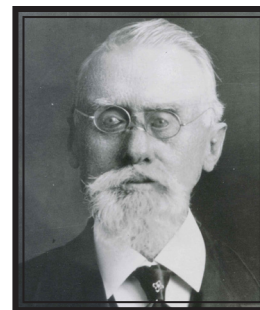


HIRAM THERON SPENCER

Born: 13 November 1835 West Stock Bridge, Massachusetts

Age: 21

Rescuer



Hiram T. Spencer knew a lot of heartache in his young life. His mother died in 1838, when Hiram was only three years old. His father moved the family of eight children to Nauvoo shortly thereafter. Hiram's narrative of the family's expulsion from Nauvoo, his father's subsequent death when Hiram was only ten years old, and some early experiences in the Salt Lake Valley, gives some indication of his expertise and preparation to participate in the rescue of 1856:

Father bought a place near the public square of Nauvoo, and here he built a house and some barns, and then he bought a farm eight miles from there where we lived during the summer and when winter came we moved back into the city. Father worked on the Nauvoo temple while we lived in Nauvoo. He was in charge of rock hauling. I was well acquainted with Joseph Smith, the prophet, because he visited at our home quite often, and whenever there were parades or any public entertainments on the square, he used to sit on our porch while they were performing. . . . We lived in Nauvoo until the spring of 1846 when we were driven out by the mob. We had to leave all of our possessions except what we could put in our wagon. . . . and we had to cross the Mississippi on ice.

Father had two wagons for his family and children, and Uncle Daniel Spencer¹ with his wife and three children had two wagons but Uncle Orson Spencer who was away on a mission to England, had a family of six and they only had one 3-inch wagon and only one horse . . . to pull it. There was Orson's wife, Aunt Catherine Curtis and her children and Aunt Catherine was so sick she had to be carried from her bed in the house and placed in the wagon. The horse that was hitched to this wagon was balky and refused to go unless someone rode him. They didn't have a boy old enough, so I had to ride him every day, keeping right behind my father's wagon. The road through the county then was very bad and the wagon would get stuck. . . . When we made camp at night the men would cut limbs from the trees and lay them down on the ground to hold the beds up out of the mud and water. . . .

My uncle Orson's wife died after we had traveled for about three weeks and they had to take her back to Nauvoo for burial. . . . While they were in Nauvoo they got some supplies and father bought some more cattle and then took the ones he had left before, he had about fifty head altogether, and started back to join the saints. The cattle he bought was pay he received for some of his land he had sold. They got word that the mob was following them to get their cattle. The ice over the river was broken now, and they were afraid if they tried to cross the ferry they would meet the mob, so they went up the river about fifteen miles and there they could cross the river on another ferry. They had to travel day and night to keep away from the mob and this was very tiring, and because of the cold weather and being in the open so much, father caught a severe cold and died on the trail, just after his companions had taken him down from his horse, and laid him at the side of the road. His body was brought to Mount Pisgah or Garden Grove. We had only been on our way about one month when my sister, Daniel Spencer's wife, Mary, died. During her illness she had a bed of limbs off the trees, this helped to keep her out of the mud and water, and during this time because of a severe rain storm we had to hold two umbrellas over her to shelter her from the rain. She was thirty years old at the time of her death. . . .

In the fall of 1846 while living at Winter Quarters, uncle Daniel Spencer married my stepmother, Emily Thompson Spencer. We built log houses to live in during the winter. Part of the men went back to Missouri to work, splitting rails and earning provisions for the people in the fort. It was such a hard winter that lots of the cattle and horses died because of the lack of feed. The next spring when the people could get cattle and horses enough to pull their wagons they started westward. A great many could not come because they did not have the means to buy cattle, so they had to lay over at Winter Quarters that season. My uncle and his family and also our family were able to start west. President Brigham Young and some of the saints had gone on ahead of the rest of us. Some other boys and myself had to drive loose cattle, walking most of the time behind the train of wagons. . . .

[After arriving in Salt Lake] that fall they killed the fattest of the cattle that could be spared and the hides were put up on poles to help shelter the other cattle. They took an estimate of the flour and other provisions they had after it had all been gathered in, in the fall, and they found there was only about one and a half pound allotted to each person per day. These provisions ran short before more could be secured in the spring and all of the hides that had been put up to shelter the cattle were taken down and scraped off and cooked and eaten before the next spring.

