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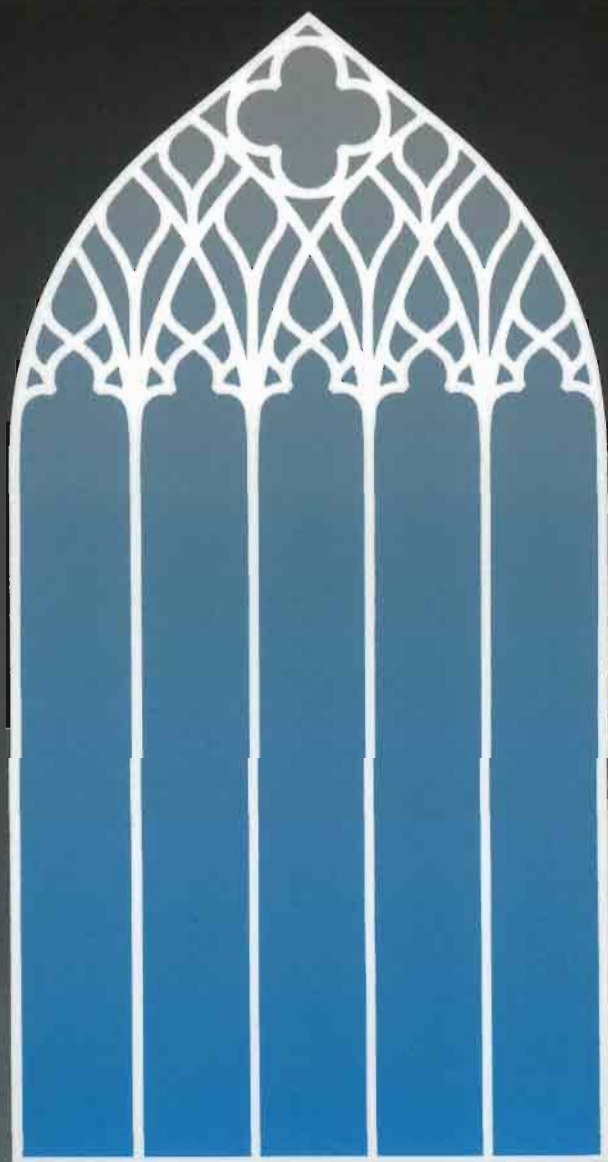
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William G. Hartley

BRIGHAM YOUNG'S OVERLAND TRAILS REVOLUTION: THE CREATION OF THE "DOWN-AND-BACK" WAGON-TRAIN SYSTEM, 1860-61

William G. Hartley

IN LATE APRIL 1861 four LDS Church team trains consisting of some 200 wagons and 1600 oxen, hauling 136,000 pounds of flour, rolled out of the Salt Lake Valley and headed east for Florence, Nebraska. These were wagons and teams on loan, to be returned when they came back to Utah that fall bringing Mormon immigrants. Manning the trains were about 210 volunteer teamsters and guards. These trains traveled 1,000 miles through spring mud and rains and normal trail circumstances, deposited one-fourth of their flour at each of four stations along the way, and reached the Missouri River Valley by late June. There they loaded up immigrants too poor to buy outfits and conveyed them back to Utah. These "down-and-back" wagon trains—down to Florence and back to Utah—operated at practically no actual cash costs to the Church. The next year, the number of wagons sent from Utah nearly doubled. During the 1860s, Church team trains became the

WILLIAM G. HARTLEY {wgh@byu.edu} is an associate professor of history and research at Brigham Young University's Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History.

primary wagon trains carrying Saints to Zion, all but eliminating independent wagon trains. About 20,000 LDS immigrants traveled to Utah during the 1860s, most coming by Church team trains.¹

The 1861 down-and-back Church trains signaled a revolution in how immigrants, Mormons or not, crossed the plains. The history of the overland trails from 1843 to 1868—the California Trail, Santa Fe Trail, Oregon Trail, and Mormon Trail—has very few turning points in terms of *how* people traveled the routes. Trail routes shifted, true, and trails year by year saw improvements and increasing services along the way. But little changed in terms of how people transported themselves west. An estimated 300,000 people went west on the Oregon and California trails, while some 60,000 to 70,000 Mormons took the Mormon trails to Utah between 1847 and 1868.² Almost all of these nearly 400,000 people journeyed west in wagons and teams that they already owned or had purchased themselves or as partners, or paid to ride with those who had such wagons.

By the late 1850s, stage coaches offered a literal change of pace but provided passage to a paltry percentage of all who went west. Certainly the Mormon handcart system was revolutionary and even was employed in 1859 by at least one company of Pike's Peak gold seekers.³ But even bolder than the handcart system, Brigham Young's system of down-and-back wagon trains was a remarkable innovation in the history of overland trail travel and of Mormon migration during the 1860s.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

To show the magnitude of this new operation and to appreciate its complexities and brilliance, I focus on the origins of the down-and-back idea, when it was first formulated, how it was introduced and tested, and how the system of using wagons and oxen from Utah, on loan, was fully implemented. Put simply, this paper presents the history of the creation and launching of the down-and-back wagon-train system that came to characterize LDS emigration during the

¹Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 283.

²Stanley B. Kimball, *Historic Resource Study; Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Interior/National Park Service, 1991), 4.

³"A Handcart Train," *Omaha Times*, 6 February 1859, 2.

1860s. The title of this paper contains three carefully chosen elements—"Brigham Young," "Overland Trails," and "Revolution," each of which needs introductory comments before we examine the creation of the down-and-back system.

Brigham Young: America's Leading Emigration Promoter

Scholars and media people credit Brigham Young for numerous achievements and involvements, good or ill, that occurred during his watch at the helm of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1844-77). Linked tightly to his name are such designations as Church president and prophet, leader of the 1847 pioneers, colonizer, territorial governor, Indian agent, enterprise promoter and developer, husband, and father. One title, however, is conspicuously missing. Despite his identification as "Brigham Young the Colonizer," American and even Mormon historians fail to give him credit as American's premier immigration promoter.⁴ Katherine Copman, in her 1921 economic history of the American West, judged Mormon immigration to be "the most successful example of regulated immigration in United States history,"⁵ yet the section on "Immigration and Minorities" in the New York Public Library's American History Desk Reference (89-128), says not a word about Mormon immigration. The record speaks for itself: In the annals of American history, no person presided over the mass movement of more people than did Brigham Young.⁶ In addition to the 60,000 or more who reached Utah by sail, train, wagon, and handcart during his administration, thousands more came in organized companies by steamships and the transcontinental railroad during the eight years prior to his death. For more than thirty years, he oversaw a pragmatic and

⁴Preston Nibley, *Brigham Young: The Man and His Work* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1937); Francis M. Gibbons, *Brigham Young: Modern Moses, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981); Arrington, *American Moses*.

⁵Katherine Copman, *Economic Beginnings of the Far West: How We Won the Land Beyond the Mississippi*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 2:184.

⁶The term *emigrant* was used throughout the nineteenth century for anyone who was moving to a different country to become its resident. However, *immigrant* had been coined in 1789 to differentiate one entering a country in contrast to an *emigrant* who was leaving a country. This paper observes that distinction except in quotations.

successful system that hired agents, chartered at least 127 sailing ships, engaged riverboats and trains, purchased wagons and live-stock wholesale, and organized 329 wagon trains. During the 1860s alone, forty-eight Church down-and-back trains made the two-thousand-mile round trip.⁷

Although the overall contribution of LDS migration to the U.S. emigration story goes mostly unheralded, most specific aspects of the Mormon migrations have received scholarly attention. We know a good deal about the mass relocation of Saints from the Nauvoo area to Utah, the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, and the handcart system, and have a few studies of aspects of the down-and-back wagon-train system.⁸ This literature, written mostly by Mormons, acknowledges that Young played a role in mass migration but not straightforward recognition of just how unique a role he played. For example, the recently published *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* comments with a vague passive verb: "A viable program of immigration was instituted for the tens of thousands of converts who were transplanted to the Great Basin in response to the doctrine of the gathering."⁹

⁷For a list of individual wagon companies and their numbers of people and wagons, see *Deseret News 1977 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1996), 278-92; and *Deseret News 1997-98 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1996), 278-92. The ship list is in this second source, 159-67.

