

Transcribed pages 48-53 of the History:

THALES HASTINGS HASKELL
PIONEER - SCOUT - EXPLORER
INDIAN MISSIONARY

1847 - 1909

Assembled by Albert E. Smith, 1964

*This portion of the history pertains to Haskell,s role in the
San Juan Mission / Bluff, Utah Settlement.*

CALLED TO ARIZONA

In 1878 the church began another expansion program. A number of missionaries were called to settle among the natives of northern Arizona and southeast Utah. The Navajo and Ute tribes of Indians had lately become a menace to the settlements and it seemed necessary to establish buffer colonies to promote friendship and to head off as many raiding parties as possible. Then too, large cattle and sheep owners began moving their livestock into the great grazing areas of that country and these non-Mormons were not always friendly to the Mormon people. Utah Territory had been much diminished by action of the Congress of the United States and it was feared that more territory would be taken away unless some ownership could be established.

Thales Haskell was sent to Moen Kapi where his services as an Indian interpreter and peacemaker could be the more readily had. Knowing that this calling would perhaps occupy all his time for a number of years, he decided to move his family to that place where he might be able to be with them a part of the time.

Maria, the oldest daughter, had in the meantime married a man by the name of Brigham W. Harrison at Pinto Creek. All the surplus property and the home were sold and the necessary and needful items loaded into two wagons, and on May 12, 1878 they started out. They headed for the Lee's Ferry crossing of the Colorado River.

Thales had been over this road many times before and knew some of the hardships that would likely have to meet. There were now seven children in the family, six of them along on this trip--four girls and two boys. They took some cows and extra horses which were driven all the way by the oldest son, Thales, Jr., eleven years old.

Irene, the second daughter then 16 years of age, gives us some description of roads and some happenings on the trip. "We traveled hundreds of miles and never saw a white man. Every little while a band of Indians would see dust of our outfit and come dashing up to see who we were. We were not afraid of them now that Father was along for he could speak five or six different Indian languages including Spanish and English. There was always some among them that spoke Spanish which Father could speak fluently. Father would explain where we were going, perhaps smoke a little with them, and they would ride away satisfied."

"Our road took us over hills, rocks, and sand which it looked impossible to drive over, but we went. One evening we drove into a small valley where a small river empties into the Colorado. There was a small home there with a nice garden in the back. Much to our surprise the woman living there was Emma Lee, the wife of John D. Lee, of Mountain Meadows fame. She was a large capable woman with five children. Not any of her menfolk were there, so she ferried us over the river. After crossing to the little flat, we had to go over a hill called Lee's backbone.⁵⁷ It looked impossible to go up that hill. Father hitched the three span of horses onto the one wagon and I and my younger sister went with him to block the wheel of the wagon when the horses had to stop to rest. As soon as this wagon was up the hill, we returned with the horses to get the others."

“We finally arrived at Moen Kopi, an ugly fort built by Father, Jacob Hamblin, and others for protection. The walls were several feet thick with portholes on every side.”

Moen Kopi was headquarters for the Arizona Indian Mission. The family took up residence for a while in the old fort. At this place was John W. Young and about twenty other men building a woolen mill to spin and work into yard [*sic*] the wool which the Indians brought in to trade. Irene and her sister, Margaret, were employed to help Mrs. Christine D. Young cook for the workers. They worked all that summer and were paid in orders on the company of Wooley, Lund, and Judd at St. George. This mercantile company refused to honor their orders. This proved to be quite a disappointment and caused the girls some hardship and embarrassment as they had expected the proceeds from the orders to pay for some clothing and schooling they wished to get during the winter.

In the spring of 1879, Silas S. Smith was chosen to lead an exploring party into the San Juan country to find a place where a settlement could be made on the San Juan River near the four corners area.⁵⁸ This party went out by way of Lee’s Ferry and to Moen Kopi where they left most of their surplus stock until they could find a permanent place for the settlement they were to locate. So far as was known, no white man had ever been over that stretch of country between Moen Kopi Wash and the San Juan River. Haskell accompanied the party to the river and then returned to Moen Kopi.⁵⁹

The scouting party returned to Parowan by way of the old Spanish Trail leaving the Harriman family at a place called Montezuma expecting that the company of settlers would reach there before winter. On the return of this scouting party, they were advised that a new and shorter route had been looked over and that the prospective settlers could go to the San Juan by way of Potato Valley (Escalante) and save at least 200 miles of travel and be safer from Indian depredations.

