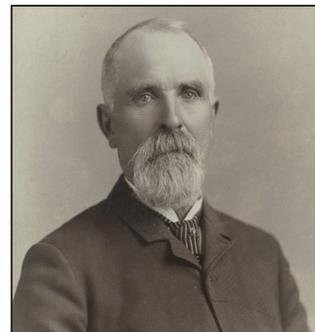


JOHN RIGGS MURDOCK

Born: 13 September 1826 Ohio

Age: 30

Rescuer



John R. Murdock was the son of John Murdock and Julia Clapp. John and Julia were also parents of the famous Murdock twins that were given to Joseph and Emma Smith when their mother died. (Joseph and Emma Smith had twins that died at the same time.)¹ John R. Murdock's story comes from a biography written of him by Joseph M. Tanner, published in 1909. (Republished in *Murdock Brothers' Pioneer Trilogy* by S. Reed Murdock, Summerwood Publishers, Layton, Utah, 2005.) In the foreword of his book, J.M. Tanner states: Among those who dedicated to the church and its cause their best efforts, efforts of intense patriotism, and whose endurance was the crowning glory of those times, the name of John R. Murdock plays an important part. Had others not drawn out from him the story of his life, its inspiration and its example would have been lost to the world. When the manuscript prepared from facts given by him was read for his approval his only remark was: "They have made quite a man of me."

Among the things "drawn out" from John Murdock's life is his account of the rescue of 1856:

Our party met the emigrants near Fort Bridger. It began to snow on us in Echo canyon and did not cease until the snow was three feet deep on the low grounds and on the Big Mountain it was a depth of ten feet, largely through drifting. In getting over Big Mountain, I consider that I had performed the big feat of my life. The train, consisting of about seventy-five wagons, had been ploughing in the deep snow all day. I went ahead on horseback, leaving the rest of the relief party behind. It was very difficult, but I managed to struggle through the snow to the top of the Big Mountain. I was quite alone, but here met two men, with six yoke of oxen, who had come up on the west side of the mountain. They had come from Provo to assist the hand-cart company.

When I told them their teams were needed at the farthest end of the train, they said they would go back to their camp and remain until the next day. I said no, and told them that if they would do as I said we would get the whole train over that night. I took full charge of all; for I realized that many of the people would perish if left on the mountain that night. My plan was to take the oxen and hitch on to the first two wagons and pull them through the snow, and thus open the road and enable the whole train to pass through. My advice was followed, and we succeeded in getting the entire train over by ten o'clock at night. The company then passed on quickly to a camp ground, where there was plenty of firewood prepared by the men who had been left behind. When the train had passed through, the cut in the snow bank was ten feet deep. You could lay a pole across the chasm and a covered wagon could easily pass under it. The next day we went into Salt Lake City, where the snow was about three feet deep. After seeing the company safely in the Valley, I returned to my home in Lehi.

John did not stay home long. As he was a trusted man since his service in the Mormon Battalion, Brigham Young called John to join the newly organized Y.X. Co. (Brigham Young Express Company) and carry the mail 1,200 miles from Salt Lake to Missouri. John wrote:

We left Salt Lake City on the first day of March 1857. Travel was so difficult and the snow so deep that it took us eleven days to get with our pack mules to Fort Bridger, a distance of only one hundred fifteen miles. ... We had a great deal of difficulty getting through the country. ... [After separating with another man from the others in this company, it became dark and John and his friend became lost.] We were at least fifteen miles from camp, and attempted to return, but the country was so uneven and rough that we lost our road and finally were compelled to stop, for our mules were tired out and we were also. The night we spent there was most terrible. The wind blew dreadfully, and there was one of the most terrible northwest storms I was ever in. We could get no wood anywhere except on a high knoll. There we found some green sage brush, which we had to pull up by the roots, to make a fire of, and we struck the last one of eleven matches which we had to kindle the fire. The exercise of pulling up the green brush was perhaps what kept us from freezing to death, for we hadn't a blanket nor a bite to eat. Our mules came nearly freezing with their saddles on, it was so terribly cold. We were a happy pair of men to see daylight again, so that we could find our way to camp. We were met by a party of men who had set out to find us, fearing, almost expecting, to find us frozen to death.

