

## EPHRAIM KNOWLTON HANKS

Born: 1826 Ohio

Age: 29

Rescuer



Ephraim K. Hanks was one of the premier frontiersmen of his day. Trustworthy and skilled, he made many trips out in the wilds and for a time held the mail contract with Charles Decker for carrying mail between Salt Lake City and St. Joseph, Missouri. He joined the rescue efforts of 1856 about three weeks after the first rescue party left Salt Lake.

Ephraim's restless and roaming nature brought him much adventure in his lifetime. As a teenager, he left home, worked for awhile on the Erie Canal and then joined the Navy. Eph soon set sail on the *U.S.S. Columbus*, and immediately learned to hold his own against the older bullies. Italy was one of the interesting ports Eph visited during his enlistment.

A few days before the ship reached its home port in New York, the returning Ephraim, like the prodigal son, was concerned about the disappointment he had caused his parents, and decided to return to his home rather than re-enlist in the Navy. That decision would prove to change the course of his life as he arrived at home and was introduced to the Church by his older brother, Sidney. Humbled by the news of his father's death the previous year, Ephraim's heart was softened and prepared to hear the Gospel.

Ephraim was soon baptized and cast his lot with the Saints in Nauvoo who were soon to become exiles. On their trek to the west, Ephraim was one who left to serve in the Mormon Battalion in the United States war with Mexico. Several other fellow-soldiers from the Battalion were involved in the rescue of the 1856 pioneers.

The following is Ephraim's account of the rescue that he gave later in his life, as recorded in the book *Scouting for the Mormons on the Great Frontier*. Prefacing this narrative, the author's state: "The following account of the hand-cart rescue ... seems to differ in many details from the one just related [in the book], but no doubt both accounts are true and could be fitted together like the parts of a picture puzzle."

The account in Scouting for Mormons comes from Andrew Jensen, who states that "In June, 1891, when visiting the Sevier Stake of Zion in the interest of Church history, I became acquainted with Elder Ephraim K. Hanks, who resides in Pleasant Creek, (in the Blue Valley Ward), now in Wayne County, Utah. He related to me the following:"

In the fall of 1856, I spent considerable of my time fishing in Utah Lake; and in traveling backward and forward between that lake and Salt Lake City, I had occasion to stop once over night with Gurney Brown, in Draper, about nineteen miles south of Salt Lake City. Being somewhat fatigued after the day's journey, I retired to rest quite early, and while I still lay wide awake in my bed I heard a voice calling me by name, and then saying: "The hand-cart people are in trouble and you are wanted; will you go and help them?" I turned instinctively in the direction from whence the voice came and beheld an ordinary sized man in the room. Without any hesitation I answered "Yes, I will go if I am called." I then turned around to go to sleep, but had laid only a few minutes when the voice called a second time, repeating almost the same words as on the first occasion. My answer was the same as before. This was repeated a third time.

When I got up the next morning I said to Brother Brown, "The hand-cart people are in trouble, and I have promised to go out and help them;" but I did not tell him of my experiences during the night.

I now hastened to Salt Lake City, and arrived there on the Saturday, preceding the Sunday on which the call was made for volunteers to go out and help the last hand-cart companies in. When some of the brethren responded by explaining that they could get ready to start in a few days; I spoke out at once saying, "I am ready now!" The next day I was wending my way eastward over the mountains with a light wagon all alone.<sup>1</sup>

The terrific storm which caused the immigrants so much suffering and loss overtook me near the South Pass, where I stopped about three days with Reddick N. Allred,<sup>2</sup> who had come out with provisions for the immigrants. The storm during these three days was simply awful. In all my travels in the Rocky Mountains both before and afterwards, I have seen no worse. When at length the snow ceased falling, it lay on the ground so deep that for many days it was impossible to move wagons through it.

Being deeply concerned about the possible fate of the immigrants, and feeling anxious to learn of their condition, I determined to start out on horseback to meet them; and for this purpose I secured a pack-saddle and two animals (one to ride and one to pack), from Brother Allred, and began to make my way slowly through the snow alone. After traveling for some time I met Joseph A. Young and one of the Garr boys, [Abel], two of the relief company which had been sent from Salt Lake City to help the companies. [This was the first group of rescuers who left immediately

(Ephraim Hanks - Page 2)

after the first call from Brigham Young on October 5. Brigham continued to make public and private calls for rescuers to meet the late companies for the next two months.] They had met the immigrants and were now returning with important dispatches from the camps to the headquarters of the Church, reporting the awful condition of the companies. [Ephraim had passed the Willie Company and the rescuers already with them near Ft. Bridger on Nov. 2. Young and Garr had found the Martin, Hodgett and Hunt companies near the last crossing of the N. Platte River and helped them back to Devil's Gate before taking this "important dispatch" to Brigham Young. Garr and Young left Devil's Gate on Nov. 3. See their biographies in *Tell My Story, Too*.]

