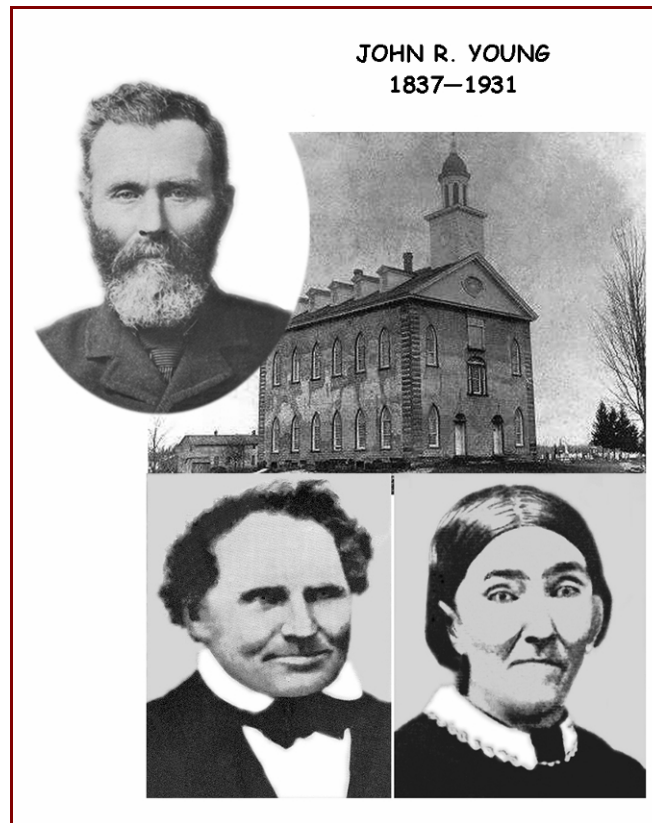


## "JOHN R. YOUNG — HISTORY MAKER"

By Robert Newel Reynolds

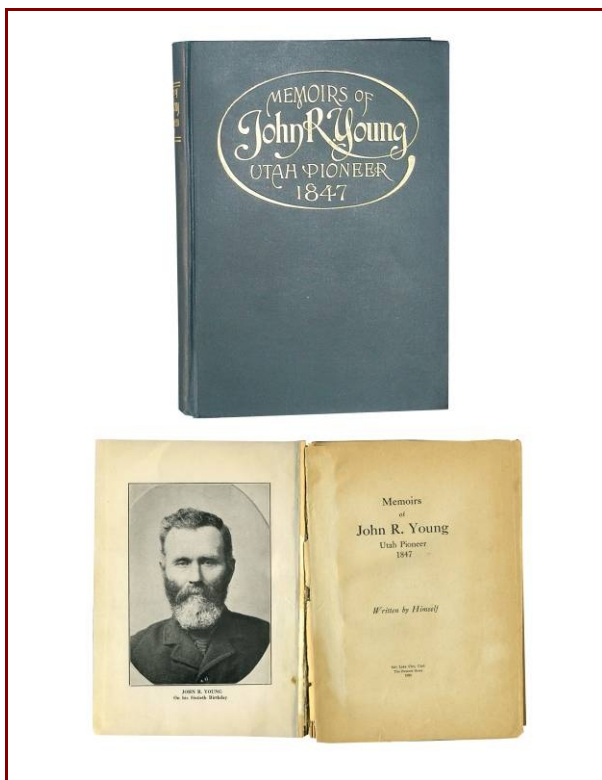
All four of my great-grandfathers were noted Mormon pioneers. Between them they had twelve wives and 92 children. They lived during a time when plural marriage was first honored and accepted and later banned, both within their faith and community. While I highly esteem all four of these paternal forbears it is John R. Young whom I most long to speak with.<sup>1</sup>

A true pioneer in both name and deed, "John R." carved a special place in history. From his birth on April 30, 1837 at Kirtland, Ohio to his death in the "Valley of the Mountains" ninety-four years later, this gifted man left a unique and creative mark and a definable image with every step of his journey.



This collage of "John R." and his parents, Lorenzo Dow Young and Persis Goodall with the Kirtland Temple in the background is by the author, January 2005.

<sup>1</sup> My four great-grandmothers were also noted pioneers with stories of their own that in many cases eclipsed even those of their husbands. Each has warranted a separate treatment elsewhere in my family history library.



