Selected Handcart Stories for Youth Treks

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The stories in this publication were selected, with some adaptations, from *Mormon Handcart Historic Sites,* a guide developed by the Church History Department for missionary use only.

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Contents

How to Use These Stories

Studying and Sharing Stories

This document will help you prepare for your trek experience by providing background information about the Willie and Martin handcart companies, along with individuals' stories of faith, sacrifice, and hope.

During your trek, you may be asked to share one or more of these stories. As you study them, "liken" what you learn to yourself and to those you will teach (see 1 Nephi 19:23). Consider the following:

- How would you have felt if you were in that person's place? How would you have reacted to his or her circumstances?
- What gospel themes or messages can you find in these stories? How might these themes be relevant to the youth of the Church today?
- What trials and difficulties do the youth of the Church face today? How can these stories help today's youth face their challenges with faith?
- How can the examples of faith, sacrifice, and hope in these stories help youth become better disciples of Jesus Christ?

A Note on Historical Accuracy

When relating historical events, especially those of a sacred nature, it is important to be as accurate as possible. When you are historically accurate, you establish trust with your audience, and the Spirit can testify to the truth of what you say.

Sometimes it can be difficult to find sources of historical information that are completely accurate. Many of the handcart pioneers wrote their stories decades after their experience, so their memories of some details had dimmed. Sometimes several people remembered the same event differently. Some stories have grown or changed as they have been shared.

The stories in this publication have been carefully researched to provide information that is as accurate as possible. If you would like to learn more about these stories, other reliable sources of information are listed on page 27.

Historical Background

Introduction

Before the first Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869, nearly 500,000 people migrated west on trails that pass through present-day Nebraska, Wyoming, and Utah. Between 60,000 and 70,000 of these travelers were Latter-day Saint pioneers. Led by President Brigham Young, the first group of these pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847.

Most pioneers used ox-drawn wagons for the journey west. However, between 1856 and 1860, about 3,000 Latter-day Saints used handcarts rather than wagons, mainly because handcarts were much less expensive. Most of the handcart pioneers were European converts who anxiously desired to gather with the rest of the Saints and were willing to traverse ocean and wilderness to do so. For many of these faithful Church members, no sacrifice was too great for them to gather to Zion and secure the blessings of the sealing ordinances for their families.

The handcart pioneers were organized into ten companies, eight of which completed the journey with relatively few problems. Although their trek was arduous, the first three companies and the last five completed it in less time than a typical wagon company. But circumstances combined to create a much different experience for the Willie and Martin handcart companies. These Saints had to draw from their deepest reservoirs of faith as they faced grueling hardships—harsh winter storms; inadequate clothing and shelter; insufficient food rations; illness; and death. Clinging to their faith in God, their vision of Zion, and their hope for rescue, they pressed forward through the most daunting conditions.

When Church leaders and members in Salt Lake City learned that the Willie and Martin handcart companies were late on the trail, hundreds left their homes to rescue them. The people in Utah gave food and clothing, and many opened their homes to care for these beleaguered Saints when they finally arrived.

Despite their suffering, most members of the Willie and Martin handcart companies finished their journey as they had started it—brimming with faith in the Lord and in the cause of Zion. The experience had strengthened their faith and helped them come to know God as never before.

The Emigration Program

Timing

By the time the handcart plan was implemented in 1856, Church leaders had gained much experience in emigration matters. Among other things, they had learned when emigrants should leave England and when they should leave the outfitting places in America to arrive in the Salt Lake Valley before winter. In 1851 the *Frontier Guardian* had advised:

> *Any wagon that crosses the [Missouri] River after the 20th [of June], crosses at their own risk and upon their own responsibility. Our faith and counsel for emigrants to leave, extend to no period beyond the 20th [of June]. Such as have not crossed over the River by that time, better not cross at all this year.*[1]

On the west side of the Missouri River, the frontier town of Florence, Nebraska, was the last substantial source of supplies for the pioneers until they reached Salt Lake City, 1,031 miles away. Wagon and handcart companies that left

Florence by mid-June could expect to arrive in Salt Lake City by September. Later departures from Florence potentially exposed travelers to winter storms before they finished the journey.

The Provisioning Plan

The provisioning plan for the 1856 handcart companies was simple in theory. When they left their outfitting site near Iowa City, they were given enough provisions to get them to Florence, a distance of about 270 miles. At Florence they loaded their handcarts and several supply wagons with enough rations for 60 days.[2] To ensure that the handcart companies didn't run out of food, the provisioning plan called for sending resupply wagons from Salt Lake City to meet them partway. In a letter to Elder Franklin D. Richards, who oversaw the emigration from England, Brigham Young said that resupply wagons might meet the handcart Saints "as low as Laramie, if we get their names in time."[3] Fort Laramie was the halfway point between Florence and Salt Lake City.

The Willie and Martin Handcart Companies

Difficult Decisions in Florence

Ideally, emigrants needed to leave England by March so they could reach the Salt Lake Valley well before winter. However, in 1856 Church leaders had difficulty securing enough ships to accommodate the large number of Saints who wanted to emigrate. The ships that carried most members of the Willie and Martin handcart companies didn't leave England until May, and those companies didn't arrive in Florence until August 11 and August 22—very late for a safe departure to the Salt Lake Valley. In Florence, both companies faced a difficult decision: risk facing winter storms before reaching their destination, or stay there for the winter and resume their journey the next spring.

While leaving Florence so late was risky, staying in Florence wasn't an easy option. There were more than 1,400 people in the Willie and Martin handcart companies and the Hodgetts and Hunt wagon companies, which traveled closely with the Martin company. Finding supplies, employment, and housing for so many people would have been extremely difficult in Florence, which had a population of only about 3,000. Moreover, most of the handcart pioneers had been city dwellers and were poor financially. They weren't used to life on the frontier and lacked the skills and means needed to survive the winter.

	Arrival in Florence	*Departure from Florence*
Willie Company	August 11, 1856	August 16–17, 1856
Martin Company	August 22, 1856	August 25, 1856

At a camp meeting in Florence on the night of August 13, 1856, leaders of the Willie company discussed whether to proceed that year or stay until the next spring. James Willie, captain of the company, spoke first and exhorted "the Saints to go forward regardless of suffering even to death."[4] He then invited Levi Savage, one of his subcaptains, to speak. With tears streaming down his cheeks, Levi Savage voiced his apprehension and pleaded for the people to stay. Summarizing his comments in his diary, he wrote:

> *I then related to the Saints the hardships that we should have to endure. I said that we were liable to have to wade in snow up to our knees, and should at night wrap ourselves in a thin blanket and [lie] on the frozen ground without a bed; that [it] was not like having a wagon that we could go into, and wrap ourselves in as much as we liked and [lie] down. No, said I, we are without wagons, destitute of clothing, and could not carry it if we had it. We must go as we are. . . . I spoke warmly upon the subject, but spoke truth, and the people, judging from appearance and after-expressions, felt the force of it.*[5]

Seventeen-year-old Emma James remembered that when all had finished speaking, "there was a long time of silence." Emma was frightened, and her father looked pale and sick. "I turned to mother to see what she was thinking," Emma

recalled, "and all I saw was her old determined look. She was ready to go on tomorrow. There were many others like her. . . . 'We must put our trust in the Lord as we have always done,' said mother, and that was that."[6]

The general feeling was that proceeding was the best option. "We really didn't have much choice," Emma James recalled. "There was no work here for us to keep ourselves through the winter, and our family had to live."[7] Approximately 100 members of the Willie company decided to stop at Florence, but about 400 decided to go forward.[8]

When Levi Savage saw that most of the people were determined to continue the journey, he humbly decided to join them. "What I have said I know to be true," he said. "But, seeing you are to go forward, I will go with you, will help you all I can, will work with you, will rest with you, will suffer with you, and, if necessary, I will die with you."[9] One member of the company related how he kept that promise: "Levi Savage . . . was I think the best help we had—resolute & determined. His whole soul was for the salvation of our company."[10]

The Martin handcart company, led by Edward Martin, arrived in Florence several days after the Willie company departed, and they also voted to move forward despite the risks.[11]

Lack of Resupply

As specified in the handcart plan, Brigham Young sent resupply teams to the first three handcart companies, and some of those teams traveled more than 400 miles to meet them. But he didn't send supplies to the Willie and Martin companies until Franklin D. Richards and other returning missionaries arrived in Salt Lake City in early October and reported that these Saints were late on the trail, hundreds of miles away.

Why didn't Brigham Young send timely resupplies to the Willie and Martin companies as he had to the first three? He knew that these Saints had arrived in America, and he apparently understood that they would begin their journey from Iowa City that year. However, because they were so late, he had expected emigration leaders to stop them in Florence for the winter.[12] Not knowing they had left Florence, he hadn't organized a resupply for them.

Beginning the Rescue

On October 5, the day after Brigham Young learned about these late companies, he issued an urgent call to rescue them. Only two days later, George D. Grant led the first rescue company east from Salt Lake City. This group consisted of about 50 men and 20 to 25 wagons.[13] Although hundreds of others would participate in the rescue, this small group had to work on their own for a few weeks before they received substantial assistance from other rescuers. The task was immense for a group of this size: finding and rescuing the nearly 1,000 members of the Willie and Martin handcart companies and the more than 400 members of the Hodgetts and Hunt wagon companies.

