

The Life of Collins R. Hakes

An autobiography written by himself

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Collins R. Hakes was born in Grafton, Loraine Co., Ohio, June 26, 1837. In the summer of 1839 I was taken down with a violent fever and was attended by three eminent doctors for near three months and my parents were told by the doctors that I could not live but a few hours. For some time prior to this there had been three Mormon Elders preaching the Mormon doctrine in the neighborhood. By name they were Zebadia Coltrin, Thomas Keer and Thomas Drier. My parents had been converted to the faith of these Elders and sent for them. They came and mother told the doctors that she had a remedy to try when they had done all they could and wanted them to tell her in time to try it before I passed away; and they told her to be quick as I could not breathe half an hour longer. She motioned to the Elders and they came and anointed my head with oil and Zebadee Coltrin confirmed the anointing, and as soon as they took their hands off I raised up in her lap well, only a skeleton, but I sat on the floor next day and played with my toys.

The room was filled with relatives and friends at the time of the administration, some of whom ridiculed and said it was of the devil and were boisterous and unkind. The doctors rebuked them and said, "we know nothing about these men nor their religion, but we do know it was more than the Power of Man that saved the life of the boy."

During the winter of 1839 the relatives and friends of my parents were so distant and unkind that in the spring of 1840 my father sold the home, got one yoke of oxen and one cow and with his kit of shoemaking tools and a family of five children started west to join the body of the Mormon people. We passed through Chicago, then a town of less than 5,000 inhabitants, reached Nauvoo in 1841.

We stayed in Nauvoo about three months, where I first saw the Prophet Joseph Smith, and as young as I was I shall never forget the impression made on my young mind as I saw that noble Son of God and was told by my father who he was. We moved about 25 miles to the town of Macedonia, where we lived until 1845, during which time we suffered from the persecution of the mobs.

My father went to Nauvoo as soon as he heard of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum on 27 June, 1844, at Carthage jail. In 1846 the oxen were hitched to the wagon and another start made westward. A stop was made at Winter Quarters on the Missouri river, not far from where the city of Omaha now stands, but which had not been even planned at that time.

There a disease called the black leg broke out in our camp from which about six hundred persons died. My next to the youngest sister, Patty Celinda being on of the victims. Here the people suffered much from common necessities of life, besides considerable annoyance from the Indians.

In the spring of 1848 the oxen and cow were brought into play and their horns pointed again to the west and in the company of Apostle Amasa M. Lyman we started for the Great Salt Lake, where he arrived on October 24th, 1848, having made the entire journey from Ohio to Salt Lake Valley during eight years with the same one yoke of oxen and the same red cow.

We located on the Cotton Wood, 12 miles from the site of the present city of Salt Lake; here we lived until March, 1851. In the spring of '49 we had sown quite a field of grain and it bid fair to make a good yield; as it was just getting in the boot there came from the foot of the mountain range, countless thousands of large black crickets and when they struck our fields of grain they swept it clean, not leaving anything green on the ground. The people turned out in mass for two days, and we fought these crickets but it did not seem to lessen their numbers at all. It was decided to be useless to fight them but that we must rely upon the Lord for help. So every house in the settlement was a scene of earnest and fervent prayer. On arising the next morning I went to the door and looked out; I was so surprised or scared that I screamed to my father to get up quick. He sprang out of bed, thinking something had happened, and when he came to the door he too was surprised, for the ground was covered with large birds besides large flocks were flying in the air and lighting on the ground. All were busy picking up crickets. My father recognized the birds as the sea gull; they were as tame as our chickens. They would pick up crickets until full, go ;to the ditch, drink a little water, and throw up great piles of crickets and return and eat more. This continued all day and was resumed early next morning and towards evening the crickets were all gone and the gulls began to leave, and next day were gone, where we knew not, but our crops were saved and beyond a doubt the people were saved from starvation and that by the direct interposition of the power of God in answer to the prayers of his children who had so faithfully served Him under such trying circumstances.

We left Payson, Utah County, in March, 1851. Again we were traveling in the company of Apostle Amasa Lyman, and we turned our faces once more toward the setting sun. My father had sold our home and had at this starting, two yoke of oxen and two yoke of cows and a larger and more roomy wagon.

There had been an increase of one daughter in the family and a decrease by death of one and a decrease of three by marriage, which left only four in our traveling home.

On this journey from Utah County we had a road made by a company that went down to what is now called Parowan, Iron County, and had started a settlement there. From here we had only the trail of some explorers that had traveled with pack animals and our progress was slow; 80 miles farther we camped on the ground that was some years later the scene of that dreadful tragedy, the Mountain Meadow Massacre; here we rested some days, there being plenty of grass and good water.

We followed the Santa Clara stream for near twenty miles, then across the mountain and down the Rio Vergin for 40 miles, then to the Muddy and across a 55 mile desert without water, to the Las Vegas Springs.

This was a beautiful spot, a large tract of meadow land watered from two large and beautiful springs about thirty by twenty feet in size appearing to have about two foot depth of water and a smooth, white sand bottom, but upon a test it was found that the white sand was held at that level by the bailing of the water from below. Twenty-five pounds of iron was let down by a rope and at a depth of 50 feet would sink no farther; neither did it strike solid bottom, but would sink and raise by the force of the water. We stayed here two weeks to rest ourselves as well as the teams. Then we pushed further west 50 miles to the Salt Springs from which place it was about 100 miles to the Mohave river, with only one place for water about half way. This was the Bitter Springs and was very poor water for man or beast.

