

JOHN BALLS

-by John Alma Balls, a grandson

John Balls was the son of William Coats and Elizabeth(Betsy) Balls of Chediston, England. Grandfather John Balls was born 13 October 1825 at Chediston, England. He was a medium-sized man, light brown hair, and blue eyes. He was a very quiet, reserved man, was never known to wear a white shirt with a stiff collar, and always carried a colored handkerchief. He married Sarah Baxter, a daughter of John Baxter and Sarah Butcher. Sarah Baxter was born 6 December 1826 at Chediston, Suffolk, England. Twelve children were born to them. My father, William Balls, was the oldest. Grandfather and grandmother had ten children born to them while in England. They joined the Church in 1851, and were baptized and confirmed members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints by Robert Winters. A Mormon Elder by the name of Nelson visited the home many times. The President of the Branch at the time was R. B. Hayes.

My father, William Balls, has told me how he remembered of going to Rumbora Common on Sunday to attend meeting, which was held at Brother George Hancy's home. The two younger children were pulled in a little wagon, and my father, who was eight years old at the time, walked behind holding to the back of the wagon for the distance of five or six miles. Grandfather John Balls was a hard working man, but wages were low in England and it was hard to make ends meet. He could get only a limited education, owing to the adverse conditions of the poorer class of people. In the locality where he lived the land was very wet and damp, so grandfather worked for other people digging trenches to drain the land. He received just sixty shillings a year for this back-breaking labor.

After joining the Church, preparations were made to immigrate to Zion (or Utah), but before leaving, a short visit was enjoyed at Grandmother Baxter's home. She had prepared rhubarb sandwiches to last them until they reached Liverpool. It was in Liverpool during the early part of 1868 that they, under the direction of William B. Preston, and in company with some six hundred Latter Day Saints went aboard a ship. They were six weeks crossing the Atlantic. They encountered a terrific storm and wind, and because of the extreme roughness of the ocean the smaller children had to be tied in their bunks for safety. The adults were required to bail water to keep the ship from sinking. Because of the storm their ship was blown back in a single night a distance which required three days to recover by sail. They finally landed in New York about July 28th, and from there they traveled by rail to a small town called Benton. The railroad to Omaha had been extended to terminate there. From this point they made preparations to travel in pioneer fashion by ox team. These were the last ox teams to travel across the plains with the Latter Day Saints. Their company was presided over by Captain Simpson M. Molen, who was at that time a member of the Bishopric in the newly-begun village of Hyde Park, Utah, which was the intended destination of John Balls and his family. John Bloomfield, who had also joined in settling Hyde Park, had been called to meet the John Balls family and bring them from the Missouri River to Utah. This meant a distance of two thousand miles, over almost barren desert. The trip was not only costly, but dangerous. The Indians were not altogether friendly toward the white man. Services rendered by John Bloomfield, and other amounts of money donated to make the immigration possible for his family were paid back in full by Grandfather through careful planning after being in Hyde Park seven years.

They left Benton on 7 August 1868 for this long and tiresome journey. I have heard my father, William Balls, say he walked all the way across the plains. They arrived in Salt Lake City on 2 September 1868 and then came on to Brigham City where they stayed a couple of days with the George Reeder family who they had known in England. Then Grandfather moved on to the north and settled in Hyde Park, where he homesteaded eighty acres of land.

The first settlers had already spent several winters in Hyde Park, and they warned Grandfather of the cold which they had not been used to. So he immediately secured a building lot on the street now two blocks south of the town square, and with pine logs secured from the mountains east of Hyde Park, built a one room log house which had a dirt roof and a dirt floor, 12 x 14 feet. There were no stoves at that time, so a fire place was built in one end of the room. This had to serve for heating as well as cooking and washing. The only fuel was wood from the mountains. This home was an improvement over the dugouts used by some of the early settlers.