In the meantime I continued my lonely journey, and the night after meeting Elders Young and Garr, I camped in the snow in the mountains. As I was preparing to make a bed in the snow with the few articles that my pack animal carried for me, I thought how comfortable a buffalo robe would be on such an occasion, and also how I could relish a little buffalo meat for supper, and before lying down for the night I was instinctively led to ask the Lord to send me a buffalo. Now, I am a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer, for I have on many different occasions asked the Lord for blessings, which He in His mercy has bestowed on me. But when I, after praying as I did on that lonely night in the South Pass, looked around me and spied a buffalo bull within fifty yards of my camp, my surprise was complete; I had certainly not expected so immediate an answer to my prayer. However, I soon collected myself and was not at a loss to know what to do. Taking deliberate aim at the animal, my first shot brought him down; he made a few jumps only, and then rolled down into the very hollow where I was encamped. I was soon busily engaged skinning my game, finishing which, I spread the hide on the snow and placed my bed upon it. I next prepared supper, eating tongue and other choice parts of the animal I had killed, to my heart's content. After this I enjoyed a refreshing night's sleep, while my horses were browsing on the sage brush.

Early the next morning I was on my way again, and soon reached what is known as the Ice Springs Bench. There I happened upon a herd of buffalo, and killed a nice cow. I was impressed to do this, although I did not know why until a few hours later, but the thought occurred to my mind that the hand of the Lord was in it, as it was a rare thing to find buffalo herds around that place at this late part of the season. I skinned and dressed the cow; then cut up part of its meat in long strips and loaded my horses with it. Thereupon I resumed my journey, and traveled on till towards evening. I think the sun was about an hour high in the west when I spied something in the distance that looked like a black streak in the snow. As I got near to it, I perceived it moved; then I was satisfied that this was the long looked for hand-cart company, led by Captain Edward Martin. I reached the ill-fated train just as the immigrants were camping for the night. The sight that met my gaze as I entered their camp can never be erased from my memory. The starved forms and haggard countenances of the poor sufferers, as they moved about slowly, shivering with cold, to prepare their scanty evening meal was enough to touch the stoutest heart. When they saw me coming, they hailed me with joy inexpressible, and when they further beheld the supply of fresh meat I brought into camp, their gratitude knew no bounds. Flocking around me, one would say, "Oh, please, give me a small piece of meat;" another would exclaim, "My poor children are starving, do give me a little;" and children with tears in their eyes would call out, "Give me some, give me some." At first I tried to wait on them and handed out the meat as they called for it; but finally I told them to help themselves. Five minutes later both my horses had been released of their extra burden—the meat was all gone, and the next few hours found the people in camp busily engaged in cooking and eating it, with thankful hearts.

A prophecy had been made by one of the brethren that the company should feast on buffalo meat when their provisions might run short; my arrival in their camp, loaded with meat, was the beginning of the fulfillment of that prediction; but only the beginning, as I afterwards shot and killed a number of buffalo for them as we journeyed along.

When I saw the terrible condition of the immigrants on first entering their camp, my heart almost melted within me. I rose up in my saddle and tried to speak cheering and comforting words to them. I told them also that they should all have the privilege to ride into Salt Lake City, as more teams were coming.<sup>3</sup> ...

After this the greater portion of my time was devoted to waiting on the sick. "Come to me," "help me," "please administer to my sick wife," or "my dying child," were some of the requests that were made of me almost hourly for some time after I had joined the immigrants, and I spent days going from tent to tent administering to the sick. Truly the Lord was with me and others of His servants who labored faithfully together with me in that day of trial and suffering. The result of this our labor of love certainly redounded to the honor and glory of a kind and merciful God. In scores of instances, when we administered to the sick, and rebuked the diseases in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sufferers would rally at once; they were healed almost instantly. I believe I administered to several hundreds in a single day; and I could give names of many whose lives were saved by the power of God.

