

GRIEF EMBERS

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GRIEF EMBERS was one of 20 negroes to accompany the Mormon colonists on the 1851 trip to California. He was born about 1812 or 1813 and listed his birthplace as Indiana, although that was unlikely since Grief was a slave until he came to California and Indiana was a free state. He probably did not know his birthplace and listed that of his owner. He may have suffered some tragedy in his early life, as his name would imply, because the most obvious alternative for receiving such a name is by way of describing a feature of his personality, and the term "grief" does not fit Mr. Embers.

Grief was certainly not somber or withdrawn, by all accounts he was one of the most liked members of the community. In fact, the pioneers called him "Uncle Grief," a term of affection reserved for elderly or respected persons. His second name was taken from one of his owners, a common practice of the times. When he came to California he was owned by William Crosby and was thus called Grief Crosby occasionally, although his earlier name seems to have been more common. After the Mormons left, he and his family used the name Embers.

William Crosby owned five slaves altogether, including Grief's wife, Harriet, and his older brother Toby. Grief and Harriet were probably married after their arrival in California, at least they did not begin their family until 1853 when their first daughter, Martha, was born. They eventually had two other daughters: Louisa, born in 1857, and Harriet, born in 1860.

Grief was best known for his tin horn, said to be about six feet long, which he played mostly for amusement. On holidays, such as the fourth of July, Grief would entertain with his horn. He used it on more serious occasions, however, as he was sort of a bugler calling the men to assembly in times of danger. Different signal calls were adopted and understood by all. Jefferson Hunt made these arrangements while organizing the militia in response to the Garra threat, although it is not improbable that some form of communication utilizing the horn had been used earlier on the trip to California.

Grief's sister-in-law, Hannah, was also a useful member of the pioneer settlement. She was the midwife for the San Bernardino Colony. Being an excellent horsewoman, Hannah responded at all times, day and night, when she was needed.

The 1852 census shows 20 negroes living in San Bernardino, although the list may not be complete since some who were known to have made the 1851 trip do not appear on the census roll. There were five men (over 21), three women, and the rest children. The total Negro population in San Bernardino did not change much until 1890, when 313 were listed.

As slaves, none of these people were taught to read or write, and so very little first-hand information is known about them. The descendants of one family recall their mother speaking later about how frightened all the black people were over the prospect of their freedom. They had not been taught a useful trade and wondered how they were going to make a living in the harsh frontier environment.

On the other hand, not all Negroes were told of their legal status. Robert Smith brought the largest number of slaves out of Utah, about 12. One of these was Hannah, the wife of Grief's brother, Toby. Smith ran afoul of the law when he tried to take his former slaves to Texas with him in 1856.

And there was good cause for worry after the Mormons left in 1857. When half the

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