

Charles Alfred Harper

Arrived in Utah July 22, 1847

by Julie Jeppson Harward, 18 March 1996

Charles Alfred Harper was born January 27, 1817, at Upper Providence, Township Montgomery Co. Pennsylvania. He was the second of three sons; he was the child of Eleanor Evans and Jessie Harper. His people were among the early settlers of America. His father and grandfather were born in Pennsylvania. His mother was a Quaker. When Charles was six years old, his father died.



Little is known of the boyhood of Charles Alfred. Undoubtedly he was schooled in the stern manner of that period. A granddaughter, Eleanor Peterson Ure, recalls he spoke of graduating from Yale Univ. At 23 years of age, Charles married his first wife, Lavina Wollerton Dilworth December 26, 1839 in Pennsylvania. Their first children were twins, and were born and died the same day in Pennsylvania.

His first wife became a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the year 1844. Prior to his conversion, he did not like the Mormons and when his wife became one he told her he would not walk down the street with a Mormon. So he walked down one side and she the other. One day Grandfather Harper walked away from home and said he would be back soon. It was not very long before his wife heard him coming home singing, seeming to be very happy and also wringing wet. "Yes, I did it today and I am the happiest man alive." Thus he was baptized.

During their stay in Nauvoo he was acquainted with the Prophet Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. And his dear friend was Heber C. Kimball.

He shared in the trouble and exodus of the saints in Nauvoo in the year 1845. Charles [*Text missing here*] home, and his own shop. He was indispensable during these hectic times. He was busy night and day repairing wagons, etc to equip outfits for emigration to the West. Two more children were born in Nauvoo and of the two, one died and was also buried there, in the early part of 1847. With their small son they joined the Saints at Winter Quarters. Here he was prevailed upon to drive the cannon wagon from the Platte crossing, westward.

Charles Alfred was in the advanced company who entered the valley July 22, 1847. He was put in charge of a committee to plant the seeds and fix the ploughs. Early in August Charles returned back over that pioneer trail to Winter Quarters to join his wife and son. They had been unable to make the trip. In the spring of 1848 they set out to join the Saints in the Salt Lake Valley. Out at old Fort Laramie their emigrant train rested a few days and their second son (fifth child) was born.

He was one of the first to build in Holladay and was one of the largest land owners there and even at his death he owned the home and thirty six acres of farmland.

The first public school was in Big Cottonwood, and was started by Abraham Hunsaker and Charles A. Harper in the year 1849. Lyman Woods was the first teacher and Charles A. Harper, Isaac Harrison and Duncan Casper were elected trustees and held these positions for eight years. Another son was born 1851 and lived three years.

During his first mission to England he converted a pretty little English girl, Harriet Taylor, she came to America and crossed the plains in Captain Harper's company, reaching Salt Lake Valley in October 1855. On her nineteenth birthday she was married in the Endowment house at Salt Lake City, to Charles Alfred Harper, as his second wife. (He was 39 years of age)

It is told that upon their arrival in Utah he took his young blue eyed bride to the home of his first wife, and although he had written ahead for her consent for a second marriage, she had a difficult time and it was only after much fasting and praying she had told him that if he insisted, to go ahead. However, upon their arrival his first wife became very angry and made Harriet sleep on the floor. In 1856 his first wife had another son, Alfred, but he lived only 3 months.

For the next few years he made several trips across the plains as a Captain of a company, assisting emigrants to reach Salt Lake City (At times with his own money). Most of these trips were made by ox-team. He was always known to be just and careful, never urging his company on to make time records. During one of these trips, some Indians rode up and stopped alongside grandfather's wagon and demanded food. The company was sorely in need of food themselves with none to spare. The Indian Chief threw his buffalo robe upon the ground in front of the oxen and gave the sign meaning, "We will not allow you to drive on until we get what we want." Grandfather picked up the chiefs robe, threw it to one side and called, "Drive on." The Indians turned and rode on their way. Many expressed fear of an attack from the Indians, as a result of disobedience, but the company resumed their journey unharmed. This is an illustration of grandfather's bravery, integrity and determination.