"John R. Young, a nephew of Brigham Young, left one of the most interesting and varied of all pioneer legacies. Intimate with most of the General Authorities, he wrote his "Memoirs" wherein he shared insight into many of their personalities and related experiences not found in any other work. Brother Young had the "knack" for being where history was made and he gave several first-hand accounts of key events of the early Saints."<sup>2</sup>

Everything unusual about John R. Young's life seemed to be affected by a special time in Mormon history—when he was born; when at age ten he was put out on his own; when he married; when he served his church on three separate missions; when he

served his state in the Blackhawk War; during his Orderville days when he sired twelve children by four wives; when he trekked to and returned from Mexico—even when he died at the beginning of the Great Depression. The times helped make this man by offering extraordinary challenges and opportunities. But it was his collective talents and physical and mental constitution that responded in each instance in just the right way to make things memorable—for him, his closest family members and his posterity. He uniquely recorded events in rhyme and prose to create his "Memoirs." But it was more than that which caused his stories to be copied by his grandchildren and repeated in numerous church publications and history books. He had a special knack for not only being where things important seemed to happen but for performing as a catalyst to fashion history.

As a boy I pondered with awe and amazement the stories my mother told me of her grandfather, John R. His life seemed so full of excitement compared to my own. As I studied and learned about him I realized he had lived a lifetime by his 26th birthday. As a boy he had witnessed the exodus from Nauvoo, experienced Winter Quarters, performed a man's labors crossing the plains to Utah; had sown and harvested wheat grown from the desert floor, hauled dirt from the foundation of the Salt Lake temple, witnessed the miracle of the gulls, served nobly on a four year mission to the Sandwich Islands, performed as a minister preaching, baptizing

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs of John R. Young. Reprinted by Archive Publishers from the original that was published in Salt Lake City, Utah, The Deseret News, 1920. Also republished in hardbound by Neta Young Palfreyman, Likes Publishing, Orem, Utah 1999.

and converting others to his faith in Hawaii and California, witnessed the coming and going of Johnston's Army, driven ox-teams and livestock over 2400 miles from Santa Clara to Omaha and back, bought and sold one farm and started another, married two wives and started families with both, witnessed the destruction of spring floods at Santa Clara and the death of his first son, and traveled a second time to Omaha this time to assist in "gathering the poor." Within a year he was called to return a second time to the Sandwich Islands to perform additional missionary labors. And the remaining 68 years just got more productive and exciting!



**The Winter Quarters Temple today**

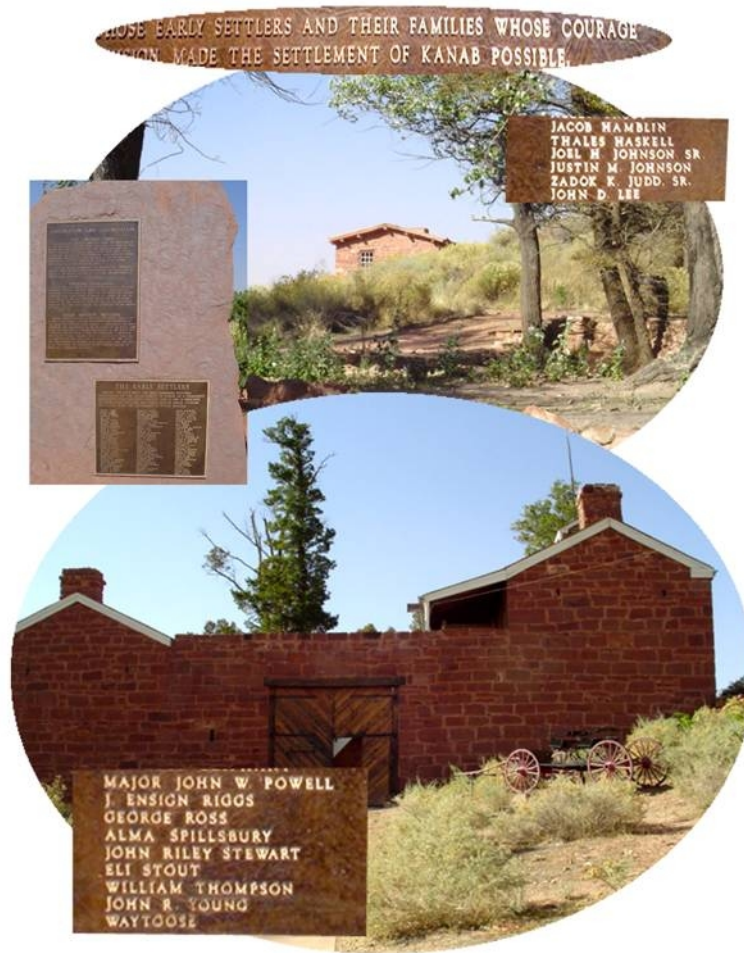
*"Winter Quarters was the Valley Forge of Mormondom. Our home was near the burying ground; and I can remember the small mournful-looking trains that so often passed our door. I also remember how poor and same-like our habitual diet was: corn bread, salt bacon, and a little milk. Mush and bacon became so nauseating that it was like taking medicine to swallow it; and the*

