

## **Experiences and Life of Amy Kirby Orme**



# Introduction

This history was prepared by Amy Orme Vowles, whose ancestors, great grandmother Amy Kirby Orme and grandfather, Samuel Washington Orme were members of the Martin Handcart company. Miraculously, this Orme family, consisting of four adult members, came through this ordeal without losing any of its members or having any frozen limbs, they were one of the few families to do so. The following year, 1857, Samuel's young sweetheart, Sarah Cross came to Utah in the Israel Evans handcart company. This company left Florence, Nebraska on the 20th of June, arriving in Salt Lake City on the 11th or 12th of Sept. It was a very small company of 149 people—31 handcarts and just one wagon to haul the heavy baggage.

While the Martin handcart company had suffered much because of the bitter cold weather, the Israel Evans company had to endure the heat of summer. Many times Sarah would lay down in the shade of her handcart feeling that she just could not go on any farther and that she would die by the wayside. However, the cool of evening would revive her and she would decide that she would go on to where the company was camped and at least be with friends when she died. Some food to eat and a night's rest and she would be ready to continue the journey the next day. What faith she must have had, the only one of her family to join the Church and come to Utah at that time. When she got to Salt Lake City and heard the Prophet of the Lord, President Brigham Young speak, it thrilled her through and through and she never regretted the long, tiresome journey. She was reunited with her young man, Samuel and they were married in October 1857.

Prepared March 1971  
by Amy Orme Vowles

## Special History

*The story of Ephraim K. Hanks and the part he played  
in the rescue of the survivors of the Martin Handcart Company of 1856*

My ancestors, great grandmother Amy Kirby Orme, grandfather, Samuel Washington Orme and his two sisters, Sarah Ann Orme and Rebecca Orme came to Utah in the Edward Martin Handcart company. The histories of these ancestors have been written and recorded elsewhere. Certain incidents in these histories have puzzled me, for instance the following from great grandmother's history:

“One day from out of the west came a dark spot moving toward camp. Eagerly the whole company watched and finally saw a man, he was walking and leading a horse. On arriving in camp the man told us that he had killed a buffalo and had put all the meat he could on his horse for us. All of the starving company got a piece of the meat. Just why that animal had not gone with the rest of it's kind to the winter range will never be known. The name of the man was Ephraim K. Hanks.”

In another history I read that Ephraim K. Hanks was sent out in a relief group from Salt Lake City. And that when they reached the J. G. Willie company, there was such distress and suffering in the camp that the relief company ministered to the needs of the distressed immigrants and thought it useless to go on any further, for surely no other company could survive such terrible weather. Ephraim K. Hanks alone went on until he found the Edward Martin handcart company buried in the deep snows, so to speak. They were so helpless they couldn't go on and so weak that they couldn't bury their dead. This spot has since been named “MARTIN'S COVE” and a monument has been erected there in memory of these people. It is just off the highway going East out of Casper, Wyoming. The company was revived with fresh meat Ephraim K. Hanks brought into camp and his help and assistance in getting them on the trail again.

This Martin handcart company was the largest of any of the ten companies that came by handcart during the years 1856-57-59-60. The Martin company also suffered the greatest loss. There were 576 persons, 146 handcarts, and 7 oxen drawn wagons to haul the heavy supplies. The company left Florence, Nebraska, now Omaha on August 27, 1856, arriving in Salt Lake City Sunday Nov. 30, 1856, eleven months and twenty days after most of them had left Liverpool, England. I have read that President Brigham Young was addressing a church meeting that Sunday when he was informed by advance members of the relief party that the last group of the handcart companies were being brought into Salt Lake City. This was the Edward Martin Handcart Company. President Young immediately dismissed the meeting saying, “There is a time for Church and a time to work, and right now we must go home, build warm fires, bake potatoes, make puddings and be prepared to take these distressed people into our homes. Bathe them, feed them and care for them until they gain strength and are able to care for themselves.”

## Ephraim K. Hanks Narrative



Ephraim Knowlton Hanks in younger days (date unknown). Photo courtesy of Sherry Smith.

Anxious to find out more about the part Ephraim K. Hanks played in the survival of my ancestors, I went to the Church Historian's Office and found this account recorded in an early issue of the *Juvenile Instructor*, by Andrew Jensen, the Church Historian at that time.