One remarkable aspect of President Brigham Young's rescue call is that he issued it two weeks before these late companies encountered the first snowstorm. On the day he called for rescuers, the temperature in Salt Lake City was in the upper 70s, and the handcart pioneers were experiencing a hot day on the trail. Brigham Young's rescue call would prove to be inspired and timely, saving hundreds of lives.

Willie Handcart Company

Sweetwater River

Historical Background

Faith in God and a burning desire to gather to Zion brought the Willie handcart pioneers to Sixth Crossing, an isolated place on the Sweetwater River, on October 19, 1856. If they had reached Sixth Crossing in late August or early September, it likely would have been a pleasant place to camp. One trail guidebook described it as having "grass in abundance up and down the creek, sage brush and willows for fuel."[14]

But it wasn't summer. The morning of October 19 dawned very cold, and to reach the Sixth Crossing of the Sweetwater, the Willie company faced a daunting journey of 16½ miles from their camp at the Fifth Crossing. They struggled to get moving but finally started. After they had traveled a few miles, the season's first snowstorm blew in and blasted them for about half an hour. The storm was so blustery and cold that they stopped to wait it out.

Making matters worse, the people had been getting weaker from being on reduced rations for more than two weeks. They had stretched their flour supply as far as they could, and that day they ate "the last pound."[15] All they had left were a few cattle and a one-day supply of crackers. Unless they were rescued, they would certainly die. They prayed constantly that help would come before it was too late.

When the storm subsided, the Willie company started moving again. At about noon they were met by four express riders from the first group of rescuers sent by President Brigham Young. The arrival of these men—Joseph A. Young, Cyrus Wheelock, Stephen Taylor, and Abel Garr—brought great rejoicing. "Such a shout as was raised in camp I never before heard," wrote Joseph Elder. "They were saviors coming to [our] relief."[16] The four express riders had little food to give, but they brought hope, giving "the cheering intelligence that assistance was near at hand, that several wagons loaded with flour, onions, & clothing, including bedding, were within a day's drive."[17] After staying briefly, these men continued east to search for the Martin company, which was 100 miles farther back on the trail.

Of necessity, that afternoon the Willie company pushed west another 9 or 10 miles to the Sixth Crossing of the Sweetwater, arriving at dark. They issued the last of their food—the crackers—that night.

When the people awoke the next morning, they found snow at least four inches deep and still falling. Five people had died the previous day, and many more were close to death. In their weakened condition, the Willie company could go no farther. But their situation was so desperate that they couldn't just sit and wait for the wagons to come. That morning, Captain James Willie and Joseph Elder set out to look for the rescuers.

These two men expected to find the rescuers at the base of Rocky Ridge, about 12 miles away.[18] The rescuers weren't there, however, so James Willie and Joseph Elder ascended Rocky Ridge and continued about 15 more miles, straining their eyes and ears for any sign of the rescuers. "The snow and an awful cold wind blew in our faces all day," wrote Joseph Elder.[19] Finally, after traveling more than 25 miles through snow and wind, they found the rescuers camped below the mouth of Willow Creek. A signboard that Harvey Cluff had just placed on the trail directed the two men to the camp. Without that sign, they might have passed by it.

It was a good thing that James Willie and Joseph Elder had gone searching for the rescuers. The previous day, the rescue team had pulled off the main trail to seek shelter. As the storm continued on the 20th, they had remained in camp, not knowing the extremity of the Willie company's condition until the two men arrived that night.

Hope for Rescue

"Weakened to such an extent, we had given up hope of moving any further. Having heard assistance was on the way, we still had hope. We still had one pony and one mule which were not entirely given out. Two of the men took these dear old animals and started out to find some relief, which they did. . . . They found the relief party camped on account of the snow, but they heard the report and came to us [as] quickly as possible."

—Robert Reeder of the Willie company
In The Daughters of Utah's Handcart Pioneers, *94*

At 8:00 the next morning, October 21, James Willie, Joseph Elder, and the rescuers started for the Willie camp with all haste. The people in camp were in a precarious condition. Most of them had been without food, other than a little meat, since the crackers were distributed on the night of the 19th. Five people died during the two days that James Willie and Joseph Elder were gone.

Rescuer Harvey Cluff said that after an "extremely difficult" all-day journey, "it was about sunset when we came in sight of the camp."[20] When the rescuers arrived, the joy in camp was unrestrained. Little children "danced around with gladness," and "strong men wept till tears ran freely down their furrowed and sun-burnt cheeks." "The sisters fell upon [the rescuers] and deluged them with kisses."[21] Feeling unbounded joy and gratitude, the people dropped to their knees and gave thanks to God. The food, bedding, and clothing that people in the Salt Lake Valley had so charitably donated would save many lives.

The next day, George Grant left some of his men and six wagons to help the Willie company. The rest of his small group of rescuers continued east to search for the Martin company and the Hodgetts and Hunt wagon companies.

"We have prayed without ceasing," George Grant wrote to Brigham Young after finding these three companies more than a week later, "and the blessing of God has been with us."[22] The emigrants had sacrificed much to gather to Zion. If it weren't for the timely rescue, many more would have made the ultimate sacrifice.

The Rescue Wagons Arrive

"Arriving within the confines of this emigrant camp, a most thrilling and touching scene was enacted, melting to tears the stoutest hearts. Young maidens and feeble old ladies threw off all restraint and freely embraced their deliverers, expressing in a flow of kisses the gratitude which their tongues failed to utter. This was certainly the most timely arrival of a relief party recorded in history, for the salvation of a people."

—Harvey Cluff of the first rescue company
Autobiography and journals, 1868–1912, 3 vols., 1:20

Stories by Location

Sixth Crossing

George Cunningham

George Cunningham was 15 years old when he left his native Scotland with his parents and three sisters to gather to Zion. George had begun working in a coal pit when he was only 7 years old to help support his family. He worked there for 6 years, sometimes for 12 to 14 hours a day. The air was bad in the coal pit, and he sometimes wouldn't see the sun except on Sunday, his only day off. His family, who had joined the Church shortly after George's birth, was grateful when the way opened for them to emigrate. George thanked God for his blessings when he arrived in America, a country he had been taught to believe was a "land of promise."[23]

Twenty years after arriving in America, George wrote a detailed reminiscence that included memories of his experiences with the Willie company. He recorded that while the company was crossing Iowa, "people would mock, sneer, and deride us on every occasion for being such fools as they termed us, and would often throw out inducements to get us to stop. But we told them we were going to Zion and would not stop on any account." George, who was a teenager at the time, didn't allow the mockery to deter him. "People would turn out in crowds to laugh at us, crying 'gee' and 'haw' as if we were oxen. But this did not discourage us in the least, for we knew that we were on the right track. That was enough."[24]

George was able to give a glimmer of hope to the Willie company at a difficult time in their journey. On October 18 the company camped at the Fifth Crossing of the Sweetwater and had issued the last of the flour, leaving only one day's rations of crackers. With people becoming weaker every day, many would die unless rescue came soon.

On October 19 the Willie company had to leave the Fifth Crossing and travel 16½ miles to meet the river again at the Sixth Crossing. The day dawned very cold, and some of the children who had been crying with hunger were now also crying because of the cold. After the people had traveled a few miles, a snowstorm blasted them for about half an hour.

While the company stopped to wait out the storm, George kept looking expectantly to the west. The previous night, he'd had a vivid dream. In this dream, the people "had started out on the road" in the morning. It had begun to snow, but "the storm had subsided some." George continued:

> *I thought that I saw two men coming toward us on horseback. They were riding very swiftly and soon came up to us. They said that they had volunteered to come to our rescue and that they would go on further east to meet a company which was still behind us and that on the morrow, we could meet a number of wagons loaded with provisions for us. They were dressed in blue soldier overcoats and had Spanish saddles on their horses. I examined them, particularly the saddles, as they were new to me. I also could discern every expression of their countenance. They seemed to rejoice and be exceedingly glad that they had come to our relief and saved us.*[25]

That day, George was amazed when he actually saw two men, like those he had dreamed about, riding fast toward the company. He called out for everyone to look. "Here they come! See them coming over that hill," he cried.[26] Two men on horseback and two others in a light wagon quickly rode into camp. These men were Joseph A. Young, Cyrus Wheelock, Stephen Taylor, and Abel Garr—members of George Grant's rescue company.

Five days earlier, George Grant had sent these men ahead as an express to find the handcart Saints. Members of the Willie company were overjoyed to see them. "[They] brought us the cheering intelligence that assistance was near at hand," William Woodward recalled, and "that several wagons loaded with flour, onions, & clothing, including bedding, were within a day's drive of us."[27] "They were saviors coming to [our] relief," wrote Joseph Elder.[28] The people told George Cunningham that he "was a true dreamer, and we all felt that we should thank God."[29]

After reaching Utah, the Cunningham family went to American Fork, where George lived the rest of his life. He married Mary Wrigley in 1863, and they became parents of 13 children. During his life he worked at day labor and railroad construction, owned a butcher shop, and was a teamster. He was faithful in the Church and active in community and political affairs.