⁸"Perpetual Emigrating Fund" and "handcart" form individual subject headings in James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker, *Studies in Mormon History, 1830-1997: An Indexed Bibliography with a Topical Guide to Published Social Science Literature on the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 839, 674. On down-and-back trains, see John K. Hulmston, "Transplain Migration: The Church Trains in Mormon Immigration, 1861-1868" (M.A. thesis, Utah State University, 1985), 985, and my articles: "The Great Florence Fitout of 1861," *BYU Studies* 24 (Summer 1984): 341-71; "Diary of a Teenage Driver: Zeb Jacobs on the Mormon Trail," *New Era* 14 (July 1984): 8-11; "Down and Back' Wagon Trains: Bringing the Saints to Utah in 1861," *Ensign* 15 (September 1985): 26-31; "Down-and-Back Wagon Trains: Travelers on the Mormon Trail in 1861," *Overland Journal* 11, no. 4 (1993): 23-34.

⁹Leonard J. Arrington and Larry C. Porter, "Brigham Young," *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, edited by Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q.

The Overland Trails

Most leading studies of Overland Trail migration end with 1860, thus ignoring nine years prior to the transcontinental railroad. George Stewart's *The California Trail*, the best one-volume history of that subject, devotes one chapter to each year of trail travel during the 1840s, a concluding chapter for the entire 1850s, and nothing on the 1860s. John Unruh's prize-winning book, *The Plains Across* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), chides Stewart and others for slighting the 1850s and 1860s, then concentrates his own study on the 1850s, likewise stopping at 1860. LDS Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jenson published a twenty-three-part series called "Church Emigration" in the *Contributor* (September 1891-September 1893), which included an essay about every year's travel—identifying and recording details about every LDS chartered ship's company and Atlantic voyages, and every wagon train which ran every year. But, inexplicably, Jenson, too, terminated his study with the year 1860.¹⁰

Three factors perhaps explain the neglect of 1860s trail travel. First, by 1860 wagon-train travel seemed to be just more of the same over well-traveled routes. Stewart claimed that, by 1860, the trails had achieved the status of "roads."¹¹ America's Civil War became the significant story of the 1860s, shifting historians' interest to the East. Also, the 1860s volume of travelers going to California and Oregon apparently fell to a trickle, making that decade more like a postscript than a solid story. Merrill Mattes's monumental bibliography of trail diaries lists 339 accounts for the 1860s, compared to 1,040 for the 1850s. Nevertheless, when Mattes factors in the Colorado and Montana gold rushes between 1861 and 1866, he estimates that some 135,000 travelers (averaging 22,000 a year) used the western trails in that half-decade.¹² In contrast, the 1860s were a vital and

Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 1378.

¹⁰Slight trail travel, mainly to Oregon or Montana, continued after the transcontinental railroad opened in 1869. Kenneth L. Holmes, ed., *Covered Wagon Women, Vol. 10: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1875-1883* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

¹¹George Stewart, *The California Trail* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 318.

¹²Merrill J. Mattes, *The Great Platte River Road* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 23.

dramatic decade for Mormon Trail activity, accounting for approximately one-third of total emigration to Zion. The trek was slightly easier then because the roads were better and more settlements had been founded along the way. But it was still a monumental journey for men, women, children, oxen, and wagons, a journey comparable in cost, time, labor, and endurance to travel in the 1850s.

REVOLUTION

History seems to capitalize on important beginnings, key turning points, and highlighted events. In the history of the overland trails, standard histories identify 1843, when the "Great Migration" to Oregon took place, as such a key moment; followed by 1846, which, among other events, included the Donner Party tragedy; the California gold rush of 1849; and 1852, which saw the largest overland traffic ever. Historians give due attention to the beginnings of the overland stagecoach lines and the dramatic Pony Express saga. They note new routes, new posts and supply stations, and peak years for Native American attacks. But until the railroad in 1869, there were few innovations in wagon design or draft animals.

Historians of overland trails do not ignore the innovation represented by Mormon handcarts, although they relish the Martin and Willie disasters and evidence scant understanding of handcart advantages. To my knowledge, however, only one scholar, John Hulmston, has focused on the down-and-back trains, a truly innovative system that the Church experimented with in 1860, implemented in 1861, and used from then until the railroad reached Promontory Summit in 1869. Hulmston calls it "an unprecedented occurrence in the field of nineteenth century transportation," and "an extremely important breakthrough."¹³ I call it revolutionary.

¹³Hulmston, "Transplain Migration," iv-v. John D. Unruh Jr., "Against the Grain: West to East on the Overland Trail," *Kansas Quarterly* 5 (Spring 1973): 72-84, focuses on "turnarounds": (1) either companies or individuals who called it quits partway west and (2) back-traffic from the California goldfields. He found reports that about twelve hundred were planning to return in 1853 and six hundred to a thousand in 1855. He cites Brigham Young as his authority for approximately three to four hundred eastbound overlanders on the trails in 1857; however, he does not mention the Mormon down-and-back trains of the 1860s.

MOTIVATIONS FOR CREATING THE DOWN-AND-BACK SYSTEM

The confluence of several elements produced the well-run down-and-back system. Most important were three decades of the Church's commitment to its poor members.¹⁴ The Doctrine and Covenants is peppered with commands and warnings: "Look to the poor and needy, and administer to their relief that they shall not suffer" (LDS D&C 38:35). "Thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support" (42:30-31, 34, 39). "Ye must visit the poor and needy and administer to their relief" (44:6). "Remember in all things the poor and needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple" (52:40). God is displeased with those who "do not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted" (105:3). "The widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor" (83:6). "The bishop . . . also should travel round about and among all the churches; searching after the poor to administer to their wants by humbling the rich and the proud" (84:112). "Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment" (104:18).

Second, the Church had already provided or sent wagons to help those in need. Joseph Young, Brigham's brother, had directed the first mass movement of the needy as president of the Seventies; this was the Kirtland Camp, which moved to Missouri in 1838.¹⁵ Next, during the winter of 1838-39 when the Saints were expelled from Missouri, several hundred members at Far West covenanted to help all Saints leave the state. Working with Brigham Young, the presiding authority while Joseph Smith was in Liberty Jail, a Committee of Removal enlisted members' wagons to aid the needy. A number of the covenanters reached the Mississippi River near Quincy, Illinois, left their families there, and drove two hundred miles back to Far West to rescue others who lacked transportation.¹⁶

¹⁴William G. Hartley, "How Shall I Gather?" *Ensign* 27 (October 1997): 5-17.

¹⁵Church Education System, *Church History in the Fulness of Times* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 178-79.

¹⁶William G. Hartley, "'Almost Too Intolerable a Burthen': The

A third application of this mutual-aid principle came six years later. When Illinois vigilantes burned more than a hundred buildings owned by Mormons in Morley's Settlement twenty-seven miles south of Nauvoo, the Saints sent empty wagons down to move the victims into Nauvoo.

