

JOSEPH ANGELL YOUNG

Born: 1834 in Ohio

Age: 22

Rescuer



From riding express in October 1856 to locate the Willie, Martin, Hodgett and Hunt emigrant companies and let them know that rescue wagons were coming—to carrying express reports back to Salt Lake City in November—to shoveling snow and breaking canyon trails into December to get the last immigrants safely in to the Valley—Joseph Angell Young traveled over 800 miles during the rescue. He is mentioned often in pioneer diaries as being the first rescuer to arrive. After a four-year mission to Great Britain, he had been home in Utah for only three days when he answered the first rescue call of his father, Brigham Young, and headed back east on the trail he had just traveled.

On October 14, Robert Burton recorded in the rescue company journal: “Sent on an express to meet the companies & report Back to us their Situation, whereabouts, &c: C[yrus] H Wheelock, J[oseph] A Young, Stephen Taylor, A[bel] Garr.”

These four express riders found the Willie handcart company on October 19. The previous day, George Cunningham (age 15) of the Willie company had seen Joseph Young and Stephen Taylor in a dream:

I dreamed a dream that morning had come. . . . I thought I saw two men coming toward us on horseback. They were riding very swiftly and soon came up to us. They said that they had volunteered to come to our rescue and that they would go on further east to meet a company which was still behind us and that on the morrow we could meet a number of wagons loaded with provisions for us. They were dressed in blue soldier overcoats and had Spanish saddles on their horses. . . . I also could discern every expression of their countenance. They seemed to rejoice and be exceedingly glad that they had come to our relief and saved us. At last morning came. . . . Everybody stood around the fires with gloomy faces, as if in a death trap, when all at once flashed into my mind my dream of the previous night. How joyfully I related my last night’s dream in detail. My mother told them that she knew it would come true, as I was promised that gift in my blessing. And to our great pleasure every word was literally fulfilled. . . . At [the] approach [of these express riders] I roared out, “See! See them coming over that hill!” They told me I was a true dreamer, and we all felt that we should thank God.

The Willie company had been reducing their rations for more than two weeks, and that day their flour supply was exhausted. The good news that wagons full of provisions were coming gave the pioneers great hope. Emily Hill, who was acquainted with Joseph Young in England, reported that when he saw her, he burst into tears. “Why do you cry, Brother Young?” she said. “Oh, because you look so starved,” he replied, “and the provision wagons are [miles] away.” Then, feeling in his pocket, he produced a small onion. “Eat this,” he said.

Thirteen-year-old Betsy Smith also recorded Joseph’s sympathetic tears when he approached the camp and saw Betsy and her sister:

“Look, Jennie [Jane]. There is a team of horses and two men! See, they are stopping to speak!” Now, Jennie was eighteen and bashful, and whispered, “You answer,” as we went towards them. It was Joseph A. Young and Cyrus Wheelock. I learned this afterwards. Brother Young said, “Sister, where is your camp? . . . Is there any sickness in the camp?” “No,” was the answer. “Just one woman died today while eating a cracker.” [He asked,] “Have you any provisions?” [I replied,] “All gone but some crackers.” “Well, cheer up,” he said. “Help is coming.” I turned to my sister and said, “What ailed that man? I saw him wiping his eyes.” [Jennie replied,] “It may be that he is sorry for us. Let us hurry to camp and hear him speak.” We did so, and he told us there were many wagons with provisions coming.

Joseph’s express team rode on in search of the Martin, Hodgett and Hunt companies. They were instructed to go no further than Devil’s Gate. When Captain Grant arrived at Devil’s Gate on October 26, he was disheartened—still no word of the rear companies. Robert Burton recorded: “27th remained in the same place, feed tolerable good. From this point sent on another express. . . . J[oseph] A Young, A[bel] Garr, D[aniel W.] Jones, to find the Co if Posable & report Back their situation, whereabouts &c.”

