



Born: 14 Jun 1837 Preston, England

Age: 18

Martin Handcart Company

Thomas celebrated his 19th birthday aboard the ship *Horizon* with his mother, Alice Pickup Dobson (48), and siblings, Mary Ann (23) and Willard Richards (17). Thomas was born in Preston, England, the city where “Mormonism” was first publicly preached in Great Britain. His christening in the Church of England was by Reverend James Fielding. In this same church, and on the same day of his christening in July 1837, Heber C. Kimball and other LDS missionaries taught Reverend Fielding’s congregation. Alice Dobson was one of the first seven women to be converted and baptized. Thomas was baptized at age eight by Elder Orson Hyde, who had also baptized his mother in September 1837. Alice was a courageous woman and full of faith to bring her children to Utah by handcart 19 years later. Her husband and two sons had already passed away. In 1906, Thomas was asked to tell his story for a *Deseret News* article: They were members of the last handcart company of the season, the one that suffered most. Thomas was 19 years old, and from the Sweetwater to the end of the journey was entirely without shoes. Both his big toes were so badly frozen that it was thought he would lose the members. Elder Ephraim K. Hanks administered to the youth and promised him that his toes would be saved. Later in the evening Thomas performed a clog dance by request, and he declares that from the same moment until the present time the toes have never troubled him. The members of the Dobson family arrived safely in Salt Lake Valley. For 30 years prior to 1903, Thomas was a nightwatchman in this city, and few men in Salt Lake were more extensively known. Since the years mentioned, he has resided in Centerville, Davis County, where as he terms it, he is “taking life easy.”

In 1906, Thomas was elected to serve as the “third vice president” of the Handcart Veterans Association for the coming year. In October 1907, Thomas wrote his own account of the miraculous healing of his feet: I wore out my shoes on the way, and had to make a good many miles of it on foot. My feet froze and it was no small task hobbling over the rough roads wheeling a handcart. Brother Eph Hanks promised me the first pair of shoes that came to camp. But my feet had swollen so that nothing would fit them. “Tommy,” says Eph, “it’s too bad; but there’s no shoes for you; and the best I can do is to wrap you up in this piece of cotton. Now, I tell you what you do. Stand up and sing the handcart song and I promise you in the name of Israel’s God your feet shall be made whole.” That night I was wakened by a sound of fiddling. A couple in our company got married and the camp was celebrating with a dance. I hobbled out to the fire and stood there listening to the music. “Tommy,” said one of the brethren in a joke, “why don’t you get up there and give us a jig.” Now, I come from Lancashire, and maybe you know what that place is for dancing. I’d known how to clog dance ever since I could remember and when that man told me to dance I got out there and danced as I never had before. That was the last of my lame feet.

Ephraim Knowlton Hanks’s grandsons reported Ephraim’s story in 1948: One evening after having gone as far as Ft. Bridger, I was requested by a sister to come and administer to her son, whose name was Thomas Dobson. 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 himself and danced the hornpipe on the inboard of a wagon, which I procured for that purpose.

Thomas married Catherine Baty on December 15, 1866. They had no children of their own, but adopted a boy who was called Henry Dobson (Johan Henry Wolfensberger) and also raised a little girl, Lucy Addie Quigley, at her father’s request just prior to his death. Addie wrote of Thomas: “No father could have loved these children more.” Addie’s son, Thomas Q. Williams, wrote that Thomas and Catherine “took my mother to raise as their very own and were most kind and lovable to her. They were most kind and tender in their treatment to us as grandchildren and we loved them very much.” Thomas was a noted Pony Express Rider who received official commendation from the federal government. He was also active in many Utah militia units. In 1871 Thomas served a mission in England.

Mary Ann Dobson married James Pearson Clark in 1857 and had nine children. Willard Richards Dobson died in Brigham City, Utah, at age 73. It appears he never married. Alice Pickup Dobson died in Thomas’s home in Salt Lake in 1886. Her obituary states she died “in full faith of the Gospel.”

Sources: *Scouting for the Mormons on the Great Frontier*, by Sidney Alvarus Hanks and Ephraim Kay Hanks, 1948, 139-140; “Handcart Veterans Select Officers,” 1906 newspaper clipping, copy in Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files (Mary A. Schaer newspaper clippings, states: “Original copy at Martin’s Cove Museum”); “Utah Heroes Who Pulled Their All Across the Plains: Thomas Dobson’s Experience,” *Deseret Evening News*, 1 Sept. 1906; “Aged Veterans of the Handcarts,” *Deseret Evening News*, 4 Oct. 1907, 7 (as transcribed on Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Database website); familysearch.org; Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; “Died,” *Salt Lake Herald*, Oct. 2, 1886. Thomas Dobson’s story is portrayed in the T.C. Christensen movie *Ephraim’s Rescue*.