As a boy, George Cunningham had come to America, dreaming of a better life and wanting to live among others who held his same religious beliefs. From his experiences, he learned that "the nearer he lived to God, the better he felt."[30]

Mary Hurren

Mary Hurren was 7 years old when she left England with her father, mother, and two younger sisters. Other family members who accompanied them were her grandfather, David Reeder; her aunt, Caroline Reeder; and her uncle, Robert Reeder.

In the beginning, each day brought new adventures and fun for Mary. There were other young children to play with, and her Aunt Caroline was especially kind. But the journey became more difficult as time went on. First her grandfather, who had been weak for some time, died when the company was just west of Fort Laramie. Two weeks later, her aunt, who was only 17 years old, died and was buried near Independence Rock.

With little food remaining, the people grew weaker. By the time they reached the Sixth Crossing of the Sweetwater, most of their provisions were gone. One morning, Mary's father uncovered a piece of rawhide, about a foot square, in the snow. He scraped off the hair, cut the rawhide in small strips, and boiled it. Mary chewed the pieces of boiled rawhide like it was gum, sucking out what flavor and nourishment she could get.

The last scraps of food were distributed on the morning that James Willie and Joseph Elder set out from the Sixth Crossing camp to search for the rescuers. "The people were freezing and starving to death," remembered Mary. "If help had not come when it did, there would have been no one left to tell the tale."[31]

The company's prayers were answered the next day when the rescue wagons arrived. For the rest of her life, Mary had a joyful memory of that time:

> *As a small girl I could hear the squeaking of the wagons as they came through the snow before I was able to see them. Tears streamed down the cheeks of the men, and the children danced for joy. As soon as the people could control their feelings, they all knelt down in the snow and gave thanks to God for his kindness and goodness unto them. . . . [The rescuers] came just in time to save our lives.*[32]

But hard times weren't over for young Mary. On the trail, her shoes had almost worn out, and her feet and legs were frozen. To keep her legs warm, her mother had wrapped them in rags. When the family reached Salt Lake City, Mary's mother bathed her legs and feet with warm water to remove the rags. Her condition was so bad that doctors didn't expect

her to live more than a day or two. They later told her father that the only way to save her life was to have her lower limbs amputated. Her father objected, saying that "his little girl had not walked for a thousand miles across the plains to have her legs cut off."[33]

Mary's parents did everything they could to restore health to her limbs. The flesh fell away from the calves of her legs, and the process of healing was difficult. "It was three long years before I was able to walk," Mary said.[34] Her feet hurt for the rest of her life. Nevertheless, she was grateful for even the hard things she had experienced. She said that if she had her life to live over again, "I would not want it any different."[35] She lived to be 88 years old and became the mother of 13 children.

John Oborn

John Oborn's family joined the Church in 1843 and soon thereafter felt prompted to gather to Zion. However, their very limited means didn't allow them to act on these promptings until 1856. John, the youngest son in the family, was 12 years old at the time. The family sailed to America and then traveled by train and boat from New York to Iowa City.

Of the Willie company's journey across the plains, John later wrote, "God only can understand and realize the torture and privation, exposure, and starvation that we went through."[36] Conditions were so bad at the Sixth Crossing camp that John described it as "the most terrible experience of my life." With their rations gone and winter upon them, it was hard to think they could survive. "We had resorted to the eating of anything that could be chewed, bark and leaves from trees, etc.," John recalled. "We youngsters ate the rawhide from our boots. It seemed to sustain life and we were very thankful to get it."[37]

As John later remembered this life-or-death situation, the coming of the rescuers remained vivid: "When it seemed all would be lost, . . . and there seemed little left to live for, like a thunderbolt out of the clear sky, God answered our prayers."[38] The rescuers brought life-giving food and supplies. John remembered that one of the men was particularly kind to their family: "He seemed like an angel from heaven. We left our handcart and rode in his wagon, and slowly but safely he brought us to Zion."[39] John's father, however, died just 10 days before the family reached the Salt Lake Valley, giving "his life cheerfully and without hesitation, for the cause that he espoused. We buried him in a lonely grave."[40] John remained a faithful member of the Church for the rest of his life.

Emily Hill

When Emily Hill was 12 years old, she became interested in the Church, but her parents were very opposed to her interest. She was finally baptized when she was 16, along with her 19-year-old sister, Julia. Four years later, Emily and Julia left England to gather with the Saints. After reaching America, they traveled to Iowa City and started west with the Willie handcart company. Although the journey seemed daunting, Emily steeled herself for it. "I made up my mind to pull a handcart," she wrote later. "A foot journey from Iowa to Utah, and pull our luggage, think of it!"[41] Julia was unable to walk for part of the way and had to be carried in a handcart.

Emily became a poet of some accomplishment and left a record of her handcart journey in a poem she wrote in 1881 titled "Hunger and Cold." The poem described the Sixth Crossing camp, when the last of the company's rations had "utterly vanished":

Not a morsel to eat could we anywhere see,
Cold, weary and hungry and helpless were we.

The surroundings were "desolate," with nothing in view but "snow covered ground." She wrote that the company could just as well have been adrift in the middle of the ocean, "shut off from the world" as they were. Nevertheless, they maintained hope and trusted in God:

On the brink of the tomb few succumbed to despair.
Our trust was in God, and our strength was in prayer.

When the rescuers arrived, Emily remembered hearing their shouts and cheers as they entered the camp:

> *Oh, whence came those shouts in the still, starry night,*
> *That thrilled us and filled us with hope and delight?*

The "Boys from the Valley" were their "saviors," and the camp cheered them loud and long. These rescuers had soft hearts and courage "like steel" to leave their homes and undertake such a difficult task. "They rushed to our rescue, what more could they do?" Emily asked. When the rescuers saw the condition of the people, they wept "like children." They quickly started cooking fires and preparing "nourishing food." Emily never forgot the selfless sacrifice of these men:

> *God bless them for heroes, the tender and bold,*
> *Who rescued our remnant from hunger and cold.*[42]

Years later, Emily said that she never would have reached the "city of the Saints" had it not been for the "compassionate people of Utah," who donated food and clothing, and for the rescuers, who sacrificed so much to help them.[43]

During her life in Utah, Emily had 10 children and became a prolific poet. She wrote the words to the hymn "As Sisters in Zion."

Joseph Elder

Joseph Elder, age 21, joined the Church in the Midwest in 1855. The next year, while he was attending McKendree College in Lebanon, Illinois, he decided to visit the Saints in St. Louis. There he met with Church leaders, who ordained him an elder and counseled him to change his plans so he could help the emigrants who would be crossing the plains that year. Feeling that it was his duty to serve, he left college and said farewell to his family and friends. He helped buy cattle and herd them to Florence, where he planned to stay until he could travel to Salt Lake City with a company of returning missionaries led by Elder Franklin D. Richards. However, when the Willie company arrived in Florence, emigration leaders approached Joseph and asked him to leave immediately with the company and drive an additional wagon, which would give them more provisions and supplies.

Despite the short notice, Joseph willingly joined the handcart company. He quickly proved himself capable of important tasks. He thought that he would travel with the company only until Elder Richards and the missionaries caught up with them, but when Elder Richards arrived, he saw that it would be beneficial for Joseph to stay with the company for the rest of the journey, and Joseph willingly did so. "I chose to remain with the handcart company and to assist them all that I could," Joseph wrote.[44]

Joseph couldn't have known at that time how important he would be in the survival of many members of the Willie company. When they arrived at the Sixth Crossing of the Sweetwater, they knew that rescue wagons were nearby, but their circumstances were so desperate that they couldn't wait for the wagons to arrive. The next morning, James Willie and Joseph Elder went to search for the rescuers. They climbed Rocky Ridge, with "snow and an awful cold wind" blowing in their faces all day, and finally reached the rescuers after a journey of more than 25 miles. "When they saw us, they raised a shout and ran out to meet us," Joseph wrote. "They could scarcely give us time to tell our story they were so anxious to hear all about us."[45]

The next morning, James Willie and Joseph Elder led the rescuers back to the Willie company's camp. The plight of the company was shocking to the rescuers. They saw "men, women, and children weakened down by cold and hunger, weeping and crying," Joseph wrote. "Oh, how my heart did quake and shudder at the awful scenes which surrounded me."[46] If he and James Willie hadn't found the rescuers and guided them to the Willie camp, the rescue efforts may have come too late. The rescuers gave the company food, clothing, and hope.

Joseph Elder was a person who put the needs of others before his own. Throughout the emigration of 1856, he showed that he had a willing heart and was ready to do whatever he was asked. He didn't murmur or voice regrets when the journey of the Willie company became difficult. In his later life, he maintained his disposition to be of service whenever needed. He served the Lord in many ways, such as completing multiple missions, one of them to Europe in 1878.

Margaret Caldwell

Margaret Caldwell, age 40, had been widowed for nine years when she left Scotland for America with four of her children, ages 9 through 16. After her husband's death, she had managed a boarding house, and with thrift and industry she saved enough to emigrate.

