

THOMAS JOB FRANKLIN

Born: 1823 England

Age: 33

Martin Handcart Company

Thomas Franklin was traveling with his daughter, Lydia (14) and his wife, Jane (34). Lydia wrote a little about the family's experiences and indicated that her father drove an "ambulance" wagon for those too sick to walk:

"My Mother was sick with fever and ague and she had a bed springs and Mattress placed on 2 trunks in the ambulance. My Father drove 2 span of mules to haul . . . the sick and aged. . . . We had to travel as far as we could every day as we were very late in the season to make it through before winter set in. I was a healthy young girl. I was very troubled for fear of losing my Mother. I walked from Iowa City to Council Bluffs, crossed the Missoura river there and that was the last house of civilization."

By mid-October, the late companies had reduced their food rations and left extra warm clothing and bedding on the plains. From the writings of John Bond of the Hodgett company, we learn of the sacrifice of Thomas at the last North Platte River crossing on October 19:

"The road was fair, though rolling . . . the wind blowing badly, very cold indeed and had every appearance of a snow storm coming which would entail on the tireless, struggling hand cart Saints . . . In the early morn, the Captain [called] to get up and yoke the cattle for a drive to the last crossing of the North Platte River, a distance of some twenty-seven miles. This took two days driving, as the cattle were commencing to get weak and in some cases, lying down by the wayside. October 18 or 19 we arrived at the river the second day and camped for noon on the west side. I was detailed to herd the oxen while my sisters made the food ready. It started raining while I was herding and then the rain turned to sleet, growing steadily colder just as the courageous hand cart Saints arrived on the opposite side of the river. Daniel Tyler gave orders for the Saints of all ages who could stand the stream, to cross. The water was waist deep and running very swiftly, taking even the strong ones off their feet, making them look quite wretched . . . the air was piercing cold and the sleet still fell thick and fast as the Saints pulled the carts into the river. The weaker ones [fell] into the river as they [were] carried off their feet. But with manly courage, John Laty, T. J. Franklin, George H. Dove, George Haines [Ainge] and others [carried] the weak ones to the opposite side of the river and set them down, giving them every care as all were brought from the icy river.

"They made several trips, carrying the aged and weak on their backs, exhausting themselves, which is a kind heartedness worthy of commendation to be handed down to future generations. We camped on the opposite bank of the river for a short time to eat the scanty meal. Their clothing was like icicles."

These four men, two of whom were teenagers, did not die from this heroic deed. Other heroes of that cold October day did succumb to the cold and privations, many leaving wives and children to travel on to Zion, bereft of their fathers. Reports of from 13 to 18 people were buried in a mass grave after this cold crossing. Surely, Thomas Franklin saved many more from this fate.

After this last crossing of the North Platte River, the companies were stranded for several days. Lydia Franklin wrote about the day the first rescuers found them, and the rest of their journey:

"I was sitting front of the ambulance [wagon] and looking up the road that we would have to travel[.] I saw two or three men with packed horses or burros coming toward us. I called Captain Martin to bring his glasses to see who they were. They seemed to me to be white men. They proved to be a party looking for us. They had left their wagon and had started to find us. They had principally clothing for us but there was wagons loaded with pr[o]visions and everything needed for to help the poor emigrants. When the Captain told the People that help was coming to relieve us and to help us through the Mountains and we would travel on as soon as possible and meet the parties and would reach our journey's end, it was a sight to behold to see the old and young go right to those men and almost try to pull them off their horses and caress them for their goodness in trying to help them to the land of promise.

We had to travel over . . . mountains before reaching Salt Lake City. . . . All that could was ordered to walk as it was hard pulling for the animals. They built fires here and there to warm by. It was Sunday Noon just as the Latter Day Saints were coming out of their church and Brigham Young had told the people to meet us and all that could possibly help us to take those poor souls to their homes and help them, give them food and clothes and shelter till they could help themselves."

Sources: *Handcarts West in '56* by John Bond, and Lydia Franklin's autobiography are both available online at Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website.