This new route was attempted, but the country was so much rougher it took the company from October, 1879 until April 6, 1880 to get to the selected spot. In the meantime a rumor came out that the Harriman family had been massacred by the Indians and Haskell was sent to find out what had happened. On arrival there, he found the family all right. They had not been molested by Indians but were extremely short of food. Haskell left them what he had and returned to report conditions to Apostle Snow and others of the leaders of the church. Soon after Haskell’s visit, George Hobbs, a brother of Mrs. Harriman, and Jack and Adam Robb left the Colorado River camp--Hobbs to take additional food supplies to the Harriman family at Montezuma as he had promised to do within 60 days from the time he had visited them before, and the Robb brothers to go to their ranch and homesteads at Farmington, New Mexico. On arrival they found the Harriman family near starvation having only a cupful of wheat left on which to exist until the San Juan settlers should arrive.⁶⁰

MOVE TO SAN JUAN

Early in 1881 Haskell received a letter from Erastus Snow assigning him to work with Silas S. Smith and colony on the San Juan as an Indian missionary, interpreter, and peacemaker.

He, accordingly, moved his family to the San Juan locating at first at Fort Montezuma with the Davis and Harriman family with whom they were quite well acquainted. In the meantime, Grandfather John J. Edwards died and was buried at Sunset, Arizona.

Very soon after the death and burial of Grandfather Edwards, Thales prepared to fulfill this call from Apostle Snow. He reported to Silas S. Smith and other officials of the colony and set out to contact the Indians of the country to make friends with them and, where necessary, to try and retrieve stolen livestock belonging to the settlers. In this work Haskell came and went to the beck and call of the bishop of the ward.

At one time Bishop Nielson called him and rather apologized for making demands so often for his services. With the fine obedient and quiet character which he always exhibited, he picked up his leather saddle pockets and food bag and said to Bishop Nielson, "Don't feel bad about that. You know that is what I am here for."

Just before the move was made to Montezuma, Irene and Margaret, the two older daughters, went to St. George to attend school. They also visited their old home town of Pinto and their older sister Maria Harrison, who was still living at Pinto. The two other girls of the family, Francella and Elijahetta, went to visit friends in Salt Lake City. Francella met and married a man by the name of Alfred M. Derrick. Mr. Derrick prepared a home for his wife there and Elijahetta lived with them until near the end of the year when she contracted typhoid fever and died from its effects. This was a very tragic happening in the life of the Haskell family for the members were so scattered and so far away that they could not get together for the funeral of this their baby girl. Her body was nicely taken care of, however, by the Derricks and buried in the old Salt Lake Cemetery.

The family at Montezuma now numbered but four--the father, the mother, Thales H., Jr., about 12 years of age, and Ashbel, the baby, about three years of age. Thales, Jr. was often out with his father for long periods of time and this left the mother and baby alone at home. Returning from one of the trips, Thales decided that his family would be more protected if they were moved to Bluff, 15 miles down the river, so the move was made.

Early in 1882, Irene and Margaret got a chance to go to Bluff along with the Silas S. Smith family and company who were going by way of the San Juan settlements to Colorado to make their home. The trip was made by way of Escalante Valley and the Colorado River was crossed at a new crossing called Hall's Ferry.

In commenting on this trip, Irene said that what they calculated would be a very hard and arduous trip really turned out to be one of considerable pleasure. The roads were rough and most all of them found it necessary to walk most of the distance. This they did not object to. A number of other young people were along and at night they would gather round the camp fire after the evening meal, sing songs, play games, tell stories of the day's happenings, and sometimes dance. One member had a violin along, one an accordin [sic] and others, harmonicas. When they reached Bluff, the Haskell girls were very glad to be with their family again after so long an absence.

At Bluff the family entered into the community and church activities and gave help wherever they could. The mother had had before this much experience as a midwife and she gave much service in this necessary work. Irene was selected as president of the Stake Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association and was also employed as school teacher at \$30 per month, one half pay in cash. Margaret was selected as secretary and treasurer of the Stake Relief Society.

In 1884, Jesse J. Smith, son of Silas S. Smith, returned to Bluff and married Margaret Haskell.⁶¹ They went to Manassa, Colorado, to make their home. The next year Albert R. Smith, another son of Silas S. Smith, came to Bluff on a visit with some other friends and the Haskell mother, two boys, and daughter, Irene, returned to Colorado with them. Albert and Irene were soon married prepared to make their permanent home there in Colorado. This left Father Thales alone in his mission at Bluff.

At a conference in Bluff in 1886 at which Erastus Snow was a visitor, he asked Thales where his family was. Thales told him that they had all moved to Manassa, Colorado. Apostle Snow then asked why he was not with them to which Thales answered that until the same authority which had called him into the mission released him, he did not feel at liberty to leave the field. Brot Snow then said, "I take it upon myself to release you as of this day and hope that you may soon join your family in Colorado." By this date, Thales had served his church as an Indian missionary since 1854 or nearly 32 years of almost constant service.

As soon as arrangements could be made, Thales departed from Bluff and joined his family in Colorado where he and his boys built a comfortable home for the family in Manassa situated just across the road north from a home built by Heber J. Grant for one of his families which lived for a number of years in Manassa. Mrs. Grant and Mrs. Haskell became fast friends and neighbors there.