Walking so many miles across the plains was hard, but Margaret said that "after becoming accustomed to walking it wasn't too bad."[47] Traveling became harder when her 14-year-old son, Thomas, had an accident in Florence, Nebraska. Thomas roped a cow so a young girl could milk it, but the cow broke away and Thomas's foot was caught in the rope. He fell to the ground and released the rope, but the cow turned on him, breaking his collarbone and leaving him unable to help pull the handcart. "This left me with a great deal of pulling to do," Margaret recalled. The bone developed gangrene, and Margaret "had quite a time clearing it up."[48]

Pulling handcarts became increasingly hard as rations were reduced. When the Willie company reached the Sixth Crossing of the Sweetwater, the last of the rations were distributed. Recalling their last meager meal in these conditions, Margaret wrote, "I boiled a small piece of buffalo meat, seasoned it with salt crackers and thickened it with a little flour, then divided it with others desperately in need of food." Two young boys remembered this meal for years afterward "as being the best thing they ever ate."[49] At a time when Margaret and her family were the brink of starvation, she reached out with charity to others.

When the family finally arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, Margaret's 12-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, had to have some of her toes amputated. Nevertheless, Margaret counted her blessings. Thinking of so many who had died on the journey, she recorded, "I still had much to be thankful for."[50] She remarried soon after arriving in Utah and lived to be 71 years old.

Lucy Ward and James Cole

Born in England in 1833, Lucy Ward was about 14 when her father died. A few years after his death, Lucy's family joined the Church, Lucy being baptized in 1851. In the following few years, her mother and sister died and her two brothers married, leaving her alone. Desiring to join the Saints in Zion, 22-year-old Lucy left England for America in 1855. She worked in New York City for the winter, and the following spring she went to Iowa City and became part of the Willie handcart company.

When the Willie company began encountering cold weather, Lucy cut the bottom off a fur cloak she had brought from England and made a covering for her head. She "took from her precious belongings a green veil and tied [it] around the fur piece to hold it more closely to her head."[51] This unusual fur hat would become important in bringing Lucy and her future husband together.

James B. Cole, age 28, was one of the rescuers traveling east toward the handcart Saints. According to Lucy's recollections told later in her life, shortly before the rescuers reached the Saints, James had a dream that he would meet his future wife on this rescue mission. He told fellow rescuer William Kimball that in the dream he saw "a beautiful woman in this group. She was wearing a green veil, and she was my wife."[52] William Kimball scoffed at the idea of there being a woman of that description among the destitute Saints they hoped they would soon find. But when the rescuers pulled into the Willie camp, he said to James Cole, "Jimmy, there's your future wife."[53] Both of them had seen Lucy Ward in her fur hat and green veil.

For James Cole, a spark was struck. Here was the beautiful girl of his dreams. During the next week or so, he courted Lucy. The Willie company journal records that on the evening of November 2, "James Cole of Fort Supply married Lucy Ward of the 4th Handcart Company at Fort Bridger."[54] On November 19, a little over two weeks after their marriage, James signed a promissory note to pay $10.50 "for the

passage and other expenses of my wife Lucy Ward from England to this place."[55] The place he referred to was Fort Supply, where the newly wedded couple spent the winter and where Lucy regained her strength.

Lucy and James had 11 children. James died in a farm accident in 1876, when their youngest child was only four months old. Lucy lived another 44 years as a widow. It was Lucy's faith and James's benevolence that brought them to a providential meeting on the plains.

William Broomhead (Rescuer)

William Broomhead joined the Church in England and came to Utah when he was 16. When he heard President Brigham Young call for rescuers to assist the late handcart companies, he was 22 and been married for only seven months. The prophet's plea for help stirred William's spirit. "I volunteered to go back to meet the handcarts," he wrote in the diary he kept of his journey.[56]

Two days after the prophet's call, William was heading east as part of the first rescue team, driving a wagon loaded with provisions. Late on October 18, the rescuers encountered the first of many storms that would slow their travel. "It was very cold," William wrote.[57] The next day they pushed ahead until the weather became so bad that they halted for camp. The miserable weather continued the next day, October 20, so they stayed in the camp. "Snowed in the morning," William wrote, "and the wind was very high and cold."[58]

That evening, James Willie and Joseph Elder came from the Willie company's camp and found the rescuers, telling them that the handcart Saints "were out of provisions."[59] The next day, October 21, the rescuers started early and pushed ahead in haste. "Started at 8 [and] camped with wiles [Willie's] company at 5," William wrote. "The day was cold and in the evening it snowed," he continued.[60] The rescuers distributed flour and clothing to the beleaguered Saints. The next day, some of the rescuers started west with the Willie company, while William and the other men continued east to find the Martin company.

William Broomhead saw the Lord's hand during this trying time. "The Lord blessed the animals, the wagons, our food, and us," he wrote, "and we had cause to rejoice all the time, for we are children of his care, and he takes care of his children if they will listen to his word."[61] On October 31 the rescuers finally met the Martin company and distributed life-saving supplies to them.

William Broomhead started home on November 9, when the Martin company left their camp in Martin's Cove, and he stayed with them until they reached the Salt Lake Valley on November 30. After seven weeks of this difficult rescue mission, he was overjoyed to be home. "I was greeted [at] home by my wife and friends with joy," he wrote.[62]

Throughout his life, William Broomhead retained the generous attitude he had shown during the rescue of the handcart pioneers, taking an active part in pioneering settlements and in community life.

Rocky Ridge and Rock Creek Hollow

The first rescue team, led by George Grant, arrived to assist the Willie company on October 21 (see page 6). This group of rescuers was small, so the next day, only several men and six wagons stayed with the Willie company while the others continued east to find the Martin handcart company and the Hodgetts and Hunt wagon companies. Because few men and wagons stayed with the Willie company, most of those Saints had to continue pulling their handcarts for another 150 miles until they met more rescuers near Fort Bridger. Those miles included the most difficult of their journey: the ascent of Rocky Ridge on October 23. It was a day that would test them like no other. James Willie later said it was "the most disastrous day" of the entire journey.[63]

The Willie company started from camp early that morning, and some of them didn't reach the next camp until almost

sunrise the next morning. The climb up Rocky Ridge ascends more than 600 feet over a distance of about three miles. For people already worn down by hunger and fatigue, pulling handcarts up that grade, sometimes in deep snow, was agonizing. They stopped frequently to rest, and their pauses chilled them to the marrow. For those who were weakest, it took hours of teamwork and toil to get their carts to the top of Rocky Ridge.

By the time it was dark, many people were far behind the rest of the company. The temperature was steadily falling, and camp was still several miles away. Subcaptains Millen Atwood, Levi Savage, and William Woodward helped those who lagged behind. As many as possible were loaded into rescue and supply wagons, which were so full that Levi Savage worried that "some would smother."[64]

At about 10:00 that night, those who had been lagging farthest behind arrived at an icy creek that they didn't want to cross without help, so Levi Savage started toward the camp for assistance. By about midnight, some of the rescuers were headed back up the trail to help.

The situation in camp was grim. "Few tents were pitched," Levi Savage found upon his late-night arrival, "and men, women, and children [sat] shivering with cold around their small fires."[65] The last wagons finally arrived at 5:00 a.m. Levi Savage wrote that it was "just before daylight [when] they returned, bringing all with them, some badly frozen, some dying, and some dead."[66]

A Long, Exhausting Journey

"It was certainly heartrending to hear children crying for mothers, and mothers crying for children. By the time I got them as comfortably situated as circumstances could admit (which was not very comfortable), day was dawning. I had not shut my eyes for sleep, nor lain down. I was nearly exhausted with fatigue and want of rest."

—Levi Savage, Willie company subcaptain
Levi Savage diary, Oct. 23, 1856

The storm continued on October 24, and the people were so weak that company leaders decided to stay in camp. Thirteen had died since beginning the ascent of Rocky Ridge the previous day—men and women of all ages, and children. They were buried in one large grave. Two others would die before the company left camp the next day.

Since October 19, Redick Allred and a few other men had been stationed with supply wagons at the westernmost camping place on the Sweetwater River near South Pass (see page 15). After George Grant's rescue team met up with the Willie company, William Kimball sent an express to Redick Allred's camp, asking him to hurry forward with assistance. Redick left early on the morning of October 24, leading six wagons 15 miles to the Willie camp. They arrived during a gale and found the people burying their dead. "We set in with the rest to make them as comfortable as possible and remained in camp till [the] next day," Redick Allred wrote.[67] The next morning, the Willie company continued their journey, still about 250 miles from the Salt Lake Valley.

Sarah James

Sarah James, age 19, was the oldest of eight children of William and Jane James. Sarah and two of her younger sisters, Emma and Mary Ann, later wrote recollections of their travels with the Willie handcart company. Of the three, Sarah's recollections are the most poignant in telling what happened on the day they ascended Rocky Ridge.

