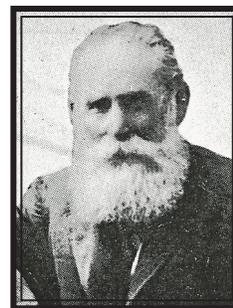
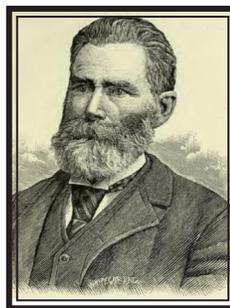


DANIEL WEBSTER JONES

Born: 26 August 1830 in Booneslick, Howard, Missouri

Age: 26

Rescuer



In 1847, Dan enlisted with the Missouri volunteers in the War with Mexico. He remained in Mexico until 1850, then joined a group of frontiersmen in driving 8,000 sheep through the Salt Lake Valley to Upper California. After a near fatal accident on the Green River, he was left by his companions in a Mormon settlement near Utah Lake. After being nursed back to health, he decided to stay and see what Mormonism was all about. He was baptized on January 27, 1851. Dan wrote:

I had been left an orphan at eleven years of age. I then left all my friends and relatives and went out into the world alone, probably as willful a boy as ever lived. No one could control me by any other means than kindness, and this I did not often meet with. The result was, I found myself among rough people ... the old Texas Rangers and many of the Missouri planters being the leading characters. I often wonder how I got through, and I can only account for it in one way: I did not like this way of living. I felt condemned, and often asked God in all earnestness to help me see what was right, and how to serve Him; telling Him I wanted to know positively, and not be deceived. I felt that the people of this age ought to have prophets to guide them, the same as of old, and that it was not a “square thing” to leave them without anything but the Bible, for that could not be sufficient or the people would not dispute so much over it. These feelings grew upon me, and I began to be more careful of my conduct.

Dan Jones was present at October Conference in 1856 and volunteered to go on the rescue. Little did he know at the time that his efforts would keep him from home for the entire winter:

A number of elders had arrived from the old country reporting that the handcart people were on the road, but they did not know how far they had advanced. In those days there was no telegraph, and mails from the east only reached Utah monthly, they being many times delayed by high water, Indians or other causes. Brother Young called upon every one present to lend a hand in fitting up [rescue] teams ... Brother Grant met me and said: “I want you on this trip.” ... I answered, “all right.” ... I was given the important position of chief cook for the head mess. I was quite proud of my office, for it made me the most sought after and popular man in camp. ... We traveled hard, never taking time to stop for dinner. ... There was some expectation of meeting the first train, Brother Willie’s, on or about Green river. We began to feel great anxiety about the emigrants as the weather was now cold and stormy, and we, strong men with good outfits, found the nights severe. What must be the condition of those we were to meet? Many old men and women, little children, mothers with nursing babes, crossing the plains pulling handcarts. Our hearts began to ache when we reached Green river and yet no word of them. ... At the South Pass, we encountered a severe snowstorm. After crossing the [Continental] divide we turned down into a sheltered place on the Sweetwater. While in camp and during the snowstorm two men were seen on horseback going west. They were hailed. On reaching us they proved to be Brothers Willie and J. B. Elder. They reported their company in a starving condition that would stir the feelings of the hardest heart. They were in a poor place, the storm having caught them where fuel was scarce. They were out of provisions and really freezing and starving to death. The morning after our arrival nine were buried in one grave.¹ We did all we could to relieve them. The boys struck out on horseback and dragged up a lot of wood; provisions were distributed and all went to work to cheer the sufferers. ... William Kimball with a few men and wagons turned back, taking the oversight of this company to help them in. Capt. Grant left a wagonload of flour near the [South] Pass with Redick Allred to guard it. There were several hundred people with Brother Willie. They had a few teams, but most of them had become too weak to be of much service. When we left Salt Lake it was understood that other teams would follow until all the help needed would be on the road. The greater portion of our company now continued on towards Devil’s Gate, traveling through snow all the way. When we arrived at Devil’s Gate we found our express there awaiting us. No tidings as yet were received of the other companies.

Having seen the sufferings of Brother Willie’s company, we more fully realized the danger the others were in. The Elders who had just returned from England having many dear friends with these companies, suffered great anxiety, some of them feeling more or less the responsibility resting upon them for allowing these people to start so late in the season across the plains. At first we were at a loss what to do for we did not expect to have to go further than Devil’s Gate. We decided to make camp and send on an express to find where the people were and not return until they were found. Joseph A. Young, Abe Garr and I were selected. (Some histories give other names, but I was there myself and am not mistaken.) ...

