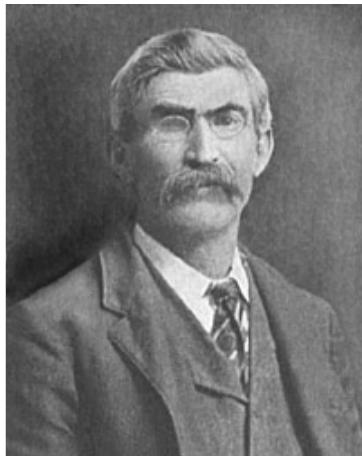


## Thales Hastings Haskell



**Born:** 21 February 1834 in New Salem, Massachusetts

**Died:** 13 July 1909 in Manassa, Colorado

**Married:** Hannah Maria Woodbury Haskell on 4 October 1855

Margaret Johanna Edwards on 15 September 1857

**Father:** Ashbel Greene Haskell

**Mother:** Ursula Hastings

### Hannah Maria Woodbury

**Born:** 14 January 1834

**Died:** 21 June 1857

**Father:** Jeremiah Woodbury

**Mother:** Elizabeth Bartlett

### Margaret Johanna Edwards

**Born:** 5 May 1835 in Abernant, Carmarthenshire, Wales

**Died:** 19 August 1916 in Manassa, Colorado

**Father:** John Jones Edwards

**Mother:** Johanna Williams

### Thales' Background

Thales Hastings Haskell was the second child and only son born to Ashbel Green and Ursula (called Zulia) Hastings Haskell. His older sister, Irene, was eight years his senior. Ashbel was a successful millwright and farmer, and provided well for his family. His mother, Zulia, was both beautiful and talented, and with her husband encouraged her children to attend as much schooling as possible. With a friend from school named Emmie Woodbury (later known as Emmeline B. Wells), Irene became seriously interested in the Mormon faith. Irene, her mother Zulia, her friend Emmie, and her cousin Catherine Haskell, were all baptized into the new religion despite growing persecution from neighbors and family members. Thales was not baptized at that time, though he became as much involved in the Mormon movement as anyone could be.

His sister Irene soon married and made plans to move to Nauvoo, Illinois, with her husband, Francis Pomeroy. The Haskells decided to follow them there, though by different routes. Thales and his mother, Zulia, oversaw the sale of the farm and mill business before departing for Boston with the intent of traveling to the Mississippi via boat. The sea voyage was not at all as romantic and adventurous as Thales had hoped, as he was sick with the measles for a good part of the voyage. His father, Ashbel, traveled aboard the ship *Brooklyn*, which set sail from New York and eventually landed in California. Ashbel's skills as a millwright enabled him to find steady employment in the area, including being hired by a man named Johann Sutter to oversee the construction of a saw mill. It is reported that Ashbel was the first person to recognize the yellowish clumps of dirt as gold at Sutter's Mill in January 1848. He made a good-size fortune in the next few years thanks to both the gold and his expertise at constructing saw mills. However, as he journeyed across Nevada to finally join his family in Salt Lake City in 1849, he passed away and was supposedly buried in place called Rock Valley, though the location of which, as well as the riches he was carrying, were never found by his surviving family members. The true circumstances of his death thus remain a mystery to this day.

### **Thales Haskell: A Pioneer of 1847**

Thales and his mother, did not stay long in Nauvoo, as tensions were high and the Saints were already evacuating the city. They traveled to Winter Quarters with Irene and Francis and began preparing to journey across the plains to the Salt Lake Valley. In the spring of 1847, Francis was chosen to be part of Brigham Young's advance party that pioneered the trail west. Thales, Irene and their mother departed two months later as part of the George B. Wallace company. Thales, though only thirteen years old at the time, drove the wagon and assumed a great deal of the responsibility for his family. Along the way, he became acquainted with Maria Woodbury, the sister-in-law of his cousin Catherine. They would sit and talk in the evenings when camp had finally been made for the night.

