

The Desert Match

By John C. Whiting

As told to his daughter Nellie Wright (about 1952)

John was a son of Edwin and Mary Elizabeth Cox Whiting, The brother of our Edwin Marion Whiting who shot the bear in the marble cave, with Edwin's help. See revised Whiting Book, page 87.

When I was eight years old [1878] two of my older brothers were called on a mission to colonize in Arizona on the Little Colorado River. Mother and family were living in Springville at the time. Father and two of his other wives, Aunt Hannah and Aunt Elizabeth, also lived there in peace and harmony.

Mother taught public school. We always kept a 'hired girl,' and Aunt Hannah was a second mother to me.

My sister May—about five years older than I—had very poor health, and on the doctor's advice Mother decided to go to Arizona hoping a milder climate would be beneficial to her health. So three of my older brothers—Edgar, Edwin, and Arthur, together with my younger brother Fred all went along.

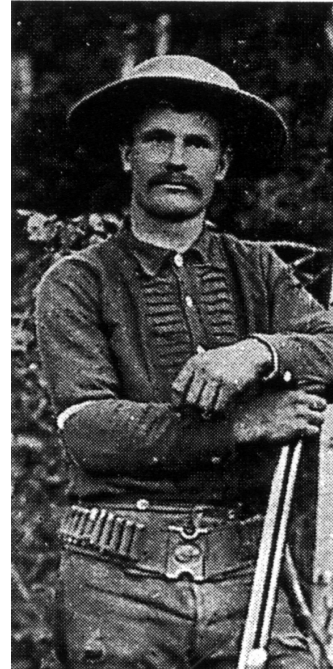
We joined the United Order and lived in it for about four years until it was abandoned. Then in the month of May 1882 we decided to return to Utah. My older sister Harriet Curtis and family joined us, making a little company of three wagons.

Feed for the horses was scarce and they were soon in very poor condition so our progress was slow. Ten to twenty miles per day were about all we could accomplish. One day we were plodding along through heavy sand (everyone walking) about ten miles south of House Rock Springs when Arthur's best horse was suddenly taken sick and dropped down in the road, refusing to go any farther.

We had enough water in our barrels to get by on and some for camp use. Arthur and I were to stay there all night, and the others were to come back to get us in the morning.

May was worse and they didn't want to stop any longer than was necessary. The long dreary afternoon slowly passed, and we prepared to make our fire and get supper. Mother, as mothers will, had left us some molasses, saying we could make a little molasses candy. We gathered a pile of shadscale sticks and prepared to light the fire. But imagine our dismay when no match could we find. First we went through all our clothes. Next the grub box without success.

We had heard how the Indians made fires with bow and string, but we knew nothing of how they did it. We made a crude little bow and sawed frantically across a board with it until the string got so hot it fell to pieces. No results.



In desperation we took everything out of the wagon box, got down on our knees and picked over every sliver of wood, every little piece of chaff until I am sure if there had been a pin in that wagon box we would have found it. The limit had been reached. We were beaten and gave it up. No supper, no molasses candy, none of the blessings a hungry boy craves. If ever a prayer arose from the heart of a hungry, lonesome little boy it was then.

Some time later I was disconsolately wandering around out in the sand some rods from the wagon wishing the sun would hurry and go down over Kaibab Mountain when glancing down at my feet there was the most beautiful match that mortal eyes had ever beheld. Our fire troubles were ended and oh how thankful we were.

Who placed our match there? It was the same loving hand that watches over the sparrow's fall.

All this happened some 70 years ago, but it is still fresh in my memory.

The Lord has blessed me through a long life. I have the best wife in the world and a family of which I am justly proud. I have been fairly active in church work; Sunday School Superintendent, counselor in the bishopric, missionary, and a High Priest at the present time.

I've seen the sick healed under the Elders' hands and heard doubters say, "Oh well, nature cured them and you give the Lord the credit." That is one reason I like to anchor my faith to my little match for I have yet to hear a skeptic say, "Oh nature just planted that match there in the middle of ten miles of sand with no camp grounds or water to attract a stray traveler just to fool you."

My brother Arthur has passed on several years ago, but he always corroborated my story in every detail.

John C. Whiting
Charleston, Utah
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