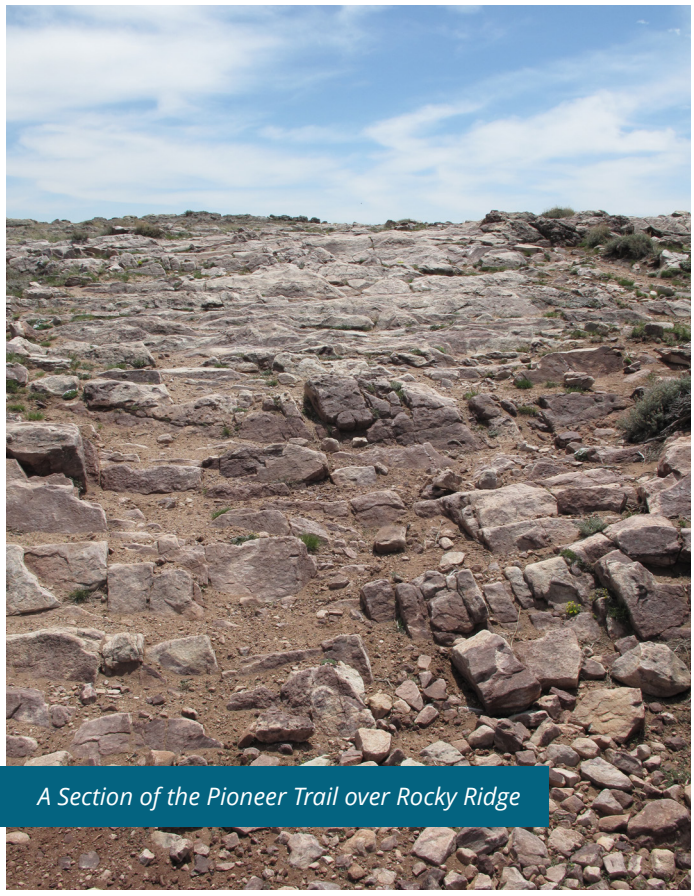
Weak from hunger and exhaustion, members of the Willie company started from the base of Rocky Ridge early on the morning of October 23. The James family started a little bit later because William and his oldest son, 14-year-old Reuben, helped bury two people who had died the previous day. Soon after the burial service, Sarah led five younger siblings ahead to catch up with the rest of the company. They pulled the family's lighter handcart.

When the burial work was finished, William, Jane, and Reuben set out, with Jane and Reuben pulling the family's heavier cart. As William tried to follow, he collapsed in the snow. For the previous several weeks, he had been in declining health.

With Jane's help, he tried to raise himself up but couldn't do it. William assured Jane that he just needed to rest and asked her to go ahead and catch up with their children, so she left Reuben with his father and continued forward.[68]

Eventually, Jane met up with her children on the bank of an icy creek. Feeling keenly the charge to look after the safety of her young brothers and sisters, Sarah had stopped there to wait for help. "We were too frightened and tired to cross alone," Sarah remembered.[69] Their mother helped them get across, and then they forged ahead.

When Jane and her children reached camp that night, they asked if anyone knew about William and Reuben. No one did. At about midnight, some of the rescuers went back on the trail to help those who lagged behind. "We felt that they would come with the next group," Sarah wrote. "All night we waited for word."[70] Mary Ann, a younger sister, remembered, "We watched and listened for their coming, hoping and praying for the best."[71]



A Section of the Pioneer Trail over Rocky Ridge

But the best was not to be. When the wagons finally came into camp, the last one at 5:00 a.m., one of them was carrying the frozen body of William James. Later that day he was buried with 12 others. Reuben was badly frozen and only partly conscious, but he survived. During this most difficult time, Jane James showed valiant faith and courage. "When it was time to move out [the next day,] Mother had her family ready to go," Sarah said. "She put her invalid son in the cart with her baby and we joined the train. Our mother was a strong woman and she would see us through anything."[72]

Sarah James suffered tragic losses on her journey to Zion. A baby sister died on the voyage, and her father died on Rocky Ridge, but Sarah, her mother, and her six other siblings all survived. Sarah married the next year and eventually had six children. She lived to be 84 years old, faithful to the end.

Mette Mortensen

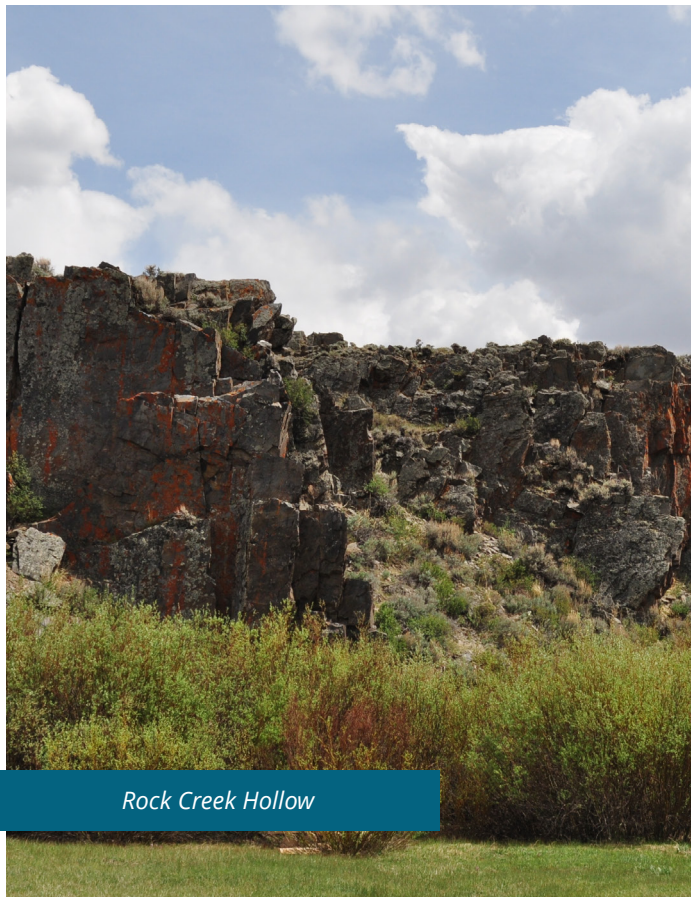
The Peder and Lena Mortensen family joined the Church in Denmark in 1855. "As soon as my father and mother heard the gospel they were not very long in accepting it," their daughter Mette recalled.[73] Soon after joining the Church, the Mortensens decided to sell their substantial home and farm and gather to Zion. With seven children ages 5 to 24, they left what Mette called their "happy little home" and sailed to England (the oldest son stayed in Denmark to serve a mission and emigrated later). In Liverpool they boarded the *Thornton* to sail to America. Mette turned 11 on the day her family boarded the ship.

After reaching America, the Mortensens went to Iowa City, intending to get outfitted with a wagon and team to continue the journey. The family had the means to do so, but Church leaders made a proposal and promise that steered their course in an unexpected direction. They asked Peder if he would use his means to help pay the way of other needy Saints and promised that if his family would "join the handcart company, not one member of his family should be lost."[74] The Mortensens decided to forgo their comfort for the greater good of others. This was a doubly difficult decision because Peder and his oldest daughter were crippled,

he severely and she with an arthritic knee. They were promised they could ride in a supply wagon.

Now very limited in what they could bring, the Mortensens left much of their clothing and bedding behind. The months ahead required great additional sacrifice, as well as suffering from hunger and cold. "How well I remember when the food supply began to get short," Mette later wrote. "We had always had plenty of good food at home and this was hard for me to understand."[75]

The journey was especially trying and even frightening one day when Mette's brothers pulled out of the line of handcarts and said they couldn't go a step farther. "We children stood by crying, thinking of the terrors in store for us," Mette remembered.[76] When their mother gave the boys a little crust of bread and something to drink, it lifted their spirits. With her encouragement, they got their cart back onto the trail and continued forward.



Rock Creek Hollow

After the long day's journey over Rocky Ridge, Mette's brothers helped dig the grave where 13 members of the company were buried. In an act of tenderness, Mette's mother laid one of her hand-woven linen sheets on the bodies before they were covered with earth.

As promised, Peder and Lena Mortensen and their children arrived safely in Zion. They settled in Parowan, Utah. Mette was married several years later and raised nine children.

Redick Allred (Rescuer)

After the Saints were forced to leave Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846, Redick Allred enlisted in the Mormon Battalion. This willingness to make sacrifices for his Church would be a hallmark of his life. When asked in 1852 if he would serve a mission to the Sandwich Islands (known today as the Hawaiian Islands), he didn't hesitate. He served for three years.

In 1856, Redick was living in Kaysville, Utah. When he heard that two handcart companies were late on the plains and in peril for their lives, his heart went out to these people. "I responded to a call [from] the brethren to assist them," he wrote in his journal, as they were "likely to be caught in the mountains in the snow without provisions and the necessary clothing."[77]

Redick Allred borrowed a pony and left on October 7 as part of George Grant's rescue company. The next day, Redick took cold and suffered "a severe pain in my breast that lasted one month that was almost like taking my life."[78] Even as he suffered, he pressed forward and fulfilled some of the most difficult assignments of the rescue effort.

On October 18 the rescuers crossed South Pass and camped on the Sweetwater River. "It snowed and was quite cold," Redick wrote.[79] When most of the rescuers continued east the next day, George Grant asked Redick to remain in camp and establish a station to help the handcart companies as the other rescuers brought them through. Redick was given charge of a small group of men, wagons, and animals at this station. He butchered some of the animals and kept the meat frozen in the bitter cold.

On October 23, Redick received an express from William Kimball telling him that the rescuers had found the Willie company and asking him to hurry forward with assistance. Redick left early the next morning, leading six supply wagons 15 miles to the Willie company's camp. "I found some dead and dying," he observed. "The drifting snow . . . was being piled in heaps by the gale & [they were] burying their dead."[80] Redick and his men did all they could to help. The next day they all moved ahead to Redick's station near South Pass.

