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ORPHANED BY BLACK HAWK'S WARRIORS

The town's protective walls were just yards away... but the Utes were closer!

By ALBERT WINKLER

Photos provided by author

IN AUGUST OF 1914 William D. Kuhre and his son Newell J. journeyed to the small town of Ephraim, Utah to attend the annual Scandinavian conference being held there. While he was of full Danish descent, William had come 100 miles from Sandy, Utah not so much to attend the conference as to interview two elderly people, James H. Hansen and Martha Bentson. They had been the first persons on the scene when his father and mother were killed by Indians in 1865.

William had been orphaned at such a young age that he had no clear recollections of his parents. As an adult, he had become a prominent businessman, mayor of Sandy, and a bishop in the Mormon Church, but all his accomplishments never fully compensated him for the incident nearly fifty years before that had robbed him of his only relatives in this country. William D. Kuhre had come to Ephraim in search of his past.

William's father, Martin Pedersen Kuhre, was born in Denmark in 1838. As a young man he took to the sea on a whaler and later as a member of the Danish Royal Navy.
tin first joined the Baptist faith but later became a Mormon. He served as a missionary in his native country and converted Hansine K. Jensen whom he married February 1, 1862. Later that year Martin took his bride to join the Mormons in far-off Utah where his son William was born January 21, 1863.

The mountain valleys of semi-arid Utah were vastly different from the lush countryside the Kuhres had known in Denmark, but the couple found some consolation by living in Ephraim with many of their countrymen. The town had been settled by a number of groups starting in 1854, some speaking English and the rest Danish. At first the clothing and customs of the Danes were the subject of good fun for their neighbors, but when the influx of Scandinavians nearly overwhelmed the community, it became necessary for almost all residents to learn Danish.

The townspeople had constructed a large fort that enclosed some seventeen acres where the residents made their homes. The walls of the fort were built largely of stone. One side was fourteen feet tall and four feet thick at the top, while the remaining sides had walls seven feet high. These precautions proved to be wise because war with the Utes broke out in 1865.

The Indians of the area had many grievances against the whites. Efforts were made to keep good relations with the Utes by giving them food, teaching them to farm, and attempting to convert them to the Mormon religion. Results were mixed. Few Indians cared for the farming techniques of the whites and the new faith brought few permanent converts. The frequent gifts of food were welcomed by some, but the young braves seemed to find it degrading to take handouts from those who were destroying their traditional hunting grounds. While many of these young warriors learned English and knew a great deal of the culture of the whites, they still felt a growing animosity towards them. When smallpox, inadvertently introduced by the whites, ravaged the Indians during the winter of 1864-65, hatred grew to the point of war.

ON APRIL 9, 1865 a meeting was held in Manti, six miles south of Ephraim. The meeting of reconciliation proved to be the spark of hostilities. When an argument erupted over who was to speak next, Yene-wood, a young brave, reached for his arrows. John Lowery, who had obviously been drinking, pulled the Indian from his mount and was only restrained from thrashing the young warrior by the intervention of others. Yene-wood and his friends stormed off to the Indian camp at Shumway Springs from where the call to war was sent in all directions to other Utes.

One messenger found the brave
Black Hawk just sitting down to a meal in a white woman's home. The young warrior left without touching his food to meet with Yene-wood and assume leadership of the hostile band.

Black Hawk led a series of raids against the whites. Using the Manti-La Salle Mountains to cover his movements, his band swept down the canyons to steal cattle and kill any whites in their way. At Twelve Mile Canyon one white man was killed and a herd was taken. A similar raid from Salina Canyon brought heavy pursuit by a Utah militia company under the command of Colonel Reddick N. Allred. To the chagrin of Allred, who was an experienced soldier, his men were ambushed and routed leaving two dead as they fled.

In May of that year Black Hawk's group surprised a family making their home in a willow shanty. John Given, his wife, son, and three small daughters were killed. The girls, aged nine, five, and three, were cut down by tomahawk blows. For the remainder of the summer and into the fall, there were sporadic skirmishes with the Indians, but the trouble was far from over.