After Thales' arrival in the valley, his family settled for a time in Mill Creek and Thales earned money herding cows but food remained in short supply, especially that winter. Eventually, however, Thales and his family moved to the Second Ward area and were fortunate to draw a lot near the church farm which favored a good wheat crop. The burden of starvation was finally lifted from them. Thales and Francis worked alongside each other farming wheat, until Francis was called on a mission to California. Once again Thales assumed responsibility for providing for his mother, his sister and her children. When Francis returned they decided to move the family closer to the city. As a token of his gratitude for caring for Irene and their young family, Francis bought Thales an accordion, and in time Thales learned to play it with ease.

### **Called to Serve**

On his nineteenth birthday, Thales was finally baptized into the LDS faith. That same year he was asked to go to Parowan and give aid to the settlement there. After his return he was asked to head east to aid groups of European Saints making their way to the Salt Lake Valley. In 1854, following the Church's April conference, he received another church calling that literally became his calling in life – that of missionary to the Indian peoples of the Southwest in what was called the Southern Indian Mission. His brother-in-law, Francis, had originally been called to the mission but had declined to go due to pressing business and family concerns; Francis had suggested that Thales might go in his stead, unbeknownst to Thales at the time. Thales was already en route to Southern Utah when he learned of Francis' refusal. At first, he was bothered by the news. But he accepted the counsel to continue on with his mission anyway, believing that he "would not be the loser in the end."<sup>i</sup>

Jacob Hamblin was also called to be part of this mission. During that first winter he became very sick and a rider was dispatched to Parowan to obtain medicine. In addition to bringing the needed medicine and food, the man brought a small cloth filled with cottonseed, a gift from a woman named Nancy Anderson who had emigrated from Tennessee. That spring Hamblin planted the seeds as an experiment. From a handful of small seeds were harvested seventy-five pounds of cotton that season. Within a few short years, Southern Utah became populated with several small towns by settlers called to labor in Dixie's Cotton Mission. Thales Haskell's new bride, Maria Woodbury,

was among the first women to help harvest, card, spin and weave the cotton into thirty yards of fine cloth.

### **Marriage**

Thales had married Maria in the home of her father on 4 October 1855, the friendship of their early youth blossoming into marriage. The couple moved immediately south and settled in Santa Clara where Thales could resume his missionary duties. A year and eight months later, while Thales was away from home, Maria was shot by a young Indian who had accidentally discharged one of Thales' guns that he kept upon the wall. A neighbor heard the shot and saw Maria stagger out of her house. Others arrived on the scene and removed her to a sick bed, while runners were sent to find Thales. Within a few days, Maria, and the unborn child she was expecting, died from the wound. Thales was devastated, but did not seek retaliation upon the young Indian. The boy was well-known to the settlers and was often to be found helping them with their chores. He pleaded innocence to Maria's killing, explaining that he had merely removed the gun from the wall to examine it when it accidentally went off. Thales believed him and did not wish to punish the boy. Members of the boy's tribe disagreed, however, and it was Thales' belief that the boy was later executed by the tribe. Maria and the baby were laid out in a wagon box and buried in a simple grave.

Thales returned home to Salt Lake for a time to have the support of loved ones as he grieved for Maria. While there, he was visited by Brigham Young and other church leaders who voiced their sympathy for his loss. President Young then kindly advised him to marry again "as soon as the right one came along."<sup>ii</sup>

The "right one" for Thales proved to be a young woman named Margaret Johannah Edwards. She had been born in Wales on 5 May 1835, and as a young teenager joined the LDS faith not long after her mother had died. She immigrated to the United States alone at age nineteen, and arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1854. For the next few years she boarded with various families in the valley, eventually staying on with the Woolley family who owned a mill near Little Cottonwood Canyon. She became acquainted with Thales Haskell during this time, and on 15 September 1857 the two were married by Brigham Young in the Salt Lake Endowment House. By the next week, they were on their way back to Southern Utah where Thales had been called to serve. They passed through the area of Mountain Meadows within a few days of the tragic massacre there, and were dismayed to see many bodies lying unburied in the autumn sun. It was a startling reminder that life would not be free from danger or possibly even death in the Indian territories where they were headed.

