

Walter Pyramus Read

BY EDNA MICHELSEN FAUX

His Early Life

I am going to tell you a true story about a wonderful person. His name is Walter Pyramus Read. He and his family lived in England. His father's name was Samuel George Read, and his mother's name was [Elizabeth] Georgina Quilley Read. This precious little boy was born in Poplar, a small place just outside London, on August 8, 1848. Besides his mother and father he had three sisters and a brother. Clara was the oldest, then Alicia, his brother Samuel Milford, and Thisbe. Walter was the youngest in the family.

When his father was a young man, he became a soldier in the British Army and was active in the East India Company. Samuel George Read was such an excellent soldier that he was promoted to a Lieutenant and served as a member of the Bengal Marines. Later he was employed in the office of the general mercantile department of the docks of that company in London.

The Elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were preaching their new gospel in England. Samuel and Elizabeth heard it and believed them, and they with their children were baptized into this marvelous new Church. Then came the opportunity to emigrate to the center of the Church established in the valley of the Great Salt Lake situated high in the Rocky Mountains.

Taking their belongings, they left London for Liverpool crossing England in a northwesterly direction to that port of debarkation for the saints of northern Europe. This family of six (Clara having chosen to accompany an uncle to Australia) boarded the sailing vessel, "Horizon," and became a part of the great company of Saints numbering 856 members. The Horizon sailed from Liverpool for Boston May 25, 1856 under the presidency of Elders Edward Martin, Jesse Haven, and George P. Waugh. Edward Martin is a name to remember. We shall hear more about him.

After four days on the Irish Sea and with the Horizon located off Cork in Ireland John Jaques reported in a letter to President F. D. Richards that, following a period of rough seas and bad illness among the passengers, the ill was rapidly recovering. He wrote, "The children make themselves happy, both above and below deck. Marbles, skipping ropes, and all available paraphernalia of childhood games are called into request. The older boys amuse themselves by tugging at the ropes with the sailors. So merrily we live together. All is peace and harmony in our floating town." Our eight-year-old boy Walter surely must have had fun playing marbles and tugging on the ropes with his big brother Samuel.

"I think, altogether, that we, on the Horizon, had as agreeable a voyage as most emigrants are favoured with. We had an occasional rough breeze, that put us to the right about, and split a sail or two, but not a single storm did we experience from the time we left Liverpool till we sighted Boston. We had every variety of weather but storm - wet, dry, calm, light and strong breezes; foul winds often, fair very seldom; warm, a good deal of cold; clear, and plenty of fog. Indeed, we all felt relieved when we escaped from the clammy, flabby regions of eternal fog, that is, from the banks of Newfoundland. The principal things we enjoyed in that raw clime were the sight of a few fishing boats, and a taste of fresh codfish, which the captain obtained in exchange for a few nails. We would, for a time, sail hard with a strong breeze, till many of the people were sick, then we would have a slight breeze or a calm till the majority of them had recovered. And so we passed our

voyage, the weaker of us alternately sick and well, according to the weather. There was one thing, however, which I did not anticipate, and that was, the protracted debility sequent on the sea-sickness. I would scarcely have credited, had I been told before my embarkation, that, after being sick two days, I should not recover my wonted strength, during the remainder of the voyage. Yet such was the case. And the experience of many others was similar. Indeed, not once before landing did the company, as a whole, fully regain the heartiness and vigour manifested previously to the sick attack. I felt my spirits good and willing, but my body weak. Sometimes, after walking from the lower 'tween decks up the ladder to the main deck, it seemed imperative on me to sit down and rest, while to carry a saucepan, or boiler, or my child upon deck, was indeed a severe tax on my strength. To use a common expression, I was as "weak as a cat," and I was a king to many. I was considerably better at times, and, on the whole I gradually mended as we neared Boston. But terra firma and fresh provisions were the best doctor for me, and for the others too."

When the Horizon docked at Boston after approximately five weeks spent crossing the ocean, Walter and his family joined the other 850 Saints in the slow, crowded departure from the rocking, rolling ship.

The next part of their journey was over land by train which took them to New York City and then west to Iowa City on the banks of the Iowa River, Here they would stay for about three weeks, time enough to obtain a handcart and necessary provisions, and to make plans for the long walk west to the Great Salt Lake.