*scurvy was making such inroad amongst us that it looked as if we should all be "sleeping on the hill" before spring, unless fresh food could be obtained." - John R. Young<sup>3</sup>*

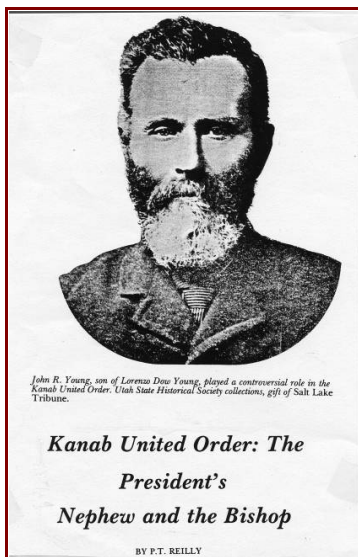
John R. assisted in the establishment of a number of early Utah Mormon communities including Santa Clara, Kanab, Orderville, Loa, Huntington, Blanding, and Fruitland, New Mexico. During his life he experienced personal relationships with the first six Latter-day church presidents and prophets, four of whom befriended him in a very personal way—they being Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff and Joseph F. Smith. These four church presidents personally knew him, blessed him, and commissioned him in ways that greatly influenced his actions and behavior. This support and friendship has in many ways, directly and indirectly, surfaced like a vein of silver or gold in the lives of six generations of descendants.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 41.



This collage depicts the founder's monument at Kanab, Utah with John R. Young's name included with the likes of Thales Haskell, Ira Hatch, Major John Wesley Powell, Jacob Hamblin and John D, Lee. The structures depicted are at Pipe Springs National Monument, south of Kanab. See story later in this article. Photos by the author.



Not everything John R. did was without fault. He was a favorite nephew of Brigham Young which set him up at once for special scrutiny. While it may have given him certain access and privileges it also cost him dearly in terms of spending time with and caring for his plural families. In the Orderville days when things got "a little too hot to handle" he was called to go on a mission to England leaving his three wives and children to totally fend for themselves. After serving and recording a great mission he returned home once again—and with him came a new wife—his fourth.

John R. also had a disposition with a "quick-start" button. It kept him moving all the time. In his own words he described himself by nature, as having a quick, irritable disposition.<sup>4</sup> But he recognized and gave credit to having chosen wonderful, wise and good woman as wives. Of his first, Albina Terry he said: "*her firm calmness was a great help to me. It served as a balance wheel to keep me from flying to pieces.*"



Original copies of John R's book are now collector's items. The copy I am fortunate to own belonged to Samuel Claridge Young (1877-1954). In it at the bottom of his mother's photo he wrote: "To me no one ever lived a more humble upright, God fearing life and nearer to the Lord than did my mother. S.C. Young" S.C.'s mother was Tamar Black (middle photo). The right photo is Albina Terry, first wife of John R. A recent check of used books on the Internet found John R's book selling for \$135.00 to \$345.00 depending on the condition and the presence of an original inscription by the author.

The "Memoirs of John R. Young" contain an array of wonderful firsthand accounts of historic events including working for and confronting the man who murdered Parley P. Pratt, dealings with Jacob Hamblin and native Americans who were being displaced by the Mormon settlements, the Santa Clara flood of 1862, the Black Hawk war, the founding of Kanab and Orderville, the anti-polygamy crusade and many, many more. What the book does not cover may have been equally as interesting--like his relationships with his fathers-in-law Archibald Waller Overton Buchanan and William Morley Black, his knowledge of participants and his thoughts on the Mountain Meadows massacre, his feelings about the Missouri period, his relationship with his brothers, his children and grandchildren etc. There are so many things he could have elaborated on but didn't. In the company of the

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<sup>4</sup> Memoirs of John R. Young, page 245.

