

Incidents in the Life Of Sidney Alvarus Hanks

By His Daughter,
Lydia Hanks Perry

My father, Sidney Alvarus Hanks, was born in Madison, Lake County, Ohio, 16 August 1820. Sidney's father was Benjamin Hanks, and his mother was Martha Knowlton Hanks, a daughter of Ephraim Knowlton and Jemima Farnham.

Little is known of Sidney's boyhood days, but in his early twenties, he joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the days of its first leader and prophet, Joseph Smith. Shortly after his baptism, Sidney was directed in a dream to return and visit his home in Ohio. Arriving there, he found a younger brother, Ephraim Knowlton Hanks, who had recently been released from a United States ship of war, who was also visiting the old home.

Learning of Sidney's conversion to Mormonism, his mother was horror-stricken and broken-hearted, so strongly was she prejudiced against the unpopular new faith. To try to set matters right, she invited two or three of the leading sectarian ministers of the neighborhood to come to her home to show the young man the errors of Mormonism. Sidney's younger brother, Ephraim, by whose hand the invitations to the ministers were carried, was also present at the interview and witnessed the utter discomfiture of the clericals by his brother.

As usual in such arguments on Mormonism, when reasoning failed the ministers resorted to blackguardism and personal abuse, vilified the Prophet Joseph and his people--declaring that all his followers were as bad as their leader, "murderers, thieves and blacklegs." At this stage of the discussion Ephraim lost his temper, seized a chair, and drove the ministers out of the house, declaring, "no one could abuse his flesh and blood in any such manner and get away with it." And henceforth he said he would be a friend and defender of the Prophet.

Sidney's mother felt humiliated and disgraced more than ever. While Ephraim thought that he had committed an unpardonable offense in the eyes of his mother, he resolved to leave home at once. Early the following morning as he started out Ephraim found Sidney in the yard chopping wood and essayed to pass him without a word, thinking that he, too, was disgusted with his actions of the night before. Sidney called him back, however, and motioned to him to sit down by him, saying, "I never was as delighted in all my life as I was last night when you rough-handled those ministers. It was all right for you to do it, but being a Mormon, it was not fitting for me to do it. I am glad to know I have one friend in the family." At Ephraim's request, Sidney briefly explained the new faith, and related how he had been healed of a serious rupture through the healing ordinance of the laying on of

hands, as in the ancient Church.

Ephraim went to Chicago to get work, while Sidney returned to Nauvoo to labor on the Temple. Not finding his Chicago job to his liking, Ephraim decided to join his brother at Nauvoo, losing his trunk on the way. On his arrival at the depot at Nauvoo, he saw his brother sitting on his trunk, which was marked, "E. K. Hanks," and which Sidney had just stumbled onto a few minutes before. All this had been shown to Ephraim in a dream. Soon after his arrival in Nauvoo, Ephraim was baptized and both were thereafter staunch and valiant church workers. Sidney labored on the Temple at Nauvoo until it was finished, then on January 22, 1846, he received his endowments therein.

Sidney was with the Saints in their trek through Iowa to Winter Quarters on the Bluffs of the west banks of the Missouri River, where Omaha now stands. When the people were organized preparatory to moving westward across the plains to the Rocky Mountains, he was chosen as a member of the first Pioneer Company--that of President Brigham Young, which numbered one hundred forty-three men, three women, and two children. They were organized, as were all the later caravans, in companies of tens, and Sidney was a member of the fourth company with Luke S. Johnson as captain. Millen Atwood, who later became Bishop of the Thirteenth Ward, was also a member of this company, a very dear friend of Sidney's, who also became a close neighbor when they found homes in Salt Lake City.

Sidney shared in all the vicissitudes of the memorable journey, which ended on July 24, 1847, when President Young, and the last of this Pioneer band entered Salt Lake Valley, after he made the welcome announcement that this was "the place" which they were looking for as the future home of the saints. It looked so desolate and forbidding that some of the women cried in despair, and wanted to go on to find a more promising vision.

The following August twenty-sixth, Sidney left the Valley with President Young and a number of others to return to Winter Quarters to assist in the care of those left behind and aid their migration the following year, returning in 1848.

In the distributing of lots for home sites, Sidney located on the east side of what was named the State Road, later as State Street, one and a half blocks south of the Eagle Gate, Salt Lake City, in the Thirteenth Ward.

At the General Conference of the Church held in Salt Lake City in April 1850, Sidney was called with others to fill missions to the Society Islands in the Pacific Ocean to carry on the great work already begun. In fulfillment of this call, he left Salt Lake City on May 7, 1850. His associates were: Jonathan Crosby, wife and son; Joseph Busby and wife; Thomas Tompkins, wife and two children; McMerty, wife and child; Simeon A. Dunn and Julian Moses, also Mrs. Louisa Pratt, wife of Addison Pratt, and her four daughters, and Hiram E. W. Clark, a fourteen-year-old boy traveling with the Pratt family to join Elder Pratt who was already on the islands.

At San Francisco, California, the company boarded the ship "Jane A. Hersey" with Captain

Salmon, and set sail September 15, 1850, arriving at Tabuai on Monday, October 21, 1850. There they found Elders James S. Brown and John Hawkins, who most heartily welcomed the new arrivals. Sidney spent the first seven months studying the language, building boats and meeting houses, after which until August 5, 1851, Sidney, with these two brethren visited the branches on Anaa and baptized a number of people.