Finally on July 28, 1856, as members in the Captain Edward Martin's (remember the name) Handcart Company, they put their bodies to the task of pulling and pushing the handcart which held the earthly possessions they were allowed to take with them.

They departed Iowa City in a company of "575 souls, 146 carts, 7 wagons, 30 oxen, 50 beef cattle and cows." They were going west!

To some the journey from Iowa City to Council Bluffs seemed a pleasure outing. "The country for two hundred miles ahead was beautiful beyond description, and the roads in condition nothing short of perfect. Game was everywhere plentiful, and the wild flowers in full bloom. Groves of timber dotted the land, and delicious fruits hung on every bush. Honey could be bought for a song, and milk was had for the asking. There was no place on earth where the birds sang sweeter. All nature seemed to smile.

Many rivers and creeks flow into the Missouri River in the vicinity of Council Bluffs. When the family reached Keg Creek a few miles east of the city, the young boy, Walter, who now had walked for more than 200 miles, was invited by two men to leave his family and to go with them. Their invitation and promise to the tired boy were tremendously exciting. They promised him that if he would stay with them until he was 21 they would give him a large farm and a pony of his very own. Walter was delighted at the unexpected opportunity and went with the men.

His sudden disappearance was upsetting to the plans of his family. What to do? So it happened that his father and brother Samuel M., went in search of the boy, hoping to find him quickly and catch up with the company. Walter's mother and his sisters, Alicia and Thisbe, put their hands to the handcart and pushed on west with Capt. Martin and the handcart company. These three would now do the work alone. The story of the Martin Handcart Company and its hardships is a story of its own both dramatic and sad. It finally arrived in the valley November 30, 1856, four months endured in crossing the plains.

After searching for two or three months his father and brother found Walter, but by then it was too late for them to start for the valley.

When travel east became possible in 1858, Walter's mother and sister, Thisbe, began the long trek back across the plains to find the boy, his father, and brother. Upon locating them, they remained in Iowa. The father emigrated to the valley in 1859.

In 1861 Walter, at twelve years of age, his mother and sister joined an ox train company in

charge of Capt. Joseph Young. The large pioneer train left Florence, Nebraska July 11, 1861. Sixteen days later at Wood River, the company was divided into two companies. Walter's wagon along with about 40 other wagons became a part of the company headed for the Rocky Mountains under the leadership of Captain Ansel P. Harmon. This young lad who celebrated his thirteenth birthday on the plains, drove, cared for the oxen, made needed repairs on the wagon, and acted as the man in charge of the Herculean task of getting his mother and sister safely out west. He drove his team of oxen into the valley September 23, 1861, after two months and twelve days time taken to cross the plains.

The realities of pioneer life require work to produce and earn means of making a livelihood. Walter had learned the necessity of providing that means at an early age. In the valley, he attended a private school. At sixteen, and spurred on by the desire to become completely independent he entered the harness business in Nephi and remained in it for the next sixteen years - six years he worked as an employee and for ten years was the owner of his business. Nephi became his home town when he accompanied by his mother and brother moved there.

While in the harness business and a young man of twenty-four in the year 1872 he married Martha Ann Pond who lived with her mother in Nephi.

I am going to leave his various business adventures, his letters, and activities to tell another time. Suffice it to say - he was a cattle man of distinction, a railroad builder, business man, and philanthropist. He changed the means of transportation in Salt Lake City from mule drawn street cars to electric powered ones.

In conclusion, I read the summary on his life written in Andrew Jensen's Biographical Encyclopedia. "The success of all the business enterprises in which Mr. Read has been interested and the strikingly successful career he has made in Utah are the results of his own efforts. Starting out in life at an age when most boys are still under parental guidance, self instructed and self-made, he has achieved results that mark him as one of the great captains in the industrial development of the West. A man of splendid physique, undaunted will power, coupled with the ability to learn from others and profit by experience, no matter how limited, has made his career one of the most striking illustration of what energy, application and industry can accomplish. Gifted with a pleasing personality and a kind and genial manner, he has become one of the best known and most popular men in the Great West."