

I WILL GO

On Saturday, **October 25, 1856**, Brigham Young sent a messenger to find Ephraim Hanks. He was needed to go into the mountains and high plains east of Salt Lake City to help bring in the last immigrating companies of 1856.¹ Ephraim had been in Utah County working on a fishing contract but he was already on his way to Salt Lake when the messenger met him. Ephraim had been visited in a dream the night before by an angelic messenger and was told he was needed. He replied to the messenger, "I will go."

It was not known in Salt Lake how far away the last companies were or what their conditions might be, but Brigham Young sent out public and private rescue calls for 8 weeks after the first calls from the pulpit in Salt Lake on **Sunday, October 5, 1856**, and the first day of General Conference on **Monday, October 6**. Approximately 75 men responded to these calls and left the city on **October 7** under the direction of George D. Grant. Some were on horseback or mules, and others were handling the teams and wagons, heavily laden with resupply for the companies. The weather in Salt Lake and on the plains was still good when this first group of rescuers left, but by the time they found the late companies, including the Willie and Martin handcart companies, the people were in great distress.

The next major rescue call from the pulpit was on **Sunday, October 26**. Ephraim had arrived in Salt Lake City the previous day and was able to report, "I am ready now." He left the next morning, with a light wagon, ahead of men with 115 teams who had also responded to the call. He passed the Willie handcart company on **November 2**, about 15 miles east of Fort Bridger. The Willie company had men from the first group of rescuers (under George D. Grant) already with them.

Ephraim reached a camp near South Pass on **November 4**, where Reddick Allred, also from the first group of rescuers, had been stationed with supplies. A violent storm caused Hanks to hunker down there with Allred until **November 6**. Ephraim said, "The storm during these three days was simply awful. In all my travels in the Rocky Mountains both before and afterwards, I have seen no worse."

The wagons behind Hanks were stopped by the same storm at various places between Fort Bridger, Green River, and Pacific Springs. Two men from this group rode ahead to Allred's camp to see if anything had been heard from the Martin company yet. When these men learned there was no word, they decided to return to Salt Lake and tried to convince Allred and Hanks to abandon the station and go with them, but they would not desert their assignments.

Ephraim continued his journey the morning of **November 6**. He had procured two animals and a pack saddle from the station in case he had to pack through. Allred wrote: "As it was very cold & the wind blowing a gale from the West, [Hanks] set a sail behind his wagon and struck out at the rate of ten knots [11.5 miles per hour]." Ephraim declared he would "obtain news [of the Martin company] if he went to [Fort] Laramie or the States for it." Three men rode twenty miles out

¹ These companies were the Abraham O. Smoot wagon train, the James G. Willie handcart company, the Edward Martin handcart company, the Ben Hodgett(s) wagon company, and the John A. Hunt wagon company.

with Hanks that day to see if they could find anything, but "returned that evening reporting snow a foot deep on a level."

Ephraim camped in a hollow near Strawberry Creek that night. He said "As I was preparing to make a bed in the snow with the few articles that my pack animal carried for me, I thought how comfortable a buffalo robe would be on such an occasion, and also how I could relish a little buffalo meat for supper, and before lying down for the night I was instinctively led to ask the Lord to send me a buffalo. ... After praying as I did on that lonely night in the South Pass, [I] looked around me and spied a buffalo bull within fifty yards of my camp. I had certainly not expected so immediate an answer to my prayer. ... My first shot brought him down ... and then [he] rolled down into the very hollow where I was encamped. ... After skinning my game ... I spread the hide on the snow and placed my bed upon it. I next prepared supper, eating tongue and other choice parts of the animal I had killed, to my heart's content. After this I enjoyed a refreshing night's sleep."

It was necessary for Ephraim continue his journey without his wagon the next morning. When he reached the Ice Springs bench on **November 9**, he "happened upon a herd of buffalo, and killed a nice cow." He "skinned and dressed the cow; then cut up part of its meat in long strips and loaded [his] horses with it."

On this same day, the Martin handcart company was leaving a cove in the mountain near Devil's Gate. They had sheltered there for five days of extreme cold, very low rations, and in need of much more help than the small first group of rescuers could render them. Rescuer Harvey Cluff was one of these with the Martin company. He wrote, "The only glimmer of hope that seemed to reconcile our feelings and that was the utmost confidence in President Brigham Young's inspiration that he would keep companies coming out to meet us." Robert T. Burton, clerk of the first rescue party, wrote that during their stay at Devil's Gate and the cove, they held meetings every night to "counsel together & ask the Lord to turn away the Cold & Storm so that the people might live." Although they were only able to travel five miles on **November 9**, their prayers were answered. Burton recorded that it was a "fine Warm morning." Ephraim was now less than 40 miles from the Martin company, and no doubt grateful for the warmer weather as he prepared the buffalo meat.

On **November 10**, as Ephraim continued his lonely journey, he finally met the Martin company at dusk. They were a little east of today's Split Rock overlook site, over 300 miles from Salt Lake City. Ephraim said, "When they saw me coming, they hailed me with joy inexpressible, and when they further beheld the supply of fresh meat I brought into camp, their gratitude knew no bounds." Ephraim learned that his arrival fulfilled a prophecy made by one of the brethren that they would "feast on buffalo meat when their provisions might run short; my arrival in their camp, loaded with meat, was the beginning of the fulfillment of that prediction; but only the beginning, as I afterwards shot and killed a number of buffalo for them as we journeyed along. When I saw the terrible condition of the immigrants on first entering their camp, my heart almost melted within me. I rose up in my saddle and tried to speak cheering and comforting words to them. I told them also that they should all have the privilege to ride into Salt Lake City, as more teams were coming."

