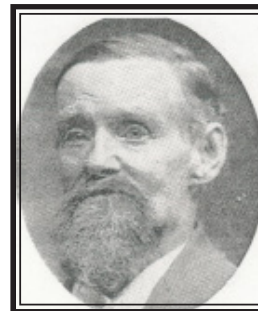


GEORGE FREDERICK HOUSLEY

Born: November 29, 1836, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottingham, England

Age: 19

Martin Handcart Company



George Housley traveled to Zion with his courageous and remarkable mother, Harriet Agnes Cook Housley (age 44). George had a brother, Charles, born in 1833, and a sister, Charlotte, born in 1835. In George's young childhood, his mother had to flee twice from her abusive husband. Relatives tried to help the family but could not afford to keep them all, so two of the children were put in a workhouse until rescued by their mother. The Parish then allowed Harriet two schillings a week for support. After some time, the father reconciled with Harriet, promising to behave better if she would come back and not rely on the Parish any longer. Harriet did return, but her husband was unable to keep his promise. The last contact he had with his family was when he abandoned young Charles on a street in the town where Harriet had gone to live with the other two children. Of this, Charles said, "So Father got shut of us all and we were all with mother and did rejoice, for truly a mother she was."¹

Missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints found Harriet and her children, and they were all converted. Charles and Charlotte were baptized March 23, 1849, at ages 15 and 13 respectively. Their mother was baptized in December of that same year, and George was baptized in 1854, at the age of 17. (Charles Housley was ordained an Elder in 1852 and served as a missionary in England for the next 9 years until his immigration to Utah in 1861. Charlotte immigrated in 1868 with her husband, George Oscroft, and their four children.) In 1856, the Martin handcart company provided the opportunity for George and his mother to travel to Utah. Even as Charles had recognized the strength of his mother in earlier years, George would later recognize the faith of his mother as a sustaining influence during this trek.

In his later years, George helped built the Second Ward church building in Hyrum, Utah, where he and his wife were long-time choir members. It was not uncommon for him to arise in a fast-day meeting and sing a hymn of praise and thanksgiving as his testimony. One day the bishop of the ward asked George to speak in church and tell about coming across the plains. George declined, as he never felt that he could be a public speaker. However, George did agree to dictate his story privately. He invited his wife's brother-in-law, George Wood, who was a lawyer, to come to his home and record it in shorthand:²

In the year of 1856, I with mother left our native land England, with about 600 others for our America "The Zion of Our God," on the good ship "Horizon," spending five weeks in our voyage to Boston. Where we took passage on a steamboat to Iowa. Awaiting there for three weeks for our hand-carts to be made that were to carry our "all" across the vast stretch of the plains to Utah. Each family supplying themselves with the necessary food for their journey if they were well. At Iowa City, where we were camped, a gentleman told me that we would starve to death if we went there at this season. One of our people and his family decided to stay over. I became tempted to do likewise and upon telling my mother that we better stay she became much depressed in spirit and told me to wait a little while. During the time she prayed to Our Heavenly Father for guidance. One fellow traveler, after deciding to stay, sent out one day in the woods to hunt for game, and while away was seized with fever and ague. He hurried home and upon entering the tent where mother I were awaiting him, he laid upon the cot and commenced singing in poetry and rhyme, telling mother to take me with her to the valley and that we should get through alright. Mother told me she had made it a matter of prayer and by this means her prayers were answered. I told her then that we would go to the valley at all hazards because I was satisfied all would be well.

Upon the company starting we were in line with our cart and ready. All went well as we joyously sang, "For some must push and some must pull as we go marching up the hill. As merrily on the way we go, until we reach the valley, Oh!" As days wore on, our spirits lagged as we became weary. Some of our people became sick and were

