

# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XLVII

ISSUED IN SEPTEMBER 1966

No. 9

*Copyright 1966 by The State Historical Society of Iowa*



## The Mormon Trail of 1846

The trek of the Mormons from Nauvoo on the Mississippi to the valley of the Great Salt Lake, at that time a part of Mexico, is one of the most colorful episodes in the history of the American frontier. Measured in terms of distance traveled and the number of individuals involved, it eclipses the heyday of mule-skinning on the fabulous Santa Fé Trail. For sheer drama it rivals the steady flow of empire-builders plodding westward along the Oregon Trail to the Pacific Northwest. Only the trail of the indomitable Forty-niners can be said to surpass it in point of daring, hardships suffered, and mass movement of pioneers.

Since the first leg of the journey ran across southern Iowa, and since the Mormons established their winter quarters on the west bank of the Big Muddy in the fall of 1846, the highlights of the exodus of these "Children of God" forms an important chapter in that "Year of Decision" which saw Iowa admitted as a state on December 28th.

Although Joseph Smith is said to have seen his first vision as early as 1820, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (commonly called Mormons), was not organized until April 6, 1830, at Fayette, New York. The Mormons, from their very inception, met with rebuff and persecution wherever they formed a settlement, partly because of their claim that they alone were the chosen people. In 1831 they transferred their headquarters to Kirtland, Ohio, where they reared a temple to their God. In 1833 (at the very time Iowa pioneers were staking out their first claims in the Black Hawk Purchase) the Mormons were attempting to settle at Independence, Missouri, where, according to their church teaching, the New Jerusalem was eventually to be built. Unfortunately, the Missourians became so bitter against these "Saints" who opposed slavery and were unusually effective proselyters, that the Mormons withdrew to Hancock County, Illinois. There, on May 9, 1839, Dr. Isaac Galland, a convert to the new faith, had sold to Joseph Smith a large tract of land which included the straggling village of Commerce with some twenty houses.

When the Mormons arrived at Commerce in 1839 they found themselves in possession of a townsite and a good Mississippi steamboat landing located at the head of the Des Moines Rapids opposite Montrose, Iowa. The following year they renamed the town Nauvoo, a Hebraic word

signifying fair, or very beautiful. By 1844 Nauvoo contained at least 12,000 inhabitants and was the "most flourishing city" in Illinois, surpassing Chicago in population. In 1841 the Latter-Day Saints had begun construction of a beautiful temple which cost a million dollars when completed in 1846.

Meanwhile the Gentiles of the surrounding country looked with envy and suspicion on the growing wealth and power of the Mormons. They were disturbed by the persistent rumors concerning the practice of polygamy and they resented the assumption of the Mormon hierarchy that their faith was to become supreme. The non-Mormon population also resented and feared the growing political strength of the Mormons which was emphasized by Joseph Smith's announcement of his intention to become a candidate for the Presidency. Moreover the legislature of Illinois had authorized the enlistment of a "Mormon Legion," a military unit entirely under the control of the Mormon Church.

Armed forces stalked the countryside and acts of violence soon became commonplace. The tense situation finally culminated in the murder of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum by an angry mob on June 27, 1844 while they were awaiting trial in a Carthage jail.

Brigham Young, a dynamic leader and brilliant organizer, succeeded Joseph Smith as head of the



church, and managed to restore order for a time. But hostilities soon broke out again and in the fall of 1845 Brigham Young appealed to the Governor of Illinois for protection, promising that the Saints would leave Nauvoo "so soon as grass would grow and water run" the following spring.

The magnitude of Brigham Young's proposed exodus can be readily demonstrated. Parley P. Pratt estimated that the average outfit for a family of five should include one good wagon, three sheep, one thousand pounds of flour, twenty pounds of sugar, one rifle and ammunition, a tent and tent-poles, from ten to twenty pounds of seed to a family, from twenty-five to one hundred pounds of tools for farming, bedding, cooking utensils, and a few other items. The cost was estimated at about \$250.

An unusually mild winter led to great optimism, and the first family of Mormons crossed the Mississippi on February 4, 1846. Two days later the George Miller family was ferried across with six wagons. In a few days the work of transporting the Saints across the Mississippi was going on day and night. A few accidents occurred, such as the sinking of one ferryboat, but in general the Mormons were fortunate in getting over safely. A camp was formed on the west bank of the river opposite Nauvoo and when Brigham Young and the twelve apostles crossed on February 15th the entire contingent traveled inland nine miles and



established their first "Camp of Israel" on Sugar Creek in Lee County. Every halting place of the president and his twelve apostles was called a "Camp of Israel" and fifteen of these were established across southern Iowa during the Mormon trek of 1846.

The Mormons were no strangers to the Iowa pioneers. In 1839 they had bought for their church a part of the town of Keokuk and the whole of the townsite known as Nashville. Mormons had also acquired a part of the town of Montrose, together with some thirty thousand acres of land in the Half-breed Tract. In a letter dated January 4, 1840, Governor Robert Lucas had described the one hundred Mormon refugees who had fled to Iowa to escape the wrath of the Missourians as "industrious, inoffensive, and worthy citizens."

Unfortunately this high opinion was destined to change in Lee County, for long before the Mormon exodus began in 1846 the Danite Band had become *persona non grata* to most of the pioneers in southeastern Iowa. Larceny, horsestealing, counterfeiting, assault, and several murders, including that of Colonel George Davenport, were attributed to Mormons or to persons harbored by the Mormons. It is not surprising, therefore, that Brigham Young should feel it necessary to petition Governor James Clarke on February 28th, imploring protection for the Saints while journey-

ing through the Territory of Iowa to a land of exile, or while remaining in Iowa "working for an outfit, or raising a crop on rented or unclaimed land, in case necessity should force any of them to do so."

No sooner had Brigham Young and his twelve apostles arrived on the west bank of the Mississippi on February 15th than a drastic change occurred in the weather. Snow began to fall, the thermometer plummeted to 20° below zero, and the Mormons suffered intensely because of improper clothing and shelter. Although they had been warned to provide themselves with sufficient food for themselves and their stock, many of those encamped on Sugar Creek had failed to do so. Fortunately some were able to buy the surplus food and fodder of Lee County settlers; others obtained funds with which to replenish their store by cutting timber and husking corn for the Iowa pioneers.

It was not until Sunday, March 1st, that the Mormons were able to break their camp on Sugar Creek and continue their journey. After traveling five miles in a northwesterly direction, they halted, scraped away the snow, and pitched their tents upon the frozen ground. Large fires were built and before the Mormons retired to their beds on the frozen earth prayers were offered to their Creator.

