

## NOAH BRIMHALL

Born: February 14, 1826 in Olean, Cattaraugus, New York

Age: 30

Rescuer



Noah's grandfather, Sylvanus Brimhall, fought in the Revolutionary War and Noah's father, also named Sylvanus, served in the War of 1812. Noah's mother, Lydia de Guiteau, was a trained nurse, the daughter of Dr. Francis de Guiteau, physician for Lafayette's troops during the Revolutionary War. Noah was the 11th of 12 children of Sylvanus and Lydia. For a year prior to Noah's birth, his parents built a large raft from the 30,000 feet of lumber prepared from their sawmill on a small tributary of the Allegheny River in New York. Dubbed "Noah's Ark," the family boarded the ship when Noah was only 6 weeks old, about to experience an adventure of a lifetime. After many months of river travel, the family settled in Indiana for 13 years, then in Illinois, where Noah heard and accepted the message of the Mormon Elders as a teenager. Noah and three brothers eventually joined the Church. Noah left Nauvoo with the first wave of pioneers in 1846. He wrote, "On arriving at Council Bluffs, I volunteered to go with the Mormon Battalion but fell ill of ague and fever before the company left and had to remain behind. My brother John joined the Battalion and served to the end."

After assisting the Saints and earning money for 3 years, Noah finally traveled to Utah in 1850 with two of his brothers, John and George. He wrote, "We found money plentiful in Salt Lake, but there was little to buy. We gave most of our stock of provisions to the poor and they were happy to have the gift." Noah's journal entries also give us some interesting details about what it was like for the brothers in their overland travel to Salt Lake:

On one occasion we had a stampede while traveling up the Platte River. A saddle horse galloped from the rear of the train with the pads of the saddle fluttering, and as fast as he came past the teams of oxen, for they were nearly all ox teams, they took fright and about thirty wagons or teams stampeded. Shortly after the teams commenced to run, they came to a deep creek, and for a moment it seemed that the people, men, women, and children, would be precipitated down the steep banks of the creek, but all at once they plunged in to the narrow ford, and teams and wagons piled into that ford one on top of the other until the jam was made so large that it finally stopped the train. Some wagons were broken, some oxen were drown[ed], and some were dragged to death, but no lives of the people were lost. My team escaped by cutting the bow trees and driving the oxen out of the yokes.

The stampede was a common occurrence in those days, but terrible is the sight to see a mad[d]ened and terrified train of teams run, led on as impelled by some invisible spirit, rushing wildly over the plains, oxen bellowing, women and children crying for help, men hollering, whoa, whoa, whoa, sometimes circling around for miles and only when perfectly exhausted will they stop at all. At a certain camp near the head of the Sweetwater our oxen broke the corral that was formed by putting our wagons close together. Some jumping over the wagons and some got away. Some of the oxen running 15 or more miles. One yoke of our team went back 18 miles on the road, and Brother John and myself traveled back 18 miles from eleven o'clock in the morning and returned about 6 o'clock in the afternoon having traveled a distance in excess of thirty-six miles. When we got back to camp, Brother John fell down exhausted and was sick for a long week.

This incident happened when our camp got to Fort Laramie. We took the new road up North Platte. Our company consisted of about ten men at that time and four wagons, and we were all strangers to the road and country. When we left Laramie about two o'clock p.m., all but the drivers walked in advance of the teams to hunt water. We had traveled until about 10 o'clock p.m., all tired and almost famishing for water. Strong men cried for water. Some rocks near the road drew my attention, and when I had got to the top of one of those large rocks, I reached down in the top of a large one that was hollow, and to my great joy and to the joy of our company, I found a few gallons of water that had been deposited by the rain, which enabled us to continue our search. When I found the water in the rock, the story of Moses came to my mind, and I felt to acknowledge the hand of the Lord in our behalf. It being very dark, we had passed the spring of water that we expected to find near the road. About two o'clock a.m. we heard the sound of a waterfall from a recent shower and were soon filled. . . .