Prophet Brigham Young he once met and talked with John D. Lee yet he never even mentioned Lee's name in his "Memoirs."<sup>5</sup>

John R. could have "waxed philosophical" on dozens of subjects. He didn't very much. Instead he often chose a poetic form of expression where his readers are left to ponder and dig deeply into other family resources to learn and appreciate the full meaning of his message and what transpired. A good example of this is the life of his daughter May. Mary Whipple Young Roberts must have been for-ordained to become a woman of sorrow for all she suffered in mortality. Beginning with the death of her seven month old "Mamie" who died in her arms in the accidental firearm accident that cost John R. his left arm;<sup>6</sup> then the tragic loss of her twenty-six year old husband Howard Daniel who drowned in the San Juan River; then the loss of her two sons--fifteen year old William Claud and twenty-one year old John Clark. Who among us can imagine the pain and anguish of such an accumulation of tragedy? Instead of elaboration and detail John R. was moved to put it all into verse—beautifully and deeply so--in his published poem he entitled "Mary's Birthday."



Mary Whipple Young Roberts and her son Howard

*"What ups and downs have passed since then!  
Who knew the future, where, how, and when  
The lightning's flash from out the storm  
Would crush to earth some loved one's form—  
Or tear loved branches from the tree,  
And shroud the home in misery?"*

--A few lines from John R's poem

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<sup>5</sup> In a letter to his grandson, John A. Young, John R. told of a meeting he witnessed between Brigham Young and John D. Lee on the streets of Cedar City, Utah in September 1865. The details of this historical event were published in the Utah Historical Quarterly, Vols. 1-6 incl. 1928-1933 under title "Reminiscences of John R. Young" and subtitle "Brigham Young and the Mountain Meadows Massacre." Interestingly, for reasons unknown, this published account has not been referenced by any of the popular authors who have researched and written about the Mountain Meadows tragedy.

<sup>6</sup> This incident occurred on March 25, 1892 near Deming, New Mexico when John R. together with his father-in-law, William Morley Black were returning with their families from old Mexico. Seven month old Mary "Maime" Roberts was laid to rest in an unmarked grave in the desert. She suffered a gunshot wound to the head from the same bullet that cost John R. his left arm. References for this event include "Memories of Howard D. Roberts, grandson, published about 1978, 134 pages, and "Our Pioneer Heritage, Mormon Scouts, He Was Called, page 391, Daughters of Utah Pioneers, and The Roberts Family History, Chapter on Mary (May) Whipple Young by granddaughter Luana Porter Bunnell, from first-hand account.

John R's father, Lorenzo Dow Young, was a great pioneer in his own right. Overshadowed by his brother Brigham, the Prophet and Governor, Lorenzo would probably not be remembered for all his positive and loving acts were it not for his own recorded life events.<sup>7</sup>



This special image of Lorenzo Dow Young is from the public domain collection of the Harold B. Lee Library. On several occasions John R. wrote of the gratitude he had for his father's generosity in helping him, especially in later life. The two frequently communicated by letter and John R. sought for and gave tribute to the quality of advice and counsel he received from his father.

The Biography and Diary of Lorenzo Dow Young provide an informative and interesting glimpse into the life of early day Mormon Pioneers. For those of us who descend from Lorenzo's first wife Persis Goodall, the significant thing missing from Lorenzo's writing as well as that of John R. is an adequate accounting of what happened in the relationship between Lorenzo and Persis in their post-Nauvoo