Thus, it is not surprising that the Saints attending the October 1845 conference covenanted in the temple to help everyone who needed assistance to move west. This "Nauvoo pledge" drove efforts for the next six years to transport those without adequate outfits. During the fall 1846 exodus from Nauvoo, three rescue teams went from Council Bluffs and Garden Grove to the poor camps, picked up the needy, and moved them to Mormon encampments farther west in Iowa.¹⁷

According to P. A. M. Taylor, Brigham Young planned for teams to intercept 1848 immigrants at Fort Laramie and take them over the Wyoming leg while the "original teams returned to the Missouri before winter." Taylor continues: "This was not put fully into practice; but aid was sent over shorter distances." During many immigrating seasons, teams went from the Salt Lake Valley to help trail-weary companies during the last hundred or two hundred miles of their journey.¹⁸

Another effort was the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, created in 1849, to loan money and extend credits to Zion-bound Saints. Donations allowed the Church to organize its first PEF wagon company in 1850. As planned, Bishop Edward Hunter carried five thousand dollars to Kanessville, Iowa, where he bought teams of oxen and cattle, and, where necessary, wagons, then captained the train back to Utah where the PEF livestock was sold for cash. By that fall, after a single trip, the PEF had nearly twenty thousand dollars to work

Winter Exodus from Missouri, 1838-1839," *Journal of Mormon History* 18 (Fall 1992): 6-40.

¹⁷Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846-1852: "And Should We Die"* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 82-84. Bennett identifies two rescue companies, both from the Council Bluffs area, but a third rescue company also left from Garden Grove. *Journal of Luman Andros Shurtliff, 1807-1884* (N.p., n.d.), 69.

¹⁸P. A. M. Taylor, *Expectations Westward: The Mormons and the Emigration of Their British Converts in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), 138.

with.¹⁹ By late 1852 “all the exiles from Nauvoo who wished to come had been removed to Zion,” which meant that “the obligations of the Nauvoo pledge had been faithfully discharged.”²⁰ Closing the Nauvoo door, however, opened the European portals. Between 1852 and 1856, the PEF expended £125,000 in emigrating the “poor saints” from Europe to Salt Lake Valley.²¹

“Gathering” the poor, however, was the Church’s most costly program during the early 1850s. The PEF could not work unless the Saints repaid their loans; but scratching out a living proved to be such a challenge, especially exacerbated by drought and famine during 1855, that the PEF “realized very little from repayments.”²² By early 1855, the fund was depleted.²³

Faced with the Church’s inability to provide expensive wagons pulled by expensive oxen, Brigham Young proposed the creation of handcart brigades.²⁴ During 1856, five separate handcart companies reached Utah. The first three made the trip without undue hardship. The last two, the Martin and Willie companies, suffered many deaths—about two hundred out of twelve hundred—because they started too late, were caught by a series of blizzards in Wyoming, and took almost double the number as the earlier

¹⁹Fourth General Epistle of the First Presidency, 17 September 1850, in James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833-1964*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-75), 2:61. Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (1958; reprinted Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 100, provides an illuminating vignette of PEF fund-raising in one northern Utah community: Block teachers solicited contributions from each family in the ward, with the following results: \$66 in cash, \$58 in produce, \$50 in “store pay,” \$2.50 in corn, 26 bushels of wheat, 10 dozen eggs, and 3 3/4 pounds of butter. Four families gave nothing, two because they were “too poor,” and two because they were “too mean.”

²⁰Gustive O. Larson, *Prelude to the Kingdom* (Francestown, NH: Marshall Jones, 1947), 113.

²¹*Ibid.*, 99.

²²Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 101.

²³Twelfth General Epistle of the Presidency, 25 April 1855, in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 2:168.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 2:185-86.

companies. The Utah Saints again sent rescuing wagon trains into Wyoming.²⁵

Despite the costly miscalculation, the First Presidency still reported that “the enterprise, having proved so eminently successful, will in the future enter largely into all our emigrating operations,” but with several adjustments and improvements.²⁶ Between 1857 and 1860, LDS agents sent another five handcart companies west. The ten handcart brigades brought some three thousand Saints to Utah.²⁷

As part of modifying the handcart system, Young launched the Brigham Young Express and Carrying Company, or BYX Company. When Utahn Hiram Kimball won a lucrative government mail contract for the route between Independence, Missouri, and Salt Lake City—essentially for the Church—Young arranged heavy investments in wagons and teams, and planned to establish new settlements in key locations along the Mormon Trail. To implement the plan, in 1856 Kimball selected five sites of 640 acres each for five new mail stations along a 250-mile segment of the trail in mountainous central Wyoming that was difficult for wagon trains.²⁸ By early 1857, square mile villages, with farms, shops, storehouses, and corrals were under construction, and teamsters and settlers were assigned. In addition

²⁵Rebecca Foster Cornwall and Leonard J. Arrington, *Rescue of the 1856 Handcart Companies* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1981); LeRoy R. and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* (Glendale, Cal.: Arthur H. Clark, 1960), 119-42.

²⁶Fourteenth General Epistle of the Presidency, 10 December 1856, in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 2:198.

²⁷In addition another 5,200 immigrants paid for their own way with wagon trains. (Even those traveling in wagon trains generally walked most of the way to Utah.)

²⁸Fort Laramie, eighty-five miles northeast of present-day Laramie, Wyoming, was considered the halfway mark on the Mormon Trail, being 522 miles from Winter Quarters (Florence, Nebraska), and 509 miles from Salt Lake City. The five locations were Horse Shoe Creek (43 miles from Laramie), La Bonte River (another 18 miles), Deer Creek (another 37 miles), and Rocky Ridge (152 miles from Deer Creek). See locations and mileages in William Clayton, *The Latter-day Saints' Emigrants' Guide*, edited by Stanley B. Kimball (St. Louis, Mo.: Republican Steam Power Press, 1848; reprinted St. Louis: Patrice Press, 1983), 12-16.

to providing services for the express companies, they would also service the handcart travelers.

It was an ambitious but not over-optimistic project—until word leaked out that Johnston’s army was coming west to repress the Mormons and that Kimball’s mail contract was being voided. By then nearly every Mormon village had sent men to assist in the enterprise, and Utahns had contributed \$100,000 (nearly \$2 million in contemporary terms). On 12 August 1857, Young issued the order to “break up” (dismantle) all Mormon stations between Laramie and Missouri and close those between Salt Lake City and Fort Laramie. Swiftly, the Mormons abandoned forts and farms, packed, and withdrew to Utah with all movable property and livestock. The net result was that an enormous outlay of labor and materials “was almost a complete loss.”²⁹

One of the casualties of the Utah War was LDS emigration. British Saints read Brigham Young’s order in October: “In view of the difficulties which are now threatening the Saints, we deem it wisdom to stop all emigration to the States and Utah for the present.”³⁰ Even after the Saints accepted the occupying army without bloodshed in the spring of 1858, emigration was slow to resume; and it was not until late 1858 that Brigham Young could again take up the matter of helping the poor gather to Zion; and even then, he was expressing his hope and guiding principle—not a plan:

We realize there are many worthy, faithful Saints who are poor and have not the means to emigrate to this place, and that they are exceedingly anxious to do so. Our desire and prayer is that the way may open before them, that the Lord will so order and direct affairs that they may be delivered from bondage and brought to an inheritance with his people. But the Lord’s will be done. . . . This we consider the duty of every Saint—to help the poor Saints to gather home to Zion.”³¹

The same issue of the *Millennial Star* that carried Young’s prayer also carried the lifting of the emigration ban for those who

²⁹Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 159-70; quotation is on 170.

³⁰“Emigration to the States Stopped for the Present,” *Millennial Star* 19 (17 October 1857): 668.

³¹“Correspondence: Brigham Young to Asa Calkin,” *Millennial Star* 21 (1 January 1859): 10.

