



Brigham Henry Roberts

Born: 1857 Died: 1933

Children's Story: In 1866, "Harry" was only ten years old when he journeyed to the Valley without his parents.

He had many unusual adventures as he coped with life on the plains and attempted to be self-reliant.

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Born: March 13, 1857, Warrington, Lancashire, England
Parents: Benjamin and Ann Reed Everington Roberts
1866: William Henry Chipman Company
Age at time of journey: 10

"Harry" Roberts, age ten, and his sister, Mary ("Polly"), age sixteen, crossed the Great Plains with an LDS wagon train. Their father remained in England, and their mother had gone to the Salt Lake Valley four years earlier, where she was anxiously awaiting their arrival. They departed from a camp called Wyoming, which was south of Council Bluffs, Iowa, on the Nebraska side of the Missouri River, and which was on a branch of the Oregon Trail.

Captain William Henry Chipman's train was the company to which my sister and I were assigned for the journey. He was from American Fork in Utah County. The company was one of the largest leaving Missouri that year and made an imposing trail of covered wagons as it started over the long and adventurous trail. There was much cheering and cracking of whips by the teamsters and shouting of war whoops in imitation of the Indians by the Western men as they passed through the immense encampment of wagons which were to follow later in similar groups. There was a thrill in the departure for the long journey. All were rested up by the stay at the Missouri encampment, and all were eager for the march.

Soon the lack of preparation for my sister and me became manifest. Of course our clothing was sparse and by now worn and not suitable to the journey. Our mother, in distant Utah, had sent with a young teamster who came from the settlement in which she lived-Bountiful, Davis County-gloves and a shawl and stout walking shoes for Mary, with heavy quilts, homemade, for bedding and a little money, such as she could manage to scrape together. But all these comforts that would have been well-nigh invaluable for us never reached our hands. The teamster to whom our things were entrusted claimed that he could never find us in the Missouri encampments on the journey.

The only night covering I had was a petticoat that my sister Mary slipped to me after retiring into the wagon. This night covering I caught with eager hands, and I curled up under the wagon and generally shivered through the night.

On one occasion, I and a boy about my own age had become interested in some ripening yellow currants along one of the banks of the stream and lingered until the train

had passed over a distant hill. Before we realized it, we were breaking camp regulations, but still we lingered to fill our hats with the luscious currants we had discovered. The caps at last filled, we started to catch the wagon train and were further behind it than we realized.

Coming to the summit of a swale in which the wagon road passed, we saw to our horror three Indians on horseback just beginning to come up out of the swale and along the road. Our contact with the Indians around the Wyoming encampment had not been sufficient to do away with the fear in which the red men were held by us, and it could be well imagined that the hair on our heads raised as we saw an inevitable meeting with these savages.

Nevertheless, we moved one to the right and the other to the left with the hope that we could go around these Indians, but nothing doing. As soon as we separated to go around, the Indians also separated-the one to the right, the other to the left, and the third straight forward. There was trembling and fear that we were going to be captured. It was, therefore, with magnificent terror that we kept on slowly towards these Indians whose faces remained immobile and solemn with no indication of friendliness given out at all. I approached my savage, knowing not what to do, but as I reached about the head of the horse, I gave one wild yell, the Scotch cap full of currants was dropped, and I made a wild dash to get by-and did-whereupon there was a peal of laughter from the three Indians. They say Indians never laugh, but I learned differently. As the race for the train continued with an occasional glance over the shoulder to see what the Indians were doing, I saw they were bending double over their horses with their screams of laughter. The running continued until each of us had found his proper place beside the wagon to which he was assigned. The fright was thought of for several days, at least by strict adherence to camp rules about staying with your wagon.

One morning, Harry heard the company was going to cross the Platte River (probably near Ft. Kearney, Nebraska) for the first time to pick up the Mormon Trail of 1847. He wanted to be the first in the company to arrive at the crossing, so he walked on ahead of the rest of his group.

Up the stream, probably one quarter of a mile where a side stream dipped into the Platte, clumps of willows grew, and as the sun by now was burning hot, I thought of the grateful shade that could be reached by going that far above the point where the road dipped into the river. I went on and soon found a comfortable place where I could recline and dropped into a sound slumber that had been denied me the night before on account of the cold.

I slept on and on, and not all the shouting of the teamsters and emigrants nor the lunging of the wagons into the river awoke me. In fact, when I did awake, the last wagon of the train was just pulling up the opposite bank of the river, where the road led into the cottonwoods and other river trees, and was winding up the opposite bank of the turbid stream. Shouting at the top of my voice and rushing down to where the road met the river, I attracted the attention of Captain Chipman, who sat upon his horse on the opposite bank, watching the last wagon as it was drawn from the river bed by its long line of yoked teams. Cupping his hands the captain shouted to know if I could swim and was answered in the affirmative.