The following day Apostle Orson Pratt re-

corded that the detachment moved on over ground so rough and bad that some of the wagons were broken. In the evening the travelers encamped on the east bank of the Des Moines River, four miles below the little village of Farmington, and probably about midway between Croton and the northern boundary of the Half-breed Tract. On March 3rd the Mormons followed the general course of the Des Moines River for eight miles and pitched their camp on a muddy site in the vicinity of present-day Bonaparte. The following day they remained in camp because of the mud, spending their time mending broken harnesses and repairing their wagons. At the "earnest solicitations" of the citizens of Farmington, the band of musicians from the Mormon camp returned to that community and gave a concert.

On March 5th most of the people in the camp forded the river at Bonaparte's Mills. The roads in many places were almost impassable on account of the mud. According to Orson Pratt some teams were unable to draw their loads in bad places without help and many wagons were broken. A portion of the group was forced to stop on account of the roads while the others proceeded on about twelve miles to Indian Creek, encamping a few miles south of the site of present-day Keosauqua.

Two days later a detachment, including Orson Pratt, moved about twelve miles westward and encamped on the Fox River, probably just west of



where it crosses the Davis County line. The main body of Mormons encamped about three miles to the east. Here the Mormons halted two or three days, at a place called Richardson's Point, and here they established a permanent Camp of Israel.

On March 10th they were once more on the move, toiling ten miles over "exceedingly bad" roads to the center of Davis County near Bloomfield. "We are very much scattered at the present. Many are engaging work in the thinly scattered settlements, to obtain food both for themselves and their animals. It was found necessary to exchange our horses for oxen, as the latter would endure the journey much better than horses. Many have already exchanged."

An incident which is recorded as having occurred near Richardson's Point reveals the simple faith of the Saints and the sorry condition of their draft animals. A horse was "violently" attacked by some disease and lay as if dead. The Saints believed in healing by the "laying on of hands," but they questioned the propriety of using this method in the case of an animal. However, some one quoted the Prophet Joel as having said that "in the last days the Lord would pour out His spirit on all flesh." This quieted their scruples and six men accordingly placed their hands on the horse, "prayed for his recovery," and commanded the evil spirit to depart. The horse "rolled over twice, sprang to his feet, and was soon well."

On Friday, March 20th, the Mormons were once more on their way, starting out with the temperature ten degrees below freezing, and making ten miles before pitching their tents in western Davis County. The next day they traveled about twenty miles and encamped on the west bank of the Chariton River, pitching their second permanent camp in a large body of timber not far from Centerville. Thus far they had traveled approximately ninety-four miles, averaging a little over three miles per day after leaving Sugar Creek.

Nor were their troubles over! On Sunday and Monday, March 22nd and 23rd, Orson Pratt recorded in his journal the movement of the pioneer units to the banks of Shoal or Locust Creek in southeastern Wayne County, where another permanent camp was located.

"The day is rainy and unpleasant. Moved only seven miles. The next day went through the rain and deep mud, about six miles, and encamped upon the west branch of Shoal Creek. The heavy rains had rendered the prairies impassable; and our several camps were very much separated from each other. We were compelled to remain as we were for some two or three weeks, during which time our animals were fed upon the limbs and bark of trees, for the grass had not yet started, and we were a number of miles from any inhabited country, and therefore, it was very inconvenient to send for grain. The heavy rains and snows, to-

gether with frosty nights, rendered our situation very uncomfortable. Our camps were now more perfectly organized, and captains were appointed over hundreds, over fifties, and over tens, and over all these, a President and Counsellors, together with other necessary officers. Game is now quite plentiful. Our hunters bring into camp more or less deer, wild turkies, and prairie hens every day." Nine days later, on March 31st, clear weather enabled Elder Pratt to record the position of their camp on Shoal Creek —  $40^{\circ} 40' 7''$  north latitude and  $90^{\circ} 59' 50''$  west longitude.

During such scenes of adversity the Mormons did not lose faith in their God. On Sunday, April 5th, Orson Pratt observed that a portion of the camp met together to offer a sacrament to the Most High. The next morning was April 6th, a significant day in the Mormon church calendar, and the Saints did not fail to observe it. According to Orson Pratt: "This morning, at the usual hour of prayer, we bowed before the Lord with thankful hearts, it being just 16 years since the organization of the Church, and we were truly grateful for the many manifestations of the goodness of God towards us as a people. The weather is still wet and rainy. Nine or ten wagons, with four yoke of oxen each, have started this morning for the settlements to obtain corn. In the evening we were visited by a heavy thunderstorm, accompanied by a high wind and hail. Most of



the tents which were pitched upon high ground were blown down, and the inmates exposed to the fury of the storm. The water in Shoal Creek arose in a very few minutes several feet in height, and threatened to overflow its banks, and disturb our tents." To add to their misery, most of the wagons that had been sent to the settlements returned empty, and the Mormons found it difficult to sustain their teams, even though the oxen were not working.

It was not until Thursday, April 9th, after spending sixteen days encamped in the mud and cold of Shoal Creek, that the Mormons determined to move on slowly. After a tortuous day's journey Orson Pratt ruefully recorded:

"With great exertion a part of the camp were enabled to get about six miles, while others were stuck fast in the deep mud. We encamped at a point of timber about sunset, after being drenched several hours in rain. The mud and water in and around our tents were ankle deep, and the rain still continued to pour down without any cessation. We were obliged to cut brush and limbs of trees, and throw them upon the ground in our tents, to keep our beds from sinking in the mire. Those who were unable to reach the timber, suffered much, on account of cold, having no fuel for fires. Our animals were turned loose to look out for themselves; the bark and limbs of trees were their principal food."

From their camp on Shoal Creek the route of the Mormons veered in a northwesterly direction. On April 14th some scanty feed began to make its appearance on the wettest portions of the prairie but it was still too cold for the grass to grow well. On April 19th they were able to hold their first outdoor meeting since they left Nauvoo. On April 24th Elder Orson Pratt recorded:

"Yesterday we traveled about eight miles, today, six miles. We came to a place which we named Garden Grove. At this point we determined to form a small settlement and open farms for the benefit of the poor, and such as were unable at present to pursue their journey further, and also for the benefit of the poor who were yet behind."

Garden Grove was one of the most important Camps of Israel established by the Mormons in Iowa. Here, on the banks of the Grand River, Brigham Young proposed to fence in a large field, build a number of log cabins, plow some land, and put in a spring crop. He also proposed to select certain men and families to take care of the improvements while the rest of the camp proceeded westward.