Ephraim did not take the reports of the various incidents lightly and companies of militia started drilling in earnest. Bastions were set up on various sides of town, each manned night and day by a lookout with a spy glass. The most important of these positions was the Guard Knoll where a small fortress was erected on a hill east of the town complete with stone walls nine feet high with slits from which to shoot. Stock was kept west of the town, and the herdsmen prepared piles of brush that could be set ablaze as a warning if the cattle were in danger. In addition, three men scouted the mountains to gather information on the Indians. Despite these elaborate precautions, the whole system failed when Black Hawk and his band struck on October 17, 1865.

WITH WINTER approaching, a number of men decided to risk going into Ephraim Canyon to gather firewood. Taking few precautions, they went high into the canyon and spread out. There they were ambushed by a party of Indians and forced to flee for their lives.

Peter Graves ran through some brush to come upon a brave who...
had just fired his rifle but had no time to reload. Graves ran past him and noticed that he was being pursued by two other Indians. His followers were tireless, so Graves had to hide when he thought best, then run at every opportunity. He was accompanied by his dog and was forced to hold the animal’s mouth to keep it from barking when he was hiding in the brush. Finally, one of his pursuers tried a shot at him and then gave up the chase. After the grueling pursuit that had lasted nearly all day, Graves and his dog arrived in Ephraim after dark.

Thomas Wolsey warned two companions of the presence of the hostiles before they all ran down the canyon in plain sight of the Indians, but William T. Hite and Benjamin Black were not so fortunate. Each was killed before he could outdistance the braves.

Men working farther down the canyon were also surprised by the Indians and forced to flee. All escaped successfully except the elderly Soren N. Jespersen. Nearly stone deaf, he did not hear the shouts of warning from his friends. He was cut off from his wagon and rifle and killed. His body was recovered the following day; his hands, feet, and the top of his head had been hacked off.

With little effort Black Hawk had cleared the canyon of whites and emerged into the valley. The citizens of Ephraim had rushed some men to Guard Knoll and the nearby mill hill to contest any advance directly on the town. But the Indians decided to skirt those positions and attack travelers on the road heading toward Ephraim from the south.

L.C. Larsen had been transporting grain to Salt Lake City to exchange for firearms and ammunition. Having heard of the Indian troubles, Larsen had a rifle and a pistol under a quilt in his wagon. In Manti, he met Andrew Whitlock who had come from Ephraim to get a doctor, Mrs. Maria Snow. Whitlock invited Larsen to accompany him in his carriage as far as Ephraim. Larsen did so but neglected to take his two weapons with him.

When they were about two and a half miles from town, they noticed some horsemen in the distance who were approaching rapidly. When they could see the riders were Indians, Whitlock said he had heard that Chief Sanpitch and his friendly group of Utes were coming to make peace. But Mrs. Snow, speaking in Danish, was sure that the braves meant them harm. She buried her head in her lap and did not look up again during the entire ordeal.

When the Indians crossed their path in front, Whitlock knew Mrs. Snow was right. The only chance to escape was to run for Ephraim. Whitlock whipped the two trained race horses he had harnessed to his carriage that day and the race was on.

Roughly thirteen Utes had made a semicircle to the west of the road, and they fired as the carriage passed. All shots missed except one. It hit one horse square in the flank. The animal ranged forward but kept running at full speed.

The carriage horses were so fast that none of the pursuing Indians except Yene-wood was able to overtake them. Larsen looked over to see the young chief leveling a revolver at him not more than three feet away. With no weapon at hand, he simply jumped over the dashboard onto the wagon tongue to avoid being shot. Yene-wood apparently directed his shots at Whitlock, but he emptied his revolver to no effect. Yene-wood then used his bow, also with no success until the team of horses was forced to slow down as it reached a depression with a ditch at the bottom. The brave then put an arrow six inches deep into Whitlock, just under his left shoulder.

