

WILLIAM JASPER HARRIS Sr

Written by Sarah Harris Passey

William Jasper Harris was born October 25, 1836, at Geneva, Morgan County, Illinois. He was the only son of Zachariah and Emily Hill Harris. He also had three sisters. Their names were Martha Artie Missa, June, and Elizabeth Ann. The two latter died when small babies.

William's father, Zachariah Harris, died leaving him a small boy three years of age. Emily, his mother, was a wonderful woman, very ambitious. She made a living for herself and two children by weaving and knitting until the year 1846, when she married Abraham O. Smoot as a plural wife. William, then a lad of seven years, with the rest of the family, moved to Nauvoo where wagons and teams were made ready for the long journey across the plains.

They camped at Winter Quarters where they remained until spring when they started west in A. O. Smoot's Company, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley September 1, 1847. William, then at the age of nine years, barefooted and thinly clad, was willing to assist in any way to help his mother and others.

A. O. Smoot secured a large farm which provided employment for his family. William had his work laid out for him to do and worked very hard until he reached the age of nineteen years when he was called to go on a mission to England.

In looking through Father's paper, not long ago, I found the Elder's Certificate which was given to Father at the time of his departure. I will copy it here.

"To all persons to whom this letter shall come:

"This certifies that the bearer, Elder William J. Harris, is in full faith and fellowship with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and by the General Authorities of said Church, has been duly appointed a missionary to Europe to preach the Gospel and administer in all the ordinances thereof pertaining to his office. And we invite all men to give heed to his teachings and counsels as a man of God, sent to open to them the door of life and salvation--and assist him in his travels in whatever thing he may need. And we pray God the Eternal Father to bless Elder Harris and all who receive him and minister to his comfort with the blessings of heaven and earth, for time and for all eternity, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

Signed at Great Salt Lake,
Territory of Utah,
22nd April A.D. 1857
in behalf of Said Church

Brigham Young (signed personally
Heber C. Kimball by the First
Daniel H. Wells, Presidency)
First Presidency

William went to Brigham Young, April 21, 1857, for his blessing and instructions. President Young said, "William, have you a young lady you think enough of to marry?" William shyly said, "Yes." "Go bring her with you and get married before you go." He obeyed counsel and went to the Smith home and said, "Martha, put on your bonnet and come with me. We are going to be married." Imagine the surprise of Martha Ann Smith, then at the age of 16 years. She obeyed and they were married the 21st of April, 1857, by President Brigham Young.

William helped his companions rig out the little carts with bows and wagon covers to protect their few belongings. His mother knitted heavy wool socks to protect his feet, and cloth she had woven and dyed made his clothes. Everything was ready, bidding mother and young bride of two days good-bye, he was off in company with 70 other Elders with Brother McTosh as traveling companion. They started on their 1000 mile journey across the plains, pulling their handcarts all the way.

This is a statement made by Seymore B. Young. "In our missionary hand cart experiences, there were six divisions of the hand cart missionary company called tens. In the rear ten of yesterday was the leading ten of today. William Harris would travel in front and in the rear of the ten to which I belonged and when we camped for the night, we were all together and had our evening hymns and prayer as one family." Father encountered many hardships on the journey.

This is a little extract from his diary:

"Thurs. April 30th. The ground covered with snow four inches deep. After all things ready arrived at Muddy Creek, I pulled off my boots and waded in very cold water. We made a fire and washed. We then proceeded to Fort Bridger. A cold day, muddy and disagreeable. After traveling some distance we ascended a rocky ridge, which called for a long pull, a strong pull, and all pull together. We arrived at the Fort about one o'clock, repaired our carts and retired for the night.

"May 31st. T. C. Angel and others arrived with the mail on their way to the valley. A Brother Smith spoke a while. We then sang our handcart song written by Brother P. Margetts. We said goodbye and started again traveling six miles. We encountered one

of the most dreadful thunder and lightening storms, the lightening vivid and the thunder shocks heavy and often. We rolled to a small creek and camped, builded a large fire and soon all were busy drying ourselves. We were thoroughly wet through. I am tired and sore, but feel well in spirit.

"Foot worn and weary we arrived in Boston and prepared to take the ship for England, crossing over safely." The voyage was rough. William was very sea sick. An Elder came by and said, "Billy, we're going to drown!" He replied, "I don't care. Let her go."