On April 27th, at the "sound of the horn," the emigrants gathered to organize for labor. The council had found 359 laboring men in camp, besides trading commissaries and herdsmen. From these, 100 were chosen to fell trees, split them into

rails and make zig-zag fences. Ten were appointed to build fences, forty-eight to build houses, twelve to dig wells, ten to build bridges, and the remainder to clear and plow the land, and plant crops. "There was no room for idlers there," one authority declared. "The camp was like a hive of bees, every one was busy. And withal the people felt well and were happy."

At one of the outdoor meetings Brigham Young said: "We have set out to find a land and a resting place, where we can serve the Lord in peace. We will leave some here, because they cannot go further at present. They can stay here and recruit, and by and by pack up and come on, while we go a little further and lengthen out the cords and build a few more Stakes." By the month of May, hunger and personal responsibility had reduced President Young so greatly in flesh that a tight fitting coat in which he started from Nauvoo "lapped over twelve inches!"

On May 11th Brigham Young and many of the Mormons left Garden Grove and continued their northwesterly trek with their long wagon trains. They reached the middle fork of the Grand River on May 18th and found Parley P. Pratt encamped there. On a hill nearby Pratt had found "a mass of grey granite, which had the appearance of an ancient altar, the parts of which had fallen apart in various directions as though separated by fire." This was considered the "more remarkable" since



there was no rock in that area and Pratt accordingly had called the place Mount Pisgah. One of the leading Camps of Israel in Iowa was located near Mount Pisgah in what is now Union County. Some eight hundred burials at this camp stand as a mute reminder of the sojourn and suffering of the Mormons. A camp was maintained here until 1852.

Towards the end of May "most of the Twelve, with large companies, proceeded in a westerly direction" into present-day Adair County whence they journeyed westward along a route approximately that of State Highway 92 between Greenfield and Council Bluffs. In this area the Potawatomi Indians still lingered, but they were friendly and helpful.

Brigham Young left Mount Pisgah on June 2nd, reaching the Missouri River within the present limits of Council Bluffs twelve days later. It had taken five long months to make the 300-mile journey (according to modern highway measurements), an easy eight-hour drive on the paved roads of 1956. To the Mormons encamped on the banks of the Missouri River came news of the dedication of the Temple at Nauvoo overlooking the Mississippi.

At Miller's Hollow, later Kaneshville, and now Council Bluffs, the Mormons built a ferry boat which was launched on June 29th. Before the last Mormons evacuated Nauvoo on September 17th,

the pioneer groups were being ferried across to their main encampment, which became known as Winter Quarters, a point located on the northern outskirts of modern Omaha. In April of 1847, the first company of 143 men, 3 women, and 2 children, started west from Winter Quarters under the leadership of Brigham Young. After traveling a thousand miles over the trackless Nebraska plain and rugged Wyoming mountains they entered the valley of the Great Salt Lake through Emigration Canyon on July 24, 1847, a day that has ever since been observed as Pioneer Day in Utah. A year later this valley became part of the territory of the United States.

The exodus of the Mormons across southern Iowa was of lasting significance to the Hawkeye State. In July of 1846 fifteen thousand Mormons were said to be encamped or toiling westward along the Iowa trails, with 3,000 wagons, 30,000 head of cattle, horses, and mules, and a vast number of sheep. The trails they left were noted by surveyors later on, just as were the streams, creeks, woods, and other physical landmarks. Garden Grove, Mount Pisgah, and Lamoni are but a few of the modern reminders of this great trek. The Mormon trail-blazers of 1846 hold the honor of marking the first great route across Iowa from the Mississippi to the Missouri.

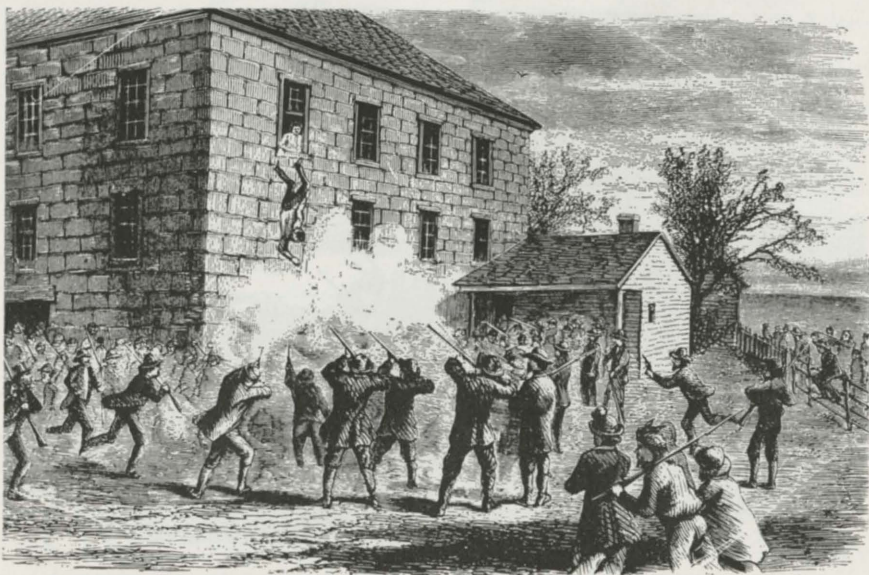
WILLIAM J. PETERSEN



GENERAL JOSEPH SMITH  
Founder of the Church of Jesus  
Christ of Latter-Day Saints



BRIGHAM YOUNG  
"Dynamic leader and  
brilliant organizer"