June 1891 when visiting the Sevier Stake in the interest of Church History, I became acquainted with Elder Ephraim K. Hanks, who resides in Pleasant Creek (in the Blue Valley Ward) now in Wayne County, Utah. He related to me the following:

In the fall of 1856, I spent considerable time fishing in Utah Lake, and in traveling backward and forward between the Lake and Salt Lake City, I had occasion to stop over night with Gurney Brown in Draper, about nineteen miles south of Salt Lake City. Being somewhat fatigued after the day's journey, I retired to rest quite early, and while I still lay awake in my bed, I heard a voice calling me by name and saying, "The handcart people are in trouble and you are wanted. Will you help them?" I turned instinctively in the direction from whence the voice came and beheld an ordinary sized man in the room. Without any hesitation, I answered, "Yes, I will go if I am called." I then turned to go to sleep, but had laid only a few

minutes when the voice called a second time, repeating almost the same words as on the first occasion. My answer was the same as before. This was repeated a third time.

When I got up the next morning I said to Brother Brown, "The handcart people are in trouble and I have promised to go out and help them" but I did not tell him of my experiences during the night.

I then hastened to Salt Lake City, and arrived there on the Saturday, preceding the Sunday on which the call was made for volunteers to go out and help the last handcart companies in. When some of the brethren responded by explaining that they could get ready in a few days. I spoke out at once saying, "I am ready to go now." The next day I was wending my way eastward over the mountains with a light wagon all alone.

The terrible storm which caused the immigrants so much suffering and loss overtook me near the South Pass, there I stopped about three days with Reddick N. Allred, who had come out with provisions for the immigrants. The storm during those three days was simply awful. In all my travels in the Rocky Mountains both before and afterwards, I have never seen worse. When the snow at last ceased falling, it lay on the ground so deep that for many days it was impossible to move a wagon through it.

Being deeply concerned about the possible fate of the immigrants, and feeling anxious to learn of their condition, I determined to start out on horseback to meet them. For this purpose I secured a pack saddle and two animals from Brother Allred, one to ride and one to pack. I began to make my way slowly through the snow alone. After traveling for some time I met Brother Joseph Young and one of the Garr boys, two of the relief company which had been sent out from Salt Lake City to help the companies. They had met the companies and were now returning with important

dispatches from the camps to the headquarters of the Church, reporting the awful conditions of the immigrants.

I continued my lonely journey through the deep snow. The night after meeting Elders Young and Garr, I camped in the snow in the mountains. As I was preparing to make a bed in the snow with the few articles 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. Before lying down for the night I was instinctively led to ask the Lord to send me a buffalo. Now I am a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer, as I have on many different occasions asked the Lord for blessings, which He in His mercy has bestowed upon me. But when I, after praying as I did on that lonely night in



Ephraim Hanks: Obeying the Spirit  
a painting by Clark Kelly Price

the South Pass, looked around me and spied a buffalo bull within fifty yards of my camp, my surprise was complete. I had certainly not expected so immediate an answer to my prayer. However I soon collected myself and was at a loss to know what to do. Taking deliberate aim at the animal, my first shot brought him down. He made a few jumps only, and then rolled down into the hollow right where I was camped. I was soon busily engaged skinning and dressing my game, finishing which, I spread the hide on the snow and placed my bed upon it. I next prepared supper eating the 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, while my horses were browsing on the sage brush.

Early the next morning I was on my way again, and soon reached what is known as the Ice Springs Bench. There I happened upon a herd of buffalo, and killed a nice cow. I was impressed to do this although I did not know why until a few hours later. The thought occurred to my mind that the hand of the Lord was in it, as it was a rare thing to find buffalo herds around that place at this late part of the season. I skinned and dressed the cow; then cut up parts of it in long strips, and loaded both of my horses with it. Thereupon I resumed my journey, and traveled on till towards evening. I think the sun was about an hour high in the west when I spied something in the distance that looked like a black streak in the snow. As I got nearer to it, I perceived that it moved. Then I was satisfied that this was the long looked for handcart company, led by Captain Edward Martin. I reached the ill fated train just as the immigrants were camping for the night. The sight that met my eyes as I entered their camp can never be erased from my memory. The starved forms and the haggard countenances of the poor sufferers, as they moved around slowly, shivering in the cold, to prepare their scanty evening meal, was enough to touch the stoutest heart. When they