George Grant had originally told Redick Allred that he could return to Salt Lake City "with the first train." But Captain Grant sent word with William Kimball that Redick should remain at his station until the later companies came through, "as their lives depended upon it."[81] It was a long, tedious wait. During that time, two men tried to induce Redick to go home, but he refused, committed to do his duty.

Redick Allred remained in this camp for a month before George Grant finally arrived with the Martin company on November 17. When George Grant saw that Redick had remained faithful to his assignment, he saluted him with, "Hurrah for the Bull Dog—good for a hang on."[82] The next day, Redick broke camp and "set out for the city with this half-starved, half-frozen, and almost entirely exhausted company of about 500 saints."[83] By the time he arrived home, he had lost his toenails to the frost. "Thus ended one of the hardest & most successful missions I had ever performed," he wrote.[84]

Redick Allred was a farmer for most of his life. He also loved serving in the Church and community. He died in 1905 in Chester, Utah, a town where he had served for 10 years as bishop. He was a patriarch in the Church at the time of his passing.

Martin Handcart Company

Devil's Gate

Historical Background

Led by Captain Edward Martin, the Martin handcart company was typically about nine or ten days behind the Willie company. Two wagon trains, the Hodgetts and Hunt companies, traveled closely with the Martin company.

After enduring two weeks of winter weather, the Martin company arrived at Devil's Gate on November 2, 1856, still 327 miles from Salt Lake City. (That same day, the Willie company reached Fort Bridger, 113 miles from the city, and finally met enough rescuers that they could ride in wagons the rest of the way.) Buffeted by swirling snow and pierced by subfreezing temperatures, the Martin company camped at Devil's Gate for two nights. Then on November 4 they took shelter nearby in what is now known as Martin's Cove.

For five days and nights the cove was the best refuge they could find from the storm. They huddled in tents and clustered around fires to try to keep warm. Although the cove offered some protection, a raging wind flattened many tents the first night. With the temperature dropping to 11 degrees below zero, the cold penetrated to the core.[85] With little to eat, people were drained of the stamina and will needed to succor life. Deaths added up as the cold and lack of food took their toll. "It looked like we would all die," Heber McBride said of that time.[86] "It was a fearful time and place," remembered Elizabeth Jackson. "It was so cold . . . , and nothing but the power of a merciful God kept [us all] from perishing."[87]

A Trying Time in Martin's Cove

"My father went to gather some brush, willows, etc., there being no wood, to keep me warm. His hands became very benumbed. He laid down by my side [and] told mother he was going to die (it was not any trouble to die). Mother took hold of him and gave him a shaking up, and told him she was going on to the Valley. He then gave up dying."

—Langley Bailey of the Martin company
Reminiscences and journals, 6

Due to deep snow, as well as weakness caused by starvation rations, most members of the Martin company could no longer pull their handcarts. To continue moving toward the Salt Lake Valley, most of them would need to ride in wagons. But George Grant's rescue team didn't have enough wagons to carry more than a fraction of the people, and no other rescuers had come as far as Devil's Gate.

The only other way to transport the handcart Saints was to use the wagons of the Hodgetts and Hunt companies. George Grant called on members of these companies to unload most of their belongings to make room for as many of the handcart Saints as possible. Concerning the sacrifice this required, rescuer Daniel W. Jones wrote:

> *These goods were the luggage of a season's emigration that these two wagon trains had contracted to freight, and it was being taken through as well as the luggage of the people present. Leaving these goods meant to abandon all that many poor families had upon earth. So it was different from common merchandise.*[88]

While the Martin company was in the cove, the goods in the wagons were moved into the buildings at Fort Seminoe, an abandoned trading post near Devil's Gate (a replica of Fort Seminoe has been built on the old site).

On November 8 the weather improved and the last of the goods were unloaded from the wagons. The next day, the Martin company left the cove, and most of them were given places to ride in wagons. (On that same day, the Willie company arrived in Salt Lake City.) The Martin company's grueling time in the cove was behind them, but their journey would continue another 22 wintry days before they reached the Salt Lake Valley. Gradually, enough rescue wagons would reach them to allow everyone to ride.

Stories by Location

Devil's Gate and Fort Seminoe

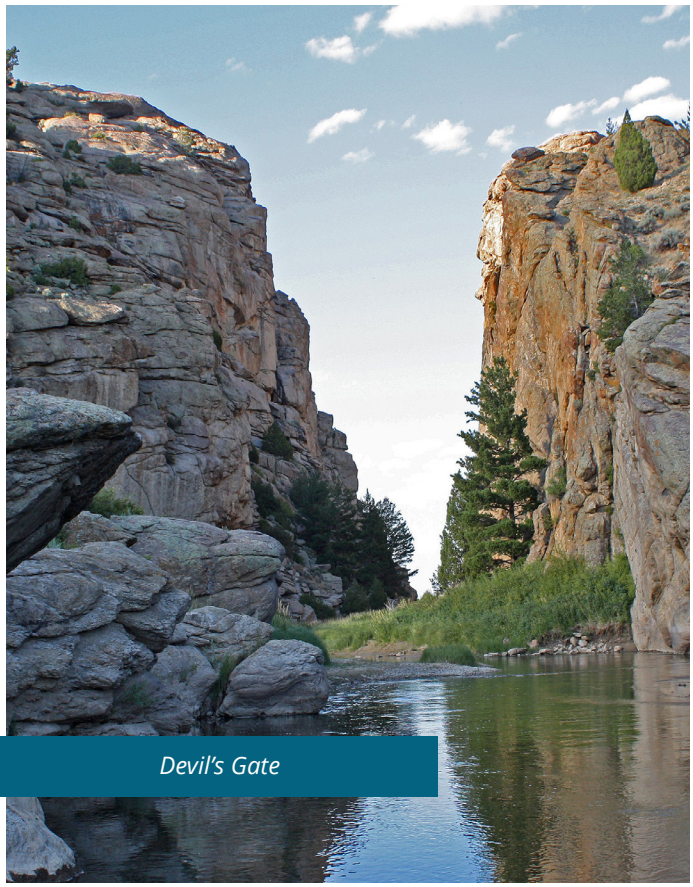
John Cooper

John Cooper was born in 1834 in Loughborough, England. He was left fatherless before he was 3 years old, and his mother was too poor to raise him to good advantage, so he went to live with a wealthy uncle when he was about 8. In the care of his uncle, John received a good education and learned the shoemaking trade. While in his youth, he heard the Mormon missionaries preach and was drawn to hear their message again and again. When John's uncle learned that John had joined the Church at age 17, he disowned him and cut off any association with him.

John was fully converted to the gospel, and he willingly did what Church leaders asked of him, which included serving as a traveling elder from 1854 through 1855. In 1856 he boarded the ship *Enoch Train* to go to America to gather with the Saints. Also on board the ship was Mary Ann Lewis, who was a few months older than John. Mary Ann had also been born and raised in Loughborough, and she had joined the Church in 1853. The association between John and Mary Ann may have been nurtured as they sailed across the Atlantic and traveled by rail and steamboat to Iowa City. They remained in Iowa City for more than six weeks, helping people prepare for the journey to Salt Lake City.

When it was finally time for John and Mary Ann to leave, they were assigned to travel in the wagon company of William B. (Ben) Hodgetts. Their names are side by side on the roster.

After leaving Iowa City, the Hodgetts and Hunt wagon companies stayed close to the Martin company in case the handcart Saints needed their assistance. At Devil's Gate the rescuers decided that the Martin company could go no farther without the help of the wagon companies. They decided to unload most of the goods from the wagons to make room for those in the Martin company whose strength was spent. They stored the goods at Fort Seminoe.



Devil's Gate

On November 9 the Hodgetts company left the fort to pick up the Saints in Martin's Cove. Before leaving, all the men were called to a meeting, where it was announced that 20 of them would be asked stay behind to guard the goods at the fort. John Cooper was appointed to be one of these men. Captain George Grant wrote that these were "men with large souls, men of integrity, men of God who would not do a wrong thing." They weren't "half or chicken hearted men." George Grant urged them to be vigilant and prayerful and to use their time well. He knew that "they would have hard times," but he felt that they wouldn't starve because they could hunt.[89]

It turned out that George Grant's estimation about their well-being was too optimistic. The winter was very hard, and those left at Devil's Gate were snowbound with very little food and clothing. Benjamin Hampton, one of the men chosen to stay at the fort, said they lived "four months on poor meat, without flour, and the last three weeks on rawhide, straight."[90] The men also soaked, boiled, and ate old moccasin soles and even a buffalo hide floor mat to stay alive. John Cooper weighed 160 pounds when he left England, but he weighed only 80 pounds and could barely walk by the time he left Fort Seminoe. The other men were in similar condition.

In the spring, teams were sent from Salt Lake City to transport the goods from the fort to the valley. The men who had stayed the winter at the fort began arriving in Salt Lake in late May. A granddaughter of John Cooper later wrote that he reached the valley on June 6, 1857.[91] John had proven to be a man who would do what he was asked. He would sacrifice, and he would obey.