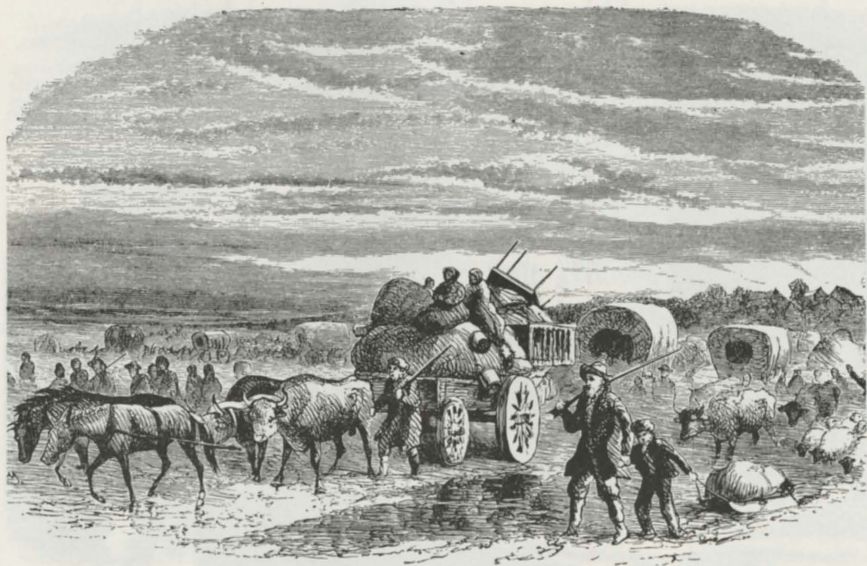


The Assassination of Joseph Smith by a Mob at Carthage, Ill., June 27, 1844





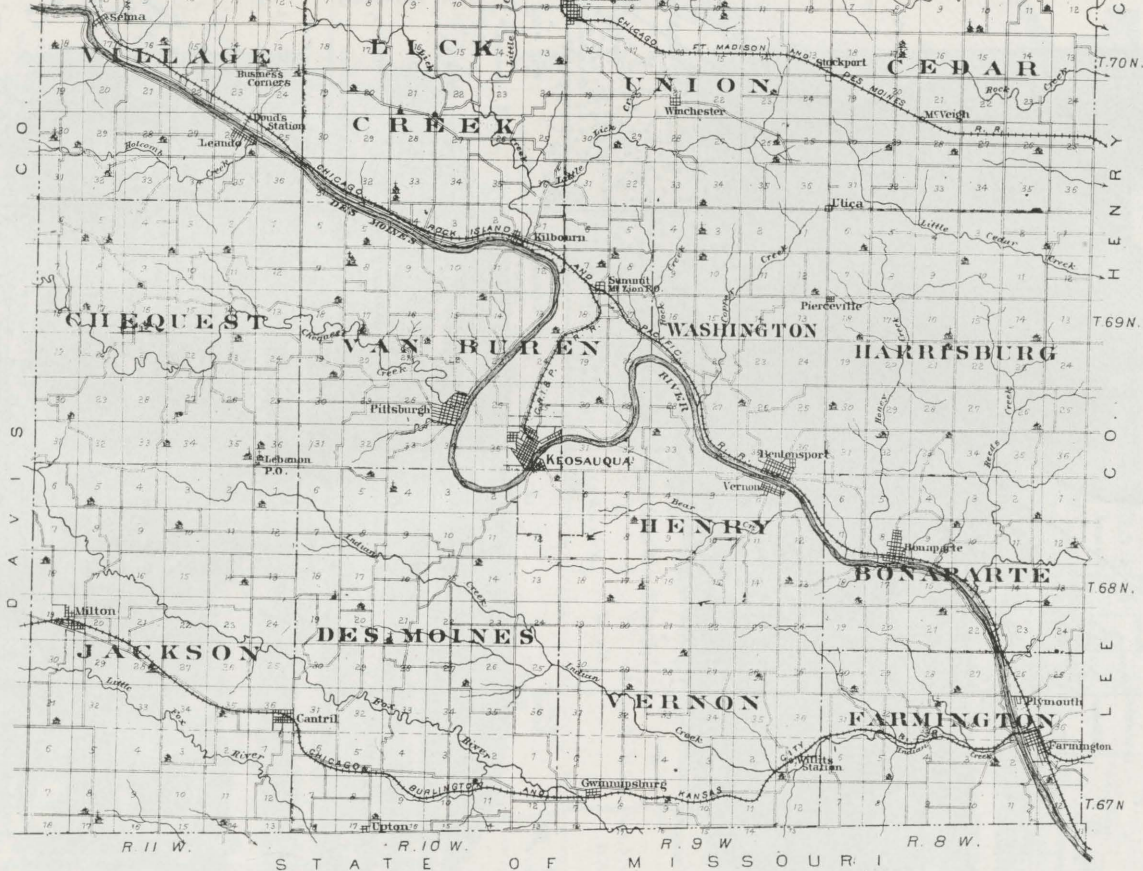
The Mormon Legion on the March



The Exodus from Nauvoo, Ill.







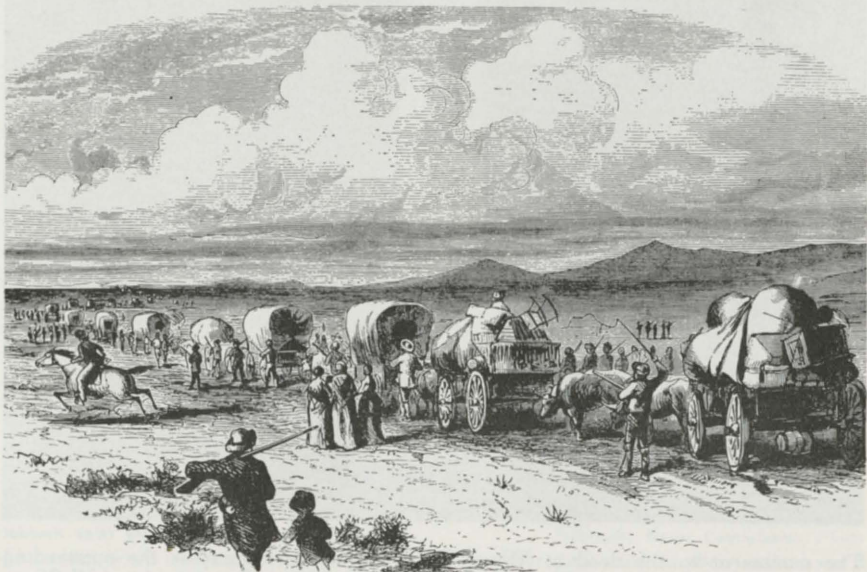
Leaving their encampment on Sugar Creek on March 1, 1846, the Mormons toiled through Van Buren County. They gave a band concert at Farmington, crossed the Des Moines River at Bonaparte's Mills, and encamped on Indian Creek, a few miles south of present-day Keosauqua. The outline map is from *Platbook of Van Buren County, Iowa*. (1897)





"View of the Missouri River & Council Bluffs, from an elevation."

(A steel engraving of a sketch by Frederick Piercy for *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*, edited by James Linforth.)



"A thousand miles over the trackless Nebraska plain and rugged Wyoming mountains."



*Courtesy Olav Smedal*

The monument to the dead at Mount Pisgah in Union County is the outstanding Iowa memorial of the great Mormon Trek of 1846. Mount Pisgah was one of fifteen Camps of Israel set up by the Mormons across southern Iowa.



