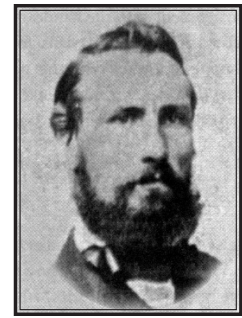


JOHN CHISLETT



Born: 1832 England

Age: 24

Willie Handcart Company

John Chislett and his fiancée, Mary Ann Stockdale (18), both immigrated with the Willie handcart company in 1856. It appears that John and Mary Ann were postponing marriage until they could be sealed in eternal marriage in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City.

John was, in a sense, like Captain Willie and the other returning missionaries, except that he had been called on his mission from his homeland of England. He served as a home missionary in the British Mission for several years and was then called to the Swiss-Italian Mission where he served for at least two years before his emigration. During his missionary service, John was the conference president of both the Kent Conference in England and the Geneva Conference in Switzerland. The Geneva Conference also covered parts of Germany and France. We learn something of John's missionary labors under the presidency of Daniel Tyler from a letter that Elder Tyler wrote to the European Mission President, Franklin D. Richards, dated February 2, 1856. The letter itemizes the successes and spiritual gifts manifested in the missionary labors, as well as the imprisonment and persecutions suffered in this mission by all of the Elders. Following are some excerpts from this letter:

The foreign Elders having all left the Swiss Mission, except Elder John Chislett and myself, led many to believe that 'Mormonism' so called would soon die a natural death; but in this they were mistaken. No sooner had the foreign Elders departed than their mantel fell upon the native ones and they went forth preaching in every place where they could get a hearing; the Lord confirming and witnessing His approval of their labors with signs following. The Holy Ghost was mightily poured out upon the Elders to their own astonishment, and it fell upon whole households even before they were baptized. One of the Elders in giving an account of his labors and of how the Spirit fell upon him and a few families who had assembled to hear him ... said: "The Holy Ghost fell on us, even as on the day of Pentecost, and those who knew me from childhood were astonished at the knowledge which the Lord had given me."

After this meeting some five or six were added to the Church by baptism. Several cases of healing occurred, both in and out of the Church. Of the latter, one was of a woman who had been confined for some years to her bed. So sudden was she healed that on the following day after Elder (Hug?) administered to her, she walked four miles and a half to receive the ordinances of the Gospel.

As a natural consequence the native Elders and Saints having shared in the blessings of their departed brethren, have had to share also in their sufferings, being called before magistrates, and having fines to pay for entertaining the servants of God. But in all these things they rejoiced, hoping to repay, through faithfulness to the end, to enjoy the society of those whom they so dearly loved. While upon this subject, I will observe that the authorities generally are more liberal in their feelings than many of the people whom they represent. ... Although there has been much opposition and the Elders have had to flee from place to place to evade mobs, yet the authorities have never interfered further than to forbid them entering certain towns and threatening fines on those who entertained them. ... The last persecution of any magnitude that has come under my notice is that of Elder John Chislett, which took place in the Canton of Neufchatel, on the 18th of October last. He was ordered by a police officer to leave the village of (Soals?) which he had just entered. Brother Chislett obeyed the mandate and was pursued by a mob out of the place. He was knocked down several times, jumped upon, rolled in the mud, thrown into a ditch, dragged through a hedge and otherwise roughly handled. He lost his hat, umbrella and walking stick, and his clothing nearly ruined with rents and mud. In the midst of it he thought upon the persecution of brother Joseph [Smith] and it gave him strength and reconciled him to his fate. Elder Chislett being in a land of strangers went before the chief of police in Neufchatel who sympathized deeply with him in his unfortunate condition, and directed him to the hospital for the night and proffered to investigate his case if he would present it in writing. Elder Chislett was very kindly treated by the Sisters of Charity who gave him a cap and loaned him a coat to wear to Geneva. Before leaving the hospital next morning, Elder Chislett addressed a note of thanks to the authorities who had treated him so kindly, but chose to leave his persecutors in the hands of God.

(John Chislett - Page 2)

John was born in Trowbridge, Wiltshire, England, to James and Lucy Ridley Chislett on November 23, 1831. He was baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on March 17, 1849, by Samuel Ferris.

In March 1856, John led a small company of German and Swiss emigrants to Liverpool. John was finally on his way to the Salt Lake Valley. He served as captain of the guard aboard the ship *Thornton*, and in Iowa City, he was appointed to be a sub-captain over 100 of the 500 Saints in the Willie handcart company. John had responsibility for their five tent groups and at least one provision wagon. It is unclear if John continued in this same capacity after reaching Florence, Nebraska, when 100 people dropped out of the company, although he certainly assisted with the Willie company provision wagons and fulfilled other duties as assigned.

John was sealed to his sweetheart, Mary Ann, two weeks after arriving in the valley. He eventually worked in merchandising and became quite well-to-do in Utah. John and Mary Ann left their faith and Utah in 1880 and moved with their seven children to St. Paul, Minnesota. John continued his business and was a successful merchant. In 1881, Chislett & Sons was listed in the *St. Paul Daily Globe* as one of the “Money Kings” of St. Paul. In 1888, John was listed in this same publication as one of the wealthiest people and businesses in St. Paul. Shortly after this, the family moved to Chicago, Illinois, where John died in 1914. His obituary in the *Chicago Tribune* read: “DIED: John Chislett, Oct. 26, 1914, at his residence, 6525 Greenwood Ave. Funeral and burial private. Kindly omit flowers.”

John’s children were successful in the arts and in their educational pursuits. They were respected members of their communities, particularly Dr. Howard Ray Chislett, who was President of the Hahnemann Medical College in Chicago, clinical professor of surgery, and member of the American College of Surgeons. Some of the Chislett children never married, and those who did had no children. There is no known posterity of John and Mary Ann Stockdale Chislett.

In 1873, a Willie handcart company narrative attributed to John Chislett was published in the anti-Mormon book, *Rocky Mountain Saints*, by Thomas B.H. Stenhouse. (Stenhouse was the President of the Swiss and Italian mission in 1854 when John first went there as a missionary.) Due to the number of probable as well as verifiable errors in the narrative, its reliability for Willie handcart company history is in question.¹ It is also the opinion of Jolene Allphin that John Chislett was not the actual author of the narrative, although he did allow his name to be attached to it. There is ongoing research and analysis on this subject.

Sources: “John and Mary Ann Chislett Family Chronology,” research notes by Jenny L. Lund, April 8, 2011, used by permission; letter from Daniel Tyler to President Franklin D. Richards, Feb. 2, 1856, in Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files, typescript submission by Emily T. Cramer, Ucon, Idaho, (cites *Millennial Star*, Vol. 18, pages 154-56); familysearch.org; “John Chislett and the Chislett Narrative,” by Jolene S. Allphin, unpublished research paper, April 2012.

¹ After the publication of the “Chislett Narrative” in *Rocky Mountain Saints*, the next book to utilize the narrative for history of the Willie Handcart Company was Hubert Howe Bancroft’s *History of Utah, 1540-1886*, San Francisco, The History Company, 1889. Of the handcart immigration, Bancroft wrote his history based entirely on the narrative, but he also questioned its reliability. Bancroft wrote: “Stenhouse and others delight in making out something horrible in the hand-cart business, and the leaders no better than the vilest criminals. It was an unfortunate affair, in which the leaders suffered with the rest, but nothing further than this can be justly charged to any one.”