He was a faithful Latter-day Saint, serving two missions to England for the Church. In 1856 he was requested by the Church to settle Carson, Nevada. And with his young wife Harriet, they moved there. Their first baby, named Harriet, was born there. They had some most severe experiences and privations. The food supply was very meager. Finally the Church recalled this mission as being a failure and they returned to their home. His second wife gave him two more daughters, Elizabeth and Emmaline. Elizabeth fell into an open fireplace while very small and died of burns. His first wife had two more sons and another set of twins.

About 1860 he and his second wife obtained property in Parley's Park, Summit Co. Utah. They lived there for eighteen years, and were engaged in the sheep and cattle industry, and prospered. Two girls and three boys were born while here. He was called upon by Brigham Young to help establish places in Southern Utah and Arizona.

In 1887 Grandfather Harper purchased a farm of forty acres in Lehi, Arizona. It was raw and covered with mesquite. At nearly seventy years of age he grubbed this off and built a brick home where he and his first wife lived for about 8 years before they returned to their home in Holladay.

Captain Harper was a man of striking personality and leadership. He was also a faithful Latter-day Saint; he held various responsible positions in the Holladay Ward. He was a lover of music and literature and loved to take part in the old dances and good times. His favorite dance was the Virginia Reel, and his favorite tune, "Leather Breeches." He was interested in community and political affairs and was a staunch Democrat.

The following is an extract from the "Salt Lake Tribune." "Charles A. Harper, a pioneer of '47, was found dead in his home at Holladay, Salt Lake County, yesterday. The discovery was made by Mrs. George [Text missing] daughter-in-law, who publicly notified other members of the family. It appears that this gentleman, who was eighty-three years of age, had sought the quiet of his own room and fallen asleep never to awaken again in this life. He had not been ill nor was his death expected, though he was getting quite feeble. His death was due to heart failure, as determined by an inquest conducted by Justice Stevenson."

Eighty-three years crowned with the glory of pioneering from start to finish was a most beautiful close to a beautiful life well lived. Fifty years of pioneering had fulfilled the promise of the Lord; the desert was blooming like a rose. And to those years go the crowning glory of his life. He had eleven children with his first wife and eight with the second wife. Of the total of nineteen, eight died in infancy. Eleven survived their parents.

Newspaper clipping entitled

FIFTY YEARS AGO Dated: April B, 1947

The most interesting pioneer visitor at the Jubilee headquarters in Salt Lake City this week was Charles Alfred Harper, age 81, of Holladay, Cottonwood Canyon, who is hale and hearty for an octogenarian. He was one of the men of whom Orson Pratt was the leader, who were sent ahead by Brigham Young to plant seed arrived in the Salt Lake valley through Emigration canyon on July 22, 1847, and two days in advance of Brigham Young. He says Orson Pratt and Porter Rockwell were the first of the pioneers to explore the valley in the vicinity of the site of Salt Lake City and that was after known as the Eighth ward square. The first seeds planted were potatoes, also onions, cucumbers, and beans. A plot of ground near Red Butte hollow was subsequently selected for gardening purposes, but neither effort resulted in what could be termed success.

Mr. Harper was one of the party of ten hunters who procured buffalo meat for the pioneer company suffering for the want of nourishing food while journeying across the plains, and he relates with great unction the gastronomical feats he and his companions performed with the meat of the Buffaloes they had killed. He also states that the pioneers established their second camp August 2, 1847 on the block in which the tithing yard is now located, and not on the Temple Square, as some claim.

He tells of being in awe of the high cliffs and mountain walls as they came through immigration canyon and the dense brush and undergrowth in immigration canyon and how impossible it was for the wagons to move forward until the growth was cut away, and how some pioneers hauled their wagons by hand around a spur of mountains to avoid the undergrowth obstruction.

He was a humble, obedient, giving; hard working man. He was alive and well when the monument in down town SLC was put in place. His name is on the monument of Brigham Young in downtown Salt Lake City and also at "This is the Place Monument" at the mouth of Emigration canyon. His personal journal was placed in the Historians office in S.L.C in 1971—a small 3 X 5 worn, pocket record bound in fine brown leather—it contains the journey record of the first migration, of settlers to S.L. valley. Although a personal friend of Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball he never sought high positions and often said, "he felt bigger on the back seat."