“have means at their hand to gather to Zion.” The editor repeated, “No one will receive any help whatever from the P.E. Fund. The deliverance of the Saints depends entirely upon themselves.”³²

Costs remained high, pushing an urgent search for a new system. For the 1859 emigrating season, George Q. Cannon reported that railroad fare from New York City to Florence, Nebraska, was \$14.50, plus \$22.30 for handcart travel to Salt Lake City (at least \$1,300 for a family of four in contemporary dollars). Handcart materials, tents, and wagons had to be purchased with cash. In 1860, a Mormon elder told world traveler Sir Richard Burton that estimated trail costs were approximately \$500 for animals, equipment, and supplies—\$10,000 in contemporary dollars.³³

This costly sum, however, did not include travel expenses from Liverpool to Florence. In June 1860 the First Presidency estimated the following costs for one person: \$20 from Liverpool to New York and \$15 from New York to Florence.³⁴ Thus, a family of four would pay somewhere about \$2,100 in modern dollars to reach Florence and roughly \$12,000 to reach Salt Lake City.

The system was under pressure. The number of European converts continued to grow, but the poor fund was exhausted and the

³²“Emigration, *Millennial Star* 25 (1 January 1859): 8-9; Only 842 sailed that year. *1997-87 Church Almanac*, 162.

³³Sir Richard Burton, *City of the Saints and Across the Rocky Mountains to California* (Niwot, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 1950), 139, 85, 87. The specific costs were \$180-200 for two yoke of oxen, \$25 for a cow, \$87.30 for a wagon, \$8.50 for a doubled cover, \$8 for two ox yokes, \$1.50 for an ox chain, \$1 for a tar bucket, \$9-15 for two large tents, \$10 for camp equipment (“axes, spades, shovels, triangles for fires”), \$28 for a stove, \$25.50 for 600 pounds flour, \$14 for 100 pounds of ham and bacon, \$13.13 for 150 pounds of crackers (sea biscuits), \$9.50 for 100 pounds of sugar, \$3 for 25 pounds of crystallized sugar, \$4 for 24 pounds of raisins, \$3 for 20 pounds of currants, \$2.25 for 25 pounds of rice, \$6 for 1 bushel of dried apples, \$4.30 for a bushel of dried peaches, and \$2 for a bushel of beans.

³⁴Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Daniel H. Wells, Letter to Bishop Hunter and Counselors and Utah Bishops, June 1860, Brigham Young Letterbook 5, original at LDS Church Archives; typescript at Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, Provo, Utah (hereafter Smith Institute). Additional Brigham Young correspondence is cited by letterbook number from this typescript edition.

handcart system, although it continued until 1860, was not only unpopular but still too costly for mass movement. Faced with this crisis and under covenant to help the worthy poor, Brigham Young and his colleagues thought of the rescue wagon trains and originated the down-and-back system.

1859-60 TESTS OF THE SYSTEM

With the Utah War settled, Brigham Young planned to send a sizeable wagon train from Utah to Florence to haul freight during the summer of 1859. In early April, Young announced that some empty teams would start for Florence as soon as weather permitted. Stalled by snow on Big Mountain plus high water in Weber Canyon, the train could not leave until early May, although it was so small, Young lamented, that it would "not be able to do any but its own hauling."³⁵

This train belonged to Feramorz Little,³⁶ a thirty-nine-year-old partner in a freighting business with Charlie Decker, Brigham Young's brother-in-law. He believed it was possible to travel to the Missouri River and back in one season, cutting out the expense of buying cattle, wagons, and provisions on the eastern end. On 6 May, he and Decker departed at the head of a string of wagons pulled by sturdy mule teams.³⁷ With them Young sent the surveys of the Hiram Kimball's abandoned mail station sites and instructions for Horace Eldredge, Church agent in St. Louis, to keep them until some Church representative could file for title in Washington, D.C., or with the Department of Interior. (The effort to file was not successful.) Thirty-five days later, Little and Decker reached Florence, their mules in excellent condition. With a full load of merchandise, they returned on 1 September. Feramorz Little arrived with the small mule train.³⁸

³⁵Brigham Young, Letters to B. F. Johnson, Santaquin, 8 April 1859, to Asa Calkin, 28 April 1859, to J. W. Cloward, St. Louis, 28 April 1859, and to Joseph E. Johnson, Deer Creek Station or en route, 4 May 1859, all in Letterbook 5.

³⁶Taylor, *Expectations Westward*, 138.

³⁷Brigham Young, Letter to Horace S. Eldredge, St. Louis, 5 May 1859, Letterbook 5. No personnel roster has survived, but another Brigham Young letter mentions Daniel Davis, Allen Kelton, "and others." *Ibid.*, 6 May 1859.

³⁸Brigham Young, Letter to Asa Calkin, 1 September 1859, Letter-

Coincidentally that summer, a wagon train belonging to Horton Haight and Frederick Kesler, also hauling Church freight, tried out some new wagons produced by the Peter Schuttler company of Chicago. In August, Eldredge informed Young that the Schuttler firm's St. Louis branch had about 500 wagons on hand. Young inspected the wagons when Haight and Kesler reached Salt Lake City on 1 September and apparently liked what he saw, since two years later he was encouraging Utah bishops to buy these wagons and import them to Utah for daily use.³⁹

Three related problems, each caused by Utah's cash-poor situation, made Little's and Decker's experiment very interesting to Young: the high cost in cash of immigration, the high cash cost of buying imported freight, and a surplus of Utah cattle that could not be turned into cash locally. The PEF Company, even though it was not functioning, had inherited most of the BYX Company's animals. Also, when the U.S. Army pulled out of Utah in 1860-61 because of the Civil War, it sold an unknown number of oxen, horses, mules, and wagons to private citizens and the Church. The army's supplier, Russell, Majors, and Waddell, sold off 3,500 large freight wagons and large numbers of oxen and mules at bargain prices.⁴⁰ Simultaneously, the Colorado gold rush was forcing prices of wagons and animals up in the Mississippi River Valley, which meant that Utahns could command good prices for their oxen.⁴¹

The down-and-back wagon trains, therefore, could fill three purposes simultaneously: (1) bring poor immigrants west cheaply, (2) haul in freight that was not marked up by a middleman, and (3) sell or trade surplus Utah oxen and flour in the Midwest.⁴²

During the winter of 1859-60, Brigham Young considered two options. In January 1860, he sent word to Utah territorial delegate William H. Hooper (1859-61) to persuade a steamboat captain to take a riverboat up a tributary of the Missouri River—the Yellow-

book 5; Andrew Jenson, "Church Emigration," *Contributor* 14 (July 1843): 438.

³⁹Brigham Young, Letter to Peter Schuttler, Chicago, 1 September 1859, Letterbook 5.

⁴⁰Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 196.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 206.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 205-11.

stone, if possible—into Wyoming.⁴³ If boats could haul freight that far, Utah teams could meet them and return to Utah the same season. Although Young was still encouraging this plan as late as March, Hooper was unable to find a captain willing to risk his boat on this scheme.

Young's second plan was to send an ox-drawn wagon train of flour to Florence to bring back machinery and goods. It would be a test to see if the oxen held up as well as the mules.⁴⁴ It coincided with a plan that George Q. Cannon had suggested in January. If the Church wagon train deposited flour at intervals along the trail, the immigrants would not need to haul an entire trip's worth from the outfitting grounds.⁴⁵

On 29 March 1860, Young informed Hooper that his nephew, Joseph W. Young, would be leaving soon with the flour.⁴⁶ In fact, it was not until 27 April that Joseph Young left with thirty wagons, pulled by oxen and a few mules.⁴⁷ But even as he was plodding across the plains, the First Presidency was writing enthusiastically to Utah's bishops that the down-and-back plan "promises to be very beneficial."⁴⁸ After reminding the bishops of the high costs of immigration and freight, the First Presidency pointed out the advantages of hauling "with teams already in our possession without an outlay of money, which is so scarce." Obviously, the Church leaders assumed that Joseph Young's experiment would be successful, for they alerted the bishops that in 1861 a "much larger ox train" would be needed. The bishops should start planning to send 100 to 150 wagons with three or four yoke of oxen per wagon as soon as spring grass was

⁴³Brigham Young, Letters to William H. Hooper, 30 January 1860, 1 March 1860, Letterbook 5.