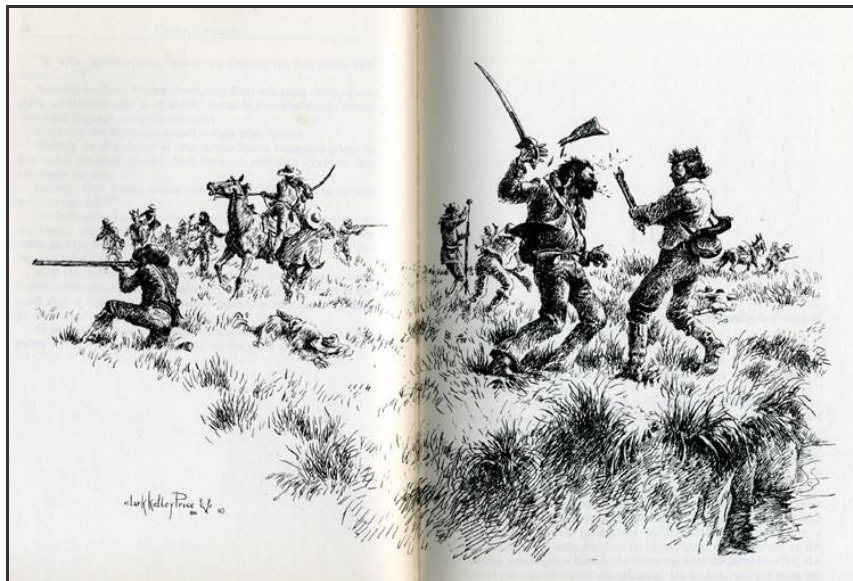
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<sup>7</sup> The Utah Historical Quarterly, Volume XIV includes the Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young by James Amasa Little as well as the Diary of Lorenzo Dow Young accompanied by some fine images of his wives and handwriting. A copy of this document was given to me by my cousin Bobbie F. Railsback with a choice note of appreciation for some of the photo work I did for her. It is much appreciated.

history. A special page gives memory of this good woman whom John R. always mentioned with great affection after paying her a visit.

Childhood was an exciting time for John R. and life on the frontier afforded many opportunities for making memories that lasted a lifetime. Like the time in 1846 when he accompanied his father on a trip down into Missouri to purchase hogs for the starving Saints who had made a temporary home at Winter Quarters.<sup>8</sup> Writing of this memorable trip he said: *"While we were in this impoverished condition, President Young called one day at the door of our cabin, and said to my father: Lorenzo, if you will hitch up your horses and do down into Missouri, the Lord will open the way, so that you can bring up a drove of hogs, and give the people fresh meat, and it will be a blessing to you."*

John R. remembered many interesting things about that trip as he accompanied his father to northern Missouri to buy hogs for the starving Saints. This trip was remarkable in several ways, not the least of which was the fact that here was Lorenzo being sent back into a country from where he had been driven just a few years before.



In a recent published biography of Orrin Porter Rockwell, there is an illustration of Lorenzo busting the butt of his rifle over the head of an attacking Missouri mobster, who with raised sword was about to end it all for him at the battle of Crooked River where Apostle David Patten was killed.<sup>9</sup> John R. said of his father's part in that battle: *"his heroic part in that fight led to a price being set upon his head."* With others, he fled to the State of Illinois.

<sup>8</sup> Memoirs of John R. Young, starting on page 41.

<sup>9</sup> Porter Rockwell, A Biography, Richard Lloyd Dewey, Paramount Books, New York, Illustrated by Clark Kelley Price, pp 36-37.



To make a long story short, it came to pass that in the late fall of 1846 Lorenzo Dow Young with his son John R., with a "spike" of three horses, left the impoverished Council Bluffs and went back down into Missouri again to receive what his brother and Prophet said would be more blessings! At Polk's Tavern in St. Joseph he found a Mormon family by the name of Lake who had left Winter Quarters in search of work. One of the daughters had found work there at the Inn and had told many inquiring souls about the sufferings and conditions of our people. John R. wrote: *"She knew my father well and joyfully recognized him. In the evening the bar room was full of gentlemen, eager to learn the news and for two hours they listened almost breathless to father's talk."*<sup>10</sup>

The next day Lorenzo was able to secure the loan of one thousand dollars from one of them--a Jewish merchant. His first move was to buy a forty-acre field of unharvested corn at four dollars an acre as it stood in the field. It yielded sixty bushels to the acre. The best corn was put in bins. Then a notice was posted for hogs. They came in droves of about thirty head and were bought in the bunch at seventy-five cents a head. Lorenzo returned to Winter Quarters with a four-horse team, a new Messenger filly and a drove of hogs weighing between 150 and four hundred pounds each and in this way President Young's promise to him had been realized. His blessings were sufficient and came in such a way that he later wrote, "I lost my labor and one hundred dollars, but had the satisfaction of helping hundreds of my poor brethren, which in after years gave me much pleasure."<sup>11</sup>

Incidentally it is 117 miles by bird flight from St. Joseph to Council Bluffs--- and quite a bit further by the Missouri River trail. Just think of driving 212 hogs that distance. John R. was but nine years old when he made this trip with his father but he remembered it in vivid details all the remainder of his life.