saw me coming, they hailed me with joy inexpressible, and when they further beheld the supply of fresh meat that I brought into their camp, their gratitude knew no bounds. Flocking around me, one would say, "Oh, please give me a small piece of meat," another would exclaim, "my poor children are starving, do give me a little." And children with tears in their eyes would call out, "Give me some. Give me some!" At first I tried to wait on them and handed out the meat as they called for it, but finally I told them to help themselves. Five minutes later both of my horses were relieved of their extra burden-the meat was all gone and the next few hours found the people in camp busily cooking and eating it with grateful hearts.

A prophecy had been made by one of the brethren that the company would feast on buffalo meat, when their provisions might run low. My arrival in 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 conditions 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 men and teams were coming.

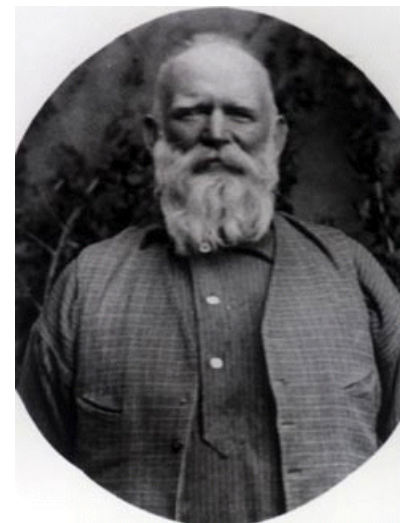
After dark on the evening of my arrival in the handcart camp a woman passed the campfire where I was sitting. She was crying aloud. Wondering what was the matter, my natural impulse was to follow her. She went straight to Daniel Tyler's wagon, where she told the heart-rending story of her husband being at the point of death, and pleading with Elder Tyler to come and administer to him. This good brother tired and weary as he was after pulling handcarts all day was a little reluctant in getting up, but on this earnest solicitation, he soon arose, and we both followed the woman to her tent, in which we found the apparently lifeless form of her husband. On seeing him, Elder Tyler remarked, "I cannot administer to a dead man." Brother Tyler requested me to stay and lay out the supposed dead brother, while he returned to his wagon to seek the rest he needed so much. I immediately stepped back to the campfire where several of the brethren were still sitting, and addressing myself to Elders Grant and Kimball and one or two of the others, I said, "Will you boys do just as I tell you?" The answer was, "Yes." We then went to work and built a fire near the tent which I and Elder Tyler had just visited. Next, we warmed some water and washed the dying man from head to foot, then anointed him with consecrated oil all over his whole body, after which we laid our hands on him and commanded him in the name of Jesus Christ to breathe and live. The effect was instantaneous. The man who was dead to all appearances, immediately began to breathe, sat up in bed and commenced to sing a hymn. His wife unable to control her feelings of joy and thankfulness, ran through the camp exclaiming, "My husband was dead, but is now alive. Praised be the name of God. The man who brought the buffalo meat has healed him."

This circumstance caused a general excitement in the whole camp and many of the drooping spirits began to take fresh courage from that very hour. After this the greater portion of my time was devoted to waiting on the sick. "Come to me." "Help me." "Please administer to my wife." or "To my crying child." etc., were some of the requests that were made of me almost hourly for some time after I joined the immigrants, and I spent days going from tent to tent administering to the sick. Truly the Lord was with me and others of his servants who labored faithfully 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. In scores of instances, when we administered to the sick, and