¹ Five people were buried in one grave on Oct. 20 at this camp. Four more were buried the night of October 21, the evening that the rescue party arrived. By the time Dan Jones’s group left the morning of Oct. 22 to continue on their rescue journey, nine members of the Willie company had been buried, but not in one grave.

(Dan W. Jones - Page 2)

The first night we camped, [Oct. 27] our horses followed a band of buffaloes several miles; it was near noon the next day when we returned with them. We determined to get even with them so rode at a full gallop wherever the road would permit. After riding about twelve miles we saw a white man's shoe track in the road. Brother Young called out, "Here they are." We put our animals to their utmost speed and soon came in sight of the camp at Red Bluff. This was Brother Edward Martin's handcart company and Ben Hodgett's wagon company. There was still another wagon company [John A. Hunt company] down near the Platte crossing.

This company was in almost as bad a condition as the first one. They had nearly given up hope. Their provisions were about exhausted and many of them were worn out and sick. When we rode in, there was a general rush to shake hands. I took no part in the ceremony. Many declared we were angels from heaven. I told them I thought we were better than angels for *this* occasion, as we were good strong men come to help them into the valley, and that our company, and wagons loaded with provisions, were not far away. I thought this the best consolation under the circumstances. Brother Young told the people to gather "up" and move on at once as the only salvation was to travel a little every day. This was right and no doubt saved many lives for we, among so many, (some twelve hundred) [with the Martin, Hodgett and Hunt companies combined] could do but little, and there was danger of starvation before help could arrive unless the people made some headway toward the valley.

After talking to and encouraging the people, they agreed to start on the next morning [Oct. 29]. We then started full gallop for John Hunt's camp fifteen miles further. On arriving no one noticed us or appeared to care who we were. Their tents were pitched in good shape, wood was plentiful, and no one seemed concerned. Joseph A. Young became offended, not expecting such a cool reception and remarked, "Well it appears we are not needed here." So we went down into the bottom and made camp for ourselves. After a while someone sauntered down our way thinking probably we were mountaineers. These recognized Brother Young and made a rush for camp, giving the word; soon we were literally carried in and a special tent was pitched for our use. Everything was done to make "amends" for the previous neglect. I never could see where the amends came in, for no one happened to know us when we first arrived, and strangers were often passing, this being near where several camps of old traders were located.

About the time we were settled in our tent, Captain Hunt and Gilbert Van Schoonhoven, his assistant, arrived from the Platte bridge [Reshaw's bridge, about 5 miles from the Upper crossing, where Hunt had gone to purchase some more animals at "Fort Bridge," a small trading post at the site], also Captain Ben Hodgett. They were rejoiced to meet us. Here I first met "Gib Spencer" [Gilbert Van Schoonhoven, foster son of Daniel Spencer]. ... Next morning Brother Young and others went to Platte bridge, leaving Brother Garr and I to get the company started according to agreement made the evening before. There was a spirit of apathy among the people, instead of going for their teams at once, several began to quarrel about who should go. This made us feel like leaving them to take care of themselves. We saddled up to do so. The clouds were gathering thickly for storm, and just as we were about to start it commenced snowing very hard. The heavens were obscured by clouds, excepting a small place about the shape of the gable end of a house. This opening was in the direction of the valley and the sun seemed to shine through with great brightness. We mounted our mules; Brother Garr, pointing to the bright spot in the heavens, said, "Do you see that hole? You had better get out of here before that closes up, for it is your opening to the valley. We are going." The people, I believe, took this for a warning and soon started for their cattle.

Next morning they moved on. Brother Garr and I went back to where E. Martin's camp had been. They had rolled out and Captain Hodgett's wagon company were just starting. We continued on, overtaking the handcart company ascending a long muddy hill. A condition of distress here met my eyes that I never saw before or since. The train was strung out for three or four miles. There were old men pulling and tugging their carts, sometimes loaded with a sick wife or children—women pulling along sick husbands—little children six to eight years old struggling through the mud and snow. As night came on the mud would freeze on their clothes and feet. There were two of us and hundreds needing help. What could we do? We gathered on to some of the most helpless with our riatas tied to the carts, and helped as many as we could into camp on Avenue hill. This was a bitter, cold night and we had no fuel except very small sagebrush. Several died that night.

Next morning, Brother Young having come up, we three started for our camp near Devil's Gate. All were rejoiced to get the news that we had found the emigrants. The following morning most of the company moved down, meeting the handcart company at Greasewood creek. Such assistance as we could give was rendered to all until they finally arrived at Devil's Gate fort about the 1st of November. There were some twelve hundred in all, about one-half with handcarts and the other half with teams.

