

Ebenezer Brown

From the Mormon Pioneers by Delbert M. Draper

Ebenezer Brown was born 6 December 1802 in Herkimer County, New York, the son of William Brown and Hannah Sweet. We do not know anything of his early life, but on 23 July 1823 he married Ann Weaver, and they had four children. Joseph Guernsey born 8 November 1824 in New York, Harriet born 6 February 1827, Norman born 6 February 1830, and John Weaver born 17 June 1837 at Peru, LaSalle County, Illinois. We find the family living in Illinois at the time their youngest child was born. The next August they moved to Far West, Caldwell County, Missouri, arriving in September. The saints who reached Missouri were so brutally treated and suffered privation, hardships and some of them sickness and death. Ann Weaver Brown, the mother in this family, died 24 June 1842 at Quincey, Illinois, and Ebenezer was left a widower with four young children.

When the dispossessed saints returned from Missouri to Illinois, most of them crossing the river went northward to Commerce (later Nauvoo), but the Brown and Draper families went south and settled near Pleasantville, Illinois, in the wide Mississippi River bottom. It was a place of beauty and great fertility. The surrounding country lush with corn and fruit and timber and one can hardly suppress regret that they ever had to leave there. They were fast becoming economically independent, and they enjoyed the full measure of religious liberty. Their Non-Mormon neighbors were impressed with their industry, character and religion.

Ebenezer was good friends with William Draper and his sister Phoebe Draper Palmer, a widow with six or seven (6) children. Phoebe had received a patriarchal blessing from Joseph Smith Sr., and had been promised if she was faithful and wise she would be blessed with a companion who would be a man of God and that she would be able to bring up her family right, that she would have good happy days. She kept the faith and was wise and the blessing and promise was fulfilled in Ebenezer Brown, a righteous and kindly man who gave her much and to whom she returned the full measure of her devotion. Ebenezer and Phoebe were married 1842, and she, no doubt, felt her patriarchal blessing had been fulfilled. There were now ten children in this combined family, her youngest child was eight while his youngest was five.

What their lives would have been had they been permitted to remain in Pleasantville can only be surmised, but it is almost certain that they would not have been subjected to the trials and hardships that beset them and their children for more than a century. In the very year that Ebenezer and Phoebe joined forces the church found itself in deep difficulties in Hancock County, Illinois, where Nauvoo was located. Mob hostility had grown so fierce that Joseph Smith sent out a call to all saints in outlying counties to

break up their settlements and move in to Hancock County. The Draper and Brown families were in Pike County, where hostility had not yet developed, but they could not ignore the call to their leader. Ebenezer and Phoebe moved directly to Nauvoo where they lived until about 1844. There they had two more years enjoying the good will of the Non-Mormons in the neighborhood, but tensions built up at Nauvoo to an alarming extent. Hostility against the leaders of the church grew until it culminated in the assassination of the founder of the church and his brother Hyrum.

After this, it became manifest that the Mormons would have to leave the state of Illinois. In 1846 Nauvoo was abandoned under bloody and miserable circumstances known to all. The whole Church membership began to move westward. On their way through Iowa they learned through Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball who were returning to Nauvoo after establishing camps on the Missouri River that Captain James Allen of the United States Army had requested the saints to furnish 500 able-bodied men to march against Mexico with an army under the command of Colonel Stephen L. Kearny. This call seems to have been resented until advice was given that the formation of a battalion for service in Mexico which at the same time would help to get the saints to their destination on pay from the government.

To fully understand the heroism and suffering of the battalion, they had just been forcibly ejected from their homes in Illinois and were plunging into the wilderness almost empty handed. They were short both on clothing and food and were poorly prepared for military service. After the recruiting and enlistment, a gala farewell party was held for the departing recruits in a large bowery at Council Point, a trading post on the river, and the next morning 16 July 1846 a march began which made history. Ebenezer and Phoebe were part of the enlisted personnel. Ebenezer was given the rank of sergeant in Company A., and Phoebe was given the title of laundress. The first leg of their march was between Council Bluffs in Iowa and Fort Leavenworth in Kansas. They marched southward along the river in temperatures exceeding 100 degrees for about 200 miles. It took them 11 days to reach Fort Leavenworth where they were uniformed, armed, and given a 12 day rest. Already the ordeal had begun to tell. Many of the men were sick with chills and fever and even the officers did not escape. Captain Allen died 23 July 1846.