rebuked the diseases in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sufferers would rally at once, they were healed almost instantly. I believe that I administered to several hundreds in a single day, and I could give names of many whose lives were saved by the power of God. But I will give the details in only one more instance. One evening after we had gone as far as Fort Bridger, I was requested by a sister to come and administer to her son, whose name was Thomas. He was very sick indeed, and his friends expected he would die that night. When I came to the place where he lay he was moaning pitifully and was almost too weak to turn around in bed. I felt the power of God resting upon me, and addressing the young man, said, "Will you believe the words I tell you?" His response was "Yes." I then administered to him and he was immediately healed. He got up, dressed himself and danced a hornpipe on the end-board of a wagon, which I procured for that purpose. But notwithstanding these manifestations of the Lord's goodness, many of the immigrants whose extremities were frozen, lost their limbs either whole or in part. 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. Some of the immigrants lost toes, others fingers and again others whole hands and feet, one woman who resides in Koosharem, Piute Co. Utah, lost both her legs below the knees, and quite a number who survived became cripples for life. But as far as I remember there were no fresh cases of frozen limbs after my arrival in camp. As the train moved forward in the daytime, I would generally leave the trail in search of game, and on these expeditions killed and dressed a number of buffalo, distributing their meat among the people. On one occasion, when I was lagging behind with a killed buffalo, an English girl by the name of Griffin gave out completely and not able to walk any further, she lay down with her head in the snow. When I saw her disabled condition, I lifted her onto my saddle, the horse being loaded with buffalo meat, and in this condition she rode into camp.

Soon more relief companies were met and as fast as the baggage was transferred into the wagons, the handcarts were abandoned one after another, until none were left.

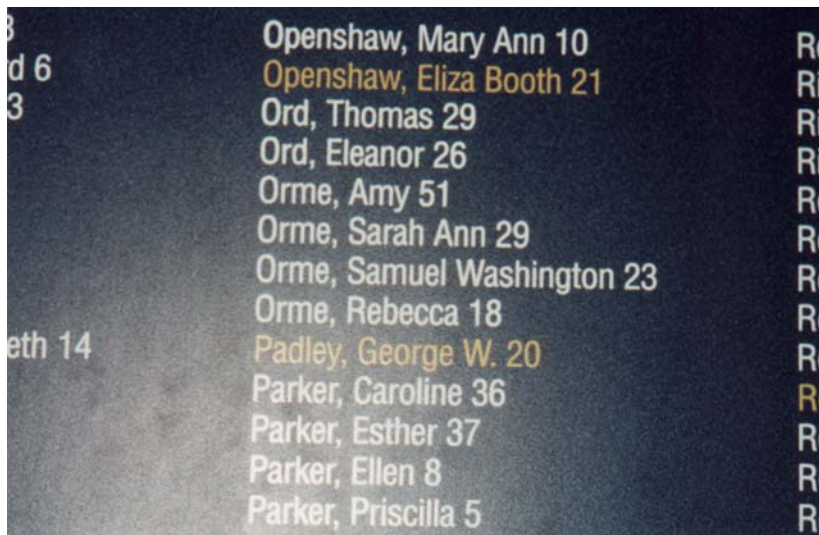
I remained with the immigrants until Captain Martin's company arrived in Salt Lake City on the thirtieth of Nov. 1856. I have but little to say about the sufferings of Captain Martin's handcart company before I joined them. They had passed through terrible ordeals. Women and the larger children helped the men to pull the handcarts and in crossing the frozen streams, they had to break the ice with their feet. In fording the Platte River, the largest stream they had to cross after the cold weather set in, the clothes of the immigrants were frozen around their bodies before they could exchange them for others. This is supposed to have been the cause of so many of the deaths in the company. It has been said on good authority, that nineteen immigrants died in one night. The survivors who performed the last rites of kindness to those who perished were not strong enough to dig the graves of sufficient depth to preserve the bodies from the wild beasts, and wolves were actually seen tearing at the graves before the company was out of sight. Many of the survivors, in witnessing the terrible afflictions and losses, became at last almost stupefied or mentally dazed and did not seem to realize the



Ephraim Knowlton Hanks  
in later years (date unknown).  
Photo courtesy of Sherry Smith.

terrible condition they were in. The suffering from the lack of sufficient food also told on the people. They were reduced to a ration of one quarter pound of flour per day per person. This is equivalent to one half cup, and some made it into tiny biscuits to be portioned out during the day. When the first relief trains met the immigrants, there was only one day's quarter rations left in camp.

