

## LOUISA JONES

Born: 1837 Appledoor, Devonshire, England

Age: 19

Hodgett Wagon Company

Louisa Jones (Oakley)  
circa 1905

Louisa wrote a moving autobiography of her life and immigration to Zion. Especially poignant are her recollections of her relationship with her father and his death on the plains.

My beginnings I owe to my parents. My father, William Jones, was born July 13, 1811, at Northam, Devonshire, England. . . . My mother, Mary Ann Dovell, was born in Devonshire. The Dovells were very wealthy ‘aristocrats’ who proudly traced their ancestry to the Lords of England. The Dovells could not understand that one of their own, Mary Ann, could fall in love and marry some common rough sea captain, my father . . . To my mother’s grief, the Dovell’s disowned her for they thought she married “below her station.”

I was born October 13, 1837 to a loving family. My father . . . had a roaming disposition and was nicknamed “Roaming Billy.” For twenty years, father worked his way up in the English Navy and finally became Captain of one of the Queen’s sailing vessels. On one occasion, his ship took fire and as a result, [the] flailing ship’s rigging tore off his right thumb. The English Government gave him a captain’s pension in retirement. He was strong, heavyset, had blue eyes, and a sandy complexion. In contrast, my mother, Mary Ann, was rather tall, with dark hair and hazel eyes. Many remarked that she was a beautiful woman. To add to my father’s pension, he learned telegraphy and worked in the railroad station at Penzance, nine miles from his home. This is where my father taught me telegraphy and I became an operator myself. At this time, passing messages by telegraph was done by sight, not sound. I would watch the movements of a needle on a board to determine the letters and words being sent. I became quite expert and passed many a note to the young men up and down the lines. We lived comfortably and I was having a wonderful time.

We listened to the missionaries of a new church. “Mormons” they were called. We knew it was true and were baptized. My father became an Elder and home missionary in Devonshire. Most of our friends and loved ones turned against us because of our beliefs. My father longed to go to America to be with the Saints and to be taught first hand from a prophet of God. Father propositioned the Pension Board for a specified sum in lieu of monthly payments. That way he could buy passage for our family and we could join the Saints in Zion. It was so hard to say goodbye to close friends and sell possessions for whatever we could get, even giving them away. But we had to have enough for passage and for so many things in America, if we were going to make it. My parents, my older brother, Robert [21], my younger brother, Fredrick [14], and I being in my nineteenth year, set off sail to America on the vessel S. Curling. On board, I met a wonderful man by the name of John DeGroot Oakley who was returning to his family after a four-year mission to England and France. Since he had lived among the Saints and knew Joseph Smith personally, I had many questions to ask him which passed the time and made the several week voyage seem much shorter. Also, before coming into the Boston harbor, I became very ill with chicken pox. . . . I draped a heavy veil over my hat and face to hide them when we left the ship on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1856. America! We made it. The land of promises, hopes, freedom and dreams. . . the sound of [America] was wonderfully exciting.



Mary Ann Dovell Jones

We started out with much hope and promise for a new life in Utah and plenty of provisions, we thought. However, before we reached Devil’s Gate, the provisions were very low, [and] the ox team gave out. It became necessary to double up [the wagons] and leave much of our belongings there. Some were stolen. Mother had been a milliner in England and owned some beautiful material. It was hard for her to part with it so some of the best cloth was kept. We had no idea how desperately hard it was going to be. . . .

The Indians would wait in hiding to take whatever they could. Even when stopping for the night, it became necessary for father to guard the oxen. Because of the constant exposure to the cold, wet and snowy nights, father took cold and then came down with Typhoid fever. He laid in the wagon, being too weak to walk. We had to keep up with the rest of the company or perish. Mother tried to drive the oxen, but it was too much for her. She had a stroke and also became an invalid. My older brother, Robert, had been left a cripple since he suffered Meningitis as a baby. So the arduous task of driving the oxen fell to me. If we were going to live, I had to do my part. It was the hardest thing I had ever done. My hands, once so delicate and frail [that] could tap out telegraph messages in what now seemed a dream or another life, now bled in open sores from roping and handling the oxen.

Father suffered in desperate pain now. One night, after our company had traveled two days from the Platte River, he begged mother to have me drive to the side of the road and let him die in peace. We had very little left of our provisions. [This was about one week before the Rescue Party located them.] Mother showed me how to use the flour to bake sea-biscuits, or hard tac on the campfire. They were nearly as hard as rocks. We put them in sacks and kept them in the josky box and nibbled or sucked them as we walked along. When an ox gave out and could go no further, we killed it and used all the parts for food, even the tripe which my brother Robert would clean.

