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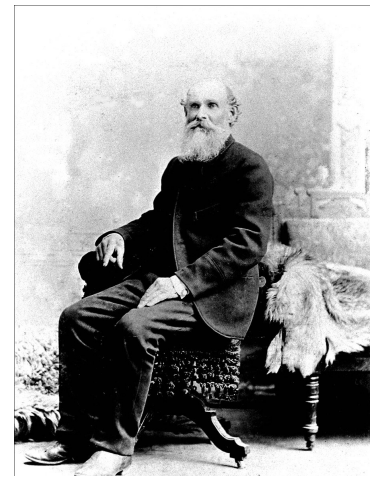
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Medical Practices in early Utah Territory

Today it is estimated that 64,000 Utahns are of Welsh descent. Some Rocky Mountain communities have an even higher Welsh heritage, such as Wales, Utah, and in Idaho, the town of Malad, which claims to have the largest per capita Welsh ancestry of any town outside of Wales.

My great-grandfather William Harman was born November 22, 1820, in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales. He worked in the coal mines from the time he was a little boy until 1870 when he left for America to be with fellow members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He arrived in Utah by train on the newly-completed continental railroad. When he reached Utah he met and married Martha Jane Davis Thomas, eventually having four children. At 15 their son Richard received a terrible injury to his right hand. Broken glass nearly severed his hand between the palm and the wrist. Richard suffered through months of painful infection until the whole arm was swollen to twice its size and covered with the marks of doctors' lances. Without getting any consent from Richard's father William, four doctors arrived at the house. They prepared the room for an amputation, when William said, "Doctor, you won't need to prepare for this operation as it will not take place." The four doctors became very nervous and finally angry. They left predicting the boy's death. A neighbor was called in and he and William Harman administered a blessing of healing. From that moment the arm began to improve in a remarkably short time and it became as strong as a right arm could be. Many times William Harman bore testimony to this remarkable healing and thanked the Lord for the great blessing. (Partly from a biography written by my grandmother Gwendolyn Harman Hatch)



William Harman

The Territory of the Deseret (or later called the Utah Territory) was certainly a religious community as well as a political state. There were approximately 56,000 Utah-Territory-bound pioneers of 1847 to 1868, with by far the majority belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Church President Brigham Young was named Utah Territory's first governor and held the position for eight years, and even after officially stepping down he was the acknowledged leader. He had a mammoth task to manage and facilitate such a large group, one constantly fluctuating in numbers and needing permanent places to live. Settlements were made across the full Territory for reasons of mutual safety, potential contributions of resources from different areas, as well as social needs. Though much boundary revamping eventually took place, in the beginning the State of Deseret--a word meaning "honeybee"--covered much of the American west (see map). Assignments, considered callings or missions, were made at the semi-annual General Conference, and individuals and families would head out as soon as



- The State of Deseret 1849
- The Old Spanish Trail
- The Mormon Trail to southern California

supplies were gathered. During the first ten years after the entry into the Salt Lake Valley in July 1847, an amazing ninety settlements were founded over the vast territory.

An important corridor of some of these new settlements was specifically located by Brigham Young on the Old Spanish Trail, each 35 miles apart or the distance of a day's ride on a horse. This was so that a traveler would have a town in which to spend the night. Parowan, Beaver, Cedar City, Cove Fort, were all such pioneer settlements.

Success in these far-flung outposts depended not only on crops and herds, but also upon the physical well-being of those brave settlers. In the early years Brigham Young was reluctant to use questionable patent medicines and encouraged a greater reliance on herbal remedies. There was also a major belief in health blessings or prayers by those with priesthood authority, as seen in William Harman's account of his son's healing. A 2014 Brigham Young University study analyzed the health and mortality rates of those earliest Church of Jesus Christ

pioneers and came to a surprising conclusion: Though in remote and rugged conditions, most pioneers were in better health than and had about the same mortality rate as other Americans of the time period.

When I was a child my grandfather would tell me stories of his uncle Ira Hatch, who spent 50 years among the Indians and was witness to the earliest days of the settlement of the Utah Territory. Ira spoke eight Indian languages as well as Spanish, and was called upon by Brigham Young for special missions. When the Old Spanish Trail held great dangers from the Indians, Ira was asked to station himself along the trail to provide some security at the Big Muddy River where it dips into southern Nevada. The Indians would come and tease Ira by shooting arrows through his clothes. He told them that with his gun he would be able to do worse damage to them at any range. While Ira was at the Big Muddy, Colonel Thomas L. Kane (a great friend to the Utah colonists) and his party came through from California. From the Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star magazine of July 12, 1870 (though the original event was a decade earlier) is the following account. "Colonel Kane requested Elder Hatch to make a treaty with the Indians concerning a cave near the Mountain Springs. In this cave Col. Kane had placed a number of bottles of medicine, and wished it called Dr. Osborn's Cave. He desired the treaty with the Indians to stipulate that the contents of this cave should never be disturbed, and that when a sick white man got into it he should be safe."