In 1887-88 the Indians in the San Juan area became troublesome again and application was made by the citizens of Bluff to have Thales Haskell recalled to that mission again. Such a call was made by Wilford Woodruff,⁶² President of the Church, and obedient to it, Haskell returned to Bluff where he helped quiet the disturbances and preserve a good feeling among Indians and settlers again. When affairs quieted down, Haskell was induced to act as a clerk in the Cooperative Store for a while where the San Juan residents said of him, "He not only attracted Indian customers but found time to deliver the laconic declarations and impressive sermonettes he wished to deliver. He could out Indian the red men themselves and from his beaded moccasins to the fine line of his firm old face, they found tacit dignity which impelled them to concede to him the superiority they otherwise would assume in silence for themselves." Another San Juan resident said of him, "He had an uncanny way of impressing on the Indians that he meant what he said."⁶³

Henry, a friendly Indian youth who assisted the first white explorers into Elk Mountain country, was ever emphatic in his praise of the old missionary, "Haskell, he all time one talk and heap good man." Mancos Jim, too, a veteran of all the old fights, doesn't hesitate to declare when Haskell's name is mentioned, "Me heap like 'em."

In 1891 Haskell was again released from the Indian Mission and returned to his family at Manassa, Colorado. Soon after reaching home again, he applied for a postmastership and received the appointment, and for 15 years he ran the post office for the Manassa settlement.

A comic incident is related of a happening in connection with the post office while Thales was in charge. One morning a stranger came in on the mail stage. The stage driver threw the mail bags on the platform. Haskell dragged the in to the mail distribution room and opened one and started putting the letters into the various boxes. The stranger entered the distribution room and began looking through the letters. Haskell stopped his work, laid down his handful of letters, made a dive for the stranger, grabbed him by the coat collar and the seat of his pants, and shoved him out the door with a swift kick telling him that no stranger would be fooling with Uncle Sam's mail as long as he was postmaster. The man later came and explained that he was a postal inspector just making his regular rounds. He also remarked to the onlookers that he thought the mail here was in pretty reliable hands.

Thales was a good entertainer. He loved his grandchildren. He was a good singer and an excellent accordian [*sic*] player. He was also a good reader. He especially liked the poems and papers of Robert Burns whose poems he could recite for a whole evening without missing a line. His experience with the accordian dated from about 1852 at which time his brother-in-law, Francis Pomeroy, brought Thales an accordian from California. His first wife, Maria Woodbury Haskell also played an instrument called the concertina which was quite like the accordion; and before she was killed by an Indian at Santa Clara, she and Thales would frequently entertain the community with their music. His singing and musical ability was of much help to himself, his mission companions and to the communities in which he lived for he was frequently sought to help play for dances and concerts at Pinto and at Bluff.

The following account written by Bernice Smith Monson, Thale's granddaughter, tells of their 50th wedding anniversary celebration. "In the fall of 1907 an affair in honor of Grandfather and Grandmother was held at the home of Albert R. and Irene U. Haskell Smith. A large group of relatives and friends attended and it was a grand occasion. Thomas D. Reese and his brother, Nephi, Grandmother's Welsh friends who were at Manassa teaching in the San Juan Stake Academy sang a group of Welsh songs to please Grandmother especially. Their beloved bishop, Samuel Jackson who had served in their ward for 12 years, told of the fine qualities which had endeared the Haskells to all in the community. Grandfather was presented with a lovely new accordian and Grandmother with a gold watch."

As a grandchild I frequently recall as some of the happiest experiences of my young life the times I, with other grandchildren and relatives, assembled at his home in Manassa and listened with breathless interest to his Indian stories and accordian music.

His description: height, 6 ft.; weight, 150 pounds; hair, dark brown; eyes, dark brown, some say black but they were very steady and piercing. He always had ponies or mules and he was a good horseman having had to rely on horses for so long a time in accomplishing his missionary duties and his many travels into the rough southern Utah and Arizona country. Up until his health failed, he would ride as exercise and always sat his horse as straight as an Indian.

In 1908 his health failed him and he had to retire from active work. He died June 13, 1909 and was laid to rest in the Manassa Cemetery.

⁵⁷ See description of the road by Jesse N. Smith in Diaries of J. N. Smith by the Smith family.

⁵⁸ Typescript of letter from Erastus Snow calling on Silas S. Smith to take charge of colonizing the San Juan.

⁵⁹ Letter to Thales H. Haskell from Erastus Snow calling him to assist Silas S. Smith with colonizing on the San Juan.

⁶⁰ Hobb's Journal.

⁶¹ Sunday, April 6, 1884. "At 12 today, I preformed the marriage ceremony for Jesse Joel Smith, son of Silas S. Smith, and Margaret A. Haskell, daughter of Thales H. Haskell." Journal of Platt D. Lyman.

⁶² Letters from Erastus Snow and others.

⁶³ San Juan Record.