

HISTORY QUESTION OF THE MONTH

At 5:00 p.m. on April 28, 1895, a shaft of lightning preceded a deafening roll of thunder that was heard all over Salt Lake County, What were the tragic consequences that resulted?

ANSWER

During the afternoon of April 28, 1895, Andrew Maxfield, son of Joseph Maxfield, a seventeen year old from Butlerville, and a nineteen year old friend, Frederick Webb, who had previously lived in Butlerville, went for a horseback ride into the foothills above Butlerville. A fast moving storm approached when they were about a quarter of a mile from home. The boys hurried their mounts as they attempted to reach safety before the storm hit. They were about 800 feet from the Maxfield ranch when a bolt of lightning struck, killing both horses instantly. The Webb youth who was riding a horse with only a blanket, was thrown over the horse's head and to the ground unconscious. The Maxfield boy, didn't fare as well as the horse he was riding had a saddle, causing the lightning bolt to enter the boy's forehead and travel down his spine and exit his foot. His horse fell on him, pinning his feet. His clothes were literally torn in threads and still burning when a traveler happened upon the scene and summoned help. By this time the Webb boy was wandering around in a daze. A rider was dispatched to the home of Dr. Rauscher who lived in South Cottonwood.

The Salt Lake Tribune reported that Dr. Rauscher of South Cottonwood was attending a service at the meeting-house in that locality “. . . when a mounted messenger came plunging through the torrents that fell and driving his animal's steaming nostrils right in the door of the little place of worship” requested the doctors help. Dr. Hensel, of Salt Lake City, also happened to be in attendance at the meeting and the two doctors immediately drove by horse and buggy to the accident scene which was about five miles away. Upon their arrival they found both boys stretched out. The Webb boy had suffered paralysis to the left side of his face affecting both his eye and his hearing. The Maxfield boy was severely burned and barely alive and all attempts to save him failed.

Dr. Hensel, after examining the bodies of the two horses, reasoned that if young Maxfield had been riding with just a blanket and not with a saddle that had steel stirrups, his injuries may not have been fatal.

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