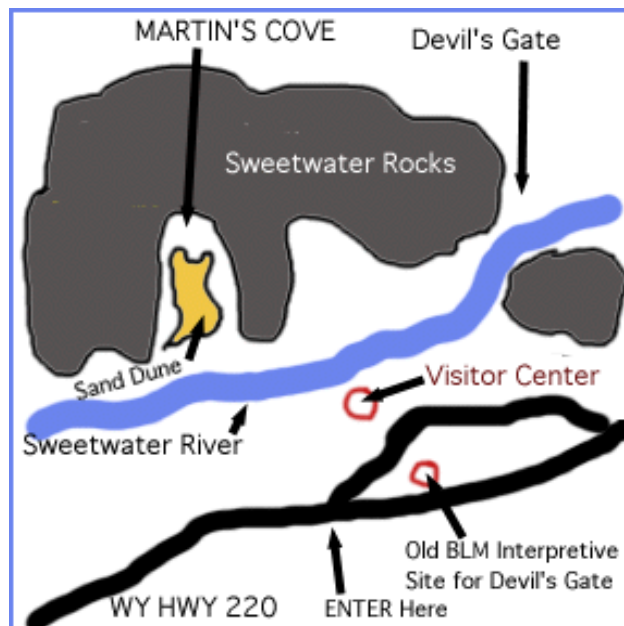
## LIFE OF AMY KIRBY, MOTHER OF SAMUEL WASHINGTON ORME



Names photographed at the Martin Handcart Visitor's Center near Martin's Cove, Wyoming.

Names in yellow represent those who died on the trek. Note the names of Amy [Kirby] Orme, age 51 and her children Sarah Ann, 29 Samuel Washington, 23 and Rebecca, 18.

Map of Martin's Cove/Diagram of the Sun Ranch site. Note the space between the sand dune and the Sweetwater Rocks. This is the sheltered cove into which Martin led his beleaguered company to try to escape the fierce winter winds.





Amy Kirby was the daughter of John Kirby and Charlotte Reddles and was born in England (likely Burbage, Leicestershire) on January 13, 1804. She had seven sisters and five brothers.

She married Samuel Orme of Sileby, Leicestershire in 1823. It seems that they moved around somewhat as their children were born at several different places. The first, Sarah Anne, was born at Lee Lais, England, in January 1824. About the year 1831 Amy with her husband and three small children, emigrated to America and settled in Ohio where her father and mother and several brothers were. It is likely that a number of the Kirby family came to America about this time.

On July 4, 1832, her only son was born. All the people were talking about and celebrating the birthday of the nation. It was suggested that the new boy be named George Washington Orme. The mother said he must have his father's name so he was named Samuel Washington. This was at a place which she pronounced Menta, but as that is not found in Ohio records, it may have been Mentor or Mantau.

About the year 1833 or 1834, she and her husband decided to return to England. They likely lived for some time at Mt. Sorrel, Leicestershire, as their fifth child was born there April 14, 1835.

They later moved to Coalville where the husband was a bookkeeper at the Bidland Rail Road Office. Her husband died February 10, 1842. She was left with a family of eight children. The oldest girl had very poor health and the only son was not yet ten years of age. It was now quite a struggle for existence.

As the name of the town would indicate, coal mining was the main industry. It was decided when Samuel W. was old enough he should be a blacksmith. After serving seven years as an apprentice, he began to earn enough to support the family comfortably. In the meantime, however, she had the sorrow of losing her two youngest children and a few years later a daughter twenty-two years of age. All this was a great grief to her for she was very devoted to her children.

She was a very devout member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and her husband had somewhat irritated her by telling her while they were yet in America that their Church was not correct. He had been away from home one night to another town in Ohio and had heard two men preach a new religion and he said they have got the truth. He did not remember the name of the Church. After their return to England, he told Amy prophetically that the day would come when she would hear that religion preached and she must join it. He said that she would have a different feeling than she had ever felt before.

Shortly after her husband's death, she heard that there would be two strange men preach at Whittick, just about two miles away and she said to some of the children, "Let us go and hear them." When the meeting ended she told her children, "This is the religion your father heard in America because that feeling has come to me and I know it is true."

In a short time the whole family applied for baptism. The ordinance was performed by James or John Bowers. They hardly got acquainted with the gospel principles and learned of the wonderful prophet Joseph Smith when they heard of his cruel martyrdom. They were anxious to emigrate to Zion and join the main body of the Church, but it was hard to get means together under the circumstances.