The winter storms had now set in, in all their severity. The provisions we took amounted to almost nothing among so many people, many of them now on very short rations, some almost starving. Many were dying daily from exposure and want of food. We were at a loss to know why others had not come on to our assistance. ...

(Dan W. Jones - Page 3)

The company was composed of average emigrants: old, middle-aged and young women and children. The men seemed to be failing and dying faster than the women and children. The handcart company was moved over to a cove in the mountains [on Nov. 4] for shelter and fuel, a distance of two miles from the [abandoned Fort Seminoe]. The wagons were banked near the fort. It became impossible to travel further without reconstruction or help. We did all we possibly could to help and cheer the people. Some writers have endeavored to make individual heroes of some of our company. I have no remembrance of any one shirking his duty. Each and everyone did all they possibly could and justice would give to each his due credit. All the people who could, crowded into the houses of the fort out of the cold and storm. One crowd cut away the walls of the house they were in for fuel, until half of the roof fell in; fortunately they were all on the protected side and no one was hurt.

Many suggestions were offered as to what should be done, some efforts being made to cache the imperishable goods and go on with the rest. Accordingly pits were dug, boxes opened and the hardware, etc., put in one, while clothing, etc., were put in another. Often these boxes belonged to different persons. An attempt was made by Brother Cantwell, to keep an account of these changes. [Brother James Cantwell was with the independent wagons traveling with the Willie Company until reaching Fort Laramie. They had waited there and traveled on with the Hodgett Wagon Company in order to recruit their animals and then be of assistance to the Martin Handcart Company when it came through.] This caching soon proved to be a failure for the pits would fill up with drifting snow as fast as the dirt was thrown out, so no caches were made. The goods were never replaced.

Each evening the Elders would meet in council. I remember hearing Charles Decker remark that he had crossed the plains over fifty times (carrying the mail) and this was the darkest hour he had ever seen. Cattle and horses were dying every day. What to do was all that could be talked about. ... Steve Taylor, Al Huntington and I were together when the question, "Why doesn't Captain Grant leave all the goods here with some one to watch them, and move on?" was asked. We agreed to make this proposal to him. It was near the time appointed for the meeting. As soon as we were together, Capt. Grant asked if anyone had thought of a plan. We presented ours. Capt. Grant replied, "I have thought of this, but there are no provisions to leave and it would be asking too much of anyone to stay here and starve for the sake of these goods; besides, where is there a man who would stay if called upon." I answered, "Any of us would." I had no idea I would be selected, as it was acknowledged I was the best cook in camp and Capt. Grant had often spoken as though he could not spare me. That a proper understanding may be had, I will say that these goods were the luggage of a season's emigration that these two wagon trains had contracted to freight, and it was being taken through as well as the luggage of the people present. Leaving these goods meant to abandon all that many poor families had upon earth. So it was different from common merchandise. There was a move made at once to adopt this suggestion. Accordingly, next morning store rooms in the fort were cleared and some two hundred wagons run in and unloaded. No one was allowed to keep out anything but a change of clothing, some bedding and light cooking utensils. Hauling provisions was not a weighty question. This unloading occupied three days. The hand-cart people were notified to abandon most of their carts. Teams were hitched up and the sick and feeble loaded in with such lightweight as was allowed. All became common property.

When everything was ready Brother Burton said to me, "Now Brother Jones we want you to pick two men from the valley to stay with you. We have notified Captains Hunt and Hodgett to detail seventeen men from their companies to stay with you. We will move on in the morning. Get your company together and such provisions as you can find in the hands of those who may have anything to spare. You know ours is about out. Will you do it?" I said, "Yes." "Well take your choice from our company. You are acquainted with the boys and whoever you want will stay." I had a great mind to tell him I wanted Captains Grant and Burton.

There was not enough money on earth to have hired me to stay. I had left home for only a few days and was not prepared to remain so long anyway; but I remembered my assertion that any of us would stay if called upon. I could not back out, so I selected Thomas Alexander and Ben Hampton. I am satisfied that two more faithful men to stand under all hardships could not have been found. That night we were called together and organized as a branch. Dan W. Jones, Thomas Alexander and Ben Hampton were chosen to preside, with J. Latty as clerk. [The names of the other men are listed at the end of the list of rescuers names in the back of *Tell My Story, Too.*]

Captain Grant asked about our provisions. I told him they were scant, but as many were suffering and some dying, all we asked was an equal chance with the rest. He told us there would be a lot of worn out cattle left; to gather them up and try to save them. They consisted mostly of yearlings and two-year-old heifers, some one was taking through. The storm had now ceased to rage and great hopes were felt for a successful move. We were daily expecting more help and often wondered why it did not come. Next day all hands pulled out, most of them on foot.