*Nebraska Game Commission Photo*

Once the wide Missouri River was reached the Mormons used as their main base a site in Nebraska known as "Winter Quarters." More than six hundred died that first winter on a site now known as Florence, a suburb of North Omaha.

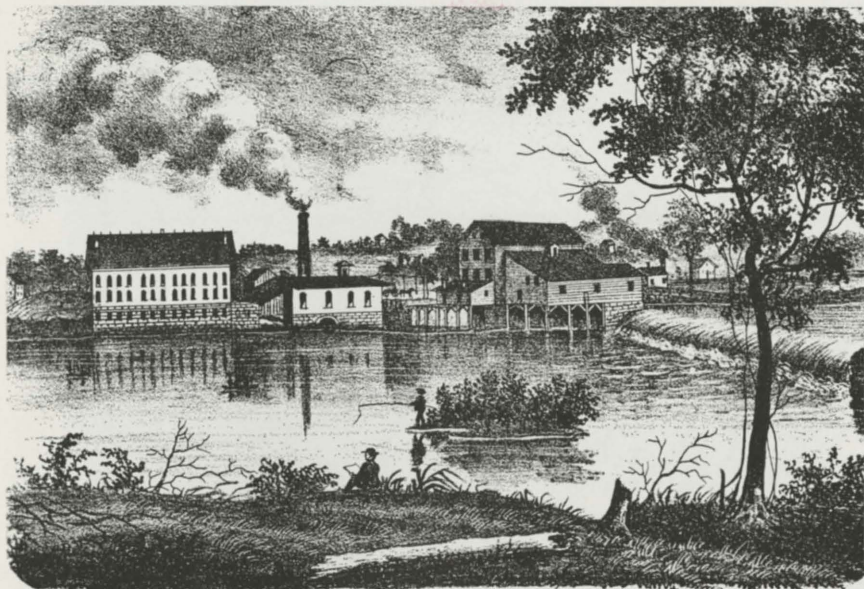


## LONGITUDE, WEST OF GREENWICH



SCALE OF MILLS.





Woolen Mills

Paper Mills  
*Clare Bro. Prop.*

Flouring Mills  
*Miller & Kirkwood Prop.*

Coralville Johnson Co. Iowa.

The Mormon Handcart Expedition was outfitted in the Iowa City-Coralville area, the former being the end-of-track of the present-day Rock Island Railroad in 1856. The flouring mill was in existence, and a future Governor of Iowa, Samuel J. Kirkwood, was a part owner of it. This steel engraving is from Thompson and Everts' *Combination Atlas Map of Johnson County*. (1870)



Old Capitol was "New" and oxen were common on the streets of Iowa City in 1853.



Clinton and Washington Streets in Iowa City in 1853.



Mormon Handcarters found Iowa City like this in 1856.





The Handcart Expedition was cheered as it crossed Iowa.



Crossing the Platte River.



"Came to me and begged Bread."



*A painting by C. A. A. Christensen.*

Mormon Handcart Expedition fording a stream.

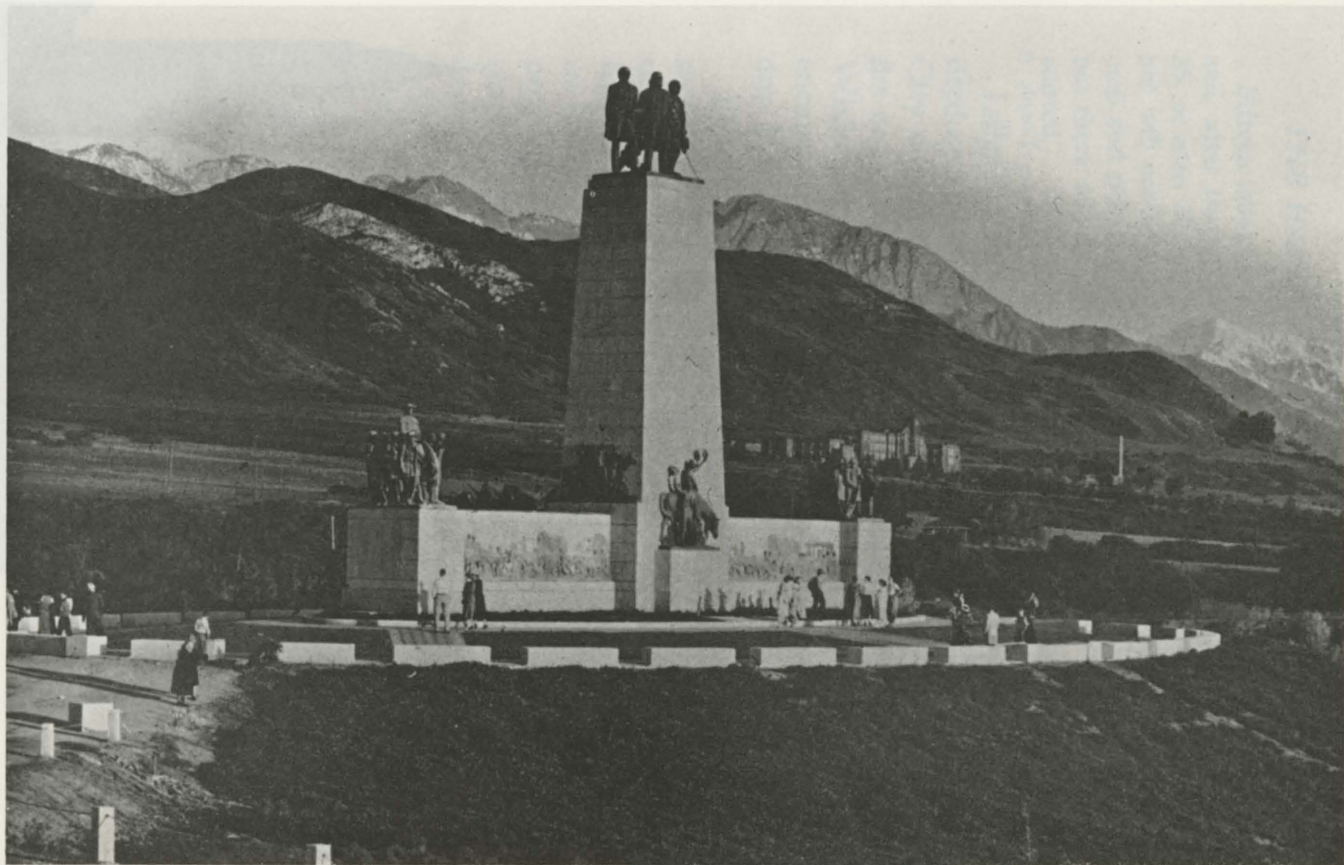


"They woke to find the snow a foot deep, their hungry cattle had strayed away . . . and five of the company had died."