John Cooper and Mary Ann Lewis had parted company at Fort Seminoe in November and didn't see each other again for seven months. On June 8, 1857, just two days after John arrived in Salt Lake City, they were married. Six months later they moved to Fillmore, Utah, where they had eight children.

John lived to be 87, outliving Mary Ann by 30 years. He was active in the Church until the end of his life and was a public-spirited man. He was justice of the peace at the time of his death and had been the Millard County treasurer for 14 years. He learned early that the path of life could be bumpy. The winter at Fort Seminoe was a great hardship for him, one of the experiences that might have caused him to reflect: "We must [not] expect everything to run smooth."[92]

Looking toward Martin's Cove

Martin's Cove

Edward Martin

One afternoon while the company was camped at Martin's Cove, Captain Edward Martin and two or three others started toward the fort at Devil's Gate, a distance of about two and a half miles. Soon after they left, a fierce snowstorm began. In the swirling snow, the men lost their bearings and wandered around for several hours. They became so wet and cold that their lives were in danger, so they stopped to make a fire to warm themselves. After repeatedly failing to get a fire started with wet twigs, in desperation they tore pieces from their clothes to add to the kindling. They finally started a fire with their last match. Fortunately some people in the handcart camp saw the fire, only a half mile away. Some of the rescuers went and brought the men back to camp, having to carry Edward Martin because he was so exhausted. Were it not for the vigilance of people in the camp, Edward Martin and the others who were lost might have perished.[93]

Peter McBride

Six-year-old Peter McBride was the youngest son of Robert and Margaret McBride. He had two older brothers and two sisters. His father had died after the last crossing of the Platte River, on a night when as many as 13 people died after being battered by the first winter storm. Fatherless, the McBride family pushed on.

While the Martin company was in Martin's Cove, Peter and other children received only two ounces of flour a day. In the account Peter later wrote of those days, he said it was hard to forget the hunger when everyone was on starvation rations. One day someone gave him a bone from a dead ox. He cut off the skin and began roasting the bone in the fire, but some older boys took it away. Left with only the skin,

he boiled it, drank the soup, and ate the skin. "It was a good supper," he recalled.[94]

The winds were ferocious the first night in the cove, flattening many tents, including the McBrides' tent. Everyone but Peter crawled out and found other places to bed down for the night. Peter remained in the tent and later said he "slept warm all night." The snow on top of the collapsed tent may have insulated him from the colder air. In the morning he heard someone ask, "How many are dead in this tent?" His older sister said, "Well, my little brother must be frozen to death in that tent." The tent was jerked loose from the snow, uncovering Peter. "I picked myself up," he later wrote, "and came out quite alive, to their surprise."[95]

Peter later became a talented musician, and he shared this talent throughout his life. He also served in a bishopric in Arizona for 20 years.

Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson Kingsford

The oldest of 11 children, Elizabeth Horrocks was born in Macclesfield, England. She began working in a silk factory when she was only 7 years old. Her family joined the Church in 1841, when she was 15. She married Aaron Jackson in 1848.

Elizabeth and Aaron had three children when they left England to gather to Zion in 1856. Elizabeth's 19-year-old sister, Mary, was in the Martin handcart company with them. Soon after the last crossing of the Platte River, in present-day Casper, Wyoming, Aaron Jackson died, leaving Elizabeth a widow. Her memoirs are especially poignant about this time. "I will not attempt to describe my feelings at finding myself left a widow with three children, under such excruciating circumstances," she wrote. "But I believe . . . that my sufferings for the Gospel's sake will be sanctified unto me for my good." Expressing her testimony of God's goodness in her time of trial, she wrote:

> *My sister Mary was the only relative I had to whom I could look for assistance in this trying ordeal, and she was sick. . . . I could therefore appeal to the Lord alone, he who had promised to be a husband to the widow, and father to the fatherless. I appealed to him and he came to my aid.*[96]

Elizabeth and her three young children survived the journey. They went to Ogden to live with Elizabeth's brother, Samuel Horrocks. There Elizabeth became acquainted with William R. Kingsford, a widower, and they were married in July 1857. She became a successful businesswoman in Ogden and was a diligent worker in the Relief Society.

Amy Loader

Amy and James Loader and six of their children, ages 9 to 28, left England in November 1855. After arriving in New York, they learned that they would be expected to travel to Salt Lake City in a handcart company rather than by wagon. At first they were greatly troubled by this. Nevertheless, they went to Iowa City and joined the Martin company. One of their married daughters, Zilpah Loader Jaques, also traveled in this company with her husband and young family.

During the journey across Iowa, James Loader's health began to fail. Many days he was unable to pull the cart, so Amy and the older daughters shouldered much of the work. During the journey across Nebraska, James continued to weaken and died before reaching Chimney Rock. He had so wanted to reach the Salt Lake Valley to see his daughter Ann, who had emigrated the previous year.

Despite being grieved by her husband's death, Amy Loader did everything possible to help her children survive. She frantically called for men to help her daughters when they were in danger during the last crossing of the Platte River. She also shared her own meager clothing to warm her children when they were freezing.

One bitterly cold morning in Martin's Cove, Amy tried to get her daughters to arise and start a fire. "Come, Patience, get up and make us a fire," she called.[97] It was cold, and Patience (age 29) wasn't feeling well, so she said she couldn't get up.

Amy then asked her daughters Tamar (age 23) and Maria (age 19) to arise and make a fire, but they said it was too cold and they didn't feel well. Amy worried that her daughters were getting discouraged and giving up. Others in the company were feeling like it was easier to die than to live.

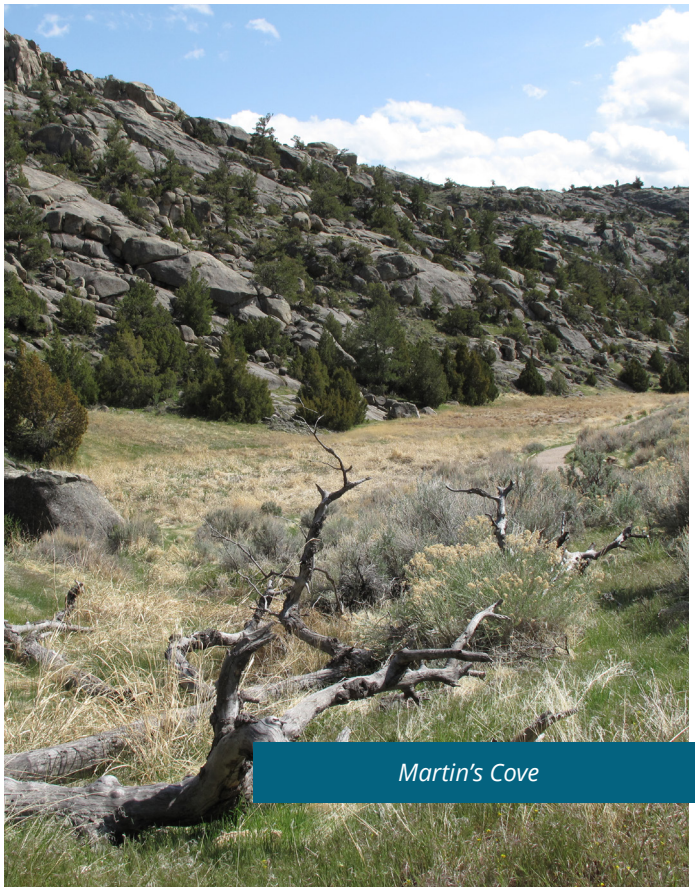
Amy Loader needed to do something to get her daughters moving—something to put the snap of life back into them—so she got up and began dancing and singing. Before long, she slipped on the snow and fell. Afraid that she was hurt, her daughters all jumped up. Seeing them come to her rescue, Amy laughed and said, "I thought I could soon make you all jump up if I danced." The girls then realized that their mother had fallen down on purpose. "She knew we would all get up to see if she was hurt," Patience said. "She said that she was afraid her girls were going to give out and get discouraged." Amy told her daughters that it "would never do to give up."[98]

Amy's grit and determination that morning reinvigorated her children. Having the right attitude—keeping faith and hope that they would make it—was important in staying alive. Amy tried to impart that to her children. They recognized that their mother was a strong woman and that this terrible journey had made her even stronger. She had been in delicate health when they lived in England, unable to walk a mile without tiring. Now she was their strength—in body, mind, and heart. "My dear mother had kept up wonderful all through the journey," declared Patience.[99] Amy Loader and her six children who traveled with her all survived. She lived to be 83.

James Bleak

James Bleak joined the Church in 1851 and became president of the Whitechapel Branch in the London Conference in 1854. He and his wife, Elizabeth, wanted to emigrate, and they had saved enough money to purchase a wagon for their family. But when the handcart plan was announced, Church leaders asked those who planned to purchase wagons to consider traveling by handcart and allow the extra money to be used to help others emigrate. Despite having four young children, James and Elizabeth made the sacrifice of giving up their wagon for a handcart.