I was directed to "come on then." With this, my old clogs [wooden shoes] from England were shuffled off blistered feet and left on the sand bar. Slipping off my coat-made as will be remembered from an old suit of a policeman, thick and heavy-with only shirt and barn-door trousers left, I plunged through one stream after another between the sandbars until I came to the main stream, which surged to the north side of the Platte

above which on the bank sat Captain Chipman. Without hesitation I plunged into this last stream, to be carried down very rapidly. Apparently Captain Chipman felt uneasy and drove his horse, well practiced, into the stream and came swimming to where I was struggling for the further shore. The captain slipped his foot from the stirrup and bade me take hold of it, and the horse without being turned upstream swam down until a suitable landing place was reached, and all three of us came up from the river together. The Captain held in his hand a light horse whip, and as I let go of the stirrup and scampered up the bank to reach the road, the captain felt it evidently not unjust to give several sharp cuts cross my pants, which stung sharply, but no cry was uttered, and I felt that I was well out of a bad scrape.

"During another crossing of the Platte River, Harry and a young lady in the camp secretly rode in the back of a wagon that became stuck in quicksand midway across the river. After several attempts were made to free the wagon, the team of horses was unhitched and taken to the other side of the river until another, stronger team could be brought in. Meanwhile, the following incident took place while Harry and the young girl waited for help:"

A team did not return until the next morning, and all through the night the vibrations of the wagon in the sand were continued until the water reached and seeped into the bed of the wagon and soaked the sugar bags. Hunger, of course, asserted itself, and how to satisfy it for the time was the question. But I was carrying as my most precious possession a four-bladed pen knife, a gift for my mother, which had been purchased with money coming into my hands in England. In addition to the four blades there were a pair of pinchers, a nail file, and some other contrivances that made it an amateur tool chest. The knife was used to slit a hole in one of the sacks of sugar; one of the pieces of side bacon was uncovered in the same way, and pieces of raw bacon or ham were hacked off. Upon these the young lady and I feasted.

While cutting the bacon, the knife slipped and dropped into the turbid water of the Platte River and was never found, and the treasure which had been bought for my mother, who was remembered to be a seamstress and to whom the complex knife and other implements would have been useful, was gone forever.

The next morning teams were brought to the relief of the freight wagons, of which there were several, which had been left in the river bed from the day before. It was always a matter of regret that the young lady's name was either never learned or else not remembered.

On one occasion a night drive was necessary, and a young man was entrusted with the freight wagon team. The young teamster was unusually devoted to helping the young ladies, especially on this night, so I ran in behind the ox on the near side and climbed up on the seat that had been arranged in the front of the wagon by the regular teamsters. This seat consisted of a broad plank placed across the open head of a large barrel. The day had been hot and the hours of the journey long, and I was decidedly tired, nearly unto exhaustion. Fearing that my riding, which was "agin" the law, would be discovered, I slipped the broad board from the barrel head and conceived the idea of dropping down in the barrel, secure from the eyes of those who might oust me from my seat in the wagon if I were found. To my surprise, if not amazement, I discovered when I let myself down in the barrel that my feet went into about three or four inches of a sticky liquid substance which turned out to be molasses. The smarting of my chapped feet almost made me scream with pain, but I stifled it. Too tired to attempt to climb out, I remained and gradually slipped down and went to sleep doubled up in the bottom of the barrel,

with such results as can well be imagined. It was daylight when I woke up, and there began to be the usual camp noises of teamsters shouting to each other to be prepared to receive the incoming team driven from the prairie by night herdsmen. As I crawled out of the uncomfortable position, and with molasses dripping from my trousers, I was greeted with yells and laughter by some of the teamsters and emigrants who caught sight of me. I crept away as fast as I could to scrape off the syrup, which added to the weight and thickness of shirt and trousers, for there was no change of clothing for me, and so bedaubed I had to pass on until dusk and drying somewhat obliterated the discomfort.

The lads in the train were always in search of swimming holes, so they scampered down through the willows in search of bathing places. I and a comrade more venturesome than the rest went some distance down the stream until we found a swimming hole that was admirable. The water had washed out a hole on the west side of the creek with quite a deep clear collection of water under the banks held up by the willow roots. Here we began our bath. Cattle were on both sides of the streams when suddenly a strange rattling sound was heard, followed by intense hissing and hissing. Looking out of the swimming hole, we observed three Indians riding up the bank of the stream. One of them had a dry piece of rawhide in his hand, which by shaking produced the rattling noise. All three, following the rattling of the rawhide, hissed intensely. As they did so, the cattle with loud bawling rushed out of the willows to the open prairie, which rolled off in successive hills. Pretty soon it seemed as if the whole herd, whose thundering hoofs could be heard, were stampeded, their mad race accompanied with bawlings. The thundering of their hoofs would have waked the dead.