⁴⁴Brigham Young, Letter to William H. Hooper, 1 March 1860, Letterbook 5.

⁴⁵George Q. Cannon, Letter to Brigham Young, 18 January 1860, cited and discussed in Davis Bitton, *George Q. Cannon: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 100.

⁴⁶Young, Letter to William H. Hooper, 29 March 1860, Letterbook 5.

⁴⁷Brigham Young, Talk, 14 January 1861, Brigham Young Sermons, Typescript Vol. 1861, Smith Institute; original in LDS Church Archives.

⁴⁸Brigham Young, Letter to Edward Hunter and Utah Bishops, June 1860, Letterbook 5.

available. The bishops could also send surplus cattle back East in a herd to be sold, while Church emigration agents would buy the best quality of Chicago wagons—as Young was calling the Schettler design—for those who deposited purchase money with the Church Trustee in Trust.⁴⁹

It is not clear if Brigham Young received periodic progress reports about his nephew, who reached Florence on 1 July and waited twenty-three frustrating days for freight. Brigham Young's enthusiasm remained high. In August, he wrote to John Van Cott, then president of the Scandinavian Mission, calling the arrangement a "good policy" for 1861 emigration. Optimistically, he predicted that the trip back by the ox teams would "doubtless demonstrate the practicability and good policy of sending ox trains from here in the spring to deposit flour at suitable points on the way down, and freight back with the poor, and such articles as it may be advisable to import."⁵⁰ The next month, he again enthused: "We now propose sending an ox train from here again next spring, this season's operations in that line having proved so successful, as far as we have heard."⁵¹

Joseph Young reached Salt Lake City on 3 October 1860 with 50 wagons, 340 oxen, and 234 horses and mules. His pleased uncle publicly announced that "sending teams to the States proved entirely successful." In fact, "the teams were in far better condition than teams are generally that have only crossed the plains once."⁵² This trip was, in Hulmston's terms, the "foundation for the most successful period of immigration in [Mormon] history."⁵³

Based on Joseph Young's success, Brigham Young moved firmly forward, getting word to LDS immigration agents in the States

⁴⁹Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Daniel H. Wells, Letter to Bishop Hunter and Counselors and Utah Bishops, June 1860, Letterbook 5.

⁵⁰Brigham Young, Letter to John Van Cott, 9 August 1860, Letterbook 5.

⁵¹Brigham Young, Letter to Joseph E. Johnson, Wood River Center, Nebraska Territory, 27 September 1860, Letterbook 5.

⁵²Brigham Young, Talk, 14 January 1861, Brigham Young Sermons, Typescript Vol. 1861.

⁵³John K. Hulmston, "Mormon Immigration in the 1860s: The Story of the Church Trains," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 58 (Winter 1990): 28.

and in Europe, and recruiting through Utah ward bishops the requisite wagons and teams and teamsters needed by the next April. Greatly speeding up communication between Young and Hooper was the completion of telegraph lines to Fort Kearney, Nebraska, by November 1860 with Pony Express riders carrying letters between Utah and the telegraph station.⁵⁴

In previous seasons, Mormon wagon trains outfitted whenever enough passengers arrived to create one; but obviously for maximum efficiency, waiting time at the staging point needed to be reduced to the minimum. Young envisioned the entire process of moving people from Europe to Utah as one consecutive, unbroken journey, uninterrupted by layovers. On 20 December 1860, Young wrote Cannon, then serving as European Mission president: "I have thought it might be well to so time the sailing of companies, or at least a good portion of them, from Liverpool that they will reach Florence about the middle and last of June, in readiness to at once start over the plains, without tarrying at any one place for any length of time."⁵⁵

THINKING THROUGH THE PLAN, EARLY 1861

By early January, Brigham Young had worked out a detailed plan that was, according to Hulmston, "a model of ingenuity and practicality," especially in solving the enormous logistical problem of supplying thousands of immigrants with food at the right time and place.⁵⁶ The Church would give tithing credit to those who loaned wagons, donated provisions, volunteered to be teamsters or wagon-train personnel, or contributed flour for the periodic trail caches.

On 14 January 1861, Young met with bishops from Salt Lake City and those from outlying settlements who were in the city for the territorial legislative session. He described Joseph W. Young's

⁵⁴Young, Letter to Hooper, 20 December 1860, Letterbook 5. The Pony Express opened in April 1860. From Fort Kearney, riders could reach Salt Lake City in less than four days. Anthony Godfrey, *Historic Resource Study: Pony Express National Historic Trail* (Washington, D.C. Department of the Interior/National Park Service, 1994), 56, 64, 77-78, 92. The first coast-to-coast telegraph message was sent 26 October 1861.

⁵⁵Brigham Young, Letter to George Q. Cannon, 20 December 1860.

⁵⁶Hulmston, "Mormon Immigration in the 1860s," 43.

1860 round trip, described the problems that this new plan would solve, and explained: "Next season we wish to start a large train, or three or four of them, to go back to the Missouri River and bring home the poor of our people, and to bring also, goods, machinery, and anything that should be brought. Thirty teams and wagons went back last season, but we design the ensuing season to send back two hundred."⁵⁷

For example, Sanpete County needed to provide five wagons, each capable of hauling 3500 pounds, with at least four yoke of oxen per wagon. Wards could send as many additional wagons as they wanted to haul back goods and freight for ward members, but the quota wagons would haul only passengers. Settlements without wagons could send extra oxen, whose purchase price in the Mississippi Valley would pay for "new waggons brought from Chicago, which will cost only you ninety dollars or a hundred, and it will cost you nothing to bring them here. If you want cheaper wagons you can get one for fifty dollars." (Fifty dollars would be \$1,000 in today's figures.) Utah oxen that did not sell at the outfitting camp could be pastured on the prairie until agents Jacob Gates and Nathaniel V. Jones could sell them in St. Louis as draft animals or for meat. Thanks to the Pony Express, Young would be able to advise the agents exactly how many oxen would be coming with the various trains. By the same means, he could inform Church units throughout the East "that our teams are on hand to bear them to the gathering place, invite them to come up to Florence and we will bring them home as far as we have strength." (The Saints in Europe did not know about the plan.)

Those who provided teams, wagons, and supplies would receive labor tithing credited to the PEF, a genuine opportunity for those who owed the PEF to pay back their loans. "I do not suppose we have gathered one cent to a thousand dollars in money that we have paid out," acknowledged Young. He professed himself indifferent to how the trip was credited—regular tithing, labor tithing, PEF donation, property tithing. "Our object is to gather the people together and establish the Kingdom of God, we do not care how it works, but we want to keep the business portion of it straight so as to know where we are."

⁵⁷Brigham Young, Sermon, 14 January 1861, Brigham Young Sermons, Typescript Vol. 1861.

Young then assigned Presiding Bishop Edward Hunter to organize the quotas of oxen, wagons, and teamsters so that the first train could leave Salt Lake City by mid-April. Young stressed that teamsters should be responsible and careful, since they, not the Church, would be responsible for teams and wagons. Hunter was also responsible for determining the credit for hauling, although Young, not surprisingly, volunteered an opinion: six to ten cents per pound for hauling flour toward Florence and fifteen to twenty cents for hauling freight back toward Utah. Young also insisted that the trains be large enough so that if they “meet twenty or thirty cut throats, they can use them up and feed them to the wolves.”