"... The carts were generally drawn by one man and three women each, though some carts were drawn by women alone. There were about three women to one man, and two-thirds of the women were single. It was the most motley crew I ever beheld. Most of them were Danes, with a sprinkling of Welsh, Swedes, and English, and were generally from the lower classes of their countries. Most could not understand what we said to them. The road was lined for a mile behind the train with the lame, halt, sick, and needy. Many were quite aged, and would be going slowly along, supported by a son or daughter. Some were on crutches; now and then a mother with a child in her arms."



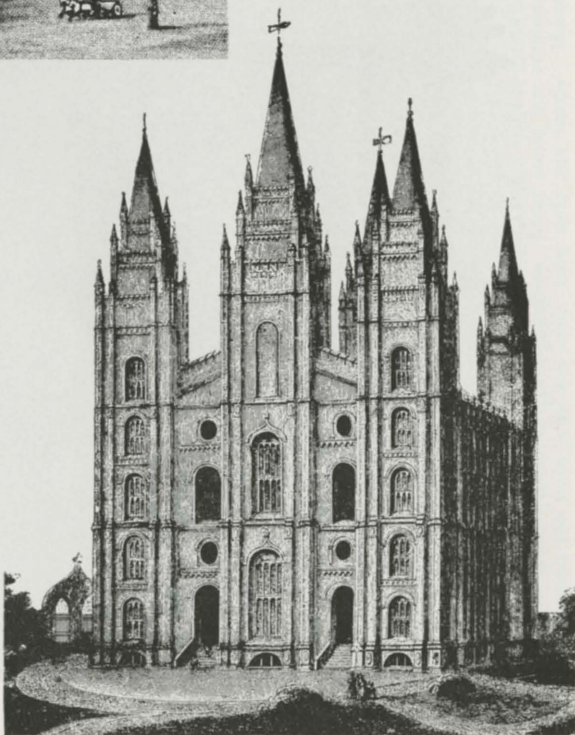


"This Is The Place" Monument, Salt Lake City, Utah. Dedicated on July 24, 1947, this monument is located at the mouth of Emigration Canyon. It was near here that Brigham Young, looking into the valley, said, "This is the Place."



The Mormon Temple at  
Nauvoo, Ill.

The Temple at  
Salt Lake City, Utah  
*"The Valleys of the  
Mountains in the  
land of Zion."*



## The Handcart Expeditions: 1856

During the summer of 1856 thirteen hundred Mormon converts from the British Isles and European countries arrived at Iowa City, then the western terminus of the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad. Many were wards of the Perpetual Emigration Fund Company which had been organized to assist those unable to pay for their transportation, the immigrants signing contracts to work for the church until the full amount was refunded.

At this time the wave of converts bound for Utah had become so great the Mormon church decided it was impossible to provide wagons and oxen to transport all the needy immigrants from Iowa City to Salt Lake City, although the total cost of bringing one of these poor converts from Europe to Utah was only about sixty dollars. Accordingly, in 1855, Brigham Young evolved the plan of having these hundreds of proselytes journey from Iowa City to Salt Lake City on foot. "The Lord, through his prophet, says of the poor, 'Let them come on foot, with hand-carts or wheelbarrows; let them gird up their loins, and walk through, and nothing shall hinder them.' " To the leader of the Liverpool converts Young wrote:



Fifteen miles a day will bring them through in 70 days, and, after they get accustomed to it, they will travel 20, 25, or even 30 with all ease, and no danger of giving out, but will continue to get stronger and stronger; the little ones and sick, if there are any, can be carried on the carts, but there will be none sick in a little time after they get started.

Lured by this rosy picture the thirteen hundred tired and bewildered converts had arrived at Iowa City during the summer of 1856 to find their outfits not ready and their handcarts yet to be made. While waiting for their equipment, the newcomers encamped two miles west of Iowa City at present-day Coralville.

Finally, after several weeks delay one detachment after another got under way for the first leg of the journey — the trip from Iowa City to the Missouri River. The first company left Iowa City on June 7, 1856, with two hundred and twenty-six people; the second, with about the same number, started two days later; and a third and smaller company, composed largely of Welsh converts, began their march on June 23rd. Since these three companies were small and started fairly early in the summer, they arrived safely at Salt Lake City before the cold weather began. The fourth and fifth companies suffered untold hardships and death before they reached their Zion.

Let us follow Archer Walters as he crossed the Atlantic and then pulled his handcart from Iowa

City to Salt Lake City. A 47-year-old carpenter from Sheffield, England, Walters was accompanied by his wife (Harriet Cross Walters) and children Sarah, 18; Henry, 16; Harriet (daughter), 14; Martha, 12; and Lydia, 6. Baptized into the Mormon faith in 1848, Walters had declared he would give his life if he could reach "the Valleys of the Mountains, in the land of Zion, with my family, that they may grow up under the influence of the Gospel of Christ."

The ship *Enoch Train*, on which the family embarked from Liverpool for New York on March 22, 1856, carried 534 Saints representing the following countries: England 322, Scotland 146, Wales 18, Ireland 17, and five other nations. They were actually the first Utah bound emigrants transported overseas by the Perpetual Emigration Fund in 1856. F. D. Richards had served as Brigham Young's agent in England but Orson Pratt and Ezra T. Benson, an Iowa City paper reported, had arrived in Alton, Illinois, "destined for Great Britain to take the superintendence of the Mormon affairs in that country."

After a long and harrowing voyage across the stormy Atlantic, accompanied by sickness, lack of food, and death, the Walters family reached New York on May 2. The following day the Mormons left New York for Iowa by train, reaching Rock Island on May 10. The *Davenport Gazette* noted the arrival of 520 English Mormons on May 13.

All day Sunday baggage wagons were transporting their trunks and boxes from Rock Island to the depot of the M. & M. R. R. They were the lowest class of English, squalid and illiterate, just the kind of people that one would suppose the most apt to embrace the peculiar tenets of the Mormons.

Such unfavorable comments were destined to follow the Mormons as they proceeded across Iowa.

After crossing the Mississippi, Walters and his Mormon friends boarded the Mississippi & Missouri railroad train whose tracks had been laid as far as Iowa City. Upon their arrival in Iowa City, where they were "temporarily lodged" in the railroad building, Walters recorded in his diary:

Dragged our luggage about 2 miles to camp ground [near Ezekiel Clark's Mill, now Coralville]. Fixed some tents that was made aboard ship. It rained and it was cold. My wife and daughters got into a tent. Henry and me slept in a tent but was very cold.