As soon as the Indians and cattle had reached the creek bottom, we, naked as when born, ran for camp full speed. We found Captain Chipman seated on the tongue of his wagon and made our report of the Indians among the cattle, apparently stampeding them. The captain laughed at us and advised that we had better find our clothes before we went into camp. While saying this, he climbed upon the tongue of his wagon and opened the lid to his bread box in front, making an improvised seat of it. As he did this, it enabled the captain to see over a line of willows, and he beheld the whole herd under stampede, followed by the three Indians. All at once a cry arose from the encampment, a number of whom now saw the cattle under stampede. Then there were attempts of mounting in hot haste and seizure of firearms and a rush made to follow the marauders. Captain Chipman, however, stood at the west entrance of the encampment and commanded all to remain where they were until he could give his orders. We two boys, meantime, wended our way back to the swimming hole, where we obtained our clothing. Captain Chipman here proved himself a real plainsman captain, and the thought nearest his heart was care for the emigrants bound on their way to Zion. He ordered the men to roll up the wagons into solid corral formation, namely by pushing the wagons together in such manner as to have the forewheel pushed up and interlocked with the hind wheels of the wagon before it. The corral became an improvised fort, with the men and the women of the camp and such stock as remained huddled on the inside. After this the three remaining horses of the encampment were brought out and saddled, and three men mounted and went after the Indians to bring back as many of the herd as would be possible.

"As a result of this incident, the company lost over one hundred head of their strongest and best cattle and six or eight riding horses. The men were able to bring home only a very few of the herd."

It was the custom of the emigrants to gather and carry in their arms, or else in the rear of their wagon, dry sticks gathered from the bushes or else "Buffalo Chips" from the plains for the evening camp fires. "Buffalo Chips" were the droppings of cattle and buffaloes that once inhabited the region in certain seasons of the year, and these "dried chips" made an excellent smoldering fire that gave out a great amount of heat.

Before dark, I had gathered my quantum of such fuel. Then the train was drawn up in such formation as the usual corral. I wandered outside the corral a bit until I found two boulder stones, which I rolled together. Between the two I lighted my fire, carrying a blazing buffalo chip from another fire with which to ignite this fire. After it had burned down a little, I curled myself about the two stones with the fire between, and in the warmth sleep soon overcame me. In the early morning when I awoke, to my amazement I was covered with an inch or two of snow which had fallen through the night and which had covered me and my now dead fire, as with a white blanket. Shaking off the snow, I made my way to look for breakfast, grateful for this long night of pleasant and apparently warm covering until the sharpness of the morning hour made me shiver again with cold. Before long, we approached Chimney Rock, Nebraska, which had a peculiar attraction to Mary and me because it was at this point that our baby brother, Thomas, who had been carried from the Missouri River in the arms of our mother, had died and was buried. To us it was, in a way, his monument. The child had been afflicted from its birth with water on the brain, and the head had grown large with the progress of the disease. He was peevish and during the whole journey did not permit anyone to touch him but his mother, and here this burden had ended.

There was a pathetic painful incident in his burial. Morton B. Haight was the captain of the company in which my mother made the journey, in the year 1862. The grave for the baby was dug between Chimney Rock and the Platte River, and the babe wrapped in a blanket, a bed sheet, and lowered into the grave. Then came the dropping of the dirt upon the body. This was too much for my mother, and with a groan she sank beside the grave in a dead faint, as she heard the clods of dirt fall upon her baby's body. "Hold on," said the captain, beginning to feel the grief, "this is too much for me." He went to his wagon and took out the bread box in the front end of it and came back with it to the grave. Then the body was taken up and comfortably placed in the bread box and in this improvised coffin was again lowered to the bottom of the grave, which was then filled in and covered with cobblestones gathered from the surrounding hills to afford protection. Ever after, of course, the name of Captain Haight was an enshrined memory in the Roberts house.

"Harry describes their arrival in the Great Salt Lake Valley on September 14, 1866:"

In the morning everybody seemed to be up with the first streaks of the light of day over the eastern mountains, and in great haste in preparation to take up the journey. Breakfast seemed to be neglected, and there was not much to eat anyway. Before the sun rose, the train, falling into its old line, swung down the low foothills until they struck a well-defined road leading into the city.

This entrance proved to be via Third South-then and long afterwards known as "Emigration Street," now Broadway. When Captain Chipman's ox team swung around the corner of Third South into Main Street, I found myself at the head of the lead yoke in that team, walking up the principal street of the city, the rest of the train following. Here the people had turned out to welcome the plains-worn emigrants and were standing on the street sides to greet them. Some horsemen dashed up the street swinging their

cowboy hats, the customary cowboy handkerchiefs around their necks as if they were in from the ranges.

