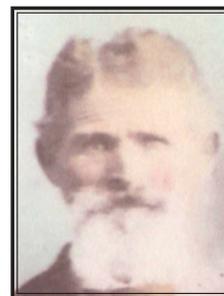


WILLIAM MILTON BELL

Born: July 22, 1833

Age: 23

Rescuer



Alfred and Martha Bell were living in Illinois when they came in contact with the Church and were baptized in May of 1839. Alfred and Martha received their temple ordinances in the Nauvoo Temple in 1846. They were the parents of two sons, William Milton and Eli (born 1834). The boys enjoyed several years of their childhood in Nauvoo.

William remembered seeing the prophet Joseph Smith “riding on his fine gray horse and Hyrum on his black one. He also remembered distinctly the cruel assassination of the Prophet and Hyrum, and was among those saints who mourned deeply the loss of their great leaders. William, as a boy, accompanied his father to the meetings where the mantle of the Prophet Joseph fell on Brigham Young, and told how he asked his father if that was the Prophet returned to his people, even his voice was like that of the Prophet Joseph.” (Sarah Bell Harris, daughter, 1876-1965)

William’s family was driven from their home in Nauvoo by mob violence in May of 1846. William was a young teenager when he drove the family’s cattle across the plains.

In 1851 the Bell family settled in Cedar Valley, where they built the first home. William’s father reportedly selected and located the town of Cedar Fort. They later moved to Lehi, where they were living in 1856. It was at this time that William volunteered, in company with another man, to carry supplies to the handcart companies. Due to the severe weather conditions encountered, William’s companion did not continue on with him, but returned to the valley. After serving faithfully in the rescue, William returned home on Christmas day 1856. His feet were so badly frozen that he never fully recovered from the trouble with his feet, and his family felt that this contributed significantly in causing his death.

William was an Indian war veteran. Many of his badges are in possession of the family. William was highly skilled in carpentry. He worked on the Salt Lake Tabernacle and the Temple, and was commissioned by Brigham Young to construct several articles of furniture. Of these, two cabinets, a writing desk and a picture frame made by William are exhibited in the Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum in Salt Lake City. His daughter, Sarah, proudly noted that “many of the best homes in Salt Lake City and Cache Valley were built by him.” William was also the carpenter who constructed the original wooden eagle, with its 16-foot wingspan, that sat atop the Eagle Gate monument in downtown Salt Lake City. He worked on the finish carving with Ralph Ramsey. Some years later the eagle was sent east to be electro-plated. Fifty years later, the monument was hit by a truck. (A metal box revealing this history was found inside.) Due to the widening of State Street in the early 1960s, the prior monument, including Bell’s and Ramsey’s eagle, was removed and replaced with a much wider and larger third-generation monument. The current eagle is bronze and weighs 4,000 pounds and has a wingspan of 20 feet. The original wooden eagle is on display at the Daughters of Utah Pioneers museum in Salt Lake City.

In 1859, Milton married a Danish girl, Martha Kirstine Benson. They lived in Lehi, Logan, Clarkston, and Newton, Utah, and were founding pioneers of Newton. They first lived from their wagon-box while they built a home. Because lumber was hard to get, the family’s first log house had no floors, doors or trim.

(William M. Bell – Page 2)

One pioneering problem these new families experienced was protecting their crops and animals from predators. One time the men banded together in two groups, then had a contest to see which side could bring in the largest number of coyote and wolf scalps. The losing team had to treat the winners to a big dinner and dance. At one time William almost lost his life in an encounter with a grizzly bear that had been destroying the pioneers' gardens in Cache Valley. He finally formed a posse and went out one night to catch the bear. The presiding authorities had warned the citizens not to go on any bear hunts, but William unwisely went anyway. There were not enough rifles to go around, so some of the men had only old-fashioned six-shooters. Phillip Cardon was armed with a gun with a long bayonet, as he was considered the most skilled hunter in the group and could probably fight at close range. His brother, Paul Cardon, carried a six-shooter.