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Captain Grant instructed them not to return until the companies were found. They rode out on October 27. The next morning, “after riding about twelve miles, we saw a white man’s shoe track in the road. Brother Young called out, ‘Here they are.’ We put our animals to their utmost speed and soon came in sight of the camp at Red Bluff. This was Brother Edward Martin’s handcart company and Ben Hodgett’s wagon company. . . . They had nearly given up hope. . . . Many declared that we were angels from heaven. I told them I thought we were better than angels for this occasion, as we were good strong men come to help them into the valley, and that our company, and wagons loaded with provisions, were not far away.” (Dan W. Jones)

The renewed hope of the immigrants was expressed in many writings. William Binder recorded: “It is impossible to describe the joy and gratitude that filled every heart upon the arrival of such messengers of Salvation.” John Kirkman said, “More welcome messengers never came from the courts of glory.”

John Bond wrote: “Joseph A. Young, Daniel W. Jones, and [Abel] Garr came into camp with a small dun-colored pack mule packed with supplies. The broken-hearted mothers ran, clasping their emaciated arms around the necks of the relief party, kissing them time and time again as [did] the brethren also, rushing up in groups to fall on their necks, the tears falling from their eyes in profusion. . . . ‘God bless Brigham Young and the rescuing parties’ . . . was heard all over camp.”

Samuel Openshaw concluded: “In the midst of all this uncertainty and doubt our hopes were realized, for lo and behold, Joseph A. Young and two others with him came riding into the camp; voices from all parts of the camp, ‘Help for the camp.’ We all rushed together to hear the news. He told us that there were about ten wagons loaded with flour and sent out from the valley for our relief and was about fifty miles ahead of us at a place called Devil’s Gate.”

Patience Loader recorded that when Joseph Young arrived, he asked, “How many are dead and how many are alive?” I told him I could not tell. With tears streaming down his face he asked, ‘Where is your Captain’s tent?’ . . . He [asked] Captain Edward Martin if he had flour enough to give us all one pound of flour each and said if there were any cattle, to kill [them and] give us one pound of beef each, saying there were plenty of provisions and clothing coming for us on the road, but tomorrow morning we must make a move from there. . . . Then he said he would have to leave us [to go find the Hunt company]. He would have liked to travel with us the next morning, but we must cheer up and God would bless us and give us strength. He said, ‘We have made a trail for you to follow.’”

One of the most poignant accounts of the express riders’ arrival was written by 16-year-old Albert Jones of the Martin Handcart Company: “It was at this place that Joseph A. Young arrived as the leader of the [express] relief party sent from the valleys by President Brigham Young. He rode a white mule down a snow covered hill or dug way. The white mule was lost sight of on the white background of snow, and Joseph A. with his big blue soldier’s overcoat, its large cape and capacious skirts rising and falling with the motion of the mule, gave the appearance of a big blue winged angel flying to our rescue. The scene that presented itself on his arrival I shall never forget; women and men surrounded him, weeping and crying aloud; on their knees, holding to the skirts of his coat, as though afraid he would escape from their grasp and fly away. Joseph stood in their midst drawn up to his full height and gazed upon their upturned faces, his eyes full of tears. I, boy as I was, prayed ‘God bless him.’”

After finding the Martin and Hodgett companies, the express riders continued east approximately 10 more miles to find the Hunt Company near the last crossing of the Platte. They got the company moving the next morning and rode hard toward Devil’s Gate to report to Captain Grant. They overtook the struggling Martin Company: “A condition of distress here met my eyes that I never saw before or since. The train was strung out for three or four miles. There were old men pulling and tugging their carts, sometimes loaded with a sick wife or children—women pulling along sick husbands—little children six to eight years old struggling through the mud and snow. As night came on, the mud would freeze on their clothes and feet. There were . . . hundreds needing help. What could we do? We gathered on to some of the most helpless with our [lariats] tied to the carts, and helped as many as we could into camp on Avenue Hill. This was a bitter, cold night and we had no fuel except very small sagebrush. Several died that night. Next morning . . . we three started for our camp near Devil’s Gate.” (Dan W. Jones)

The express team rode hard again, back to Devil’s Gate to report, then turned eastward one more time to assist the immigrants to Devil’s Gate for regrouping and shelter. On November 3, George Grant decided to send express riders to Salt Lake to inform Brigham Young of the situation. Robert Burton recorded for that day: “Remained at the same place [Devil’s Gate] so cold that the Co could not move. Sent an express to Salt L City, J[oseph] A Young, [and] Abel Garr to report our situation & get Counsel & help.”