Margaret adapted herself to her new environment as best as anyone could. Thales' built a small cabin – only twelve feet square – with a dirt roof and floor. Thankfully, however, they had the luxury of a comfortable feather bed and a few pieces of homemade furniture. Maria learned to be industrious with what little was available to her. For instance, she boiled down watermelon juice until it thickened into a sort of syrup that she used to preserve tomatoes in. Flour rations were meager, though beef was plentiful, and the family even ate the suet, or beef fat, as a substitute for butter. But

in spite of their best efforts to survive, the arid country was harsh and unpredictable, and in 1859 the little that they had was washed away by a flash flood. The settlers decided to move to Pinto, about forty miles away, rather than attempt to rebuild what they had lost. Thales and Margaret called Pinto "home" for the next twenty years.

### **Margaret Called as a Midwife**

While living in Pinto, Margaret received a unique calling and priesthood blessing by President Woodruff – that of midwife and nurse to the settlers of Southern Utah. Though she had no experience or formal training at the time of the call, she eagerly sought out anyone who could teach her anything about it. Throughout the remainder of her life she assisted in the births of over one-thousand children, only three of whom did not survive birth. And in addition to helping so many other women give birth, she and Thales had seven children of their own during the course of their marriage – five daughters and two sons.

Their grandson Albert recorded a revealing story about Margaret that captures the determination and strength of her character. She was summoned to the home of a family who lived across the river from her one spring evening. The river had quickly become a torrent of rushing waters, and the man who had come to seek Margaret's help for his sick wife was daunted by the current, and afraid to cross it with his team of mules. Margaret responded, "Those mules can swim, can't they?"<sup>iii</sup> She told the man to remove the harnesses from the animals, and then handed the man her bag of medicines. Fearlessly she swung up on the back of one of the mules and plunged into the river. The mule carried her safely to the opposite bank, where she waited for the man on the other mule to join her. They then proceeded on to the aid of the man's sick wife. When Margaret had a job to do, she went to all possible lengths to ensure it got done.

### **Thales' Work as an Indian Missionary**

Margaret's independent nature was a blessing to their family, as Thales was often gone from home for long stretches of time. He visited with different Indian tribes, and learned their languages, customs and ways, so as to help bridge the gap between them and the white settlers. He became a gifted speaker of five different Indian languages, in addition to Spanish, and understood Indian sign language. He also spent a lot of time chasing down horse thieves and livestock rustlers, and helped to build many trails, roads and forts in the area. Though his life was often in danger, he had been promised in a priesthood blessing that as long as he remained obedient to the Lord, he would never be harmed by Indians.

Nevertheless, a tragic event occurred in the fall of 1860 that deeply affected Thales. He was traveling with other Indian missionaries under the direction of Jacob Hamblin on a peace-making mission to the Navajo and Hopi Indian tribes of Northern Arizona. At the time, the Navajos were growing increasingly hostile towards their neighbors, both Indian and white. They warred against the Hopis, who sued for peace but found none. In this tense atmosphere, the missionaries hoped to establish peaceful relations with both tribes, but found the Navajos to be increasingly antagonistic. Advised to give-up their

efforts, they decided to return home. As they broke camp, the horse of George A. Smith, Jr., became spooked and galloped off. George mounted another horse and went off in search of his own. When he did not return in a reasonable amount of time, Jacob Hamblin asked for volunteers to go and find him. Thales was the first to volunteer. He and another man found George A. Smith, Jr., mortally wounded, having been shot with his own gun by a Navajo. The Indian had asked to hold George's gun – a request that implied reciprocal trust and friendship in the offering. Understanding this, George had willingly handed over his gun, which the Indian took and immediately shot him with. It was the ultimate betrayal. Thales and his companion did what they could for their dying friend, managing to hold him on a horse while they retreated from the Navajos, but after he had passed away they were obliged to leave his body behind as they made their escape. It was not for some months later that George A. Smith, Jr.'s, remains were recovered, though mutilated and scattered across the desert. Thales never forgot the bitter sting of this unfortunate event throughout the rest of his life.