In the fall of 1848, Hiram had a serious accident that cracked his skull, leaving some of his brain exposed, broke his jaw in four places, and knocked his eyes out of their sockets. A doctor saw

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him, but said it was not possible for Hiram to live. Brigham Young was nearby. He told the doctor to attend to the boy, that he was going to live longer than the doctor.

[The doctor] dressed my wounds and then President Young, uncle Daniel and Brother Rich administered to me. [In President Young's] prayer he said that I should live and have my eyesight and my senses and that I should be able to do a great work. I was unconscious at the time and didn't know what was done or said, but my sisters told me about it after I got better. I was laid up six or eight months. . . .

In the winter of 1856 the handcart company got snowed in near Devil's Gate on the Sweet Water. I left here [Salt Lake City] with others taking four horse teams and wagons loaded with provisions down to meet the saints. I drove one of the wagons that met them on the three crossing on the Sweet Water [on November 12]. The people were so worn out and frozen that they were like dumb animals and after the fire was made we had to watch them so they would not walk right into the fires. We had to go back along the trail four or five miles to get those that weren't strong enough to walk into camp. They were but frozen and starving. We traveled with them until they reached the valley.

When we started home from Devil's Gate the Indians stole 35 head of our horses and mules. Gib Spencer and a man from San Pete and myself followed them all day going north from Devil's Gate.² When we came to a creek we were close enough to them that the water hadn't cleared since they rode through. Just over the creek the tracks split and went to the right and left. We decided to go and see what would happen, so we went down the canyon to Powder River and then turned and started back. We were eighty or ninety miles from camp and it was dark and we didn't know the way. It was near midnight and we thought it best to stop for the night. We staked the horses and then laid down with our heads to the direction we thought we ought to travel next morning. I was nearest the right direction. There were only two saddles for our three horses and I had to ride bareback all but about ten miles back to camp. The next spring the Indian agent made the Indians give nearly all of the horses back to Porter Rockwell for us. We learned then that the Indians had separated at the creek so as to set a trap for us, and had we gone back that night it would have meant trouble because they were waiting for us.³

Hiram married Mary Barr Young four months after returning from the rescue. He was present in Cottonwood Canyon at the 24th of July celebration of 1857 when Brigham Young was notified "that two thousand government soldiers were marching toward Utah." The following excerpts contain a few of many things Hiram recorded about his participation in the Utah War.

President Young called the people together and told them not to worry or get excited because they would never be driven away from their homes again. The next day we all came back to Salt Lake and that night Brother Young called Robert Burton and Squire Wells to his office and told them to get fifty men and to go back to meet the soldiers and watch them until they found out what the soldiers intended to do. It took two days for them to get their men and for them to fix up their provisions. I was one of the men that went. We met the soldiers as they were making their last crossing over the Platte River. On the head wagon of each train there was a pole fixed forming a cross and from this hung a rope, below was written: "Hang Brigham Young, Heber Kimball and all of the leaders." The next day Robert Burton wrote a note and left it in the road for the soldiers. It said: "Take down those poles or they will be taken down." And the soldiers that day took down all of those poles from their wagons. We used to go into the soldier's camp and pass ourselves off as the men that guarded their horses and we would get in line and walk past the tables and would get something to eat, then we would go over by the officers' camp and hear what their plans were for the next day. We would take this word back to Robert Burton and he would write it on paper and leave it fastened to a stick in the road for the soldiers to get. They wondered how we knew their plans but they could never tell.

In 1852, Hiram farmed an area known as "Spencer Springs." The first school in this area that was eventually named "Magna" was taught in Hiram's home by his daughter, Emma.

¹ "Daniel Spencer had earlier served as mayor of Nauvoo. After the exodus from Nauvoo in 1846, he served as a bishop of one of the wards in Winter Quarters. During the journey to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, he had been president of two companies of 50." (Olsen, *The Price We Paid*, 55.) In 1856, Elder Daniel Spencer was returning from a four-year mission in England, when he was appointed to be in charge of the emigration in Iowa City.

² This is a reference to Gilbert Henry Van Schoonhoven, who was an assistant captain to John Hunt's wagon company. He traveled under the name of Gilbert Spencer. He was a foster son of Daniel Spencer. (Anderson, research; see also Jones, *40 Years Among the Indians*, 45.)

³ When Hiram Spencer met the Martin company at Three Crossings, they were already three days travel west of Devil's Gate, so it is unclear where this horse-theft event actually happened. The Three Crossings area is also sometimes referred to as Rocky Ridges, but is not "The" Rocky Ridge nearly 50 miles west of Three Crossings.