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Joseph carried a letter from Captain Grant which included the following, “Our company is too small to help much, it is only a drop to a bucket, as it were, in comparison to what is needed. I think that not over one-third of br. Martin’s company is able to walk. This you may think is extravagant, but it is nevertheless true.” At this time, Joseph put on three or four pairs of woollen socks, a pair of moccasins, and a pair of buffalo hide overshoes with the wool on, and then said, “If my feet freeze with those on, they must stay frozen till I get to Salt Lake.”

The temperatures at Devil’s Gate at this time were well below zero, the snow was deep, and the wind fierce. On this express ride, Joseph was able to inform and turn back eastward many wagons of rescuers who had given up and were returning to Salt Lake. Joseph and Abel Garr made this 327-mile ride in 10 days. They arrived in Salt Lake City at 4:00 a.m. on November 13. This was the first word Brigham Young had received of the whereabouts and condition of the last companies, but he had continued to send hundreds of men and wagons into the mountains. Joseph spoke at the tabernacle on Sunday, November 16:

Brethren and sisters, as I have the latest news from companies yet on the plains, and as you are all anxious to hear from them, I have been the first one called upon to speak to you this morning. You are aware that Captain George D. Grant’s relief company left this city on the 7th of October to go and meet the immigration. Captain Grant kept an express in advance until we reached the Devil’s Gate, when he sent three of us on to the Platte River, to see if we could find the companies or hear of them. We traveled until the 28th, when we met Captain Edward Martin’s company of handcarts and Captain Hodgett’s wagon company, at a place called Red Buttes, 16 miles [above] the Platte bridge. [Richard’s or Reshaw’s bridge] We met Captain John A. Hunt’s wagon company [6] miles [above] the bridge. . . .

Captain Martin informed us that about 56 out of 600 had died upon the plains, up to that date. Those who had died were mostly old people. On the 29th, I returned from Captain Hunt’s to Captain Martin’s company. Captain Martin had started early in the morning, and when I overtook them their cry was, “Let us go to the Valley; let us go to Zion.” I camped with them that night in the snow, at a place called Rocky Avenue. . . . The next day I journeyed on towards Captain Grant’s company, and on the 31st rode into their camp and found all well.

In the morning [of November 3rd] Captain Grant sent me and Brother Abel Garr on an express to this city. We found plenty of teams at Fort Bridger, and by this time the [Martin] handcarts have all the assistance necessary to take them up and bring them in within nine days from tomorrow. There were teams enough, so soon as they could meet them, to bring them right through as fast as horses and mules can travel, and such will be done.

All the companies requested me to inform the Saints in the valleys that they desired your faith and your prayers, and that they would endeavor to merit them in their journey and after their arrival. That the blessing of God may attend them is my sincere desire: Amen.

After reporting back to Salt Lake, the tireless Joseph, along with his brother, Brigham Young Jr., and others with ox teams, began breaking the road at Big Mountain through waist-deep snow. The last of the two wagon companies were brought to Salt Lake City by December 15.

In 1864, Joseph was ordained an Apostle by his father, Brigham Young. However, he was never made a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles or the First Presidency. Therefore, no one was called to the apostleship to replace him when he died. Joseph was active in territorial politics and was a member of the Utah Territory’s House of Representatives and the Senate during several sessions. Joseph married Margaret Whitehead of the Hunt wagon company in February 1857. Their son, Richard Whitehead Young, was an Associate Justice of the U.S. Territory of the Philippines Supreme Court between 1899 and 1901. At the time of Joseph’s untimely death at age 40, he was serving as the first Stake President of the Sevier Stake of the Church. The town of Joseph, in Sevier County, Utah, was named in his honor.

Sources: *Deseret News*, 19 Nov. 1856; Robert Taylor Burton diaries; *40 Years Among the Indians*, by Daniel W. Jones; *The Price We Paid*, by Andrew D. Olsen; familysearch.org; wikipedia.org. (See stories for William Binder, John Kirkman, Samuel Openshaw, Patience Loader and Albert Jones in Martin company section of *Tell My Story, Too*. See John Bond in Hodgett Company section; George Cunningham and Emily Hill in Willie Company section of *Tell My Story, Too*. Dan Jones, Abel Garr, Cyrus Wheelock, George D. Grant, and Stephen Taylor are in rescuer section of *Tell My Story, Too*. Also see “The Blue Angel,” by artist, Julie Rogers, at www.tellmystorytoo.com.)