I will not try to picture our journey across this 100 miles of desert nor our suffering of thirst, hunger and fatigue, only to say that after about ten days of time never to be forgotten by those who passed through it we reached the Mohave river without loss in our numbers, but not so favored in the number of our cattle, for we had left beside the road 150 head of our work cattle. But as we had a heard of near 200 head of cows driving loose, as the oxen died they were replaced by recruits from the cow heard and we were able to continue our journey.

We traveled up this miscalled river for ninety miles and then pushed up through the scrub cedars interspersed with the shaped species of the cactus family so plentiful in these regions. We crossed the summit of the mountains and dropped down into the Cahoon Canyon, which was narrow and very rough most of the way to the Valley of San Bernardino.

About noon of June 21, 1851, indelibly imprinted on my mind as being my 14th birthday, we drove from the canyon onto a ridge running from the mountain and here we feasted our eyes on such a sight as we had not seen for years and probably most of us had never seen before. From this ridge we had a full view of the San Bernardino Valley. Talk about beautiful sights -- it seemed like being transferred from hades to Paradise; it was like looking over one vast field of green grain or meadow and the lines of trees along the streams of water made it a sight long to be remembered.

After ten years of travel and toil across the great trackless plains, so drear and lonesome, then across the dry, rough and lifeless desert of Utah, Nevada and California, to emerge so suddenly in view of a sight so lovely and inviting, it looked as though the wise creator had in laying out and painting this piece of His creations approached as near the line of perfection as He deemed best for His children to look upon in mortality. We camped under some large sycamore trees and stayed here about three months.

James H. Rollins taught us in school under one of the trees, peeling off the bark of the trunk of the tree and using for a blackboard, taking dead fire coals for chalk. We had six elementary spellers and near a dozen first and second readers, a few old arithmetics for about 36 pupils, and here I made my start for an education and in after life it proved a boon to me.

The company purchased the San Bernardino ranch from the Lugo family, paying \$77,500 dollars for a tract of land nine miles square, taking in all the best of the valley. I helped survey the city of San Bernardino and the land of the ranch into 5, 10, 20, and 40 acre lots. We lived here until December, 1857; we built a fine city and many fine farms around it, and here I spent the most enjoyable days of my young life, but when the call came from Brigham Young and with other families of the Saints, owing to anticipated persecution, as a result of the feeling engendered owing to the Mountain Meadow Massacre, we returned to Utah, and arrived in Parowan, Iron County, Feb. 23, 1858.

While living in Parowan I was ordained an Elder, and later a Seventy, and became affiliated with the 69th Quorum of Seventy.

In 1868 I was sent by Governor Shaffer to do guard duty on the Sevier river against the Indians. I served three months and had many thrilling experiences. In the spring of 1868 I removed with my family to Kanosh, Millard County, Utah, and when the Kanosh Ward was organized, was chosen as second counselor to Bishop Cuthbert King.

In 1875 I, together with many other Saints of Millard County, organized ourselves into the United Order, and spent a very happy year in that organization.

When that order was dissolved, and many of my friends having moved to Mesa, Arizona, I sold my property and together with my family and my two sons-in-law, Lyman Leavitt and James Charlesworth, and their families, removed to Mesa, arriving here in the spring of 1883.

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This autobiography was taken from the GENEALOGICAL AND HISTORICAL MAGAZINE, October 1931, pp. 13-16. The following notes on his family were also printed. Several serious errors were made in dates and names and they appear here in their correct form.

Collins R. Hakes and family arrived in Mesa, Arizona, on the --th day of --, 1883. Accompanying him was his wife, Mabel Ann, and six children, Lottie Mabel, Harriet Jane, Effie Elizabeth, Collins Riley, Daniel Edgar and Lyman Leavitt and James Charlesworth, both Sons-in-law, and families. They came overland by team via Lees Ferry from Kanab, Utah where they had formerly made their home.

Collins R. Hakes was the great-great-grandson of Solomon Hakes, born in England in 1688, and who sometime before 1709 came to America, for on that date, at a town meeting held in April, in Westerly Rhode Island, he was given the status of a "Freeman". He was the first known ancestor of the Hakes family coming to America. He later moved to Stonington, Conn., where his son George was born in 1719, and died 1790-3. His grandfather, James Hakes, joined the great westward move of pioneer colonization, and finally settled in New York where his son, Weeden Vander Hakes, was born, who was the father of Collins R. Hakes, the latter being born at Grafton, Loraine County, Ohio, on the 26th day of June, 1837.

His father's family was converted and baptized into the Mormon faith and the family moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1840. In 1846, when the members of the Church were expelled from the State of Illinois by mob rule, the family started with many of the saints in the great westward move, remaining in Winter Quarters on the banks of the Missouri river, however, until 1848, when in Amasa Lyman's company they began the great Trek to the Rocky Mountains. Before leaving Winter Quarters, Collins R. Hakes was baptized in the Missouri River, and at once entered enthusiastically into the great latter-day work.