

Startling Story of the First Trip From Salt Lake to Los Angeles

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Who first crossed the trail to Los Angeles from Salt Lake? The question has been growing in importance with the interest in the southwest country. Credit has generally been given, so far as Americans are concerned, to a "Mormon" emigrant party under Apostle Amasa M. Lyman, who left Salt Lake in 1851. This week has developed the fact that a part of "Mormons," numbering eighteen men, preceded this trip by four years. All record of the expedition has been overlooked. It has been omitted in the histories, and but for the announcement by President Clark that those who first made the trip were to be given a ride over the trail on his new railroad, would perhaps never have come to light.

One of the survivors of the first party is Bishop John Hunt of Snowflake, Arizona. When he read in the "News" last week that the party of 1851 was the first to cross the desert, he called to correct the error, and in doing so unfolded an altogether new chapter of early history, both of the southwest and of Utah.

HISTORY "READJUSTED"

As the memory of an old man, however honest his intentions, is hardly an authoritative source for names and dates of history over half a century old, the "News" has gone over the statement of Bishop Hunt most carefully, and it has been fully verified by the records of the times, and proved conclusively to be a forgotten chapter of Utah's earliest history.

In readjusting the statement of expeditions into the southwest, it is now necessary to date the first one at Nov. 16, 1847, less than four months after the pioneers arrived here. The expedition of 1851 becomes the second Utah expedition, while the returning members of the "Mormon" battalion, who arrived here Sept. 16, 1847, still hold the record for making the first trip from Los Angeles to Salt Lake. The Hunt trip in 1847 was not the first American trip, either. That party started out with a map, or set of directions, furnished them by a trapper named "Duff" Weber, after whom Weber river and Weber county are

named.

Weber had crossed the trail with Kit Carson several years previously, and had only imperfect recollections of the trail. But with this as a guide and a returned member of the "Mormon" battalion as an additional source of information, the party made the long trip.

SEEDS WERE WANTED

In the usual conception of the settlement of Salt Lake valley, it was seeds which were brought with the pioneers that were first planted, and seeds from the harvest next year which furnished the permanent supply. But the grave need for seed grain, and for milch cows for the colonists was the cause of this earliest trip. It consumed forty-five days in getting to the Chino ranch in San Bernardino. The party rested there for a number of days and returned to Salt Lake, bringing with them into the valley ninety-seven head of cows and one bull. Originally, the drove consisted of 200 cows and about 20 bulls, but all but the number given were killed by Indians or died while en route over the waterless tracts of desert.



John Hunt

Photo courtesy of Jack West, Jr.

HOW THE RECORD WAS LOST

The story of the trip as narrated by Bishop Hunt is an interesting one. He is a very modest man, and objected to talking more about it than merely to tell the fact that it was made so that it might secure its place in the history of south-western trail blazing.

The way in which this trip became lost to record is interesting, too. It has to do with the coming here of Johnston's army when the settlers were thrown into a state of confusion and had hurriedly to leave their newfound homes, and seek refuge in the south. When the trip started, long trips had no historical significance. The leading men of the pioneer party were away in Winter Quarters, while affairs in the valley were in charge of the stake presidency. The men who made the trip were mostly young men who ranged about more freely and entirely uncharted on the western domain while their older brethren performed the work of which records have been kept. Hunt returned to California with the party under Apostles Parley P. Pratt and Amasa M. Lyman in 1851. He remained there until San Bernardino was abandoned at the call of President

Young, and then with others of his religious faith, went south before the approach of Johnston's army. He located in Beaver county for a time, and in 1875 went to Snowflake, Ariz., where he had since resided. He is now in Salt Lake attending the semi-annual conference.

BISHOP HUNT'S STORY

"When the Mormon Battalion was called for, my father was in Winter Quarters," he said, on being asked to tell the story from the beginning of the movement towards the west. "And he enlisted. He was made captain of company A of the battalion, while my two older brothers, Martial and Gilbert, enlisted in his company. My age was then 14 years, as I was born in Illinois in 1823, after my parents had joined the Church. My father had an adopted child of about my own age, named Peter Nease. He is still living in Idaho, somewhere, and he went through most of my experiences with me. If he can be located now he will verify all that I say.

"My father obtained permission for my mother and the children to follow the battalion, and we went with it as far as Pueblo, where we found a Mexican stockade fort. There we were left, together with the sick of the battalion under Capt. Brown. As the pioneer train under Brigham Young came west, Apostle Amassa M. Lyman came to our camp at Pueblo and notified us to join the main party. We started out to do it, but got to Fort Laramie after they had left there. We tracked their road, however, and followed them into Salt Lake, arriving here July 29, 1847, five days after the main party had come in.

"That summer Peter Nease and I built two houses in the old Pioneer square, covering them over with brush and mud roofs. We also herded the town cows along the Jordan river.

"In September my father arrived from Los Angeles, having taken his discharge from the battalion. He reported that on the way he had stopped at a ranch owned by Col. Williams, an American who had been under command of Col. Fremont in the capture of California, and had obtained prices on cows and seeds.

