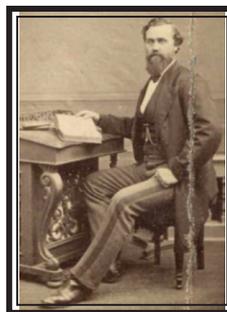


STEPHEN WELLS TAYLOR

Age: 21

Born: 16 December 1834 Dukenfield, Cheshire, England

Rescuer



Stephen Taylor's parents joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during the early years of missionary work in England. They sailed for America in 1841, arrived at New Orleans, then traveled up the Mississippi River on the river boat *Maid of Iowa* to Nauvoo, Illinois. They found shelter in the home of McKay Thomas. Stephen was only 6 or 7 years old, the fourth of eventually nine children. The family later moved out on the prairie not far from a place known as "The Mounds" where his father worked as a bricklayer. His father died there from dysentery in 1845. Stephen was baptized that same year by Brother Thomas Clark.

In 1847 Stephen's mother moved the family back to Nauvoo where they were driven out with the other remaining Saints by a mob in the "War of Nauvoo." Stephen wrote of these experiences:

[Mother] thought fit to send me west—but previous to this we were set upon by the mob which came to our house and ordered us to leave. In order to have everything their own way, they came around to each house to get the guns. I had a little old gun manufactured from a Queen Ann's lock and barrel and stocked by Brother Turley. I remember sitting up at the head of the ladder with it loaded, waiting for them to come upstairs, but mother told them there were no men folks around and that she was a widow so they left. I brought that gun with me to the valley.

I also was close to young Gus Anderson when he was shot with a cannon ball coming through a blacksmith shop which cut him half in two. His father [Major Anderson] was shot the same day.

The Mormon people had cannons made from steam boat cranks and the breach pin was soldered instead of being solid. There was much killing and bloodshed. Finally the Mormons promised to leave and the mob moved into town and placed their cannon in front of the temple. Many of the Mormons moved across the river.

My mother thought it best for me to go West, so, being acquainted with Squire Wells, asked him to look after me. I started to drive a yoke of oxen for Mr. Fulmer. We got about as far as Farmington, Iowa, when, through my neglect, the tongue of the wagon was broken and I was discharged.

It seems as though I was destined to come to the valley, for Brother Wells was 40 miles ahead when the accident occurred, but drove up the river while I was meditating what to do, so when I saw him on the other side of the river, I jumped into the ferry boat, went over and told him of the calamity, and he told me to get in with him. So we have been together ever since. Thank God, for a better man never lived. [Stephen later added Wells as his middle name out of honor and respect for Daniel H. Wells.]

We arrived at Winter Quarters just about haymaking time. I went up the Missouri to what was called Kimballs Ranch and stayed with one Sherman and helped to haul hay. Brother Wells went back to Illinois and to Burlington and left me with E. T. Dugell and family. I wished him to help mother out, which he would have done, but Mother had fallen in with a man [James McGloan] who told her he possessed land in Oregon and that is where the Mormons were going, so they married and after they were married he made no point of coming. It grieved her so that she died of a broken heart in the fall of 1847, leaving 3 living children, Lee [or Leigh] Eekinbottom, Jemima and John William. Jemima and Lee were taken in and cared for by Squire Mousley who was appointed by the Government [as] Indian Agent.

Upon arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, Stephen served as a messenger to the Territorial Legislature and rendered military service with the Life Guards in skirmishes with the Shoshone Indians. In October 1856, Stephen volunteered with the first party of rescuers to go in search of the late companies still on the plains. After this first rescue party had been out for one week (Oct. 14) and still not met any of the immigrants, Captain Grant sent Stephen Taylor, Joseph A. Young, Cyrus Wheelock and Abel Garr ahead as an express team to find and encourage them and let them know that help was on the way. They met the Willie company about noon on October 19. The first winter storm also arrived on that day.

(Stephen W. Taylor - page 2)

William Woodward, a sub-captain who also kept the company journal, recorded: “[They] brought us the cheering intelligence that assistance was near at hand; that several wagons loaded with flour, onions, and clothing, including bedding, [were] within a day’s drive of us.”

Stephen Taylor and Brigham Young’s oldest son, Joseph A. Young, were remembered by George Cunningham of the Willie company as wearing “blue soldier’s overcoats.” George had seen them coming in a dream the previous night and had encouraged the beleaguered members of the Willie Company by sharing the dream with them. He wrote, “At [the] approach [of these rescuers] I roared out, ‘See! See them coming over that hill!’ They told me I was a true dreamer, and we all felt that we should thank God.”

The rescuers continued riding and nine days later the Martin, Hodgett and Hunt companies were located near the last crossing of the North Platte River. They had been stranded there for several days. Assistance was rendered, then these companies were brought to a camp at Devil’s Gate. At this time there were over 1,000 people in these companies and only a few rescuers as some had returned to Salt Lake with the Willie company. It was determined to send the Martin company off the trail into a nearby cove where firewood was more plentiful and where they could find shelter and feed for the animals. It was necessary to cross the Sweetwater River to get there.

Many were the heroics of that dreadful day in assisting the immigrants across the river and into what is now called Martin’s Cove. Of these heroes, John Jacques of the Martin handcart company identifies four rescue boys: David P. Kimball, George W. Grant, C. Allen Huntington and Stephen W. Taylor. Patience Loader of the Martin company wrote: “Those poor brethren [were] in the water nearly all day. We wanted to thank them, but they would not listen to [us].”

Stephen assisted the late companies back to Salt Lake, celebrated his 22nd birthday on arrival, and married Harriet Seeley three months later. To this union were born 9 children. In 1872 Stephen married Mary Evans, a new immigrant from England, and they became the parents of 10 children. Stephen returned to his homeland of England in answer to a mission call, where he served faithfully from 1869-1871. He summarized his life by saying:

I was a mining prospector and a rancher, raising and selling cattle and horses. Brigham Young, Governor of the Territory of Utah, commissioned me color bearer general with the rank of Captain of Calvary of the Nauvoo Legion and of the militia of the Territory of Utah, to take office April 11, 1857. I served the people of Utah as sheriff of the territory, being elected August 3, 1874. I was also an Indian scout, often riding horseback to meet the incoming emigrants, giving them food and help. I served the Church as Deacon, Teacher, Priest, Elder, Seventy and High Priest.

Stephen’s humble conclusion to his autobiography seems to reflect the sentiments expressed in November of 2006 by Russell Bower, sculptor of the Sweetwater crossing monuments near Martin’s Cove. These monuments memorialize the sacrifice made by those four rescue boys. Russell Bower stated in an interview:

“For me, it’s more ... a celebration of the Aaronic Priesthood. And that young men are called to oversee and protect the membership of the Church temporally - and these young men went out there and there wasn’t [a lot of prior thought]. They didn’t sit down at a committee meeting. They saw a need and they responded immediately, even at the risk of physical injury to themselves. They weren’t perfect - they were rough-and-tumble Utah boys, and they were strong. ... It affected them but they did it. And that’s what the Aaronic Priesthood needs to do. So I see it as a monument to the Aaronic Priesthood even more than a monument to the valor of the rescuers and the incredible courage of the pioneers.” (See <http://newsnet.byu.edu/print/story.cfm/62038>)

Sources: “Life History of Stephen Taylor,” Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; letter from Taylor descendant, including documentation of his donation of the 1870’s log building to the Mormon Handcart Historic Site at Sun Ranch; Stella Jaques Bell, *Life History and Writings of John Jaques*, 1978; “Autobiography of George Cunningham,” Mar. 29, 1876; Willie Company Journal, Oct. 19, 1856.