From here the group made it safely to the post at Devil's Gate where Dan Jones and his men were spending the winter guarding the luggage of the Hunt and Hodgett wagon companies. They were able to share some provisions with these men who had nearly starved to death through this bitter winter. (See Dan Jones, rescuers section, *Tell My Story, Too*.)

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After John returned to his home in Lehi, he was able to remain home for only a month when he was again called to make a trip with the mail to Independence, Missouri. John wrote: We left Salt Lake City about the first day of July, 1857, carrying with us United States mail. There were three vehicles and six men in the party. ... John Kerr, an agent for Kincaid & Bell, ... merchants, ... had with him a large amount of money, about sixty thousand dollars. I also had about thirteen thousand dollars in Church drafts. We felt, naturally, the great responsibility placed upon us. In fifteen days we covered the entire distance of twelve hundred miles from Salt Lake City to Independence, Missouri. Our stock was fed on grass only, but this was good all along the road. Our method of traveling was as follows: We arose at daylight, hitched up and traveled twenty miles, then stopped for breakfast and rested an hour or two while our stock fed and watered. We then traveled twenty miles and made another stop. In the afternoon we made a like drive and stopped for supper, after which we made a fourth drive into the night, thus making an average of eighty miles' travel each day, for fifteen days.

John made many such record trips across the plains, thwarting thieves and assisting emigrant trains safely to their Zion in the mountains. One important trip he made was with an escort group to safely convey the Saints' friend, Colonel Kane, back to Washington D.C. after his peace-making trip to Utah in 1858. On the return trip, important documents from Washington to Brigham Young needed to be conveyed as quickly as possible: "John R. Murdock was committed the duty of conveying this important document with speed and without delay. He covered the distances of one hundred and fifteen miles in twenty-four hours. ... Some of these rides of [Murdock] will go into history in days to come with the celebrated rides that are characterized in the poetry of our national heroism. ... That faithful horse, Painter, will hold his place, too, in the honorable mention of great deeds."

John served in many responsible positions, being called out of Lehi to be the Bishop of Beaver, elected to the legislature for four consecutive terms, and as a member of the Territorial Convention, the object of which was to draft a state constitution. He was later appointed by the Territorial Legislature as the probate judge of Beaver County. He also served for many years as a beloved Stake President in Beaver, leaving for a time to serve a mission in the Southern States. He also served as a Patriarch in Beaver after his release as Stake President.

John had three wives and 19 children, 10 of which died as infants or children. Bereft of his mother at four years of age and also being subjected to the persecutions of Ohio, Missouri, and Nauvoo in his young years, John had a tender heart for all and was known for assisting the poor and unfortunate. Of his mother's passing, John said many years later: "Fresh in my memory is the death of my dear mother. ... There was a dreadfully sad scene among her poor children following her death. It was simply heartrending to hear little sister Phoebe, only two years old, cry out for her mother as if her little heart would break. We were staying at a neighbor's when father came and told us the sad news. He wept most bitterly; for he realized all the sorrow of the situation."

John married May Bain in 1863. May had come with her mother, siblings, and a good friend, Euphemia Mitchell, to Utah in 1856 with the Willie Handcart Company. May's brother, Robert Bain, had emigrated to Utah from Scotland earlier and also came out on the rescue from Lehi, although it appears he left a little earlier than John. He married May's friend, Euphemia Mitchell.²

Sources: Murdock, S. Reed, *Joseph and Emma's Julia - The Other Twin*, and *John Murdock: His Life and His Legacy*, 2000 and 2005; Walker, Ron W. "Emigrant's hero," *Deseret News*, (unknown date, clipping in possession of Ron Ray).

¹See *Joseph and Emma's Julia - The Other Twin*, by S. Reed Murdock for further accounts of John R. Murdock's childhood and relationship with his sister, Julia, who was adopted by Joseph and Emma Smith. Also read about John R. Murdock's visit to Julia in Nauvoo during his mission to the Southern States in 1880-1882. Julia was dying from breast cancer at this time. John stayed with her for about a month and upon leaving, he "left sufficient means to provide for her and to cover the expenses of her burial and of a tombstone. She died soon after [his] departure." John also visited with Emma Smith some time prior to her death in 1879.

²See *Tell My Story, Too*, biographies of Robert Bain (Rescuers section), Euphemia Mitchell (Willie Company Section) and Elizabeth Smith (Willie Company Section). Elizabeth was May's younger half-sister.