He labored without purse or script as the missionaries did in those days for eighteen months, enduring many hardships, when the Elders were called home on account of Johnson's army invading the valley. He arrived home feeling fine. After arriving in Salt Lake he was anxious to see his mother and wife so he rode horseback, starting for "Pond Town" or better known as Salem, where he was sure of finding them. He was made glad when he met his mother and wife, "Maw Smoot and Aunt Diana Smoot" returning to Salt Lake after having lived in Salem two months. This was a happy meeting for all of them.

He again took up his work on the Smoot farm. Six months later he, with Joseph Abbott, was working in the field, William driving the horse and plowing, Abbott carrying a brass bucket planting potatoes, when they were both struck with a bolt of lightning. The brass of the bucket was melted and Abbott was instantly killed. The horses were frightened and dragged William several blocks, filling his mouth and nose with mud and dirt. Patriarch John Smith came riding along on horseback, saw something was wrong, made his horse jump the fence, getting them to them as soon as possible. He could see Abbott was gone, but was thankful to find William still breathing. So he began to take dirt and mud from his mouth, and do all he could to revive him until he could leave him to go get help.

John Smith, his brother-in-law, must have been inspired to come that way. It was the first time in three years he had traveled that road. William was taken home and carefully nursed back to life again by his wife. Thus the Lord was kind and merciful to spare his life. Four months later he was the father of a fine son. They gave him the name of William Jasper, Jr.

When Father fully recovered from this shock, he made a trip to California with wagon and mules to freight dry goods and groceries for A. O. Smoot. The Indians were so troublesome. They would steal his food and goods until he would have to take a buggy whip to them. He took another trip back East with Captain Hooper as his bodyguard.

William started on another trip with a yoke of oxen and wagon, taking money for A. O. Smoot (then mayor of Salt Lake City) and also himself, to buy oxen and wagons, also a train of goods for

Salt Lake City, and hardware of all kinds. While on this trip twenty-seven head of oxen took a disease called the bloody mure, and died. It was a great loss and disappointment to him.

Another trip he went to help freight gun powder. Everything had to be freighted in this way. On this journey he endured many hardships, wading through water, ice and snow up to his waist. He was gone three months receiving \$30.00 in all for his labor. On this trip he met Joseph F. Smith, his brother-in-law, returning from his mission to the Hawaiian Islands.

He was next called to help fight a people called the Morsus. These people were a lawless and quarrelsome people who wanted to trample on other's rights. So our people had to defend themselves. When this was over he again freighted to a place called Bannock City for himself, this time taking salt and staple goods. He made two trips to this place. He also freighted to the Salmon River with flour, bacon, and cheese. These trips were all hard and wearing on him, and not much was gained from them.

Next he was called by President Young to go to Sanpete County to help fight the Indians, as second lieutenant in Heber C. Kimball's company. He was gone three months, furnishing his own equipment, horse, saddle, bridle, and bedding, leaving his wife to provide for herself and five children.

For eight years he served as policeman of Salt Lake City, when President Young called him to go to Provo to serve as his minute man and life guard, which he did for many years.

He sold his home in Salt Lake City and moved his family to Provo. Father bought the corner on Second South and Third West, where they lived in two small adobe rooms. Six more children were born to them--making eleven children and Mother and Father who lived in these two rooms until the youngest child (myself) was about the age of nine years, when a larger house was built.

Father was a splendid gardener, always raising everything we needed in vegetables for the summer and our potatoes and dry beans for the winter. He did many kinds of work and tried hard to provide for his family.

Father was one of the three men to discover the mammoth mine at Tintic, but not being a moneyed man, had to give way to others. He was very fond of mining and prospecting. He took many trips doing this work and did enjoy it.

He attended a Black Hawk gathering in the old Provo Opera House one evening. When returning home, it was a very black, stormy night. He was run over and killed by a team of frightened horses, April 23, 1909, surrounded by most of his family. He was a kind father and a faithful Latter-day Saint.

Father and Mother lived to see all of their children grown to man and womanhood, and all married in the Temple and all have children. At 50 years of married life with most of the children present, they celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary. His posterity numbered 11 children, 80 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren, making a total of 192 without the in-laws.

February 11, 1929