On August 3, 1851, a conference was held on the island of Anaa, largely attended by about five hundred natives, about two hundred seventy of whom were members of the Church in good standing. Following the morning service two natives applied for baptism and Sidney was assigned to officiate in the holy ordinance. Soon a large number of Church members appeared on the scene applying for re-baptism as a renewal of their covenants. Their request was granted and Sidney was kept in the water for about an hour performing the ordinance, baptizing over seventy people. Among these was a king from the Windward Islands, a new convert. Following the baptisms all repaired to the meeting where those baptized were confirmed members of the Church.

Elder James S. Brown was sustained as Presiding Elder over Anaa, and Sidney, agreeable to the urgent request of some leading men present from the islands of Takapoto and Takarua, some one hundred and seventy-five miles north east of Anaa, was appointed to go to these islands and open up a mission field in that district.

On Monday August 4, some fifteen boatloads of visiting Saints left Anaa to return to their homes in different villages and islands. The missionaries sailed to the village of Putuah Ara, Anaa, from which place Sidney sailed on the fifth for Takarua and Elder Hawkins to Amtua.

Sidney labored in these far islands for eight years, a greater part of the time alone, and in remote sections of the archipelago out of the usual route of vessels of any kind, doing a mighty work in the conversion of souls to Christ. He was particularly favored with the gift of healing the sick, even to the raising of the dead, and drew many into the true fold.

The missionaries on the principal islands had a great deal of trouble with the French governor general who acted as the tool of the Catholic priests, who, with other sectarian priests were doing all they possibly could to hinder and harass the Mormon missionaries and frustrate the efforts of the Elders to reach the people with the truth, finally necessitating the temporary abandonment of the mission.

Sidney, however, was located on far away islands, beyond the reach of the priests and accomplished a splendid work. Nevertheless, he became lost to his brethren and failed to get his release when the others come home as the release was sent to the wrong island. Sidney served for eight years, disdaining to leave until he was honorably released. Finally, a release reached him and he returned home in 1861.

On his way, at San Francisco he lost his trunk containing his journal, records, souvenirs, etc., so all that his family has of his missionary experience has been garnered by Utah missionaries who later followed in his wake through that wonderful mission field.

Everywhere the natives always reverently spoke of him, who ever held him in loving remembrance.

Elder James S. Brown while on a second mission to the islands in 1893 learned from the natives that Sidney left a clean character among the Saints where he spent most of this time. Elder Brown was told that Sidney was cast away to the west several hundred miles off and landed on an island, Penrhyn, seldom visited by foreigners. There he was without food for five days, when he met with a white man who gave me a little to eat. The natives were not friendly with him until the white man led him to the house of the king whose daughter of fourteen years lay dead and prepared for burial. When Sidney saw her, he dropped on his knees and prayed with great power and the dead girl was raised to life there and then to the great surprise and admiration of all present. Then Sidney preached to them and the king and nearly all the inhabitants were baptized and he remained with them for some months, during which time the white man worked his way up to Takaroa, Sidney's old home, and told the story, not knowing he was among Sidney's friends, for they had given him up as lost at sea. Soon he appeared on the scene and confirmed what the man had just told his friends. Everybody that knew Sidney spoke well of him.

The following items are copied from the history of the "Society Islands Mission," published in the *Utah Genealogical Magazine*, Volume April 1917, written by Andrew Jensen, church historian:

"Early in 1852, on account of the rigid restrictions enforced upon the Elders by the French governor, nearly all the missionaries decided to return home. Elder James S. Brown was the last to go leaving Sidney Alvarus Hanks, who chose to remain until released from home, in sole charge of the mission. He was laboring successfully in the distant islands of Takaroa and Takapoto, removed from the French headquarters and far enough away from Catholic or sectarian influence to be left unmolested to pursue his missionary labors in peace, so he remained for eight years.

"Things went from bad to worse with the forsaken native Saints. They were harassed and bitterly persecuted, imprisoned and condemned to work on road making, because they would not give up their religion, but persisted in holding cottage meetings for prayer and worship led by native Elders.

"While the Utah Elders were there it was a constant affront to the Catholic and sectarian priests to see the natives flock to the Latter-day Saint meetings, with frequent baptisms which marked demonstrations of affection for the Elders. In contrast to this the priests could not hire the natives to attend their services hence the banishment of the missionaries and the persecution of the Saints."

Shortly after Sidney's return, he became acquainted with Miss Mary Ann Cook, a recent convert from England, who came to Utah, September 12, 1861, leaving Liverpool on the ship "Monarch of the Sea," May 16, 1861. She was born in St. John's Parish,

Worcestershire, England, June 22, 1830, being the daughter of Benjamin Cook and Mary Ann Jones Cook.

They were married in Salt Lake City, June 1, 1862 by Bishop Edwin D. Woolley. Their first child, a boy, was born September 11, 1863 in Salt Lake City. He lived only a week. Shortly after this, they went to live on a farm in Wallsburg, near Heber City, Wasatch County, Utah, where their second child, a girl, was born, named Mary Ann, April 19, 1865. Thence they moved to Snyderville, up in Parley's Canyon in Summit County, where Sidney built and operated a shingle mill. At this place their third child was born, January 21, 1868, Lydia Cook, the writer of this biography.

In March 1870, the family again moved, coming back to Salt Lake City, to the original homestead on State Street. The family cow was lost somewhere in the canyon and Sidney went back to find it. Somewhere in Silver Creek Canyon, he was overtaken by a terrific mountain blizzard in which he evidently lost his bearings. Not being able to find wood dry enough to burn, he perished with the cold. It was six weeks before his body was found by Uncle Ephraim and Cousin Marcellus. He was buried in the city cemetery. His friend and neighbor, Horace S. Eldredge, was the principal speaker at the funeral.