### **Call to Arizona**

In 1876 Thales moved his family from Pinto to Arizona. The LDS Church was in need of his expertise with the Indians as it began a program of aggressive settlement in the Southwest. Thales had been assigned to Moen Kopi, Arizona, the Church's headquarters in the area. He and Jacob Hamblin had built a crude fort there, and Thales decided he wanted to have his family nearer to him. His oldest daughter had married by then, but there were still six children to be loaded into the two wagons they drove southward on the horribly rocky road. Sixteen-year-old Irene described the Moen Kopi fort where they lived for a time as "ugly" – the walls were "several feet thick with portholes on the side."<sup>iv</sup> John D. Young, a son of Brigham Young, and some other men built a mill there where the settlers spun yarn from wool brought in by the local Indians.

### **Helping the Hole-in-the-Rock Settlers**

In 1879 Thales received a letter from apostle Erastus Snow asking him to help Silas Smith and those called to colonize in the San Juan area. Silas Smith and the exploring party traveled to Moen Kopi where they met up with Thales and left their excess livestock and supplies until a place for permanent settlement along the San Juan could be determined. Thales traveled with them eastward to the San Juan River where they established Fort Montezuma, and then returned to Moen Kopi.

Several months later, however, he received word that the Davis and Harriman families who were living at Fort Montezuma had been murdered by Indians. Thales was directed to go and bury their bodies, should he be able to locate them. To his relief, he found the two families unharmed, though suffering from a severe shortage of food. He gave them what supplies he could before returning home again.

In 1881, after the main body of Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers had established the settlement of Bluff, Thales again received a letter from Elder Snow calling him to assist the Bluff settlers in their endeavors to establish peaceful relations with the local Indians. Obediently, Thales moved his family to the San Juan country, first building a small home near the Davis' family in Montezuma. Eventually he moved to Bluff where he felt

his family would be more protected while he was away from home. During this time, Thales was instrumental in helping the settlers interface with their Indian neighbors. In particular, he was often called upon by Bishop Jens Nielson to aid the settlers in retrieving stolen livestock.

Kumen Jones recorded an interesting story about Thales and a notorious local Indian named "Navajo Frank." In his mid-twenties, Frank was vigorous, charismatic and crafty. He was a known horse thief, though he tried to shrug off the accusation of "thief" with the excuse of just "borrowing" animals from the Mormon settlers. One day, however, he was caught by Thales and others riding a stolen horse. In the words of Kumen:

"Brother Haskell eyed Frank seriously for some time and then quietly but seriously told him that if he continued to steal from the Mormons that he would take sick and die. Haskel [sic] said but very little more. Frank gave us the 'horse laugh'- but gave us the stolen horse and started for home.

Frank carried on his devilment for some time, and then it was several months before he was seen or heard from again, but what a change had come over him – you could scarcely believe he was the healthy, rugged Indian we had known some months before. He was thin and haggard. His full chest was all sunken in, and he made inquiry for Haskel [sic], saying that he wanted Haskel [sic] to write a letter to the Lord and tell the Lord that Frank would never steal from the Mormons again if his life was spared. . . .

Frank went up and told Haskel [sic] his story and plead for Haskel [sic] to intercede with the Lord for him. But Haskel [sic] told Frank he could not promise him for sure what the Lord would do, as Frank had been warned but he had had no ears. But it might be that if he would cease all his stealing and use his influence with the other Indians to have them stop their stealing and be friends to the white men, he might get well.

Navajo Frank is still living (1919) and while he is not the man physically that he was in 1882, he has never been known to give the settlers any more trouble."<sup>v</sup>

Once, when Bishop Nielson apologized for repeatedly enlisting Thales' help, Thales humbly replied, "Don't feel bad about that. You know that is what I am here for."<sup>vi</sup> His attitude was always one of modest obedience and willing service. Fellow Bluff settler, Kumen Jones, wrote that "within the body of Thales Haskell was one of the purest, brightest, kindest, interesting spirits; high minded, brave to a fault, always too big to do or think anything low or unworthy. 'A man among men' that could be trusted and that was an all-around true friend."<sup>vii</sup>

During the years they spent in Bluff, the Haskells were an important fixture in the settlement beyond the stability that Thales' influence brought to the region. Margaret's skills and services as a midwife and nurse continued to bless the lives of many. She also served as the secretary to the Stake Relief Society.