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compelled to ride, thus compelling others to be more heavily loaded. Provisions commencing to get scarce as the days wore on, necessitating our captain to put us on shorter rations. Many dying by the wayside where they were buried each night where we camped and their graves were left unmarked except by our tears. At this season and at this part of the plains it commenced getting cold, and [we] were again placed on shorter rations of 4 ounces of flour to each person per day. We traveled to the Sweet Waters River where we camped, being so weak and exhausted that it was almost impossible to move. Many of our people while there died of starvation while others froze to death by the wayside. . . . Receivers were sent out from the Valley to assist us in and could not find us, thinking we were lost on the plains the rescue party concluded to return to the Valley. But one of their number stated that he would go to the States but what he would find us. About noon a horseman was seen coming into our camp, and he looked like an angel to us poor starving emigrants who had eaten nothing but flour for three days. With words of encouragement he entreated us to make another start. But, many, while their will was good, their strength failed them and they dropped and froze to death by the way. The relief party returned and met us and assisted us with some provisions. But scores of our brethren and sisters died and were left in unmarked graves by the wayside. At this time I was permitted to sleep in a tent with two of my companions. Each of them dying by my side where I slep[t] by them ‘till morning when they were taken away and buried. . . . [In a 1906 letter to the Handcart Veterans Association, George reported that he was in Captain James Stone’s tent group.] At the time of my companions death[s] I became [so] despondent through weakness that I longed for death and tried to hide myself from the company that I might die, but one of the brethren returning back for something, found me sitting behind the rock where I had hoped to die. He took me along with him for a day before we caught up with the company. I was permitted to sleep in a wagon that night, where I slep[t] with a dead man all night.

The next day we were permitted to see and enter into the Valley (November 29, my birthday). Although I was too weak to walk, my feet being much swollen I wrapped them in my mother’s shaw[l] until we were taken care of by kind friends who were awaiting us. But brother Slack, our kind friend, would not allow me only a limited amount of bread as he was afraid it would kill me. But after they had gone to meeting I finished up the whole pot pie which had been prepared for the family, and I am alive yet and I have been hungry to this day.

In later years, George again met this determined rescuer, who found George behind the rock, hoping to die, and whose name he did not know previously. More than one of George’s grandchildren wrote of the occasion. The following is from granddaughter Emma Housley Auger:

One time while visiting in Mapleton at his son Ben’s home, grandfather George F. Housley and my grandfather Marshall Franklin Allen were reminiscing over old times. Grandfather Allen told of one time when “Brother Brigham” had called him to accompany several other young men in going out to meet the Handcart Company, to take them some provisions and assist them into the Valley. As he knelt in prayer the evening before going, He said that he told the Lord that it was a foolish thing to do, going out in such weather and with no roads to follow. But while he was still in the act of prayer, it was made known to him that he should go. It was also made known that he would be able to save many of their lives. After searching many hours the rescue party became discouraged. Thinking the Handcart Company had been lost on the plains, they decided to return to the Valley. [But] Grandfather said, “I told them I would go ‘till I reached the States but what I would find them.” About noon they found a group of handcarts with their poor, starving people. Thinking there may be more farther back, he rode on for some distance. He saw a dark spot among some rocks. Upon investigating, he found it to be a young man. He wrapped his blankets around him and helped him onto his horse.

Then Grandfather Housley spoke up and said: “The horse had one white leg, a white strip in its forehead and the rest of it was coal black.” Grandfather Allen: “Yes.” Grandfather Housley said, “It was a bright plaid blanket.” Grandfather Allen asked, “How did you know?” Grandfather Housley said, “Because I was the one you found.” Then he stood up and said, “and I want to tell you, if it hadn’t been for the prayers of my mother and the faith of the Saints, I would not have lived ‘till you found me and I never would have reached the valley.” (See also “Marshall Frank Allen” biography in rescuer section of *Tell My Story, Too*.)

George was always a hard-working man. He made two return trips on the pioneer trail to bring immigrants to Utah. He worked as an Indian Scout, war veteran, mail carrier, salesman, logger, miller, farmer and freighter. George was known for his compassion and charity and often waited on the sick in his community, whether it was in the middle of the night, mid-winter or during an epidemic. Emma H. Auger wrote:

“He would always go but would usually say ‘I don’t see why they always call on me. I’m not going to go. I’ll not go another time.’ But all the time he was dressing and putting on his coat and boots and hurrying off to do whatever was needed for his sick neighbors. Among the pioneer remedies he would use a warm baked potato to bind on the throat. He also spent a lot of time in the evenings going up to Gregory’s and reading the paper to Mr. Gregory. They were an aged couple and Brother Gregory was blind. George liked to carry a few raisins in his pocket to give to his little children when he came home.”