Between May 13 and June 7 Archer Walters recorded the activities of the Mormons — the "American Fever" (apparently fever and ague), lack of nourishment, frequent religious meetings, and the birth and death of children. His wife and oldest daughter hired out to neighboring farmers in order to supplement the family larder. When he was not working on the handcarts he was making coffins for those who died in camp. On June 7 they made a sporadic start, on June 8 they journeyed three miles but were delayed when the cat-



tle strayed back to the old camp ground. The following excerpts from Walters' journal reveal the travails of the first Mormon handcart expedition as it crossed Iowa.

- June 11th, 1856 — Journeyed 7 miles. Very dusty. All tired and smothered with dust and camped in the dust or where the dust blowed. Was captain over my ten of 18 in number but they were a family of Welsh and our spirits were not united. Had a tent but Bro. Ellsworth would not let me use it and had to leave my tent poles behind.
- 12th — Journeyed 12 miles. Went very fast with our hand carts. Harriet still very ill. . . .
- 15th — Got up about 4 o'clock to make a coffin for my brother John Lee's son named William Lee, aged 12 years. Meetings Sunday as usual and at the same time had to make another coffin for Sister Prator's child. Was tired with repairing hand-carts the last week. Went and buried them by moonlight at Bear Creek.
- 16th — Harriet very ill. Traveled 19 miles and after pitching tent mended carts.
- 17th — Traveled about 17 miles; pitched tent. Made a little coffin for Bro. Job Welling's son and mended a handcart wheel. . . .
- 21st — Traveled about 13 miles. Camped at Indian Creek. Bro. Bowers died about 6 o'clock; from Birmingham Conference. Went to buy some wood to make the coffin but the kind farmer gave me the wood and nails. It had been a very hot day and I was never more tired, but God has said as my day my strength shall be.
- 22nd — Got up at break of day and made the coffin for

Bro. James Bowers by 9 o'clock and he was buried at 11 o'clock. Aged 44 years 5 months 2 days. His relatives cried very much after I lifted him in the coffin and waited to screw him down. 11 o'clock washed in the creek and felt very much refreshed. Meeting Sunday 2 o'clock until 7.

24th — Traveled about 18 miles. Very hot. Bro. Ellsworth being always with a family from Birmingham named Brown and always that tent going first and walking so fast and some fainted by the way. . . .

26th — Traveled about 1 mile. Very faint from lack of food. We are only allowed about  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb. of flour a head each day and about 3 oz. of sugar each week. About  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a lb. of bacon each a week; which makes those that have no money very weak. Made a child's coffin for Sister Sheen — Emma Sheen Aged  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years.

27th — Got up before sunrise. Cut a tomb stone on wood and bury the child before starting from camp.

28th — . . . Rose soon after 4 o'clock. Started with high wind. Short of water and I was never more tired. Rested a bit after we camped then came on a thunder storm, and rain, blowed our tent down. Split the canvas and wet our clothes and we had to lay on the wet clothes and ground. . . .

29th — Rather stiff in joints when we rose. . . . Busy all day. My wife and Sarah mending. Short of provisions. Children crying for their dinner.

30th — Rose in good health, except Harriet, and started with our handcarts with but little breakfast . . . but never traveled 17 miles more easily. . . . Sleep very well after prayers in tent.

July 1st, 1856 — Rose soon. It looked very cloudy and

began to rain. Traveled about 15 miles. Walked very fast, — nearly 4 miles an hour. Bro. Brown's family and some young sisters with Bro. Ellsworth always going first which causes many of the brothers to have hard feelings . . . my children cry with hunger and it grieves me and makes me cross. I can live upon green herbs or anything and do go nearly all day without any and am strengthened with a morsel. Repaired handcarts.

3rd — Ever to be remembered. Bro. Card gave me  $\frac{1}{2}$  dollar for making his daughter's coffin. Start with my cart before the camp as others had done but was told not to and had to suffer for it. Went the wrong way; about 30 of the brothers and sisters, and went  $10\frac{1}{2}$  miles the wrong way. We put our three handcarts together and made beds with all the clothes we had and laid down about  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 10 o'clock. 11 o'clock Brother Butler who had charge of the mule teams came with the mules and wagon to fetch us. Got to camp when they were getting up. Laid down about an hour and started with the camp.

5th — A deer or elk served out to camp. Brother Parker brings into camp his little boy [age 6] that had been lost [3 days]. Great joy right through the camp. The mother's joy I can not describe. Expect we are going to rest. Washing, etc., today. Jordan Creek. Made a pair of sashes for the old farmer. Indian meal; no flour. Slept well.

6th — Made 2 doors for . . . 3 dollars and boarded with farmer.

7th — Harriet better. Lydia poorly. Traveled about 20 miles.

8th — Traveled a round about road about 20 miles.



Crossed the river Missouri and camped at the city of Florence. Very tired; glad to rest. Slept well. Lydia better and Harriet. All in good spirits. Expect to stop some time. . . .

Such were the experiences of the Handcart Expedition as it crossed Iowa along present-day U. S. Highway 6 through Homestead, Marengo, Newton, Des Moines, Adel, and on beyond the frontier through Fairview (later Morrisburgh) and historic Dalmanutha in Guthrie County whence they followed the old stage road in a southwesterly direction, joining the Mormon Trail of 1846 at Lewis in Cass County. Proceeding to Council Bluffs, they veered north to cross the Missouri at Florence, Nebraska. The new Mormon Bridge at North Omaha stands as a symbol today of their crossing.

At Brush Run west of Homestead two girls deserted the group, hiding in the woods until the party had left. They were sheltered by the settlers and ultimately married young men in the Iowa County area where their descendants still live today. As they passed through Newton on June 20th an editor described them as the "lowest order of human beings."

During their thirty day trek across Iowa the Handcart Expedition passed through towns just as quickly as possible to prevent their women and girls from meeting men. The following from the *Fort Des Moines Citizen* is typical:

Our citizens were somewhat surprised on yesterday morning at the sudden appearance of about five hundred Mormons in silent procession through our streets. They presented at once a singular and revolting spectacle, as they moved along in Indian file drawing their carts which were laden with the necessaries of the journey. It was truly an inhuman sight to see women hitched like so many cattle to rude vehicles, sometimes two and two while the men were walking along idle, sometimes a man and woman, and frequently a man and two women. — They were altogether an extremely hard looking set. An old gentleman who was in their camp the previous evening informed us that there was at least one hundred women who were almost frantic to escape, but were deterred by the threats of their friends. On their foremost waggon was perched their banner, bearing these words: "The chosen People of the Lord, bound for the promised Land."

