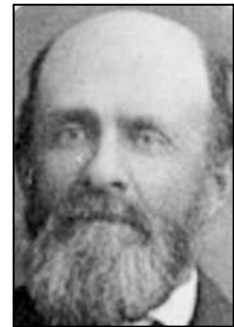




## **Benjamin Knell**

After being baptized in England in 1850, Benjamin came to Utah in 1852 at the age of 18.

At the April Conference in 1854, President Brigham Young called a group of men to be missionaries to the Indians of southern Utah and Arizona, Benjamin was one of the men. They were to leave as soon as they could get their affairs in order.



The leader of this group was Rufus C. Allen. Benjamin was one of that group, and he writes that Allen spent most of his time trying to get the Indians to come to their camps that we might let them know that we were their friends. A few of the older men could come in but were very shy.

From their visit to the Santa Clara, they went to Pinto and camped at in the summer of 1856. Brothers Dixon, Richard S. Robinson, Amos G. Thornton, Prime T. Colman and David W. Tullis (names prominent in the early history of Pinto) were part of the company.

That year (1856) they made their homes on Pinto Creek, hauling hay to ascertain if they could get a team up the canyon, as they wanted to get into Pine Valley from New Harmony. They found the pass impossible. They drove two yoke of oxen and a heavy wagon on the trail to the head of the middle fork of Pinto Creek and then climbed the ridge, getting into Pine Valley that night. Heavy freight teams enroute from Los Angeles, California to Salt Lake City would frequently come to Pinto.

In September, 1858, a special conference of these missionaries was held at Santa Clara. For some time, Jacob Hamblin, under the direction of Brigham Young, had wanted to take the gospel to the Moquis Nation and Hopi Indians and the Navajos on the other side of the Colorado River.

Jacob Hamblin was to lead the expedition. He chose ten men for his companions. Benjamin Knell was one of them. Benjamin was also set apart with Samuel Knight and Andrew Gibbons were to remain for a season with the Navajos if conditions proved favorable.

The brave little group left Santa Clara on October 28, 1858. Traveling South and East, they crossed the Virgin River and camped the third night at Pipe Springs. Time will not permit telling the story of that mission, but let us pause for a moment to consider some of the things they faced. They were now in unfriendly Indian Territory upon which no white man, save perhaps a few Spaniards, had set foot in more than a thousand years. They faced the crafty, treacherous Navajo whom they knew to be unfriendly, and the strange Hopi. Actually they were not treated too badly by the Hopi people, so it was decided four of the missionaries should remain for a year, if possible, with them to learn their language and to attempt to teach them the gospel. William Hamblin, Andrew Gibbons, Benjamin Knell and Thomas Leavitt were selected to remain; the rest of the party returned to Santa Clara after about two months with the Hopi Nation.

Soon after the main party left, a division arose among the Indians as to whether the Mormon Missionaries were really the white men of the ancient prophecy, Arguments mounted in fury until it was unsafe for the brethren to leave their quarters. Finally the clan chiefs delivered an ultimatum: "If the missionaries were really their their friends as they professed to be, they must each take one of the squaws to be their wife. This, of course, they refused to do and were virtually ordered out of the village and forced to start the trip back to Santa Clara without provisions and in the dead of winter.

It is almost impossible to conceive of the hardships and privation they endured, even to the fording of the Colorado River in slush ice. After almost freezing and starving to death, travel-frayed and gaunt, they arrived back in Santa Clara late that winter.

In spite of the difficulties involved with the coming of fall, it was decided that another attempt should be made to establish a mission among the Hopi people. However, Jacob found few brethren anxious to again undertake the hazardous journey. A number indicated their willingness to respond to the call, but when on October 4, 1859, the expedition was ready to start, it had dwindled to eight missionaries besides Jacob himself.

Paul Bailey, in his book, "Jacob Hamblin, Buckskin Apostle", says of these men: "But they were good men, hardy men. Besides Marion Shelton, handpicked by Brigham Young, there were the ever faithful and dependable Thales Haskell, Ira Hatch, Benjamin Knell, Isaac Riddle and James Price."

So again, enduring hardships, privation and braving the hazardous crossing of the Colorado, another visit was made to the Hopi Nation. For the details of these experiences, I suggest you read Paul Bailey's book on the life of Jacob Hamblin. All we can say here is after living for more than a month with the Indians, the brave little party returned to Santa Clara, having been gone for two months. Certainly, because of the courage required and the privations endured, these two trips were two of the highlights of Benjamin's life. He never complained about these or anything else, and because of these experiences, he became very appreciative of the bounties and comforts of life and every good thing, and often expressed that appreciation.

Benjamin continued to be a friend to the Indians all the rest of his life. He learned their language and understood them. Indians often visited him, and could sit down and talk with him by the hour. They loved him and he befriended them all his days.

Amid his missionary expeditions, Benjamin was married to Ann Green on October 9, 1861. He eventually persuaded his brother Robert to move to Pinto near

Benjamin's home. The two brothers, with their wives and children, established their homes in Pinto, Utah. Here they lived and were buried almost side by side at their deaths.

Once in their later years, a son-in-law suggested to Benjamin that they move to California, or somewhere where they could enjoy a few more of the comforts and advantages. Benjamin's answer: "Brigham Young called me down here and he has never released me, and so I have stuck!" and stick he did until his death, January 29, 1915.