But I will only give the details in one more instance. One evening after having gone as far as Fort Bridger I was requested by a sister to come and administer to her son, whose name was Thomas. [See biography for Thomas Dobson, Martin Company, in *Tell My Story, Too*.] He was very sick, indeed, and his friends expected he would die that night. When I came to the place where he lay, he was moaning pitifully, and was almost too weak to turn around in his bed. I felt the power of God resting upon me, and addressing the young man, said: "Will you believe the words I tell you?" His response was "Yes." I then administered to him, and he was immediately healed. He got up, dressed

## (Ephraim Hanks - Page 3)

himself, and danced a hornpipe on the end-board of a wagon, which I procured for that purpose. But notwithstanding these manifestations of the Lord's goodness, many of the immigrants whose extremities were frozen, lost their limbs, either whole or in part. Many such I washed with water and castile soap, until the frozen parts would fall off, after which I would sever the shreds of flesh from the remaining portions of the limbs with my scissors. Some of the emigrants lost toes, others fingers, and again others whole hands and feet; one woman who now resides in Koosharem, Piute Co., Utah, lost both her legs below the knees, [see biography for Maren Johansen, also known as Mary Johnson, (Parsons), Hunt Company, in *Tell My Story, Too.*] and quite a number who survived became cripples for life, but so far as I remember there were no fresh cases of frozen limbs after my arrival in camp.

As the train moved forward in the day time I would generally leave the road in search of game; and on these expeditions killed and dressed a number of buffaloes, distributing their meat among the people. On one occasion when I was lagging behind with a killed buffalo, an English girl by the name of Griffin gave out completely, and not being able to walk any further, she lay down with her head in the snow. When I saw her disabled condition I lifted her on my saddle, the horse being loaded with buffalo meat, and in this condition she rode into camp. [see biography for Margaret or Jane Eleanor Griffiths, Martin Company section of *Tell My Story, Too.*]

Soon more relief companies were met and as fast as the baggage was transferred into the wagons, the hand carts were abandoned one after another, until none were left.<sup>4</sup> I remained with the immigrants until the last of Captain Martin's company arrived in Salt Lake City on the thirtieth day of November, 1856.

I have but a very little to say about the sufferings of Captain Martin's company before I joined it; but it had passed through terrible ordeals. Women and the larger children helped the men to pull the hand-carts, and in crossing the frozen streams, they had to break the ice with their feet. In fording the Platte River, the largest stream they had to cross after the cold weather set in, the clothes of the immigrants were frozen stiff around their bodies before they could exchange them for others. This is supposed to have been the cause of the many deaths which occurred soon afterwards. It has been stated on good authority that nineteen immigrants died in one night. The survivors who performed the last acts of kindness to those who perished, were not strong enough to dig the graves of sufficient depth to preserve the bodies from the wild beasts, and wolves were actually seen tearing open the graves before the company was out of sight. Many of the survivors, in witnessing the terrible afflictions and losses, became at last almost stupefied or mentally dazed, and did not seem to realize the terrible condition they were in. The suffering from the lack of sufficient food also told on the people. When the first relief teams met the immigrants, there was only one day's quarter rations left in camp."

Many of the accounts given by these belated immigrants in the Martin, Hodgett and Hunt companies mention the arrival of Ephraim Hanks. Mary Goble of the Hunt Company writes that his arrival was like that of a Santa Claus. Throughout his life, he exercised his spiritual gifts in behalf of others. He was particularly noted for the gift of healing.

Fellow rescuer, Arza Hinckley, wrote of Ephraim: "From Ice Springs on Sweet Water River in to Salt Lake City, Eph Hanks, one of my Battalion chums, spent much of our time while in camp administering to the sick. Ephraim was a man of grate faith."

Years later, in a letter to Wilford Woodruff, while serving a mission among the Lamanites in Arizona, Arza wrote: "As to myself, it would be better as a traveling missionary, than remaining with a tribe. . . . I believe, as such, with such a man as Ephraim Hanks, if we were as well united in the faith and feelings as we were when we went out to meet the handcart company we would be willing [to accomplish the work]."

Ephraim Hanks continued to be a man of great faith and service. He served as a patriarch in the Church. He eventually had 3 wives and 26 children. One of his wives, Thisbe Read, was a girl he had helped to rescue in the Martin handcart company. They were the parents of 12 children.

Much of Ephraim's life story, and particularly his participation in the 1856 rescue, has been portrayed in the T.C. Christensen movie *Ephraim's Rescue*.

<sup>4</sup>This call was made on Sunday, October 26, by Heber C. Kimball. Hanks statement on going out "alone" is likely just an indication that he was not with a regularly organized group, and that he was alone when he met the Martin company. He had the skills and ability to do this. There were already many other rescuers with teams and wagons on the road that Ephraim passed on his way out. (See *I Am Ready Now*, by J. Phillip Hanks, 2013, pgs. 60-61, for documentation that Ephraim was in a conference in American Fork until Oct. 22, then fishing at Utah Lake, then staying with Gurnsey Brown in Draper until Saturday, Oct. 25, when he went to Salt Lake, hence responding to the October 26 call for more rescuers.)