The depth of Young’s relief at breaking the log-jam in the gathering must have been audible as he reminded the bishops of the Nauvoo pledge “that we would not cease our operations until we gathered the Saints. I have not ceased one day in trying to fill that vow.” He ended by querying the assembly jovially: “Does [the plan] feel soft to their gizzards or does it grind on them and give them pain?”⁵⁸

Two weeks later when Salt Lake City bishops met for their biweekly meeting on 31 January with the presiding bishop, Hunter read the First Presidency’s letter of instructions. Young announced that he would send ten teams himself. Heber C. Kimball pledged four outfits and would send more if needed because “he had made a covenant while in Nauvoo never to slacken his efforts until all were gathered, which he intended to carry out.”⁵⁹

The next weekend, Young preached in the tabernacle what was now his favorite topic. He wanted the city wards to raise fifty wagons with four yoke of oxen to each wagon. “But the bishops say we be very poor, and it will be hard to turn out so many wagons,” he chided sarcastically. Then he appealed to their civic pride. The outlying wards looked to the city “to take the lead in everything.” He hoped the Church could send 250 outfits, so Salt Lake City’s share would be fifty or sixty. He again promised to send ten personally, and got a vote of support for the city’s quota.⁶⁰

58Ibid.

59Presiding Bishopric, Minutes of Meeting with Bishops, 31 January 1861, Presiding Bishop Papers, LDS Church Archives.

60Brigham Young, Sermon, 3 February 1861, Salt Lake Tabernacle, Brigham Young Sermons, Typescript Vol. 1861.

Even though Young had assigned Hunter to organize the project, it would have been unlike him to stay out of an effort where his heart and mind were so deeply engaged. The next day he instructed Apostle Ezra T. Benson, then president of Cache Stake, to send only "good iron-axle Chicago wagon[s]" or, failing that, at least "a wooden axle of Chicago make." The departing "cattle, wagons, and teamsters" would have to "pass the inspection of a competent person" to assure "that all may start in proper condition." Cache Valley, he estimated, could furnish twenty to thirty wagons with their associated teams. He had already rethought the dollar sums he had suggested to Hunter, and now told Benson: "The teams will be allowed on labor tithing, \$10 a hundred for such freight as they take from here to Florence, or in that proportion for intermediate distances; and \$15. a hundred for freight from Florence to this City, also on labor tithing."⁶¹

A First Presidency letter apparently produced later that month added new details to the plan.⁶² The letter reiterated many points covered in the bishops' meeting and added several, including Young's estimate that this plan could save the Church up to \$30,000 annually. Wagons from outlying wards should haul tithing wheat to Salt Lake City where it would be ground into flour. Ward members who donated provisions and bedding to teamsters would receive tithing credit. Each wagon should carry eight light, thick ox shoes and nails so that the oxen could be shod en route as needed. The wagons would be organized into companies of fifty, each with a captain, and all the companies would be under one superintendent or agent. Each company should have four horsemen to herd and guard the livestock when they were unyoked.

Young had apparently fixed on the sums he had included in his letter to Benson: Each Florence-bound wagon would haul flour, for which the team's owner would be credited \$10 per hundred pounds while loads hauled back from Florence would be credited at \$15 per hundredweight. Immigrants, especially those unable to provide their own teams and wagons, had first claim on the wagons in Florence.

⁶¹Brigham Young, Letter to E. T. Benson, 4 February 1861, Letterbook 5.

⁶²First Presidency, Circular Letter to Bishop Hunter and Utah Bishops, February 1861, Letterbook 5.

Included in these instructions was Hunter's meticulously detailed list of required equipment. Each wagon should include one can or keg of tar, a gallon of wagon grease, two water kegs of five-to-ten gallons capacity, and two replacement lashes for the whip, with additional buckskin thongs for splicing and to make "crackers" (to create a popping sound when flipped). Each teamster should bring 250 pounds of flour, forty pounds of bacon, forty pounds of dried beef ("if to be had"), as much butter as the teamster "chooses or can take safely," ten pounds of sugar, four pounds of coffee, a pound of tea, four quarts of beans, a bar of soap, four pounds of yeast in cake form or its equivalent "in soda, acid, or yeast powder," salt for both the teamster and his animals, one "good" buffalo robe, two "good" blankets ("or their equivalent"), a gallon of vinegar in "a stone jug," "some" pickles "if can be had," "two good pairs" of boots or shoes "with grease enough" to keep them waterproofed, three "good" pairs of pants, six shirts, three overshirts, five pairs of socks, enough coats "for comfort," needles, thread, and a "good" gun—"double-barrelled shot gun preferable, with plenty of powder, balls, and shot.

The detailed instructions continued. Six teamsters would form a mess, or cooking group. These six should consult before leaving and agree on how to furnish cooking utensils plus such medical supplies as No. 6 Cayenne pepper, purgative pills or castor oil, pain killer composition, liniment, etc. Furthermore, each teamster should be provided with ten dollars in cash to give to the wagonmaster for groceries and other necessities on the return trip and to pay his ferriage down and back. If money was not available, Hunter recommended that the teamster take an extra thousand pounds of flour to sell for supplying himself with food on the way back.

COLLECTING TEAMS AND SUPPLIES

Actually carrying out these ideal instructions encountered many local realities. The Logan high priests, meeting on 9 February, offered several yoke of oxen; wagons with covers, one with only bows; a yoke of oxen with chains, a span of mules, a yoke of old cattle, a single ox, and cooking utensils. In the spirit of the occasion, one brother who had no oxen volunteered to sell his carriage if needed, while another who donated a yoke of oxen said he would donate two if he had them. The quorum leader concluded they could outfit three teams and wagons, the town's quota. Likewise, members

donated flour, beans, butter, pork, mittens, coats, guns, lead, cash, quilts, molasses, vinegar, and potatoes to teamsters.⁶³

Seven weeks later on 29 March, Bishop Thomas McCullough of Alpine, confessed that his ward could supply only three yoke of oxen and eight teamsters, with outfits for each; the fourth team and wagon must come from richer Provo to the south.⁶⁴

Brigham Young optimistically wrote in mid-February that “the Bishops and people are quite spirited in the matter of raising teams to send to Florence for the poor brethren” and confidently foresaw a large party of “at least 200 teams of 4 yoke each and a larger number of loose cattle.”⁶⁵ When the Salt Lake City bishops met in the monthly meeting with the Presiding Bishopric on 28 February, a disagreement broke out about how much to pay teamsters. Some wards were allegedly overpaying them, creating internal dissatisfaction. The Presiding Bishopric left the amount up to the bishops, who finally worked out uniform compensation. Captains would receive one dollar per day plus rations. Each ward’s tithing credit total would be \$450 per outfit.⁶⁶

When some Salt Lake City bishops expressed doubt that they could supply labor for two tithing projects simultaneously—the down-and-back train and work on the temple walls—they got a typical carrot-and-stick response from Brigham Young:

When we concluded that we would call upon this city for help, we got all we asked for and more. I say, credit is due to them. . . . I am satisfied; the Spirit that is within me is satisfied. . . . [But] if you grudgingly put forth your means to help gather the Saints, it will be a curse to you; it will mildew, and every effort you make will wither in your possession. If you do not wish to help, let it alone. . . . Will the way be hedged up by the wars and distress of nations? I neither know nor care. . . . The time will come when men and women will be glad to catch what

⁶³Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*.

⁶⁴Thomas McCullough, Letter to Leonard W. Hardy and Jesse C. Little, 29 March 1861, Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company Papers, Reports, 1854-68, microfilm reel 20, fd. 81 (Church Teams’ Accounts), LDS Church Archives.

⁶⁵Brigham Young, Letter to William H. Hooper, 14 February 1861, Letterbook 5.