The men were hiding in a small patch of brush when the bear was seen. William had instructed the men not to shoot or move without orders. When William finally felt the bear was close enough to be confronted, he yelled out the signal, "Make ready!" He expected the bear would rear up on its hind legs, but instead it charged immediately at William, so close that he was unable to shoot. William struck the bear with his gun and knocked out a tooth. The bear responded by striking William and knocking him 10 feet in the air. As he landed, the bear was astride him, then sunk its teeth into William's ribs under his right arm, picked him up and shook him. Some of the men began shooting from a distance but were afraid to aim too close for fear of hitting their friend. Paul Cardon courageously ran up with his six-shooter and fired twice, causing the bear to drop William and run off. William was injured but able to walk home with assistance. Martha was waiting up for him and thought he looked pale. He told her nothing was the matter, that he was just a little hungry. She gave him some bread and milk, but he couldn't eat it. She finally noticed some blood trickling down his wrist and realized he was hurt. William was compelled to tell her the whole story.

Under William's direction a saw-mill was set up for the Newton townspeople. William's children have many memories associated with this saw-mill. They said, "It was an impressive sight to see [our] father come home and remove water soaked clothes frozen so stiff they would stand alone." (Sarah B. Harris) The Bell home was used for all community activities until a meeting-house could be built. William's services as a carpenter were in much demand in this little community, including the building of coffins. William no doubt built a coffin for his own dear wife, who died in 1878, leaving William with a broken heart and eight children to care for, the youngest being less than two years old.

Shortly after his wife died, William moved his family back to Logan, where much of his work was, so that he wouldn't have to be gone from the children so often. He and his oldest son put up the temple saw-mill and worked on the Logan Temple for about five years, during which time William did much of the finish carpentry. His daughter, Sarah, wrote: "I remember carrying his lunch up the steep temple hill to him. Very high winds used to come down the Logan Canyon at times and do a great deal of damage. On one occasion I saw the ruinous work of the wind. It blew timbers from the very top of the temple, making their way down through the plastered ceilings and did much damage. How grieved we were to see our beloved edifice battered and bruised."

William built his two-story dream home in Logan and enjoyed much happiness here with his children. William's mother also lived close by with his brother, Eli. But when William's children began to marry and move away, William's greatest wish was to be near them and keep the family

(William M. Bell – Page 3)

together, so the family moved again in 1884, this time to Idaho. William was a pioneer one last time, helping to build the homes, bridges, and canals of Rexburg.

All of William's children settled in Rexburg where William died in 1908. A few years before his death, William broke his leg and went to live with his daughter, Marion, until he had recovered sufficiently to return to work. He had a great deal of trouble with his feet and legs, and the family believes this began in his earlier years because of being frozen while on his 1856 rescue mission. At several times he had toes amputated, then his foot, part of his leg, and finally his entire leg. The gangrene could not be overcome, and William finally died in the home of his son, Hyrum, in Salem, Idaho, on November 18, 1908. After remaining a widower for 30 years, William was buried beside his wife in the Newton cemetery. Marion Bell's son, William R. Anderson, wrote of him: "Through his works, and his family[,] he left his part of the world a by far better place for his having lived and fulfilled his second estate. By his example he taught his children thrift and industry, good citizenship, and love for the Lord and His work, and love for his fellowman."

Sources: Bell family histories and photos in files of Jolene Allphin, sent by Ray Bell, Los Gatos, California, including "History of William Milton Bell" by his daughter, Sarah Bell Harris; Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files for William M. Bell: 1. "Early Battle With Grizzly Is Recalled" by unknown author. 2. "A Brief Life Sketch or Biography of William Milton Bell" by W.R. Anderson; http://www.mendonutah.net/history/cache_county/35.htm ("Miscellaneous Cache Valley Animal Stories"); http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eagle_Gate.

Pictured: William Milton Bell (right) and his sons