On 12 August 1846 the first attachment left Fort Leavenworth headed for the Arkansas River which flows southeasterly through Kansas. They reached the river 11 September 1846 and by this time it was obvious that the sick soldiers would have to be dropped. The battalion then left the river and struck out southwesterly toward Santa Fe. Food supplies were almost exhausted and the soldiers were put on two-thirds ration. Good water was almost non-existent over this stretch and they were reduced to drinking brackish water in whatever slough or mud hole they could find it. Hunger and dysentery began to enfeeble the men until they could hardly respond to call for guard duty at night.

The drugs administered to them often within abuse seemed to have a worse effect than the disease and exhaustion from which they suffered. It was, therefore, a great relief when they reached Santa Fe 9 October 1846 where they were given a ten day rest. They were allowed to rest and recuperate at Santa Fe until the 19 October when the battalion began the last and worst 1,100 miles of its appalling march. The terrain was entirely unfamiliar even to the officers. Forage was scarce for the animals and food was just as lacking for the men. By November some of the teams died from pure exhaustion and poor and skinny as they were they were eaten by the men. There were 56 who were sent back to Pueblo more than 300 miles away.

The main body of the battalion marched on. Their objective was Tucson in southern Arizona. After crossing the Rio Grande River, they entered barren and rough terrain. Their food supplies were exhausted. If an oxen died, they ate it including the hide which they diced and boiled for soup. They also took the sheep pelts from under their saddles and roasted them for food. They often marched all day without water, and some of them died of thirst. Sometimes they sunk wells as much as 300 feet in search of water.

Finally they reached the Gila River which they followed to its confluence with the San Pedro flowing into it from the south. In this area there were extensive mesquite thickets full of wild cattle. Here at last was food in abundance (meat that is) if they could get it. The bulls, however, charged the men on sight and sent them scattering. Not until they devised some strategy could they get meat. Even then it took volleys of musket balls to stop a ferocious bull. In due time they had meat in quantity, but they had nothing to go with it not even salt. Even so this fare enabled them to reach Tucson where they had a brush (mostly conversational) with a Mexican garrison which was subdued without difficulty. Here they rested, got fresh supplies and hobbled on into the western desert. All the way from Tucson to the confluence of the Gila and Colorado Rivers the going was especially rough. Water holes were as much as 75 miles apart. It was cactus country. Their uniforms were in tatters and their shoes were worn out, so marching was something less than pleasant.

When the battalion reached the neighborhood of present day Yuma, they encountered large numbers of Pima Indians whom the Mexicans had sought to incite to attack the battalion without avail. On the contrary they had in their possession a store of goods and several mules. They gladly turned the goods and animals over and also sold the soldiers some of their own supplies. Refreshed again they began their last adventure through the desert of the Imperial Valley. Lack of shoes was their greatest handicap which they tried to overcome by making them from rawhide, but they were not skillful as shoemakers and the hides drying wrinkled in hard convolutions that were harder on the feet than cactus so they hobbled on as best they could until 29 January 1847 when they reached San Diego on the Pacific Ocean.

The next day their commander addressed them and congratulated the battalion on its safe arrival on the shores of the Pacific Ocean and the conclusion of its march of over 2,000 miles. History may be searched in vain for an equal march of infantry; nine-tenths of it through a wilderness where nothing but savages and wild beasts were found, or deserts where for want of water there is no living creature. There with almost hopeless labor we have dug deep walls which the future travelers will enjoy. With crowbar and pickax we have worked our way over mountains and hewed a passage through a chasm of living rock. Thus marching half naked and half fed and living upon wild animals (without salt to season your substance of fresh meat) we have discovered and made a road of value to our country.

He ended his speech by saying that there was work yet to be done and as Ebenezer and Phoebe had yet more than 1,000 miles of mountain and desert terrain to travel before they could rejoin their families in Utah and as they had no money with which to buy outfits or supplies to travel, they re-enlisted and served in the Army until 14 March 1848 when they were mustered out with renewed courage and a little money to start them on their way to Utah. They traveled northward over an inland route until they reached Sutter's Fort held by a German-Swiss citizen eager to make improvements on his Spanish land grant so that he could qualify to hold it under his new sovereign the United States of America. To develop it, he needed laborers and they were grateful for the opportunity to earn some money so they went to work. Early in 1848 Sutter sent a group of whites and Indians to construct a sawmill on the American River 24 January 1848. Ebenezer and Phoebe were among the first to enjoy its fruits. They might have become wealthy Californians had they not been bound to the cause of establishing a homeland for the Church to which they were so strongly attached. Brigham Young feared the disintegration of his people if they followed the lure of gold so in 1849 he called the battalion members home. They obeyed. Phoebe and Ebenezer reached Salt Lake in the fall of the year, and though they crossed the rugged Sierra Nevada Mountains, the forbidding Carson Sinks, and the Great American Desert over which but few white men had ever passed and where the bones of some who had tried to pass lay bleached in the sun,..they left no record of their ordeal. They had made it to Zion and that was enough. They had a happy reunion with their children in the fall of 1849.

