

THOMAS GRIFFIN WINN



Born: 20 December 1829, Pennsylvania

Age: 26

Rescuer

The quoted excerpts in this biography for the *Tell My Story, Too* collection¹ are from a biography by Bishop William Lucellus Winn, son of Thomas Griffin Winn.² (source originally from familysearch memories)

Thomas's parents, John and Cristina Finch Winn, were living in Pennsylvania when Elders from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints visited them.

Their preaching impressed John very much, and he began investigating this new religion. Not being fully satisfied, he went to Kirtland, Ohio, the headquarters of the Church. He was soon convinced of the truthfulness of this new religion and was baptized on the third day of July, 1833, by Oliver Cowdery. He went back to his home and at once began to dispose of his property and in the spring of 1836 moved to Kirtland. ... On arriving at Kirtland they were counseled to continue on to Jackson Co., Missouri.

Thomas Griffin and three brothers – Walstine, William Henry, and James Finch – were all born in Pennsylvania. Another brother, George Finch, was born in December 1838 at Far West, Missouri, after the family had been driven from their home in Jackson County. Thomas was baptized during their stay in Far West. After enduring much persecution and being driven yet again from their home in Far West, the two small Winn brothers, Walstine and James, died from exposure.

They then went with the Saints and helped to build the city of Nauvoo and also the temple and on the 7th of February, 1846, received their endowments in the Temple. They were in Nauvoo when the Prophet and his brother Hyrum were killed and attended their funeral. They were living in Nauvoo when the mob bombarded the City, and they crossed the Missouri River on the ice leaving all their earthly possessions behind. Being destitute, they sought shelter with relatives in Quincy, Illinois.

¹ *Tell My Story, Too*, by Jolene Allphin. Thomas Griffin Winn added to online collection August 16, 2023. See Tellmystorytoo.com.

² <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/memories/KWNV-79P>. This biography will also be uploaded there.

When Thomas was about 17 years old, he obtained employment on the Erie Canal, near Lake Erie, New York.

Thomas went to work on the Erie Canal, near Lake Erie, N. Y. He labored there for nearly two years and while there two L.D.S. Elders held meetings in that vicinity. Their preaching so impressed him that he returned to his home in Quincy and told his parents to get ready to go to Utah, and if they refused to go, he was going anyway, but if they would go with him, he would support them as long as they lived. After some persuasion they decided to follow the other members of the Church and in the Spring of 1850, in company with eight or ten other families, started for Utah, arriving in Salt Lake City, July of the same year. He immediately settled at Lehi 30 miles south of Salt Lake City where he soon met Elizabeth Hatch, born January 19, 1837 in Lincoln, Madison Co., Vermont, and on the 3rd of June, 1854, they were married at Lehi. Two daughters were born to that union; Elizabeth C., born Sept. 8, 1855, and Adeline, born Dec. 8, 1857 at Lehi. ...

In 1856, Thomas answered the call to rescue the late emigrating companies still on the pioneer trail. His brother, William Henry Winn is also noted as a rescuer in the book "History of Lehi," 110. Thomas's son reported:

Thomas was also called to go out and meet Captain Willey's hand cart company that was snowed in near Green River in the early winter of 1856. They were snowed in and camped on the banks of the Green River.³ The snow was so deep and the weather extremely cold that those poor emigrants were badly frozen. Many of them lost their fingers and toes. I have heard him tell of the terrible suffering of those people and how they were frozen. He said he suffered more on that trip than he did in the mobbings of Missouri and Illinois.

He said that the odor from those frozen people was so terrible and rank that he and the teamsters who were hauling them and to sit out in front of the cover and pull the cover down between them so they could stand the odor, it was so terrible.⁴ While riding in the open he froze his own feet and ears and suffered terribly, as did many of the drivers. James Reid, father of Robert Reid of Smithfield was one of the number he brought in and I have sat and listened to my father and Brother Reid tell of the terrible suffering they endured and the terrible condition they were in.⁵

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³ If Thomas Winn was with the first group of rescuers (October 7 group), the place where the Willie company was first found and "snowed in" was on the Sweetwater River, anywhere between the 6th and 8th crossings.