Much of the medical practices of the 1800's followed the self-healing theories of American botanist Samuel Thomson (1769-1843) where, by using various herbs, many believed they could circumvent the distrusted medical doctors. Of course, this was especially useful if the patient was miles from any formal medical help. Utah medical treatments progressed into a combination of the use of herbs such as lobelia, or detoxing by purging, plus short-course medical training of a few doctors in hub Utah towns. The first doctors in Beaver, Utah, were John Ward Christian and George Fennemore, who came there from San Bernardino, California, in 1858. Dr. Priddy Meeks was based in Parowan beginning in 1851. He did much training of other physicians and midwives in the area. My husband's great-great-grandfather Elias Hicks Blackburn practiced in Minersville, Utah, with a combination of Thomsonian medicine and priesthood health blessings. He was known throughout the region as a faith healer.

There were diseases and conditions for which little could be done in any circumstance. For instance, cholera was the number one killer for the pioneers on the trail. Such waterborne diseases would strike one group and not another, usually dependent on the sanitation practices of the wagon train ahead of them. Pandemics such as smallpox would shut down or wipe out entire settlements. My mother Norma remembered when she was a three-year-old child seeing piles of coffins being delivered at the Woods Cross, Utah, railroad station in response to the flu epidemic of 1917. In some places individuals had starved because no one would approach their house after quarantine signs were posted.



DR. JOSEPH MOTT BENEDICT
Born April 29, 1844, North Canaan, Conn.
Came to Utah 1870. Founder Salt Lake
Co. Medical Society and Holy Cross Hos-
pital.

At a certain point there began to be a departure from the old Thomsonian doctors (basically self-trained) moving to a few people being assigned to attend medical universities in the east. In 1872 Brigham Young saw a shift to better American medical practices and assigned his nephew, Seymour B. Young, to attend the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City. Other Utah men soon began to study medicine in eastern U.S. schools. Dr. Joseph Benedict was a much-respected early Utah physician, and instrumental in establishing the Holy Cross hospital in Salt Lake City. He was one of the doctors attending Richard's arm in William Harman's household.

Dr. Joseph M. Benedict

The customary midwives were still the preference for childbirth or female disorders. Eliza R. Snow and Bathsheba W. Smith, both prominent women in the Church of Jesus Christ organizations, spoke with Brigham Young about the need for women to have the same opportunities to study medicine. In 1873 at the General Conference of the Church, he made this announcement: "If some women had the privilege of studying they would make as good mathematicians as any man. We believe that women are useful not only to sweep houses, wash dishes, and raise babies, but that they should study law ...or physics.... The time has come for women to come forth as doctors in these valleys of the mountains."

Ellis Reynolds Shipp (1847-1939) was one of the first woman doctors in Utah and beyond, studying at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania. She and Eliza R. Snow worked to establish an obstetrics school at the Deseret Hospital in Salt Lake City, where Dr. Shipp trained a total of 660 midwives and nurses. My mother's family were all delivered by the wonderful Kate Chase of Centerville, Utah, who was one of those nurses trained through that Deseret Hospital program. The graduates would disperse throughout the Utah Territory to provide their medical services. Kate Chase was typical of their caring and professional service, and stayed for three weeks after the births. My mother said Kate would do the cooking, mend the boys' pants, and was a general delight, giving the new mother some personal time to recuperate.



Miss Kate M. Chase.

A part of needed medical services in Utah was for the miners who were suffering from lead poisoning or from black lung disease. Because of the huge geologic resources in Utah, many men worked in the mining industries. If they became ill, little could be done except care for them in their last months of life. My great-grandfather William Harman had a Welsh son Charles who was a miner in Utah and Colorado. Charles Harman was admitted to the Salt Lake County Infirmary Hospital, established 1885, for severe stomach problems. When Charles passed away, the hospital sold

Kate M. Chase

his body for autopsy training at the newly-opened medical school at the University of Utah. The hospital administrators had assumed that because he was born in Wales, he had no local relatives yet there were several in the Salt Lake valley.

The brave souls who stepped away from better medical services in the eastern United States or in European cities did so knowing life on the frontier would not be easy. It did progress for most, however, to better conditions within their lifetimes. Medical help was administered by caring individuals to the best of their ability. Again from the Millennial Star magazine of 1870, a comment on the spectrum of change in the early Utah Territory. "In this desert of burning sand and rock, which a few years ago seemed totally incapable of supplying the necessaries of civilized life, are now several thriving settlements of the Saints. In those settlements the traveller finds supplies and protection, and but a few years will elapse before the past of this difficult and dangerous road will seem like a dream." --Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star, July 12, 1870.