Salt Lake City was then about two and a half years old, but it was filled with immigrants seeking places to build their homes. Ebenezer and Phoebe, no doubt, had an advantage; they were fresh from the gold fields and, no doubt, had gold in their pockets. Their children whom they had left on the Missouri River with Ebenezer's oldest daughter: Harriet, and her husband had now reached the valley and together they began to plan a new life. Ebenezer with his three sons, Joseph, Norman, and John set out to find a new and unclaimed land because the land around the city had already been distributed among the first pioneers. Together they discovered unoccupied land and water in a large cove in

the south-east corner of the Salt Lake valley through which the water from four springs ran which they forthwith appropriated and began immediately to build a cabin and to prepare for crops to be planted in the spring. The waters of the springs were joined and thereafter were known as South Willow Creek.

Later they set to work building log cabins preparatory to bringing other members of the family in. By the spring of 1850, Ebenezer was ready to bring Phoebe down from Salt Lake to help build a permanent home. He felt too that there was ample room for more people at South Willow Creek than his and Phoebe's immediate families, so it appears they asked all the Drapers they knew to join them. Other people were soon attracted to this settlement. By 1852, the community on South Willow Creek had grown to the extent that the church provided it with ecclesiastical government and the name of the community was changed to Draper. Phoebe was the first mistress and also conducted a day nursery for young children.

In the meantime Ebenezer and his sons had been profitably employed. Beginning in 1849 they began establishing a cattle business. They cannily foresaw a good market for meat among the saints and particularly a cash market in the hordes of immigrants beginning to pass through Utah on the way to California.

By 1853 Ebenezer was a man of substance and as such was able to care for some of the many unmarried women in the church. At any rate in that year he married **Samantha Pulsipher**, and in 1854 he married Mary Elizabeth Wright, and had a sizeable family by each.

From John W. Brown's Diary we read: In May 1856 Ebenezer and family was called on a mission to Carson Valley. We traveled 16 miles and stopped at Mill Creek for the night. Tuesday we spent most of the day in Salt Lake ate dinner with our aged brother Kimball and left the city that night. We started each morning about 8 or 9 o'clock and traveled between 15 and 20 miles a day. The weather was fairly good and feed and water were good most of the way. We made stops at the Hot Springs, Kaysville, Weber, Ogden Hole, North Willow Creek and Box Elder City, where we found a small company waiting for us. On May 11th the camp was organized with Ebenezer Brown as Captain. We mustered 23 able-bodied men and 13 wagons. May 12th the camp took up the line of march. We have passed all the settlements, our mountain homes have passed from our view, and we are wending our way towards a lovelier country, a milder climate, but to a colder-hearted people.

We started each day between 8 or 9 o'clock and made about 15 miles a day; some days we made better time, other days travel was slower as the roads were in poor conditions, being sandy, rough and hilly. We were blessed in many ways; our teams were

strengthened, and we met with few accidents worthy of notice. We met a few Indians at the Pilot Springs and after friendly greetings and exchanges made we continued on our way making stops at Blue Springs, Stoney Canyon, Decesher Creek, Goose Creek, Canyon Creek and Humboldt River. The weather was fair except for a few days of wind and bluster. We found feed and water supplies to be fair most of the way. On June 24th we arrived at Carson and pitched our tents in Washeow Valley where a town is located and a number of saints have taken up farms and commenced improvements. It is not known how long Ebenezer remained here, but he probably was back in Utah in 1858 as he wrote his son, John, to go to Carson Valley and collect the money owing him for his improvements. He did not collect it, and had to work to earn money to come home with. John had been on a mission to the Hawaiian Islands.

When Ebenezer took his other two wives **Samantha Pulsipher** and Mary Elizabeth Wright. Phoebe seems not to have minded this. But **Samantha** died in 1870 leaving a family of minor children, whereupon Phoebe at the age of seventy-three took the responsibility of raising a third family in addition to discharging her duties as an officer in the Relief Society. She brought them all to maturity, and in the process earned the love and devotion not only of these children, but all of Ebenezer's children.

Ebenezer was the husband of four women and the father of 22 children, 13 sons and 9 daughters. He died 26 January 1878, and was buried 29 January 1878 at Draper, Salt Lake County, Utah. He had fought a good fight, and with thousands of other people like him had lived that calumny and bitter prejudice once so manifest against them died away and in its place came admiration and praised not only for themselves, but for the Church which guided them through.