## (Ephraim Hanks - Page 4)

<sup>2</sup>Redick Allred was left at a South Pass camp with supplies, awaiting the return of Captain George D. Grant, whose advance rescue party had traveled on in search of the missing companies. Ephraim probably only stayed 2 days and maybe 3 nights with Allred. Redick wrote: “Ephraim Hanks arrived from S L. City and reported 150 wagons on the way to relieve us, but nothing having been heard from the trains I sent a man with him to meet them. They started next morning and as it was very cold & the wind blowing a gale from the West, he set a sail behind his wagon and struck out at the rate of ten knots.” Ephraim was at Ft. Bridger with the Willie Company on November 2nd. He met the Martin handcart company on the evening of November 10 just east of Split Rock at a stream called Willow Creek. He was probably at Allred’s camp some time between Nov. 4-8. It is unknown who the man sent by Redick Allred with Ephraim was. It appears that Ephraim went on ahead with his horses so he could travel more quickly. Ephraim met the Martin company the night of Nov. 10. On Nov. 12, the company was met by four wagons, and three more wagons the next day.

<sup>3</sup>This was the first news the people had that more help was on the way. Rescuer Robert T. Burton recorded in the camp journal: “Br. E. Hanks ... brought good news.” Rescuer William Broomhead recorded on Nov. 10: “Ephraim Hanks came to us from the valley and reported that 2 hundred teams had started but he did not know if they had turned Back on account of the storm.”

<sup>4</sup>Many of the handcarts reportedly had already been left at or near Devil’s Gate.

Sources: *Scouting for the Mormons on the Great Frontier* by Sidney Alvarus Hanks - son of Ephraim Knowlton Hanks and Thisbe Quilley Read (Martin Handcart Company) and Ephraim K. Hanks (E. Kay Hanks, unknown relationship), *Deseret Book Co.*, 1948. The preface of this book states: “Ephraim Knowlton Hanks did not keep a diary, but in the sunset of his life took time out to tell his story to two different scribes who recorded the experiences, only to have both manuscripts mysteriously disappear. We have had to depend on the information handed down by his own children and the writings of men who rode and lived with him. ... In 1940 Sidney A. Hanks laid before E. Kay Hanks much material he had been collecting through the years about his father, the pioneer scout, Ephraim K. Hanks. It was Sidney’s dream to have these valuable experiences preserved at least for the Hanks posterity. The urge to assist in bringing about the fulfillment of this dream welled up in E. Kay, who immediately started the long process of preparation necessary to bring about this book”; *I Am Ready Now*, by J. Phillip Hanks, 2013. (See endnote 1.) *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah*, Frank E. Eschom, 1913; *Arza Erastus Hinckley - Ira Nathaniel Hinckley - Descendants and Ancestors*, compiled by Lorin A. Hinckley, 1979; “Arza Erastus Hinckley” by Joel Hinckley Bowen; “Arza” by Lynn Paul (HBL at BYU Special Collections Americana Collections); “United in Faith - The Rescue of the Martin Handcart Companies” by Steven K. Jones, 1991 (SUP Research Library, Special Collections); “Arza E. Hinckley Diary 1882-1883” (HBL at BYU Special Collections Manuscript Collection); Diary of Redick Allred, film available at Church History Library (original housed at DUP Museum is not available for viewing due to condition); *Be Kind to the poor: The Life Story of Robert Taylor Burton* by Janet Burton Seegmiller, 1988; Autobiography of Mary Goble Pay, various source locations, some of Mary’s writings available in Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files, some are on Mormon Overland Travel Database website; see website hanksplace.net for more information, stories, pictures and sources for Ephraim Hanks.

“In witnessing the (sick of our) people get out of the wagons at the different Camp Grounds I would speculate in my mind upon their chances of life and I became a Judge of how long they would be before they would probably die, a certain lanthorn jawed, famine stricken appearance would be seen in their faces which the more plainly defined was an index of their nearer death. I remember as my Brother Samuel S. was helped out of the wagon one night - I allowed him about five days to live - and had it not been for the timely efforts of Brother Eph Hanks who particularly distinguished himself in caring for the sick of the Train, he certainly would have died, but Bro Hanks bestowed upon S.S. great care and attention and was the Saviour of my Brother to all intents and purposes.” (Alfred Jones, Martin company, on his brother Samuel S. Jones and Ephraim Hanks.)