailing ships *Thornton* and *Horizon*.

²These men all served as rescuers after their return to Salt Lake City.

³William Walker did not make it through with the freight until 1857. Walker's own account is equally interesting and pertinent to the 1856 story. It will be posted in its entirety in the future at tellmystorytoo.com.