Thales Haskell family (1885), including two sons-in-law. The empty chair is in honor of Thales' first wife.

Front row: Mary Elijahetta Haskell 14, Thales Hastings Haskell 51, Margaret (Edwards) Haskell 50, Ashbel Greene Haskell 13, and Maret Ann (Haskell) Smith 20.

Back row: Sarah Francelle (Haskell) Derrick 19, Johanna Maria (Haskell) Harrison 26, Benjamin Harrison 27, Thales Haskell, Jr. 16, Jesse H. Smith 27, Albert R. Smith 23, Irene Ursulia (Haskell) Smith 23.

*Photo courtesy of Kris Johnson*

### Moving Between Bluff and Manassa, Colorado

In 1884, Thales' moved Margaret and the children to Manassa, Colorado, where they could be near married children and close associates such as Silas S. Smith's family. (Three of Thales' children eventually married children of Silas S. Smith.) Thales' mission responsibilities keep him in Bluff most of the time.

In 1885, Thales' 14-year-old daughter Elijahette went to Salt Lake City to visit her married sister Francella Derrick. While there Elijahette contracted typhoid fever and passed away shortly thereafter. Her passing was devastating to Thales and the rest of the family, especially since they were unable to attend her burial.

In 1886, Apostle Erastus Snow paid a visit to Bluff and commented on the fact that Thales' family was not there. When Thales explained that they had moved, Elder Snow inquired as to why Thales had not gone with them. Humbly, Thales answered that as he had not yet been released from his missionary service, he had not felt it proper for him to leave. On the spot, Elder Snow released Thales and encouraged him to join his family in Colorado, which he did, though not for long. In 1888, Indian trouble again became so bothersome to the Bluff settlers that they requested to church officials that Thales return. Obediently, Thales accepted the call to return to Bluff, and he did what he could to help restore peaceful relations with the local Indians. In 1891 he was again released from his missionary service and returned to Colorado. Remarkably, he had spent nearly thirty-two years of his life as an Indian missionary.

### Final Years

Finally reunited for good with Margaret and his family in Colorado, Thales lived out the rest of his years peacefully in Manassa. For fifteen years he worked as postmaster in

the local post office. Margaret kept busy as well. For ten years she served as the Stake Primary President, and for another five was president of her ward's Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association. She enjoyed reading newspapers and debating political issues with her sons and grandsons. When women's suffrage was finally attained, she rejoiced in the opportunity to cast her vote and never missed an election day afterwards if she could help it.

In 1907, the couple celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, surrounded by family and friends. To commemorate the occasion, Thales was given a new accordion, and Margaret, a gold watch. Not long after, Thales' health began to decline and he passed away on 13 June 1909. An article about him appeared in the *San Juan Record* eleven years later, memorializing him as a "friend to the weak and afflicted, ever true blue and immovable in honoring the trust reposed in him."<sup>viii</sup> Margaret, his faithful and supportive companion, lived on for another seven years, eventually succumbing on 19 August 1916.

Go to <http://www.hirf.org/history-hist-Thales-Haskell.asp> for additional information on Thales Haskell.

*Researched and written for the Hole-in-the-Rock Foundation by:  
C.S.M. Jones LLC, Family Heritage Consulting.*

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<sup>i</sup> Albert Edward Smith, *Thales Hastings Haskell: Pioneer, Scout, Explorer, Indian Missionary*, (Salt Lake City, 1964), 21.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., 58. I think this must be an appendix – and thus reflect different pagination. Check on this.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>v</sup> Kumen Jones, *The Writings of Kumen Jones*, ed. by Albert R. Lyman (s.i., n.d.), p. 41-42, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

<sup>vi</sup> "Who's Who in the San Juan," *San Juan Record*, (Monticell, Utah), 10 November 1920, as published in Albert E. Smith, *Thales Hastings Haskell, Pioneer, Scout, Explorer, Indian Missionary*, 88.

<sup>vii</sup> Kumen Jones, 20-21.

<sup>viii</sup> "Who's Who in the San Juan," in Smith, 88.