Along the road, perhaps nearly halfway from the mouth of Parley's Canyon to the city, as I strode on ahead of Captain Chipman's team, I saw a bright-colored, dainty, charming little girl approaching me in the middle of the street. It was a strange meeting, we two. My hair had grown out somewhat. But three months' journey over the plains and through the mountains without hat or coat or shoes for most of the way had wrought havoc with my appearance. My hair stuck out in all directions; the freckles seemed deeper and more plentiful and the features less attractive than when the journey began. Shirt and trousers barely clung to my sturdy form, and my feet were black and cracked but now covered by the shoes I had taken from the feet of a dead man at a burnt station. These I was wearing in compliment to my entrance into "Zion." Also my face had been more carefully washed that morning. But try as I would, the shock of hair was unmanageable, and so no wonder the dainty little lady was somewhat timid in approaching me. She had on her arm a basket of luscious fruit, peaches, plums, and grapes. These she extended to me, the "ugly duckling" of a boy from the plains, and asked me if I would have some peaches. The answer was to gather up several which I strung along in the crook of my arm, and as soon as I had obtained what I supposed a reasonable portion, I wondered how I could get this fruit so wonderful back to Mary and at the same time retain my place in the march up Main Street. Pondering this question, of course unknown to the young girl who had brought me such a treasure, I finally turned back as best I could to the wagon where Mary was concealed under the wagon cover because of her being a little ashamed of her appearance. Running behind the wheel ox and climbing up on the tongue of the wagon, I called to my sister, handed to her the fruit, and then scrambled back to the ground and ran for my place at the head of the train and marched on until the head of Main Street was reached.

This then was the old tithing office behind the high cobble walls with its half-round bastions and through a crude gateway on the west side of the block leading into the stock corrals of President Young, where most of the wagons of the train were driven and placed under the many straw-covered sheds that then occupied the place where the Deseret Gymnasium now stands. The cattle were soon freed from the yoke and seemed delighted with the straw and hay brought them.

Across the way on Temple Square block, the foundations of the temple rose above the general level of the surrounding ground and seemed to be an object of interest to nearly all the emigrants, many of whom were permitted to go within the wall and view it. By and by there were numerous meetings in various groups of people, friends of the emigrants, parents, and sweethearts, and perhaps in some instances wives of the teamsters that had returned. There seemed to be an air of cheerfulness in all this meeting of people on the arrival of this large emigrant train of Saints.

Mary and I seemed to be so little part of this excitement and joy, because nobody seemed to come for us. Mary remained concealed under the wagon cover, and I, lonesome and heartsick, sat upon the tongue of Captain Chipman's wagon, my chin in my hands and elbows upon my knees, thinking "Zion" was not so much after all, if this was all of it. The spirit of sadness, if it was not forlornness, settled upon me.

Presently, however, approaching from the west gate, I saw a woman in a red and white plaid shawl slowly moving among the hillocks of fertilizer that had been raked from the sheds and the yard. She seemed to be daintily picking her way, and there was something in the movement of her head as she looked to the right and to the left that seemed familiar to me. The woman was moving in my direction, and the closer she came the stronger the conviction grew upon me that there was my mother. I would have known her from the dainty cleanliness of everything about her.

I stood until she came nearly parallel to where I sat; then sliding from the tongue of the wagon, I said, "Hey Mother," and she looked down upon my upturned face. Without moving she gazed upon me for some time and at last said, "Is this you, Harry? Where is Mary?" Of course Mary was in the wagon, and I led my mother to where she was hiding, and when mother and daughter met, there was a flood of tears on both sides. At last I joined them, making the trio of the united family. It seemed difficult for our mother to realize that we at last were her children after more than four years of separation, but once in a while, a smile would break through the tears and she seemed to be extremely happy. A neighbor of hers, Brother John K. Crosby, a New Englander, had driven her from Bountiful to the city to get us children, and it took but a short time to leave the remaining emigrant teams and people to find this wagon and make the start for home, Bountiful.

There was one thing remembered in this reunion, and that was on my part. I felt that I had arrived, that I belonged to somebody, that somebody had an interest in me, and these were the thoughts that were in my mind as I sat in the wagon on the drive home to Bountiful.

Harry later became known as B. H. Roberts, who became a president of the First Council of the Seventy at the age of thirty-one. He was elected to the United States Congress, and he became a prolific writer of theology and history. Elder Roberts married Sarah Louise Smith, Celia Louisa Dibble, and Margaret Curtis, and was the father of fifteen children. He died September 27, 1933, in Salt Lake City.

Source: B. H. Roberts. *The Autobiography of B. H. Roberts*, edited by Gary James Bergera, 25-44. Salt Lake City: Signature, 1990. Note: B. H. Roberts used third person pronouns (he, him, his) in his account when referring to himself. Bergera has changed them to first person (I, me, my).

pp. 15-25 *I Walked to Zion: True Stories of Young Pioneers on the Mormon Trail*.

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