

Jasper Thornton

A son of Thomas and Susan Kathrine Paine Thornton, Jasper was born at Dumfries, Gore District, Upper Canada, October 27, 1832. He was the eldest of a family of five children. His parents moved from Canada to La Harpe Illinois in 1838 when Jasper was six years of age. They were baptized into the Mormon church and became friends of the Prophet Joseph Smith who often visited their home.

After the death of Jasper's father at Galena, Ill., his mother married George W. Birch and with them and a young step-brother George, came to Utah in 1851. They came in Captain Smith's company with Captain Mace, over the fifty in which they traveled. Jasper, now nineteen years of age, drove the team for Livingston and Kincaid who freighted goods to Utah from the East. The team Jasper drove on the heavily loaded wagon was three yoke of oxen--only one of which was broke. The night before they were to start, the two yoke were corralled and in the morning their tails were tied together, the yokes placed on their necks, hitched with the driver's help and with the "broke-ones" in the lead, he said, "away they went." Those six oxen with the driver's help brought the load safely through. Each one took his turn standing guard. One night Jasper was on guard from dark till 3 a.m. Returning to camp, he called the next on the list and retired to his wagon. Next morning he was notified to appear before Captain Mace to give reason for not calling the guard to take his place; as through his neglect one man had been left alone all night. He explained he had awakened the man, but Captain Mace ordered him whipped for neglect. Later Captain Smith investigated and found the other man had failed to take his turn after being called and he said: "Jasper, it's all right--there will be no whipping." He afterwards told his children that Captain Smith was a just and fine man.

While crossing the plains at different times the call to halt was sounded and everyone ordered to make a noise with tin pans or anything else on hand, in order to turn buffalo away which were headed in their direction. They encountered some terrific thunder storms, in which one of these, a young girl traveling alone with her mother, nearly lost her life. The train had halted when she, standing apart, was struck by lightning. Jasper saw her fall and rushed to remove her bonnet, allowing a torrent of rain to fall upon her. After recovering, she was profuse in her thanks. He said she was fair, beautiful and the tallest girl he ever saw. On the 4th of July the entire company of 150 wagons remained in camp. The American flag was unfurled. They celebrated by drinking egg-nogs--egg and milk furnished by the members of the company and the sugar by Kincaid. In the afternoon Jasper was resting in his wagon when some girls came looking in and turning away said: "Yes, he's asleep for good and we will have no dance." Jasper had attended schools in the vicinity of LaHarpe and other places and had become an efficient mathematician, studied music, taught dancing and played the violin. The girls rushed back and he scampered out. The dance went on until the stars came out.

Arriving in Utah, Jasper Thornton found much work to do. He became an apprentice in carpentry with his uncle William Paine, in Ogden; and, also was in great demand as a music and dancing teacher. Three girls he always remembered from those days were Lauvine Yearsley, a Miss Zondall and his cousin Charlotte Browning; but a little later he met again Sarah Elizabeth, a daughter of James and Sally Barker Dunn, with whom he had become acquainted in Illinois, and they were married.

Kate B. Carter. *Heart Throbs of the West*. Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1939-1951, (v.12, p.416).