## (Noah Brimhall – Page 2)

One day while conversing in relation to the stampeding of our teams, it was proposed by one of our company that we should so fasten ropes on the horns of each near ox, so that one person could catch the ox and could hold on to these ropes and so prevent a runaway. About two o'clock, that being the rehearsal time for the stampede, three of us took hold of the ropes and while walking leisurely, our teams took fright, and the three of us were thrown down and narrowly escaped being run over. Our teams took a circle of about four miles and then came back to the road again without any particular damage, and we resumed our journey about the 24th of July 1850. Brother John had not yet recovered from his fatigue caused by the 36 mile run after our oxen, and seemed to be nigh unto death. He was so badly weakened down with the diarrhea [diarrhea] that he could scarcely speak a loud word. We did not know, but we would have to leave him, but by giving him some herb tea, the herb we found by the roadside, and the exercise of our faith, he recovered so as to travel to Salt Lake at which place we arrived July the 27, 1850.

In October 1855, Brigham Young presented an official immigration policy change in the “Thirteenth General Epistle.” This policy change announced the handcart method of travel. Problems associated with the ox-teams, such as Noah described, were addressed in this epistle:

We are sanguine that such a trail will out-travel any oxtteam that can be started. They should have a few good cows to furnish milk, and a few beef cattle to drive and butcher as they may need. In this way, the expense, risk, loss, and perplexity of teams will be obviated, and the Saints will more effectually escape the scenes of distress, anguish, and death which have often laid so many of our brethren and sisters in the dust.

By 1856, Noah was well-prepared by hard experience to face the rigors of the rescue of the handcart companies. He had a risky and difficult job in bringing the immigrants through the last snow-filled canyons into the Salt Lake Valley. Fellow rescuer, K. Taylor Butler, told his father about it. His father wrote:

[Taylor] said that there were teams reached nearly from the City to Fort Bridger. They had to have men shoveling out snow and breaking the road, and in some places the snow was up above the wagon bows on each side. And they found the Saints in an awful condition, some with their feet froze, and some with their fingers froze, and they had no food to eat, and he said that he never saw such a sight before, it was dreadful. And he said that they [the rescued] were so overjoyed they did not know what to do hardly.

Well, they were all picked up and fed and clothes given to them. When they camped at night there were a whole lot of the boys would break a road to a tree and cut it down for firewood. And when they were coming back, they never saw the sun for six days and it snowed all the time, and they had to break the road over again. And in coming down the big Mountain they never locked a wheel but gee'd off and let the hub of the off wheel drag in the snow and so they came down.

Noah did not write much about the rescue. He recorded his journal entry as follows:

In 1856 I went from Ogden City, Utah, with about thirty brethren and as many wagons and teams to the rescue of the last Handcart Company of the Saints who were snowbound near the head of the Sweetwater. I think we started from Ogden about the 10<sup>th</sup> of October and were gone five weeks from home. We went a distance of about 200 miles. Snow all the way and deep in many places. On this ever memorable trip, I acted as Chaplin[,] being appointed to that office by authority of the Church by Quorum President, Cauncey West, Bishop.

Noah and his family pioneered in Utah, Idaho, and Arizona. When nearly 93 years of age, Noah died in Mesa, Arizona in December 1918. He was the father of 29 children from three wives. On his 74th birthday he wrote, “This day I am at peace with God and my friends. I have great comfort in the Gospel of Jesus Christ which I embraced in my youth.”

His granddaughter summarized his life in these words: He served ten years as a High Councilman, 30 years in Bishoprics, twenty years a patriarch. . . . He blessed his fellowmen, whether it was by beating out stirring military marches on drums of his own making or building houses for widows and orphans, pronouncing patriarchal blessings, [or] laying hands on the sick. With his saw and hammer, square, chisel, plane, forge and anvil, he made most everything—from a ferry on the Missouri, to shoes for his oxen and toys and cradles for his children. . . . He lived when men had to do or die, and where people had to know how and dare to do it. He was a man of temperance, steel nerve, stern, strict, exacting, yet tender and merciful. He spoke in public and men listened.

Sources: FamilySearch.org; Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; “Journal of Noah Brimhall,” unnumbered pages sent to Jolene Allphin by Keith C. Brimhall, April 27, 2009. Hartley, William G., *My Best for the Kingdom: History and Autobiography of John Lowe Butler, A Mormon Frontiersman*, Aspen Books, 1993, 295. (October 2017 update: Daughter of Utah Pioneers history files, submission by Madge Kemp Reeves, Nov. 3, 1969; see Noah’s journal at <http://www.b13family.com>)