

THE JOURNAL OF THOMAS SLEIGHT
(1833-1918)

A Pioneer of Bear Lake Valley

[Covering the Period 1857 to 1918]

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THOMAS SLEIGHT--PIONEER

THOMAS SLEIGHT was born at Swinehead, Lincolnshire, England, on the 25th day of September, 1835, the son of Richard Sleight, and Ann Lamb. He died at Paris, Idaho, on the 17th day of March, 1916, at the age of eighty four years and five months.

Short and sad are the annals of the poor, we are told, and if poor in this world's goods is the only consideration the history of Thomas Sleight should close here, but there are those who were closely associated with the man in his life's work who are convinced that riches consist of other values than money and material. The subject of this sketch was far from being poor when weighed in the balance of service and experience and when the compensation on these is calculated.

To record that a man began life as a boy might be considered trite were we not reminded that many who reach advanced years began to live only after the major part of those years had passed, and that some never reach the point of beginning. The subject of our sketch while yet a serious minded and industrious school boy heard the great Gospel message, and was converted to it in his early teens. He already had met with an irreparable loss in the death of his father, a loss which caused the breaking up of the home and the scattering of the children, many of whom came to America, among them Thomas, who, at the age of seventeen came to the land of unlimited opportunities seeking his. He located at St. Louis and remained there until the year 1857, when he moved along with the vanguard of the westward-bound movement of American pioneers to Florence, Nebraska. Here he met and married Marianna Reynolds. Shortly after the marriage at Florence, or Winter Quarters, as it was called by the Latter-day Saints, he was called to assist in making a settlement at Genoa, seventy miles farther west.

At this point the lands were broken, prepared for seeding and planting grains and other crops. The first and the second years failure only was the reward of the unremitting toil and privation of the settlers. The third year promised a good crop. However, as the harvest time neared and the pioneers were preparing to gather the much needed grain and vegetables it was found that the settlement had been made within the boundaries of an Indian Reservation and the people were notified by agency officers to vacate within thirty days. This meant that they must abandon their crops and go empty handed into the wilderness.

He traveled across the plains in the Company of Captain W. Walling, the first company of the season of 1860 to start, leaving May 30th and reaching Salt Lake City August 9th. Quoting from his diary; "In the seventy days travel we made about 1000 miles. I have since made the same points three different times in about 30 hours and did not camp on the trail." Brother Sleight relates the following incident of the trip: "Our wagons were in a circle each side of the road. I was on guard. About midnight I heard the clattering of a horse's hoofs. The night was still as death. When the rider reached hailing distance I shouted, "Who comes there?" The clatter stopped immediately and a voice was heard: "Pony Express." "Come on," and the clatter started afresh. He rode thru the camp and many who had been awakened wondered what was up."

The following year, 1861, Brother Sleight had located with his family at Hyde Park, Cache Valley, Utah. Here during the next two years he labored to establish himself, to produce food and shelter and to make permanent the homes of his people. But his own home was not yet to become permanent as under a call from President Young he was one of a party, under the leadership of Apostle Charles C. Rich, directed to enter, explore and report upon the feasibility of colonizing the Bear Lake Valley, then thought wholly within the territory of Utah. As a result of the expedition a number with their families were called, among them our subject, to establish homes in this beautiful valley, then in

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the heart of the "Wild f America." The valley was the home of wild animals and the hunting ground of wilder Indians, but these were not deemed to be serious obstacles to overcome.

Here the long trek ended, but the trial, the toil and the privation were but fairly entered upon. Brother Sleight helped to lay out the town of Paris, entered lands for farming and commenced again the process of home building. Besides the arduous labors connected with clearing and breaking land, building irrigation ditches, canyon roads and bridges, constructing dwellings and mills, also there was the necessity of providing defence against marauding bands of Indians. Brother Sleight had already assisted in making a passable road thru Emigration Canyon and one thru Logan Canyon, he being one of the first to travel these now well-known highways. Since he had had some military experience and some lessons in dealing with the Red Men, he was, on July 27th, 1867 elected adjutant, with the rank of First Lieutenant, Company A cavalry, First Battalion, First Regiment of the Nauvoo Legion Militia for the Richland Military District, U. T. With his usual dispatch and efficiency he undertook the task and it is to his credit that no Indian depredations occurred to annoy the settlers from the first.

While on a visit to Salt Lake City, in 1865, Sister Sleight, Marianna Reynolds, died childless. In July, 1867, Brother Sleight married Mary Matilda Wixom in the Endowment House. To them were born four sons and five daughters. All are still living. Three of the daughters and three of the sons still live at or near Paris, Idaho, the place of their birth.

Brother Sleight was elected a Commissioner for the then newly organized county of Bear Lake, in June 1875, and served one term in that position, assisting by his ability and energy in shaping the course of the political subdivision. Having a fair education for that day, he was called to be a public school teacher, thus bringing his influence to bear in larger measure upon the lives of young men who were to make permanent the colonizing effort in this section. He began teaching in 1863.