⁴ Many in the Willie company who were unable to walk had dysentery (or diarrhea). When they arrived in Salt Lake City, many also had body lice, as reported by William Woodward. Thomas may have helped the Willie company into Salt Lake, and then gone back to help bring in the Hodgetts and Hunt wagon companies who were stranded at Green River in early December.

⁵ See James Reid's family story at http://www.tellmystorytoo.com/member_pdfs/james-reid_1934_436.pdf. The Reid family lived in Smithfield at the same time as Thomas's family. The Reid family was in the Willie handcart company.

number. I have heard my father and him tell of the terrible condition they were in. The odor from those poor frozen people was so rank that the teamsters who were hauling them had to pull down the wagon cover between them and the people, so they could stand to sit in the wagon and drive their team. This caused the teamsters to suffer greatly with the cold and many of them froze their feet and ears.

In the fall of 1857, he was called in connection with a number of others to go out and meet the U.S. Army, led by General Johnson, and to hinder them in every way so as to keep them in the mountains until winter snows came and made it impossible to travel. They were ordered to burn the grass, drive off their cattle, set fire to their supply wagons and in many other ways hinder but not to kill anyone only in defending their own lives. They hindered them so much that the army decided to stay at Ft. Bridger for the winter. While away on that mission, his second daughter was born.

During the winter of 1857, he married Elizabeth Andrea Hansen [Nielson]. She was born April 17, 1840 in Bornholm, Denmark. Seven children were born to this union. They were: Jeramiah, Julia, Martha, Wm. L., Sylvia, Mary L., and George. He was called to go and help settle Cache Valley and accordingly set out on March 29, 1860, arriving here on April 1st. While traveling from Lehi to Smithfield, the first son took ill on the way and died and was buried in the Brigham City Cemetary.

Soon after their arrival here a branch of the state Militia was organized and Thomas Winn was made Captain of the Cavalry and Thomas Ricks Captain of the Militia and each year they would meet on the old church farm now known as College Ward, and there they would be drilled in military training. These men were expected to be ready at a moment's call to quell any outbreak of the Indians or gangs of outlaws that might be roaming over the country. During the Summer of 1860, there was a band of renegade Indians led by an Indian Chief named Pugwenie who had been causing a lot of trouble stealing the horses and cattle from the settlers and running them out of the country. Chief Pugwenie was arrested and brought down to the Bishop's for trial. Soon his followers came down, rushed into the house and called for him to come. He jumped up and ran. Thomas Winn and Samuel Cousins were placed as guards outside. As they passed the guards, the Indians fired at them. They returned shots at the Indians, and Chief Pugwenie fell mortally wounded. Samuel Cousins was also a shot through the breast but recovered.

He [Thomas] was elected to the office of policeman and acted in this office for 22 years. During that time he had many thrilling experiences of which I will mention only one at this time. There were many reckless characters roaming over the country headed for California, Oregon and Washington. Many times they would steal the people's horses, cattle or anything they could get away with. On one occasion, two men stole a horse belonging to big Sam Merrill. (I am writing this just as Sam related it to me). Sam and father followed them and overtook them camped on Bear River north of Preston just as it was coming daylight. They had hitched the horse up and was about to start when Thomas stopped them and began to unhitch the horse. The men were sitting on a seat in the wagon with drawn guns and threatened to kill any man that would attempt to take that horse. Sam became so frightened that he said, "Let them have the horse." But Thomas with gun in one

hand unharnessed the horse with the other and with his gun leveled on those men, led the horse away. This was just one among many of such incidents.

In May 1874, [Thomas] married Christina Ottobeck. Twelve children were born to this union. In the spring of 1875, Thomas was called to take the Church cattle and the spare cattle of Smithfield up into the Treasureton Country and herd them. On their return in the fall, he had to take them to Salt Lake City. His vocation was farming and along with other responsibilities, he looked after the farm and was known as a very successful farmer. He assisted in laying out the townsite of Smithfield and helped in every public improvement. In 1887 when the U. S. Government was waging war against plural marriage, he went to St. George where he obtained employment for two years. When the trouble eased down, he came back to his old home. He purchased a farm in Gentile Valley, but because of his ill health he was forced to retire. He had several serious attacks of dropsy, but finally improved in health, so he decided to visit his daughter in Grand Junction. While there, his old ailment returned and in May, 1904, he passed to the great beyond at the age of 75 years. Written by Bishop William L. Winn, a son.