After getting my camp regulated a little and giving some instructions, I got on my horse and rode on to see how the train was moving along. All were out of sight when I started. After traveling a few miles, I came upon a lady sitting alone on the side of the road, weeping bitterly. I noticed she was elegantly dressed and appeared strong and

(Dan W. Jones - Page 4)

well. I asked her what was the matter. She sobbingly replied, “This is too much for me. I have always had plenty, and have never known hardships; we had a good team and wagon; my husband, if let alone, could have taken me on in comfort. Now I am turned out to walk in this wind and snow. I am determined not to go on but will stay here and die. My husband has gone on and left me, but I will not go another step.” The train was two or three miles ahead and moving on. I persuaded her after a while to go on with me. This lady, Mrs. Linforth, and her husband now live in San Francisco, California. They could not stand the hardships of Zion; but I believe they are friendly to our people.

After overtaking the train and seeing them on the move, Captain Grant asked me to go back with instructions for the brethren left with me; then to come on next day and camp with them over night. On calling the company together at the fort that night, [Nov. 9] I told them in plain words that if there was a man in camp who could not help eat the last poor animal left with us, hides and all, suffer all manner of privations, almost starve to death, that he could go with me the next day and overtake the trains. No one wanted to go. All voted to take their chances. ...

I followed the train this day [Nov. 10] to their second encampment and the next day [Nov. 11] traveled with them. There was much suffering, deaths occurring often. Eph Hanks arrived in camp from the valley and brought word that some of the teams that had reached South Pass and should have met us here, had turned back towards home and tried to persuade Redick Allred, who was left there with a load of flour, to go back with them. The men who did this might have felt justified; they said it was no use going farther, that we had doubtless all perished. I will not mention their names for it was always looked upon by the company as cowardly in the extreme. If this had not occurred it was the intention of Captain Grant to have sent some one down to us with a load of flour. As it was, by the time any was received, the people were in a starving condition, and could not spare it.

From the third camp, where I saw the last of the brethren, an express was sent on to catch the returning supplies and continue on to the valley, giving word that the train was coming. I know nothing more of them except from reports. As I am writing mainly from my own observations, I will simply state that after great suffering and much assistance (hundreds turning out to help) the emigrants were finally landed in the valley. ...

John Bond of the Hodgett Company said when it was announced that men would be staying at Devil’s Gate, “many of the Saints shed tears as they had met Brother Jones at Red Buttes when the first relief party came from Utah, and they hated to see him stay in such a bleak, cold place.” (Olsen, *The Price We Paid*, 372-73.) The men did the best they could, at one time with nothing to eat but cattle hides. Dan prayed to know how to prepare the rawhides to make them edible:

Finally, I was impressed how to fix the stuff and gave the company advice, ... scorch and scrape the hair off; this had a tendency to kill and purify the bad taste that scalding gave it. After scraping, boil one hour in plenty of water, throwing the water away which had extracted all the glue, then wash and scrape the hide thoroughly, washing in cold water, then boil to a jelly and let it get cold, and then eat with a little sugar sprinkled on it. This was considerable trouble, but we had little else to do and it was better than starving. We asked the Lord to bless our stomachs and adapt them to this food. We hadn’t the faith to ask him to bless the raw-hide for it was hard stock. ... We enjoyed this sumptuous fare for about six weeks.

In February they reached the point where they were out of everything, “having not only eaten the hides taken from the cattle killed, but had eaten the wrappings from the wagon-tongues, old moccasin-soles ... and a piece of buffalo hide that had been used for a foot mat for two months.” Dan and his men met as usual for their monthly fast day, and this time it was a true “fast day.” He was impressed to tell the men to correct any wrong doings among themselves, clean up and pray to the Lord, saying: “[The Lord] would take care of us, for we were there on His business. ... If they would all do as I advised we would have a good clean supper of healthy food. ... we washed out our storehouse and presented it before the Lord empty, but clean. ... Evening came on and no supper; eight o’clock, no word from anyone. And the word had been positively given that we should have supper. Between eight and nine o’clock all were sitting waiting, now and then good-naturedly saying it was most supper time. No one seemed disheartened.” Soon they heard noises outside. It was the mail company trying to get through the area. (See John R. Murdock, rescuer section of *Tell My Story, Too*.) Several times during the winter, Dan and his men received food from Indians and others that helped to sustain them.

Sources: Jones, Daniel W., *Forty Years Among the Indians*, 1890. (Republished in recent years by Lee Nelson: Council Press, Springville, Utah. This book is must-read as a Mormon frontier classic, and for more in-depth narrative regarding the rescue.); Olsen, Andrew D., *The Price We Paid*, Deseret Book, 2006.