Rescuer William Broomhead recorded in his diary this day (**Nov. 10**): "Ephraim Hanks came to us from the valley and reported that two hundred teams had started but he did not know if they had not turned back on account of the storm and that [two of them] came up to [Allred's] post and scared out and turned back. Prayer by E. Hanks." Martin company member John Jaques recalled: "Some others of the relief parties, further [back], had come to the conclusion that the rear companies of the emigration had perished in the snow, but Ephraim was determined to go along, even though alone, and see for himself."

Ephraim reported, "A great portion of my time was devoted to waiting on the sick. ... Requests [for blessings] were made of me almost hourly for some time after I had joined the immigrants, and I spent days going from tent to tent. ... Truly the Lord was with me and others of His servants who labored faithfully together with me in that day of trial and suffering. The result of this our labor of love certainly redounded to the honor and glory of a kind and merciful God. ... I believe I administered to several hundreds in a single day." Although many were healed in miraculous ways, some lost their limbs to freezing. Ephraim said, "Many such I washed with water and castile soap, until the frozen parts would fall off, after which I would sever the shreds of flesh from the remaining portions of the limbs with my scissors. ... So far as I remember, there were no fresh cases of frozen limbs after my arrival in camp."

Ephraim Hanks had truly brought this first glimmer of hope, providing priesthood blessings, fresh buffalo meat, and the good news that there were more wagons behind him. Although many rescue wagons had turned back toward Salt Lake the week before Ephraim's meeting the Martin company, there were some others like Ephraim who refused to do so when the storm abated.

On **November 12**, Robert T. Burton recorded that it was another "fine morning, warm for the season ... met 4 teams with some flour. Camped above the 3 crossings." Hiram T. Spencer was one who met the Martin company that day, 300 miles from Salt Lake. He wrote: "Met them on the three crossing. The people were worn out and frozen. ... We had to go back along the trail four or five miles to get those that weren't strong enough to walk into camp."

On **November 13 and 14**, respectively, Burton again recorded the good weather: "very pleasant morning" and "Weather very pleasant." Three teams led by Arza Hinckley met the company on **November 14** at Ice Springs. Arza wrote: "From there in to Salt Lake City, Eph Hanks, one of my Battalion chums, [and I] spent much of our time while in camp in administering to the sick. Ephraim was a man of great faith. ... We were well united in the faith and feelings ... when we went out to meet the handcart company."

On **November 15**, Burton again recorded the good weather: "Weather continued fine & Warm."

On **November 16** the company crossed Rocky Ridge and camped at Strawberry Creek, close to the hollow where Ephraim had prayed for a buffalo over a week previous. They met ten teams on Rocky Ridge that day. These teams were led by Anson Call, who likewise had not let the storm stop him. After passing the Willie company earlier, and seeing some rescue teams that had turned back, Anson said, "This company [Willie] with a little help and a lot of encouragement will reach the Valley. Those following never can. We must push on! My teams start now!"

Ephraim Hanks stayed with the Martin company until they reached the valley on **November 30**. He had fulfilled his calling from Brigham Young and his promise to the Lord to go and help the handcart people. He was indeed a "glimmer of hope" to them when he arrived with buffalo meat, blessings, and encouragement for their weary souls.

Sources in order of appearance in article:

1. Ephraim K. Hanks narrative in Andrew Jenson, *The Contributor*, 1892-1893 (Volume 14), March 1893, 199-205; also in Sidney Alvarus Hanks and Ephraim K. Hanks, *Scouting For The Mormons On The Great Frontier*, Deseret Book Company, 1948, 132-142.
2. Reddick N. Allred Journal, Daughters of Utah Pioneers History Department. See Church History Library MS 8795 for diary images. (Sometimes he spelled his name Redick.)
3. Harvey H. Cluff autobiography, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, 18-25.
4. Robert T. Burton, Camp Journal, 1856, in *Be Kind To The Poor: The Life Story of Robert Taylor Burton*, by Janet Burton Seegmiller, 1988; Handcart Veterans Association Scrapbook, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library; *Robert Burton Diaries*, Church History Library, MS 1221.
5. William Broomhead diary, Church History Library, MS 6952, folder 1.
6. John Jaques, "Reminiscences," *The Salt Lake Daily Herald*, December 29, 1878.
7. Autobiography of Hiram Theron Spencer, personal copy, courtesy of descendant Elder Hardy, handcart trek missionary.
8. Arza Erastus Hinckley autobiography, Church History Library, MS 10863, 11-12; Stephen K. Jones, "United in Faith – The Rescue of the Martin Handcart Companies," 1991, Sons of Utah Pioneers Research Library, Special Collections.
9. Anson Call, journal, in *The Life and Record of Anson Call*, 56, personal copy.

Other: The source for 115 teams leaving Salt Lake on October 27 comes from the journal of Wilford Woodruff.

The source for the date and place of Ephraim Hanks passing the Willie company on November 2 comes from the Willie company journal.

Details regarding the dates Ephraim was at Reddick Allred's camp, when he left, and how far he went the first night out from there, are found in a letter from Claudious V. Spencer to Brigham Young, Nov. 12, 1856, Church History Library, CR 1234 1: Brigham Young office files 1832-1878, General Letters, 1840-1877, J-Sp, 1856, box 25. folder 7, item 88-91.

Note: Few men are remembered as much as Ephraim Hanks in handcart rescue stories. As Ephraim's and others' narratives and stories became published, some immigrants wrote their own experiences that included a rescuer they thought must have been Ephraim Hanks, but he was incorrectly identified. Some examples are found in narratives from Mary Hurren of the Willie company; Isaac Wardle and Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson of the Martin company; and likely Mary Goble of the Hunt wagon company.

Some quotes from journals have been edited slightly for readability.

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