<sup>10</sup> Memoirs of John R. Young, page 43

<sup>11</sup> See Addendum A to this section for more information about this hog story.

Less than two years later, John R. was on another trek with his dad, Lorenzo Dow Young--this time to assist the returning wagon train of Brigham Young on the high plains of Wyoming. John R. wrote about it as follows: <sup>12</sup>



**Mountain man and trader Jim Bridger**  
Photo is public domain image modified by the author

*I knew Jim Bridger. In the summer of 1848 my father, who came to Utah with the pioneers, built the first house outside the fort, a two-room log house on the ground where the Lion and the Beehive houses now stand. Charley Decker and myself went back as far as Pacific Springs with a bunch of oxen to help uncle Brigham's company. Father drove two yoke of oxen on the wagon, while Charley and I drove the loose cattle.*

*At Fort Bridger, not hearing from uncle (Brigham Young), we were advised to wait awhile as it was rumored that a band of Sioux were in the country on the war path against the Shoshones. We lay at Fort Bridger for two weeks. Every day I was at the fort watching the Indians run horse races and gamble. One day Bridger gave me five dollars. I bet it and won. Then Bridger said, "My boy, don't you ever gamble again, for I have noticed that gamblers nearly all die with their boots on, and you are too fine a boy to die that way." I never gambled again.*

*Jim Bridger was of a Puritanical mold. I never saw him laugh, yet he loved humor and fun. One day a vagabond Mormon boy came along and claimed to be a trusted secret messenger of Brigham Young. Bridger looked him over, then said, "If you will stay here and marry the Indian squaw that I will pick out for you I will give you a tent and make an Indian trader out of you." The dude accepted the offer, the tent was pitched, night came on, and the Indian woman was sent to the tent. At the camp fire where the Indians were gambling, the mountaineers*

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<sup>12</sup> These stories in italics are from the Utah Historical Quarterly, Vols. 1-6 incl. 1928-1933, page 84, under subtitle "Reminiscences of John R. Young, extracts from letters written by John R. Young, pioneer of 1847, to his grandson, John A. Young, by whom they were submitted. John A. (Alvin) Young (1898- 1984) was the oldest son of Frank Albion Young who was the oldest living son of Albina Terry and John R. Young.

*gathered around the "new fledged trader," congratulated him upon his good fortune, and bade him good night. He retired to his lodge and silence reigned. In a few minutes were heard yells of pain, and a white man in his shirt tail burst from the tent with an angry squaw, armed with a heavy quirt, following close upon his heels. The mountaineers roared with laughter, but Bridger laconically said, "He has just remembered that secret message Brigham had entrusted him with." Father got one of the men to go get his breeches and take them to him. We saw no more of the "trusted messenger."*



Dugout at Pipe Springs National Monument. Photo by author.

*Some time in the early sixties, Mr. J. M. Whitmore, a man of wealth and a recent convert to the Mormon faith, moved to southern Utah—I believe in '61 or '62—and established a herd of cattle and sheep at the now called Pipe Springs. At that time it was a wild, uninhabited desert; and when he located there it was the southeastern frontier post of Utah.<sup>13</sup>*

*In "Indian Depredations in Utah," by Gottfredson, pp. 179-80, we are told that about the 1st of January, 1866 (I believe it was in 1863), J. W. Whitmore and his stepson, Robert McIntyre, were killed by Navajo Indians. The sheep and the cattle*

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, page 86

*were driven across the Colorado River and never recovered. The men were killed on the plain about four miles east of the spring. From the Pahvant Indians rumors of the killing reached St. George and a search party was sent out.<sup>14</sup> On the 20th of January the bodies were found. Soon after the killing 18 inches of snow fell so the bodies were covered and kept in good condition until they were found.*



Berry Family grave memorial at Grafton, Utah. Photos by author.

*About the 1st of April, 1866, another sorrowful murder took place some 12 or 15 miles northwest from the springs and 4 miles east from Maxwell's ranch. Joseph and Robert Berry, and Robert's wife were returning to their homes in Long Valley.<sup>15</sup> At Cedar point, on the old Elephant road, 4 miles from Maxwell's they were ambushed by Piede Indians. Evidently Robert was taken prisoner and tied to the front wheel of his wagon, where he had to witness the brutal torturing of his wife. Then he was shot full of arrows. The horses were taken, and that wagon looted. The*

<sup>14</sup> Other accounts claim that the son of one of the two murdered men was able to reach St. George to report the killings.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Berry was 23 years old; his brother Robert was 25; Robert's wife, Isabelle was 20.