THOSE WHO WENT

"The Church authorities decided to send an expedition back to the ranch to make purchases, and my father and I were among those chosen to go. The party was under the leadership of Horace K. Lathrop, with E. K. Fuller as his lieutenant. There were 18 in the party and the names were Horace Lathrop, Elijah K. Fuller, William Peacock, Orrin P. Rockwell, Joseph M. Davis, Eli Harvey Pierce, Thurston Larsen, James Hyrons, Jake Workman, Jackson Workman, Jefferson Hunt, who was my father, Gilbert Hunt, my brother, Peter Nease, my adopted brother, James Shaw, John Y. Greene, Elias F. Pearsons, William B. Cornogg and myself.

THIRTY DAYS PROVISIONS

“We took provisions for 30 days, which we estimated would be ample time to reach our destination in. But we found the directions of Weber very hard to follow, and lost the trail so often, and spent so much time hunting it again, that we finally ran out of provisions before we had reached the vicinity of Las Vegas. We then did what I think no other party of ‘Mormon’ emigrants ever had to do—we killed and ate our horses. Three horses in all were consumed. Two of them belonged to John Y. Greene and the other to William Cornogg. The first we killed at Mountain Spring, just beyond Vegas, the next at Amargosse springs, and the final one near the Mojave river. Our equipment consisted of about 20 pack animals, and a saddle horse each, with plenty of arms with which to defend ourselves, and the slight provisions already mentioned.

“When we reached a point where Barstow station is now located we camped, while two of our strongest men—Shaw and Cornogg, rode ahead to get provisions. They sent a Mexican to us with beef and fresh mounts, and we moved on again, arriving at the Chino ranch after 45 days on the trail.

THE CHINO RANCH

“This Chino ranch is one of two which figured in the ‘Mormon’ settlement of southern California. It was leased afterwards by the Crismon boys, one of whom takes this trip. It was near the San Bernardino ranch which the Church settlers bought in 1851. One of the Crismon boys, George Crismon, wooed and won his wife, Mary Louisa Tanner, from among the San Bernardino colonists and they now live in Sugar ward of this city.”

Continuing his story of the trip, Mr. Hunt said, “We were exhausted when we reached the Chino ranch, but Col. Williams was very generous in his treatment of us. He furnished us with cows which we milked after strapping them down, and plenty of flour from which to make our bread. We remained there five or six weeks, resting up and preparing for the return trip. Finally, on Feb. 15, we started out, with about 200 cows, for which we gave him \$6 each, and a few pack animals and mares, also about 40 bulls. He told us he would give us all the bulls we wanted to drive off. They all died but one from thirst while about 100 cows also perished. Occasionally the Indians would sneak up close enough to kill one of them, but otherwise they did not bother us. We got back to Salt Lake in May, 1848.”

AN EARLY MAIL CARRIER

Mr. Hunt returned to California with his father and mother when the colony went, and took up the occupation of mail carrier between Salt Lake and Los Angeles. In this capacity he crossed the desert 27 times, which is a record, perhaps not exceeded by any other man. George Crismon crossed it 11 times.

FASTEST DESERT TRIP

He perhaps made the fastest trip over the desert, too. The mail boys were allowed 30 days to make a single trip, but usually did it in 20. In 1857, when all able bodied "Mormons" were camped in the canyons guarding Great Salt Lake Valley, and when Johnston's army was on the other side of the Wasatch, Col. Thomas L. Kane of Philadelphia went to Washington and volunteered as a peacemaker. He then took a ship to San Pedro harbor, and started for Salt Lake. Mr. Hunt was living in Beaver county at the time, but Col. Kane arrived there with William Godbe, who had been sent out as an escort, by President Brigham Young. He wished to hurry in faster than the mail boys could escort him, so that he might arrive here before a fight could occur. Mr. Hunt accordingly organized a system of relays and brought him in in a hurry. Later William Godbe was sent back to San Bernardino to secure the trunk of Col. Kane. Mr. Hunt was designated to go with him, and they made the round trip in 22 days and 18 hours, which is the fastest time ever made over the route until the train service reduced the time to 36 hours.

Bishop Hunt is still a very vigorous man, apparently not yet over the hardy days of his activity. He has many relatives living in San Bernardino now. But of the old party who made the first trip there from Salt Lake, the only member still alive to his knowledge is his boyhood brother and companion, Peter Nease.

The historical records of this trip are very meager, and consist of a reference in a letter to President Young, written by President John Smith, in charge of the settlements in Utah.

In Whitney's History of Utah, O. P. Rockwell, one of the members of this party is named as going east in August, 1847, with Brigham Young to Winter Quarters. However the historical record shows that he left the company and returned to Utah. The stake presidency in charge of affairs here were John Smith, president, and Chas. C. Rich and John Young counselors. In reporting to President Young at Winter Quarters in a letter written March 6, 1848, President Smith said: "Several of the brethren wished to go to California to procure wheat, cows, beeves, etc., and we felt to sanction their so doing and bid them God speed. Accordingly 19 men under the direction of Horace K. Lathrop, O. P. Rockwell, and E. K. Fuller started on or about the 16th day of November, and have not yet returned."