⁶⁶Presiding Bishop, Minutes of Meeting with Bishops, 28 February 1861, Presiding Bishop Papers; Hulmston, “Transplain Migration,” 35-36.

they can roll up in a small bundle, and start for the mountains, without team or wagon.⁶⁷

ORGANIZING FOUR WAGON COMPANIES

On 16 April, four outfits arrived in Salt Lake City from Parowan and Tocquerville. Two days later, the First Presidency reported pleasure at the “cheerfulness, liberality, and alacrity with which so many teams are furnished and so many men sent forth.”⁶⁸ On 20 April wagons from Ogden and Grantsville started for the rendezvous point at the mouth of Parley’s Canyon. On Sunday, 21 April, news reached Utah that South Carolina had shelled the federally held Fort Sumter, signalling the outbreak of the Civil War. Brigham Young did not revise his down-and-back plan but ordered crews into Parley’s Canyon to repair the road. On 22 April, an unspecified number of teams from the city’s wards joined the camp at the mouth of Parley’s Canyon.⁶⁹

On 23 April, the First Presidency visited the encampment, organized four wagon trains, and installed Joseph W. Young, Joseph Horne, Ira Eldredge, and John R. Murdock as captains. These seasoned men were “leaders of the right stripe . . . men who had crossed the Plains, understand camp life and the Indians, and are not afraid of the devils.”⁷⁰ Joseph W. Young, age thirty-two, had led the previous year’s experimental ox train. Horne, forty-nine, was an 1847 pioneer and experienced colonizer; Eldredge, forty-one, had been

⁶⁷Brigham Young, 3 March 1861, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855-86), 8:355-56.

⁶⁸First Presidency, Letter to William H. Hooper, 18 April 1861, Letterbook 5.

⁶⁹Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (chronology of typed entries and newspaper clippings, 1830-present), 20, 21, 22 April 1861, LDS Church Archives. George A. Smith wrote: “The town has been alive for a few days with wagons and teams neatly and substantially fitted up.” George A. Smith, Letter to John Smith, 23 April 1861, Historian’s Office Letterbook, LDS Church Archives.

⁷⁰John Daniel Thomas McAllister, Statement, Journal History, 30 July 1861. Brigham Young apparently sent five wagons, not ten, as he had initially planned, since he apparently employed only five teamsters: Samuel L. Sprague Jr., Oscar B. Young, Erastus McIntire, Isaac Eades, and Zebulon Jacobs.

an 1847 pioneer; Murdock, thirty-four, was a Mormon Battalion veteran who had carried mail for the Brigham Young Express Company to Missouri in the 1850s and helped with the handcart rescues in 1856.

The First Presidency gave the four captains letters of instructions containing the rules. No swearing, drunkenness, gambling, contention, and unreasonable whipping or abuse of cattle were allowed. Troublemakers should be "turned out of the company." Guards should sleep in wagons during the day, and their horses should not be ridden during daytime except for "necessity." The four companies should stay within a few hours' distance for mutual security. At Florence the companies should camp on high ground three or four miles above the Missouri River and near good running water. Teamsters must turn in receipts to their captains detailing kind and weight of freight loaded into their wagons at Florence. All men in the companies should keep their guns and ammunition "in good condition for use at a moment's notice."⁷¹ The trains rolled into Parley's Canyon that same afternoon.

Two weeks later, Brigham Young reported statistics on the train to George Q. Cannon in England: "183 public wagons and 20 private ones, 194 public teamsters and 23 private one, 1,575 public oxen and 124 private, 16-18 guards, 136,000 pounds of flour to be deposited at four sites along the trail for the immigrants, and 34,348 pounds to meet expenses or be sold in Florence."⁷²

However, the 1861 PEF tithing credit ledgers give a different total—185 teams, rather than 183—and is probably correct since it names each teamster and his ward. Seventy-five wards sent at least one team—nearly every ward in Utah.⁷³ As historian Richard Jensen

⁷¹First Presidency, Letter to Joseph W. Young, 15 April 1861, Brigham Young Letterbook 5.

⁷²Brigham Young, Letter to George Q. Cannon, 9 May 1861, Letterbook 5.

⁷³PEF Company, Church Team Accounts, 1861-82, Reel 19, fd. 76. Hartley, "The Great Florence Fitout of 1861," 351. The total of 185 wagons came from the following wards: one each from Cedar City, Harmony, Springtown, Alpine, Battle Creek, Cedar Fort, Pleasant Grove, Pondtown, Santaquin, Salt Lake Second, Third, Fourth, Six, Seventh, Tenth, Eleventh, and Eighteenth, Big Cottonwood, Herriman, South Cottonwood, Union, East Weber, North Ogden, North Willowcreek, South Willowcreek, Weber

observed: the down-and-back system “effectively involved” the whole Mormon community “in promoting immigration from Europe.”⁷⁴

THE 1861 DOWN-AND-BACK TRIP

The four wagon trains rolled into the Florence campgrounds on schedule during the two weeks between 16 and 30 June. The journey “down” took fifty-four to sixty-eight days—roughly eight to ten weeks. Meanwhile, in Florence at about the same time the four wagon trains left Salt Lake City, Jacob Gates was developing the outfitting campground. Without knowing how many immigrants to expect, especially given the eruption of the Civil War, he opened a warehouse, created campsites and corrals, set up a weighing machine, and stockpiled tons of foodstuffs and trail equipment. Word did not reach him until 5 May about how many down-and-back wagons were coming. During May and June, when the waves of LDS immigrants arrived from points east, he helped organize those who owned their own wagons into companies consisting of independently owned wagons and saw them off toward the West. When the Utah companies arrived in late June, they became part of Gates’s bustling operation.

Nearly 4,000 Saints showed up at Florence, including 1,900 European converts, most of whom needed Church transportation. Gates made assignments to those who needed to join the down-and-back trains, based on six to twelve people per wagon. Fares were \$41 for adults, with half-fares for children under eight, payable after reaching Utah and settling down.⁷⁵ More poor Saints showed up

Valley, Franklin (Idaho), Hyde Park, Hyrum, Mendon, and Paradise; two each from Parowan, Goshen, Provo Valley, Salt Lake First, Eighth, Ninth, Twelfth, Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Twentieth, Sugarhouse, West Jordan, Kaysville, Providence, Smithfield, and Willard; three each from Mount Pleasant, Salt Lake Nineteenth, Richmond, and Wellsville; four each from Beaver, Ephraim, Manti, Moroni, American Fork, Payson, Springville, Salt Lake Fourteenth, Millcreek, Grantsville, Tooele, Centerville, Farmington, North Canyon, and Box Elder; five each from Fillmore, Lehi, Salt Lake Thirteenth, and Logan; six from Nephi; eight from Provo, and eleven from Ogden.

⁷⁴Richard L. Jensen, “The Financing of Mormon Emigration in the Nineteenth Century,” typescript, 15, Smith Institute.

⁷⁵William Jefferies, Journal, summary before entry for 23 September

than leaders expected, forcing Jacob Gates and Joseph Young, who helped with the organization after his train arrived, to search for additional wagons. To the four down-and-back trains they added more than seventy-five wagons, some no doubt part of Gates's earlier purchase of 111 prefabricated wagons from the Schuttler firm in Chicago.⁷⁶ Young's wagon train, which had numbered about fifty wagons to begin with, became unwieldy at about ninety, so he divided it into two companies captained by Ansel Harmon and Heber P. Kimball, with himself as senior captain.⁷⁷ After two to four weeks at Florence, the four Church trains, now totaling about three hundred wagons, started back to Utah, leaving during the first two weeks in July. They transported an estimated 1,719 immigrants (44 percent of the year's immigration, with an average of 8.5 people per wagon) and averaged return journeys of 68 days, thus rolling along at about 15 miles a day.⁷⁸

The down-and-back companies traveled close to each other, as Brigham Young instructed, picking up the flour deposited on their way down. Despite the normal small problems and irritations

1861, microfilm of holograph, LDS Church Archives. Jefferies was a passenger in the Joseph W. Young Church team train.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷However, according to William Jefferies, *Journal*, typescript, summary entry before entry of 26 July 1861, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, Harmon started as captain of the large train but, after leaving Wood River, took charge of the first division while Joseph W. Young captained the second division. Young later rode back and forth, supervising all four Church trains. He does not mention Kimball's role.

