

## WILLIAM “BURT” SIMMONS



Born: April 2, 1799 Westmoreland, Cheshire, New Hampshire

Age: 57

Rescue Party

Mary Taylor Upton (Simmons)

William Burton Simmons always had the fond hope that he would be among the chosen to go back and inhabit Missouri as it had been prophesied. He was present and heard the prophet Joseph Smith say that this people would also walk the streets of “Nauvoo the Beautiful” again in peace and safety. Burt had the personal conviction that he would return to those beautiful lands and he prepared himself both spiritually and materially, hoping the great gathering event would come in his lifetime. Burt set aside funds, a new stout carriage, and the best of harnesses, horses and ample provisions. He built a special shed in which to store his carriage and provisions from the elements. He would check his “Back to Missouri Equipment” on occasion to make sure that it was in the best of order. He would put his carriage in a stream of water so that the spokes in the wheels would tighten. He would putter, re-paint and repair; and do what was necessary to keep everything in top condition for the expected and anticipated journey. When his old wagon wore out, Burt would use the stored wagon or provisions and buy new equipment for storage. Always the newest and best were stored and he kept rotating these things for years. “Always the best for Missouri” was his oft-repeated slogan. The same was true for his horses. He always kept the best of animals in good shape so that they could make a hurried trip. He always kept them well shod, grained and groomed, and in the best condition.

Some folks gossiped and made jokes about Brother Simmons’s team and stored provisions. When asked if he was doing it all for naught, he always replied, “I heard the Prophet’s voice and I am ready!” Sometimes, on very special occasions, Burt would use his prized animals and wagon, but for the most part, they simply stood at ready.

In the Fall of 1856, Brigham Young issued the call for rescuers for the late companies still on the Plains. One of Burt’s grandchildren wrote: “To Grandpa Simmons, the plight of the handcart companies held special concern. He had experienced the open plains which provided no protection from the bitter cold and driving snow. His cattle had frozen to death as he and his family had huddled together in blankets lying in the bed of their wagon with the scant protection of canvas between them and the storm as they awaited the expiration of the ferocious wind and snow. . . . In response to the promptings of the Spirit, and knowing he was prepared and had the ability and capacity for service, he volunteered at Brigham Young’s call and was one of the first wagons to leave, getting underway before ‘the Salt Lake Boys.’”<sup>1</sup>

Burt met a young woman by the name of Mary Taylor Upton with the Martin company. (See her story in Martin section of *Tell My Story, Too*.) Her husband and parents had died along the trail. She and Burt were married March 15, 1857. They became the parents of five children before Burt’s death in 1866. Mary told her children that “William Burt Simmons had a wonderful farm. He came into the valley in 1850. . . . He had respiratory problems because of his sacrifice he made in the rescue party. He had his ‘Going Back to Missouri’ Team and was able to say ‘I’m ready.’”

<sup>1</sup>The core of the rescue parties was drawn from the local militia. In 1856, the militia seemed to be organized in two general large divisions, the one commonly known as the “Salt Lake Boys” and the other as the “Valley Boys” to which William Burt belonged. The Salt Lake Boys were looked down on by the Valley Boys since they were generally thought to lack the strength, natural ability and constitution of the Valley Boys. It may have been a friendly jealousy of an assumed special status of the Salt Lake Boys, since many of them were sons of Church leaders.

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files for Mary Taylor Upton Simmons Robinson; familysearch.org; files of Jolene Allphin: “The Handcart Rescue,” chapter 5, unknown book, 95-111; “A Sketch of the Life of Mary Taylor,” by Cleo Jones Johnson; “My Grandmother Robinson” by Dora Simmons Rasmussen; “Interview with Bro. Fretwell (Elaine Lewis’s Father) March 1994,” transcript by unknown author; Bangerter, Howard and Lissa, “A Rescuer and his Rescued Bride,” fireside presentation;