Hearing Whitlock groan, Larsen jumped back over the dashboard to take the lines and whip. He asked Whitlock if he wanted the arrow pulled out. The answer was yes, so Larsen wrenched it out while still driving the team. Because of the excitement of the moment, Larsen never could remember how difficult it was to extract the arrow.

Without further difficulty, Larsen drove the carriage into Ephraim. The wounded horse promptly fell dead on reaching Whitlock’s property. The magnificent animal clearly had saved the lives of all the passengers.

The Indian band showed no interest in following the carriage into the town. Instead, the Indians headed west to the fields where the cattle was kept.

THAT AFTERNOON Martin Kuhre was working in the fields gathering potatoes with his wife Hansine and his son William who was not yet three. With them were seventeen-year-old Elizabeth Petersen and Soren A. Sorensen. The alarm had been sounded in town long ago, but no one had warned the workers in the fields.

When the Indians arrived, all were caught by surprise. As Sorensen saw Black Hawk approach, he had the presence of mind to stay calm. He knew the chief. His mother had taken a liking to the young brave and frequently had invited him over for dinner. Consequently, Sorensen felt his life was in
less danger by greeting Black Hawk than in trying to flee. He approached the chief and laid his hand on the Indian’s saddle horn. He asked Black Hawk what he was doing and was told that the braves were simply after the cattle.

While the two chatted briefly, the killing of the Kuhre family and the Petersen girl occurred only a few yards away. Startled by the Indians, the girl’s cries had been heard by a father, John Dobbie, who was ahead of the others through her head. Mrs. Kuhre was hit by two rounds, one in the left arm and the other in the back which protruded from her left breast.

Little William Kuhre lay on the ground next to his mother. One of the braves reached down from his pony to lift the boy up by the arm. After looking briefly at the child, the Indian dropped the boy back on his mother’s body. Martha Bentson was the first to arrive from the town. William was still crying, “Indian, Mamma! Indian, Mamma!”

The band of Utes were already making for Ephraim canyon with the town’s cattle. Perhaps as a gesture to his mother, Sorensen was left unharmed and his team of horses had not been taken.

It was much harder for the Indians pushing cattle to get safely past the whites’ forces on the Guard Knoll and mill hill than it had been earlier, and a brisk fight ensued that lasted for hours. As had been the case all day, however, the whites got the worst of it. No Indian casualties were reported. William Thorp was killed and Louis Larsen was shot in the leg. The Utes successfully withdrew up the canyon with over a hundred head of stolen cattle. They left seven dead and two wounded whites behind them as well as a thoroughly frightened community.

Fear of the Indians was so great that the whites did not dare venture outside the walls of the town to bury their dead and the fallen were hastily interred in a grave near the community meeting house. When the Utes did not reappear, the bodies were removed to the town cemetery where they were all hastily buried in a common grave.

The Black Hawk war dragged on for three more years. The Utes forced the abandonment of twenty-seven Utah communities but eventually could not withstand the numbers and resources available to the whites. Black Hawk himself surrendered in 1868 to be removed with the rest of his band to a reservation. Suffering from a gunshot wound that never healed, he died the following year.

It was of small consolation to William D. Kuhre that the Utes had lost their struggle for control of Utah. He had lost his parents and had been left a ward of the county which placed him in the home of John and Ellen Dobbie, a kindly couple who raised the boy in Salt Lake City.

What curiosity William had had about his past was largely satisfied in his interviews with the elderly people of Ephraim. He would go on to serve as stake president and patriarch in the Mormon Church. He lived to see many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and died in 1960 at the age of ninety-seven.

Hosstail’s Small Talk (Continued from page 5)

... The book gives a concise summary of general mining conditions and western camp life and then pinpoints activities in Meadow Lake in such a vivid way that the reader marvels at the optimistic blindness of the people who lived there.

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