*boys killed one Indian, the leader. I think these shocking murders led up to the building of Ft. Winsor at the Pipe Springs.*



*Winsor Castle i.e., "Fort Winsor." Photo by author.*

*In the meantime the Church had obtained possession of Dr. Whitmore's claims and had established a cattle ranch in care of ex-Bishop A. P. Winsor. At that time my brother, Joseph W. (Young) was president of the St. George Stake and uncle Brigham directed him to make some improvements on the ranch. Joseph planned the fort with Aunt Tamar. I went and boarded the men. My nephew, Joseph C. Young, hauled the rock with my team. They were quarried at Moccasin Spring, a mile and a half to the north. Elisha Everett, a mason on the Nauvoo Temple, was foreman in charge of building". I was timekeeper and general director of the work. I am a poor hand to remember dates. I may be wrong but I think the fort was erected in 1871. I may be wrong in dates but my memory is good on incidents and I desire to give proper praise and credit to all men who unselfishly sacrificed and toiled to build up the grand Commonwealth of Utah—John R. Young.*

## Addendum A

Following is the account of the Missouri "Hog Trip" as reported in Lorenzo's Biography by James Amasa Little, Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. XIV, page 78.

There (Winter Quarters) Lorenzo D. Young had another sick spell of three or four weeks. When able to go about he went one morning to a man who had brought a load of meat into camp for sale, and purchased a few pounds of very thin pork, for which he was asked six and eight cents per pound. Lorenzo considered the price exorbitant and reminded the vendor that he should not extort from his brethren, for his pork cost him only two cents per pound and the hauling was only ninety miles. The man treated the matter lightly and said he bought and sold to make money. Lorenzo felt indignant at his course and laid a plan for supplying the camp at more reasonable rates. After consulting with and receiving encouragement from his brother Brigham and Heber C. Kimball, he borrowed five hundred dollars of Brother Robert Pierce and three hundred from Moses Thurston. With the money he went into Missouri and purchased 212 hogs and a few beef cattle. The hogs cost one and one half cents per pound, with one third of live weight deducted for waste. Lorenzo drove his purchases up to Winter Quarters, hired Brother Thomas Grover to butcher, built a place to store the meat and opened a meat market. He sold his meat wholesale and retail at the same price, in order that the poor man, who had only fifty cents, might get his meat as cheap as the more well-to-do who could purchase a hundred pounds or more at once. He says of this business:

I sold over forty thousand pounds of pork and some beef. The pork I sold for two and two and a half cents per pound. Brother Brigham said I should have asked two and a half and three cents. I lost my labor and one hundred dollars, but had the satisfaction of helping hundreds of my poor brethren, which in after years gave me much pleasure. It was close times for the Saints at Winter Quarters in the winter of 1846 and '47, and the distribution of over 40,000 pounds of fresh meat among them for a little less than cost was no small matter. It gives me joy in my old age to contemplate the fact that I was an instrument in the hands of the Lord in feeding the hungry.

NOTE: How do we explain the differences between the account given by John R. and that recorded in Lorenzo's Biography? John R. says 1000 hogs,<sup>16</sup> the Biography reports 212; John R. has his father borrowing a thousand dollars from a Jewish Merchant after a night of story telling in Polk's Tavern. The Biography has Lorenzo borrowing five hundred dollars from Brother Robert Pierce and another three hundred dollars from Moses Thurston.

Perhaps there is something to be learned here about the writing of John R's Memoirs. Many portions of his book are based on writings; articles and letters completed in his early life, and are verifiably accurate. Other portions were completed in the weeks before publication in 1920 when John R. was in his 83<sup>rd</sup> year.

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<sup>16</sup> Page 43 of John R's Memoirs.

In the same chapter as the hog story, John R. writes about an incident involving Wilford Woodruff. But here, on page 45, he has entered a footnote admitting correction, with the statement, "My memory has become confused." Perhaps also with the hog story!

More to come.....to be added to this section at a later date:

The Two Utah Homesteads of John R. Young  
John R. and Franklin Wheeler Young and the Mormon Crickets  
The coming of Johnston's army  
Messenger Fillies, Canadian Mares and Race Horses  
John R. and James E. Talmage  
Guiding Brigham Young Jr.  
Evading the Feds  
Wildcat—Twenty Miles from Nowhere—Then and Now