Her second daughter, Eliza, married in 1847 and she and her husband started for Zion February 7, 1849. They wanted one of her girls to go with them so it was decided that Caroline should go. The other two girls and the only son struggled on. Mail came very seldom from one country to the other. When they did finally hear from the daughters in America, they were much shocked to hear that Eliza had died of cholera at Grave, Missouri. She left a small baby girl who was still living January 20, 1851. Her name was Jane Holden Knight.

This was grief indeed to Amy and yet thousands of miles separated that tiny baby from her. Caroline had work in St. Louis and the son-in-law was making his way across the dreary plains. He had to entrust the tiny baby to friends no better situated than himself.

In 1856 Amy, with the son and other two daughters, started for Utah. Many weeks were spent in a sailing vessel between Liverpool and Boston. They journeyed from there to Florence, Nebraska, which was not so bad, but now they had no money. There was no chance of employment and winter would soon be upon them. There had been a hand cart company go to the Valley, but this was a little late to start. However, the Church authorities decided that the only thing they could do was to go on. Under the leadership of Captain Martin, the large company started on. Mostly young men and women from Scotland and England were the ones to make up this company that was ready to face danger. Happily, they went along with their hand carts. As they got into the mountains it became very cold and progress was very slow. Captain Martin decided that the flour must be budgeted, or they would not have enough. Four ounces of flour a day per person was allowed. That meant one pound of flour per day for the Orme family. As the cold increased many died because of lack of food. Very often it was the ones who at first seemed the strongest. Amy seeing her only wonderful boy weakening and noticing that the men died more often than the women, proposed to the girls that they each cut their own rations of food in order to feed Samuel more. It was done. They were terrified one day to find themselves snowed in on the Sweetwater River in Wyoming. They were unable to move. They were hungry, out of food, and hundreds of miles from supplies.

Deaths were frequent and those left were too weak to dig graves for their comrades. A few oxen that were brought along to haul the heavy luggage began to die. As was said years after in a joking way, two or more men would try to hold the oxen from falling over while the others would hurriedly shoot it. They would then divide the animal up into small pieces and distribute it to the hungry crowd. Everything was eaten except the hair and the horns.

One day from the west came a dark spot moving toward the camp. As they eagerly watched the object, they saw that it was a man leading a horse. On arriving he told them he had killed a big fat buffalo and had put on the horse all the meat he could for them. All got a piece of the meat. Just why that animal had not gone with the rest of his kind to winter range will never be known.

The man was Ephraim Hanks, the advance scout of a relief party sent by Brigham Young to meet them. The news cheered them up. They took on new hope, but several days passed before the toiling rescuers reached them. Finally they reached them. Now they began to move slowly on. Finally they reached Salt Lake City on November 9, 1856. Shortly afterwards the Orme family moved to East Tooele. The following year the youngest daughter and the sons were married. Amy lived first with one and then the other of her children. Oh! How proud she was of each grandchild as it arrived. Although poor and almost destitute of clothing, she would cut up any article to make the tiny baby comfortable.

In 1866 her daughter, Sarah Amy Nix and also her twin babies died. This was a great sorrow to the family.

In 1871 her daughter Rebecca Lee died leaving a feeble husband and three boys. Amy, of course, took charge and raised another family in Salt Lake City. While she had had a family of girls of her own, now nearly all her grandchildren were boys.

In 1882 her long absent daughter Caroline, from St. Louis whom she had not seen for over thirty years came to live near her in Salt Lake City. The grandsons soon got married. After this Amy lived and visited with one and then another of her children and grandchildren.

In 1889 her son, the most wonderful of all God's gifts to her died and she was deeply grieved. She was getting old and feeble and in her heart she mourned as did David of old: "Oh, would that I could have died for thee." Of her eight children only one was left.



Amy Kirby Orme

She died in Salt Lake City, March 9, 1893. Her personality was grand and noble, her disposition sweet and lovable. She was even tempered. Many who knew her well said they never saw her at all ruffled in her feelings. She was not large but wiry and active. She always felt thankful for the gospel and the joy it had brought to her and her family.



Rebecca Orme Lee  
Grandmother of  
President Harold B. Lee



Samuel Washington Orme Family  
Top, left to right: Samuel  
Washington Jr., John K, Joseph  
Middle: Samuel Washington Orme,  
Sara Cross Orme, Alvin, on Mother's  
lap  
Seated: Silas Cross