

DAVID P. KIMBALL

Born: August 23, 1839 in Nauvoo, Illinois

Age: 17

Main Rescue Party



David Patton Kimball was the son of Heber C. and Vilate Kimball.¹ He was named after David W. Patton, president of the Council of Twelve Apostles. David's father was on his second mission to England when he was born, and his mother wrote the following poem to inform her husband of their new child:

Our darling little David P.
Is just as sweet as he can be;
He surely is the finest lad
That you and I have ever had.

His eyes are black, his skin is fair,
His features good, and brown his hair;
He's just as fat as butter, too,
We therefore think that he will do.²

David came to Utah in September 1847, shortly after his eighth birthday, with his father as the captain of the wagon train. They had been driven from their homes in Nauvoo.

David was a member of a group known as the Minute Men. The "Nauvoo Legion" had been reorganized in Salt Lake, and many of the brethren served in it. But the ones who were the first to be called if trouble arose were the Minute Men. These were usually young single men in their late teens and early twenties. They were eager to help, full of courage and capable. Such was the case in 1856 when David left Salt Lake with the first group of rescuers on October 6 and 7. His father put his large family on short rations in order to send food to those who were destitute.

The Willie Company was reached first by rescuers on October 21. After giving emergency relief, the rescue party was divided into two groups. A few stayed with the Willie company to help them. David's brother, William H. Kimball, captained the Willie company back to Salt Lake. The other rescuers continued east in search of the Martin, Hodgett and Hunt companies. David Kimball went on with these to Devil's Gate. Express riders Joseph A. Young, Abel W. Garr and Dan W. Jones were sent on from there to locate the companies. While David waited at Devil's Gate, he cut wood and made other preparations.

On October 30, the express team reported they had found the three companies about 60 miles further east. David and the others in his group hurried forward. They helped bury the dead and led the handcart emigrants west to the Devil's Gate area. Short supplies and severe weather soon forced them to seek shelter in a nearby cove. In order to reach the cove, the pioneers had to cross the icy Sweetwater River. The river was filled with floating ice. As the immigrants remembered their tragic and difficult crossing of the N. Platte River two weeks before, some sat down and wept. Their courage seemed to be lost with this new challenge. David and at least three other young men came to the rescue and carried many members of the Martin company across the river.

Patience Loader, a member of the Martin company, wrote:

Those brethren were in the water all day. We wanted to thank them but they would not listen to my dear mother who felt in her heart to bless them for their kindness. She said, "God bless you for taking me over this water," and they said in such an awful rough way, "Oh, d--n that. We don't want any of that. You are welcome. We have come to help you." Mother turned to me, saying, "What do you think of that man, Patience? He is a rough fellow." I told her, "That is Brother Kimball, I am told. They are all good men, but I dare say they are rather rough in their manners." But we found that they all had good, kind hearts. This poor Brother David P. Kimball stayed so long in the water that he had to be taken out and packed to camp and he was a long time before he recovered as he was chilled through and in after life he was always afflicted with rheumatism.

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In an oft-quoted magazine article from 1914, Solomon Kimball wrote that these boys “belonging to the relief party came to the rescue; and to the astonishment of all who saw, carried nearly every member of that ill-fated handcart company across the snow-bound stream. The strain was so terrible, and the exposure so great, that in later years all the boys died from the effects of it. When President Brigham Young heard of this heroic act, he wept like a child, and later declared publicly, ‘That act alone will ensure C. Allen Huntington, George W. Grant, and David P. Kimball³ an everlasting salvation in the Celestial Kingdom of God, worlds without end.’ ” (Kimball, “Belated Emigrants of 1856,” *Improvement Era*, February 1914, 288.)

Although this statement may be incomplete and have some inaccuracies, it is still inspiring to recognize the sacrifices the rescue boys made in saving lives. Andrew D. Olsen, author of *The Price We Paid*, clarified: “Six years before this statement was published, the same author [Solomon Kimball] reported Brigham Young’s words somewhat differently: ‘When President Brigham Young heard of this heroic act, he wept like a child, and declared that this act alone would immortalize them.’ Perhaps one explanation for the difference in these accounts is that they were written in 1908 and 1914, more than 50 years after the rescue and 30 years after Brigham Young’s death. Regardless of the differences in these statements, what is most important remains undisputed: the heroic service of these rescuers and Brigham Young’s feelings of gratitude toward them.” (Olsen, *The Price We Paid*, 360-61) The statues near Martin’s Cove seem to have fulfilled Brigham Young’s prediction of “immortalizing” these rescue boys.

David returned to his home in Salt Lake and recovered from his river crossing experience. He married Caroline Marian Williams in April 1857. They had 10 or 11 children. David served as a missionary to Europe, and as President of the Bear Lake Stake for five years. He later moved to Arizona and assisted in developing that area. He died on November 21, 1883, in St. David, Arizona, at the age of 44.

Sources: Eshshom, Frank E., *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah*, 1913; Glazier, Stewart E., *Journal of the Trail*, 1997; *Recollections of Past Days: The Autobiography of Patience Loader Rozsa Archer*, edited by Sandra Ailey Petree, 2006; Kimball, Solomon F. “Belated Emigrants of 1856,” *Improvement Era*, February 1914; Olsen, Andrew D., *The Price We Paid*, 2006.

¹David’s large family is said to have dwelt together in “peace and unity; while [the] children, especially the males, sons of various mothers, clung together with an affection all but clannish in its intensity. Woe betide the luckless wight, who, even in childhood’s days, imposed upon a ‘Kimball boy.’ The whole family of urchins would resent the insult, and that, too, with a pluckiness surpassing even their numbers.” (Whitney, Orson F. “The Life of Heber C. Kimball,” also quoted in Eshshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah*.)

²As found in Glazier, Stewart, *Journal of the Trail*, 98.

³Stephen W. Taylor and others are also recognized as giving this service.