A few days later, father called our family to his wagon and said, "I have pointed you Zionward and I want you never to turn back. God is in his heaven and all is right with us whether we are in this earth or out of it. God will be with you. If you stumble and fall back, pick yourselves up and go on again." [William Jones died Oct. 21, 1856.] . . . We rolled him in half of our wagon cover and buried him in a shallow grave. The ground was frozen and we simply had no means or time to do more. Seven others died that night and were buried there. That same night there was a terrible storm that dropped almost a foot of new snow. The next morning I managed to yoke up the oxen, but my grief was so strong I flung myself over father's grave and sobbed until others pulled me away. Winter was settling in and there was precious little time left to get to Utah before we became permanently snowbound. I put on my father's boots, slicker and hat and drove the slow plodding team of oxen in danger of freezing and starving. You simply cannot imagine how bad it was. I shared what rations we had with the starving children who had lost their mothers and whose feet were frozen and toes gone.

I remember well the bright moonlight night about 11 o'clock, when fresh provisions and teams arrived. Even our sea-biscuits were nearly gone. . . . [having] been on scant rations for weeks. How our hearts swelled inside with thankfulness as these great rescuers who put their own lives at risk, began cooking hot bread over the fires.

The Hodgett company arrived in the Valley in December 1856. Louisa married John Oakley in February and they became the parents of ten children. With Louisa's brothers and mother, they were called to settle southern Utah at the Muddy River, then St. George and finally, Kanab.



Frederick William Jones

Louisa seemed to have been prepared to care for people who had physical limitations. She states, "My husband John only had one good eye when I met him - the other being injured when he was twelve. Now the good eye was weakening as one day he was chased by a cow from his orchard in St. George [and] an apple switch struck the good eye. It was not many years until he was totally blind. To supplement our income I cooked and sewed and wove cloth. One sewing needle had to do for ten families and it could not be lost. A yard of factory [cloth] was purchased and raveled out and the threads twisted for sewing purposes. I could knit a pair of stockings in a day, and did it to prove the point and earn a wager of wool for another pair."

John became close friends with Jacob Hamblin. The children called him "Uncle Jacob." Louisa's account gives details of how they lived and of her own resourcefulness:

"We first lived in a tent and a wagon [in Kanab]. In the tent house, we put straw down as a floor and covered this with a carpet that I had made. The ceiling was sealed up with another one of my carpets. Soon, John built us a two-room house with a lean-to making a third room. A big cellar was under the house for storage of vegetables, cheese, milk, etc. The lot was planted to an orchard, vineyard, garden, and flowers. Where John lived the desert blossomed as a rose. All one summer, John stood guard at Lee's Ferry to keep the Indians from coming across as they were on the warpath. My dear John's eyesight began to go bad. People would bring in loads of flour, halves of pigs, potatoes, vegetables, etc., to pay for the trees and this is the way our family lived at that time. We even raised our own broom corn and made brooms to sell. In the summer, I made yellow butter which was thoroughly washed and kneaded until the buttermilk was out of it. Then it was put into crock jars and covered with salt brine and salt-peter. This was used when milk was not so plentiful.

John and Jacob Hamblin were both called on a mission to Arizona to labor together among the Navajos and Maquaches. . . . There seemed to be no end to the chores. . . . I delivered a hundred or so babies. The price was \$3.00 to take care of mother and baby for ten days. In those days they were not very sanitary, but I always washed and cleaned all of my cases. . . . If the family was poor I did not charge them. When Thanksgiving and Christmas came, my family made sure the sick people had a good dinner. We furnished dinners everyday to some of the chronic invalids. With the help of the children, we cut the hay with a scythe, raised beans on shares, raised our own pigs, made lard and waited on the sick. The children and I milked and fed cows on a never ending schedule. When John and Jacob returned, it was a wonderful reunion."

John Oakley died in 1890 and Louisa in 1915 in Snowflake, Arizona. Robert Jones, Louisa's handicapped brother, lived with relatives and helped with gardening and whatever he could until he died in 1913, also in Snowflake. Frederick Jones had a large family. He served as Bishop for 17 years in Pine Valley, Utah, and as presiding elder for a time where he lived in Mexico. He died in 1921 in St. George, Utah. Mary Ann had a millinery business, using the large amount of material she had brought from England. She lived with both her children at various times. She died in 1891 in Colonia Dublan, Chihuahua, Mexico. William Jones's family never forgot his words, "All is right with us . . . God will be with you . . . pick yourselves up and go on again."

Sources: *The Crossing: Trials of 1856*, by Ron Ray, 1997; Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website (photos);familysearch.org. See Julie Rogers art for Jones family at <http://www.tellmystorytoo.com/fine-arts/julie-rogers/come-come-ye-saints>.