⁷⁸John R. Murdock's train left Florence on 8 July with 63 wagons and an estimated 460 immigrants, arriving in Salt Lake City on 12 September after a journey of 66 days. Ira Eldredge's company left the next day with 70 wagons and an estimated 514 immigrants, arriving in Salt Lake City on 15 September after a journey of 68 days. Joseph Horne's company also left on 9 July with 62 wagons and an estimated 453 immigrants, arriving on 13 September after a journey of 65 days. Joseph W. Young waited three days before his double company pulled out—80 wagons and an estimated 292 immigrants, arriving 23 September after a journey lasting 73 days. Hartley, "The Great Florence Fitout of 1861," 367; Jefferies, *Journal*, summary before entry of 26 July 1861,

of overland travel, their trek was essentially safe and routine. "There was a sameness in every day's travel," said James H. Lindford, and "all in all it was a nice trip for the healthy and strong." He noted that "all of the able bodied emigrants walked from Florence to Utah."⁷⁹ Including the waiting time in Florence, the four companies spent an average of 147 days—just under five months—to go down and back, arriving with their oxen in good condition, well before snowfall.

On 2 October 1861, the *Deseret News* estimated that between four and five thousand immigrants had reached Utah that summer, and Erastus Snow gave George A. Smith a precise figure of 3,924, including about 1,900 from Europe.⁸⁰ In Utah, Church leaders welcomed the newcomers, the immigrants found lodging and work relatively easily, and the down-and-back trains disbanded.

ASSESSMENT

By any measure—not least Brigham Young's critical eye—the down-and-back experiment in 1861 was a success. Brigham Young reported that oxen sent from Utah "suffered far less loss by deaths and looked much better, as a general thing than those purchased in the states. . . . The companies have been pleased with their captains and the captains with their companies; and this season's emigration has been signally blessed all the time from their departure from their former homes to their new homes in our peaceful valley."⁸¹

⁷⁹*An Autobiography of James Henry Lindford, Sr.* (N.p.: Lindford Family Organization, 1947), 24-25.

⁸⁰ Erastus Snow, Letter to George A. Smith, 26 June 1861, *Journal History*.

⁸¹ Brigham Young, "Church Emigration of 1861," report to LDS Church leaders in England, copied into *Journal History*, 31 December 1861, Supplement, 7. He had made a similar statement earlier: "This season's immigration has been signally blest all the time from their departure from their former homes to their new homes in our peaceful vallies." Brigham Young, Letter to George Q. Cannon, 18 September 1861, Letterbook 5. The Eldredge Company experienced six births and ten deaths on the Mormon Trail. *Journal of the First Company of Church Train Emigrants, 1861*, Ira Eldredge, Captain (journal kept by John Reed), photocopy of holograph, note after entry on 15 September 1861, LDS Church Archives;

The primary goal for the down-and-back trains—to assist poor Saints to reach Utah from Florence—was successfully met. “Every Saint who reached Florence and desired to go home this season has had the privilege,” John D. T. McAllister wrote to George Q. Cannon. “The sending down of wagons from Utah to Florence is a grand scheme.”⁸² Of Scandinavians who reached Florence, “not one soul of Danes was left there.”⁸³ Church officials also saw some promise of rejuvenating the PEF’s financial health. Those assisted by Church team trains owed the PEF for that aid, typically \$40 to \$60 per person. Agents met the four trains near Salt Lake City so that the immigrants could sign promissory notes, ranging from 76 cents to \$390, plus 10 percent interest. The notes in the LDS Church Archives—the record is very incomplete—show that 337 borrowers agreed to repay a total of \$38,285.39, an average of \$113.62 each note, to cover their wagon and food expenses at Florence and across the plains.⁸⁴

Despite this business-like procedure, the separate 1877 tally of the 1861 borrowers shows that 597 had still not paid off their promissory notes fifteen years later.⁸⁵ Although the down-and-back account showed a large deficit, it was a paper loss more than a cash loss; and most Mormons recognized that the down-and-back program was, at heart, a “voluntary, cooperative, community investment in people, that is, in immigrants.”⁸⁶ One goal of the down-and-back project was to work around the Church’s cash shortage, and it achieved that purpose.

Besides bringing immigrants at minimal cost to the Church, the enterprise had two other purposes. One was to freight eastern

John Reed, Journal, 3 September 1861, microfilm of holograph, LDS Church Archives.

⁸²John D. T. McAllister, Letter to George Q. Cannon, 30 July 1861, Journal History.

⁸³Niels Wilhelmssen, Letter to John Van Cott, 19 August 1861, *Skandinaviens Stjerne* 11 (October 1861): 9-10.

⁸⁴PEF Company, Reel 9, fd. 30, Promissory Notes, 1861, LDS Church Archives.

⁸⁵*Names of Persons and Sureties Indebted to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company from 1850 to 1877* (Salt Lake City: Star Book and Job Printing Office, 1877).

⁸⁶Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 211.

goods in Utah wagons. Except for Church leaders, however, few Utahns in 1861 sent extra wagons down to Florence to haul back commodities purchased there. The third purpose—to sell surplus Utah cattle at Florence—likewise fell short. Utahns in 1861 sent only 124 surplus oxen to Florence with the down-and-back trains. As a result, Jacob Gates had to purchase forty-one oxen for \$2,522 cash—cash that could have gone into the hands of Utah cattle owners had they sent down more oxen.⁸⁷

While the Utah outfits, labor, and flour did not require any significant cash outlay, nevertheless, the labor tithing credits “paid” by the Church were sizable. Utah teamsters were expected to donate one working day in ten for the Church; thus, if they donated their labor, teams, and wagons for the down-and-back trip, they could receive labor tithing credits, thus reducing how much tithing labor local bishops received. PEF ledgers show that nearly two hundred Utah teamsters received more than \$80,000 in tithing credit, an average of about \$450 each, as payment for hauling freight and passengers and as reimbursement for rations, ferriage fees, wagon grease, and tobacco. In addition, the Church credited wards and ward members for 136,095 pounds of flour at six cents per pound, or about \$8,000 in credits. About sixteen Utahns served as herdsmen/guards, receiving about \$100 tithing credit each.⁸⁸

Because of the 1861 success, down-and-back trains became the established system for helping needy immigrants reach Utah from 1862 until 1868, the year before the transcontinental railroad opened. During this period, at least 17,000 more LDS immigrants traversed the Mormon Trail in down-and-back teams. (No trains went in 1865 or 1867.) At least 1,956 Utah teams—an average of 326 wagons per year—participated.⁸⁹

What Brigham Young envisioned in 1859, experimented with in 1860, and directed full-scale until 1868, produced a new chapter in the story of America’s western migration. Eastbound wagon trains helped thousands move west, costing sponsor and recipients very

87Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company, *Frontier Account Book*, Reel 1, fd. 14, General Accounts, 1861, microfilm, LDS Church Archives.

88PEF, *Church Team Accounts, 1861*; Hulmston, “Mormon Immigration in the 1860s,” 30-31.

89Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 208.

little cash. In terms of practicality, workability, and results, Young's immigration leadership in the 1860s served as the crowning achievement of one of the most remarkable entrepreneurs in the history of world migration.