

JAMES LINFORTH

Born: September 1, 1827

Age: 28

Hunt Wagon Company

James Linforth was traveling to Utah in the Hunt wagon train with his wife Mary (28), and their two children, Frank (age 3), Edward (2). James's younger brother, Alfred (17), also traveled with them to Utah.

We learn some interesting things about their trek, as well as the Martin handcart company, from the letters James wrote. From Florence, Nebraska, September 2, 1856, he noted:

“On the 25th, all the handcart emigrants in camp, and last of the season, left under charge of Elder Edward E. Martin, when they got to the foot of the hill on which they had been camped, they made the air ring with a good hurrah! three times repeated. On the first or second night out, sister Jaques was confined, and I believe has done well; and after a day or two detention, gone right on.

“On Sunday, the 31st, the last wagon company moved off to near Cutler's Park, and I had my first lesson in ‘geeing and hawing,’ in driving one of the teams. The thing was done without mishap, and with considerable ease, which I attribute more to the tractibility of the animals than any skill in myself. Near Cutler's Park is a delightful spot, and peculiarly refreshing after the dust around the camp at Florence. I may tell you that I have drawn water, chopped wood, and done sundry other things incident to camp life, and all with as good grace as I could. I hope to be sufficiently familiar with all these things to do away with my present awkwardness.

“I am at present at Florence, having returned yesterday from camp to attend on Brother Richards, and assist in the closing up of accounts. The rest of my family have gone on from their camp ground ... and I expect to overtake them with Brother Richards in a few days.” Very sincerely, J. Linforth

When the company was five miles west of Fort Laramie, about October 11, 1856, James sent a letter to Church leaders back in Europe, reporting some of the events that had occurred in the company. This was barely a week before the severe winter storms descended on the companies and left them all stranded and awaiting rescue. James reported that their company had passed through Indian territory without problem and they were “in good health and spirits, with one exception—brother W[illiam] Paul was in delicate health.” William was Mary Linforth's brother.

James also reported some of the deaths that had occurred in their company so far—Elias Davis (44), Susannah Bruner (64), Marinda Pay (11 weeks), John Turner (42), Esther Walters (39) and John Wiseman (5). He noted that all of these deaths were from “natural causes except Sister Walters’, which was occasioned by a stampede of the rear teams. She was knocked down by the oxen and kicked so that death was almost instantaneous.”

In the letter James wrote he also told about the death of Thomas Tennant from Captain Hodgett's company. Brother Tennant died on October 4th and was buried in the cemetery at Fort Laramie. He said, “His death will be much regretted in England, as it is here, for all must have wished that a man who had been so liberal with his fortune, in gathering the Saints, should have lived to reach the Valley in safety, and to enjoy all the blessings of which he was worthy.”

James tells of meeting a company of emigrants returning from Utah as they were crossing the Platte River. They said they were leaving because of lack of work and no provisions. James ended his letter with these words, “The Mission in Europe and the Elders in charge are continually prayed for by the Saints of this company, who do not forget their brethren yet left in the old countries, but wish they were on the way to Zion. ... I remain, yours faithfully, J. Linforth”

James and his family suffered but all of his family made it safely to Zion. They later moved to California. Alfred Linforth married Eliza Burrows and they had one daughter, Eliza Georgiana. Alfred died in San Francisco, California, on an unknown date. His daughter died there in 1877.

Sources: Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; Stella Jaques Bell, *Life History and Writings of John Jaques*, 2nd edition, 1978; familysearch.org.