The Bleak family endured many trials during the handcart journey. While crossing Nebraska, James became so sick that one day he had to be pulled in a handcart. "Francis Webster very kindly persuaded me to get on his handcart and drew me 17 miles," he wrote, and "Elder Hunter and the two sisters Brown very kindly drew me about 4 miles."[100] Weeks later, after a cold night, five-year-old Thomas Bleak appeared to have died. James anointed him with consecrated oil and gave him a blessing, and he revived.[101]



Martin's Cove

During the trying days in Martin's Cove, the daily flour rations were reduced to four ounces for adults and two ounces for children—a total of one pound a day for the six members of the Bleak family. With so little food, James Bleak's concern for the welfare of his young children could have been overwhelming. However, when writing in his journal about that

first day in the cove, James recognized God's hand in bringing them peace when they had so little to eat: "Through the blessing of our Father, we felt as contented as when we had 1 lb. per head."[102]

James, Elizabeth, and their four young children all survived the journey. They were later called to help settle St. George, Utah, where James and Elizabeth fulfilled many Church and civic responsibilities. They both worked extensively in the St. George Temple, with James serving as temple recorder for more than 20 years. He also served a mission to England.

Jane Bailey

When the way opened to gather to Zion, John and Jane Bailey sold all their possessions. With their four sons, they left England with great hope, filled with faith that God would see them all safely to Zion. Their oldest son, Langley (age 18), became sick on the journey across Iowa and had to be carried in a handcart. When they reached Florence, a doctor told the family that Langley's condition was too serious for them to continue. Jane Bailey had great faith and believed that God could heal her son, so she asked Elder Franklin D. Richards to give him a blessing. Langley was hardly conscious, but Elder Richards promised that he would live to reach the Salt Lake Valley.

When the Martin company left Florence, Langley was still riding in a handcart, pulled by his younger brother, John (age 15), and Isaac Wardle (age 21). Early one day, Langley could no longer bear the thought of being such a burden. He started out before the others and lay down under some sagebrush, hoping no one would see him. "I stretched out to die," he said.[103] But when his family's cart started past, he was prompted to jump up. His mother saw him and asked what was wrong. When he confided that he wanted to die, she scolded him and reminded him of the promise given by Elder Richards. This helped Langley deal with his discouragement, and he climbed back in the cart.

Weeks later, when the company was camped in Martin's Cove, Langley's father went looking for firewood. In his weakened condition, even the smallest exertion taxed him greatly. He returned with some brush and was so exhausted and cold that he lay down and told Jane he was going to die. As Langley later wrote, "It was not any trouble to die." But Jane wouldn't allow anyone in her family to give up. She shook her husband and told him, with forceful determination, that she was "going on to the Valley." This roused him from his torpor, and "he then gave up dying."[104] With conviction, tenacity, and faith, Jane Bailey willed her husband and son to carry on when they wanted to give up.

All members of the Bailey family survived. After arriving in Utah, they first went to Nephi and then helped settle Moroni. Jane was the first schoolteacher in Moroni and also the first Relief Society president, serving for 25 years.

Sarah Jones

Sarah Jones was widowed in 1832 and remarried in 1836. She and her second husband had two sons, Samuel and Albert. Although the boys remembered their father as attentive and kind, he was an alcoholic. This was a trial, and the marriage ended.

During this challenging time, one of Sarah's sons from her first marriage introduced her to the gospel. She was converted and shared the gospel message with Samuel and Albert, who also embraced it. They felt a strong desire to gather to Zion, so at age 55, Sarah left England as a single mother with two teenage sons.

While the company was camped in Martin's Cove, there was little to eat. But even in their extremity, people reached out to help each other in acts of charity. William Spicer and his wife were traveling in the Hunt wagon company. William had helped many members of the Martin company cross the Platte River on the bitter afternoon of October 19.[105] When the Hunt company reached Fort Seminoe, William Spicer visited the handcart camp in Martin's Cove. He looked in the tent door of the Jones family just as they were starting to eat their scanty meal. Sarah procured another cup for their guest and asked her children to take a little from each of their cups to share with him. "Not many mothers could or

Sweetwater River near Martin's Cove

would do that," William Spicer gratefully remembered many years later. "I was hungry and am ever thankful."[106]

Sarah Jones was filled with love and charity for all. "God bless her," Albert later wrote. "[She was] kind, gentle, and loving always, throughout all the vicissitudes of her eventful life."[107]

Cyrus Wheelock (Rescuer)

From the time he joined the Church in 1839, Cyrus Wheelock was willing to do his part—whether it was leaving his family to serve a mission, leading a company of Saints across the plains, or helping rescue the handcart companies. He was a selfless soul.

The few of his journals that have been preserved show his reliance on divine help and his unending concern for others. When embarking on a mission to England in 1849, he wrote, "Heaven only knows how long or what is to be our future lot, but we feel to put our trust in him who has ever been our faithful & undeviating friend." He anchored his faith in God, continuing, "He can give us comfort in every time of trouble; he can shield us from the raging and fearful blast."[108]

During that mission, Cyrus Wheelock wrote the text of the hymn "Ye Elders of Israel." Several years later, the third verse would have special meaning as Cyrus helped rescue the handcart pioneers:

> *We'll go to the poor, like our Captain of old,*
> *And visit the weary, the hungry, and cold;*
> *We'll cheer up their hearts with the news that he bore*
> *And point them to Zion and life evermore.*[109]

In 1856, Cyrus Wheelock was returning home after serving another mission to England. He traveled across the plains with Elder Franklin D. Richards's group, which arrived in

Salt Lake City in early October and reported that late companies were still on the trail. The next day, Brigham Young made an urgent call to rescue these Saints. Cyrus joined the first rescue company and left Salt Lake City only three days after returning from his mission.

During the rescue, Cyrus Wheelock was one of the four express riders who first reached the Willie company, bringing news that help and provisions were nearby. A little more than two weeks later, after the rescuers had found the Martin company and helped them move to the shelter of Martin's Cove, Cyrus Wheelock offered a remarkable prayer in a camp meeting. Josiah Rogerson recalled:

> *Raising his hands to heaven in a very impressive and appealing manner, his voice nearly stifled with emotion and grief, he prayed to the Father that if for any fault or weakness that he might have done or committed in his life and ministry, the progress of the members of our company that he loved dearer than his own life was impeded; that if through anything he had done or left undone he had caused or helped to cause, or bring about our present plight, that [God] would instantly remove him out of the way by death, and let the company go on without further loss, to the valleys of the mountains.*[110]

John Jaques also wrote about this prayer, recalling that Cyrus Wheelock shed tears and "declared that he would willingly give his own life if that would save the lives of the emigrants."[111] Josiah Rogerson said that Cyrus Wheelock's prayer was "touching and deep in its humility."[112] It was a measure of a man who would do all in his power, including giving up his own life if required, to save others.

Sweetwater River Crossing

Patience Loader

Patience Loader said that while the Martin company camped for two nights at Devil's Gate, it was "reported around camp that we would not have to pull our handcarts any further. . . . This was delightful news to us."[113] Patience was disappointed, however, when she learned that there weren't enough wagons to carry everyone from Devil's Gate to Martin's Cove, about two and a half miles. Only the people who were too sick or weak to pull their handcarts would be able to ride in wagons.

They set out from the camp at Devil's Gate, taking a course directly west. Soon afterward, the route crossed a small creek. Even though it was small, Patience Loader could hardly bear the thought of pulling her cart across it and broke down crying on the bank. "I could not keep my tears back," she said.[114] Embarrassed to have the rescuers see her crying, she pulled her bonnet over her face. One of the rescuers helped Patience and her sisters across the creek by pulling their cart. Then they fell in line, following slowly behind the ox-drawn wagons that were breaking trail through the snow.

Getting to the protection of the cove required crossing the Sweetwater River. The rescuers chose a crossing place perhaps as far as two miles west of Fort Seminoe. The river was two to three feet deep in most places and 30 to 40 yards wide. The ice was three or four inches thick.[115] The wagons that hauled the tents and provisions were the first to ford the river and broke the ice in crossing. Men from the rescue company were standing at the bank, ready to help people across. Most of the women and children, as well as the weaker men, were ferried across in wagons or carried across by rescuers. The rescuers also helped pull the handcarts of some of the able-bodied men who crossed the river on their own.

These rescuers gave selfless service in time of great need. When Patience Loader's mother, Amy, tried to thank them for taking her and her children across the river, one of them said, "I don't want any of that."[116] Kind words, expressions of gratitude, and even recognition may have been dismissed as unnecessary by these brave, sometimes rough men. People needed help badly, and the rescuers were there to help. It was a simple matter. "We have come to help you," the rescuer told Amy Loader.[117]

After arriving in Utah, Patience Loader married and had four children. She was a hard worker and served diligently in many Church callings. She passed away in Pleasant Grove, Utah, in 1921 at the age of 93.

Helped across the River

"We moved from the fort and located the camp in a small ravine on the north side of the Sweetwater. We experienced a good deal of difficulty in crossing the river, it being most intensely cold. After I had crossed, I again went in the stream and assisted Bros. S. S. and Albert Jones out of the water, they being fast in the bed of the river and perfectly discouraged so that they could not pull an ounce. Several of the Valley brethren whose names I did not know labored diligently for hours in carrying the women and children over the stream."

—William Binder of the Martin company
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Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Database

The Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Database contains more than 50,000 names of pioneers that are linked to year of travel or company, as well as excerpts transcribed from more than 3,000 Mormon Trail narratives. You can access it at history.lds.org/overlandtravels.

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