Grandfather and his older boys worked in the canyon logging for lumber and firewood. Grandmother and the girls worked at whatever they could find to do. They were all undernourished and weak as they faced the cold of their first winter in Zion. The fire was banked at night to save coals for starting the fire the next morning. If the fire died out they would have to go to the neighbor to borrow live coals as matches were very scarce. Lights were furnished by homemade candles made of tallow and a bake kettle was the main cooking utensil.

Grandfather sawed timber for himself and other people of the town. He and other men would leave home early in the morning, heading for the hills on foot, each carrying an axe on his shoulder, a dinner bag, and a canteen to fill with water when he came to a spring along the road. One particular morning he left home alone and on foot. He had gone about four miles and as he came to a fork in the road he met a brown bear with two cubs. The bear had come down to the spring for a drink of water. As soon as she saw him she made a rush for him. Not knowing what to do, he decided to throw his lunch bag to her hoping that would satisfy her, but the bear rushed at him, knocking him down with a slap of her paw, and began biting him severely. Meanwhile the cubs ran up the hill and hid behind some shrubbery. Shortly the bear left and went to her cubs, but in a few moments she returned and mauled him even more severely. By this time Grandfather was only partly conscious of his surroundings, but he had enough presence of mind to hold his arm over his face and hold his breath so that the bear would think he was dead. The bear, after turning him over and mauling him some more, finally returned to her cubs again. But for a third time she returned and smelled Grandfather, but this time without molesting him and then went away. He lay very quiet for some time, then attempted to get up and walk. He found he was too severely wounded to stand up and was in a lot of pain. Finally he crawled on his hands and knees for thirty or forty rods down the canyon, where he met Ruben Perkes and Harry Griffith, who had a pair of mules and a wagon. They cut some brush, piled it on the wagon, laid some hay on it, put a blanket over it, and made a bed for Grandfather. After arriving at Hyde Park it was necessary for someone to ride horseback to Logan for a doctor. Doctor Ormsby came and took care of Grandfather. It was about a year before he was well enough to take up farm work again.

Grandfather was a good farmer and engaged in the raising of livestock. Marriage soon took four of the older children. Two of the twelve were born after their arrival in Utah. Grandfather and his boys worked together in the canyon getting out lumber. He built the first frame saw mill in Hyde Park, and helped to build what was called the Old Canal in Hyde Park. Grandfather was also watermaster for ten years.

I remember Father and Grandfather working together to get logs from the hills to build houses. Grandfather had a white horse and Father had a white mare which they put together for a team to do heir farm work with. At harvest time Grandfather would cut the grain with a cradle and Father would follow and tie it in bundles. They would change jobs when one was tired. In those days all the grain was cut and stacked before starting the threshing machine. Sometimes they wouldn't get through threshing until late in November when snow would come and cover the stacks of grain.

Grandfather was a religious man and would walk to Logan, a distance of five miles, to attend stake conference. He held the office of High Priest.

In the spring of 1874, his wife Sarah was afflicted with brain fever and became very ill. She was a good homemaker, a devoted wife and loving mother. She shared with him the hardships of life. On 23 April 1874 she passed away leaving a family of eight children still living at home. The youngest child was only seven months old. Emma, the wife if Elijah Seamons and having no children of her own, took baby Charles Herbert to rear. Elijah's sister, Sarah, having a baby near the same age, helped to nurse Charles. Grandfather's two older girls, Eliza and Ellen, took over the duties of housekeeping. He had added two more rooms on the west end of the log cabin. These were built of adobe and wood floors now covered all the rooms making them much more comfortable.

During the year 1879 Grandfather remarried. He was married to Mary Ann Hawkes in Salt Lake City. She already had several children of her own.

Grandfather Balls was stricken with pneumonia and died 30 October 1902 and was buried in the Hyde Park Cemetery. He had twelve brothers and sisters whose names were Hammond. The names of Grandfathers's children were: William, Mary, John Jr., Sarah, Hannah, Ellen, James, Eliza, Daniel, Heber, Jabus, and Charles Herbert.