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At one time George had a small café in Logan called “The Little Broom Hotel.” However, he gave away so many meals that he “lost out” and had to sell this business. George’s kind nature was also shown at home. When differences arose between George and his wife, Maria, “he would just put on his hat and walk a block or so and return, open the door, and throw his hat in—would laugh and say, ‘Please, may I come in?’ ” Maria passed away in March 1896, after a lingering illness of more than twenty years.

In November 1896, George married a widow from Hyrum by the name of Mary Ann Buckley Baron. She was thirty-six years old and the mother of ten children. Three of these had died and those still living were between the ages of two-and-a-half and twenty years. Three children were born to George and Mary Ann: one boy and two girls. Emma H. Auger wrote:

Mary Ann was a good cook and they did a lot of entertaining on special occasions such as having dinners for birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Just as always, both he and his good wife were continually waiting on the sick, many of the sick, lame, and crippled were taken into their home and cared for. Some of them were nursed back to health, others passed away, but they never expected pay. . . .

George was a good entertainer, both of the old and the young. He would gather the children around him and maybe one or two on his knee while he sang songs, rhymes and ditties to them such as “Oh Susannah,” “Yankee Doodle,” and many others. He would also play tunes by flipping his fingers against his teeth. The children would sit spell bound and as soon as he would stop they would say, “Grandpa do that again.”

He was a small man, his average weight being about 110 pounds. He had a sandy complexion, blue eyes and he wore a beard. He was quick both in speech and action. He stood erect being but very little bent in his later years.

He was the father of fifteen children; and he had ninety-four grandchildren at the time of his death. His funeral was held in the Second Ward Church House. One of the speakers spoke of the good name he had left us and admonished the grandchildren to work hard to keep it that way. He also told us that it was up to us to take the name back to him as pure and undefiled as he had left it to us.

George worked hard to support his mother when he first came to Utah. They lived and worked in Draper before George moved to Cache County. Harriet remarried and was sealed to Benjamin Green in 1862.³ Charles Housley and Charlotte Housley (Oscroft) (Whetman) also chose to be sealed to Benjamin while he was still living (1892). Harriet died in Draper, Utah, in 1879, having faithfully seen her children and children’s children in Zion.

¹George F. Housley told his children that “the last time he and his mother saw his father was when their ship was pulling out of the harbor at Liverpool. They saw him take a white handkerchief, hold it against his face, and sob into it.” George’s father, Charles Douben Housley, died Aug. 8, 1857, in England.

²The biography was then typed by George’s granddaughter, Emma Housley Auger, as well as other unnamed transcribers. The transcript was read at a family reunion while George was still alive.

³Perpetual Emigrating Fund records show that Benjamin Green had paid for Harriet’s emigration in advance. (Church History Library, CR-376-1-R3 Fd 2 Scan 44, Sept. 1855)

Sources: “Narration of Mr. Geo. Housley (written on Northern States Mission, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, German E. Ellsworth, President, Chicago, Illinois stationery),” original document in Special Collections, HBLL, BYU, Provo, Utah (now online at <http://net.lib.byu.edu/imaging/into/latepc/41gfhifs.html>); letter from Donna Olsen, April 12, 2004, citing interview with Marilyn Housley Hill; email, Price and Betty Davenport, 2008; “The Story of Two Grandfathers” by Clarissa Housley Talbot; interview by Jolene Allphin with Elder Clair Layton, handcart missionary in Wyoming (Elder Layton’s mother was present at the Housley/Allen grandfather’s meeting); email interviews with descendant Fran Jensen, 2012; interviews with and emails from Sister NaDene Nordick, a granddaughter of George Housley and Frank Allen, 2016. (Elder and Sister Nordick have served several missions tirelessly at three different handcart sites in Wyoming, and currently (2017) in Argentina); “George Housley’s History” by Emma Housley Auger, granddaughter of George Frederick Housley, courtesy Fran Jensen, Sandy, Utah. (This history cites Charles Cook Housley’s diary, among other primary sources.)