Miserable, deluded people! Our heart almost bled for these poor women, and children as they trudged along covered with dust, and the sun at a temperature of about one hundred degrees beating upon them. — There were doubtless many of them, who had left homes and friends in the old world, who would gladly give all their future prospects to return. There is yet a journey of some twelve hundred miles between them — nearly two hundred miles of which lies through a habitless, waterless desert. It must not be otherwise but that some of them must fall by fatigue and disease. There was about three women upon an average to one man. — There were also a great many children. — These people were all from Europe — mostly from England. About seven hundred more are expected through this evening or to-morrow.

Despite such comments in the press, the people of Iowa gave food to the hungry wayfarers and

urged them not to attempt the long trip overland, especially so late in the summer. The converts, however, were new to the difficulties of prairie travel; they were inspired by the hope of seeing the new Zion, and thoroughly under the influence of their leaders who constantly warned them against the Gentiles. Relatively few of the company withdrew.

On August 18, 1856, the first detachment left Florence, Nebraska, westward bound. If the trip through Iowa had been full of hardships that now before the immigrants was appalling. In Iowa food was more plentiful and charity frequently supplemented the regular rations. But on the plains there was no opportunity to secure clothing or bedding as the nights grew chill, no settlers' shanties where food might be secured if their own supply gave out. There was food, it is true, in the herds of buffalo, but these European working men were totally unfitted to secure it.

The carts were more heavily laden than before, bedding and warm clothing being discarded for lack of room, and a ninety-eight pound sack of flour added, nearly doubling the original burden. The flour ration, however, was increased to a pound a day, fresh meat was issued occasionally, and each hundred had three or four milch cows.

As they traveled westward they sang their favorite handcart song to the tune of *A Little More Cider*. The words were as follows:



Oh, our faith goes with the hand-carts,  
And they have our hearts' best love;  
'Tis a novel mode of travelling,  
*Devised by the Gods above.*

## CHORUS:

Hurrah for the Camp of Israell  
Hurrah for the hand-cart scheme!  
Hurrah! hurrah! 'tis better far  
Than the wagon and ox-team.

*And Brigham's their executive,*  
He told us the design;  
And the Saints are proudly marching on,  
Along the hand-cart line.

Who cares to go with the wagons?  
Not we who are free and strong;  
Our faith and arms, with right good will,  
Shall pull our carts along.

As they traveled across Nebraska with their heavy loads the handcarts were frequently breaking down and the axles worn from the constant grinding of the dry sand. Men like Archer Walters not only pulled their carts all day but worked late repairing the rickety carts. In addition to heat and dust, violent storms added to their miseries. On July 26th Walters recorded:

Passed over the ferry — Lucke Fort. Traveled about 6 miles. As soon as we crossed it looked very heavy and black. We had not got far and it began to lightning and soon the thunder roared and about the middle of the train of handcarts the lightning struck a brother and he fell to rise no more in that body. By the name of Henry Walker, from Carlisle Conference, aged 58 years. Left a

wife and children. One boy burned a little named James Stoddard; we thought he would die but he recovered and was able to walk, and Brother Wm. Stoddard, father of the boy was knocked to the ground and a sister, Betsy Taylor, was terribly shook but recovered. All wet through. This happened about 2 miles from the ferry and we then went 2 miles to camp. I put the body with the help of others, on the handcart and pulled him to camp and buried him without a coffin for there were no boards to be had.

27th — The next morning, Sunday 27th, 1856, four miles west of Luke Fort Ferry. Rose about 4 o'clock. Put a new axle tree to a cart that was broke yesterday. Traveled about 2 miles to a better camping ground.

28th — Traveled about 18 miles. Harriet much better; for such we feel thankful.

29th — Traveled about 15 miles. Met a company coming from California. A child born in camp. Sister Doney. My birthday.

To add to their difficulties a herd of buffalo stampeded their cattle near Wood River on August 2nd and thirty of the oxen were lost. The one yoke remaining for each wagon was unable to pull the loads of some 3000 pounds over the rough roads and the beef cattle, cows, and young stock were put under the yoke. Even then another sack of flour had to be added to each cart to lighten the weight of the wagons.

On August 4th they camped on the Platte; on the 6th Walters recorded thousands of buffalo "so thick together they covered four miles at once

. . .” On the 7th they had to “dig for water and it was very thick. Our hungry appetites satisfied by the buffalo.” On the 10th they traveled fourteen miles. “All or most of the people bad with diarrhea or purging, whether it was the buffalo or the muddy water.” Despite their illness, men were sent out almost daily to shoot buffalo which the hungry emigrants devoured eagerly. In his journal Walters recorded:

- 11th — Traveled about 17 miles. Four men sent to shoot buffalo. Harriet much better; very weak myself. I expect it is the short rations: three-fourths lb. of flour per day. It is but little but it is as much as the oxen teams that we have could draw from Florence. Forded over two creeks. Met a man coming from California by himself; going to the states. One of our cows died. Buffalo killed.
- 12th — Rested while some of the brethren with Captain Ellsworth went and shot two more buffalo and we dried the meat.
- 13th — Traveled 12 miles. Forded a large creek.
- 14th — Traveled 18 miles; crossed three creeks. Last herd of buffalo seen.

For approximately three weeks they traveled along the north bank of the Platte. On August 21st they encamped four miles beyond Chimney Rock on the Platte. On August 24th Walters recorded:

Rested from travels but had to repair handcars, meeting at night. Received the Sacrament. Spoke at the meeting. Brother Ellsworth spoke some time and said we had made great improvement. That last week there had been



less quarreling and those that had robbed the handcarts, or wagons, unless they repent their flesh would rot from their bones and go to Hell.

When they arrived at Fort Laramie on August 27th they found that some promised supplies had not arrived. It was decided to reduce rations from a pound to twelve ounces for working men, nine ounces for women and old men, and from four to eight ounces for children, and to make every effort to travel faster. They traveled 18 miles on the 27th, 15 miles on the 28th, 25 miles on the 29th, and 30 miles on the 30th. On August 31st Walters complained of being "faint and hungry" but despite this they covered 22 miles. His journal for September, 1856, reads as follows:

- 1st — Rested from travels. I mended carts. Meeting about flour and paying for extra that was brought in the wagons, 18c per lb. Harriet getting quite well and walks all the way.
- 2nd — Platte River. Traveled 19 miles. Walter Sanderson, aged 56, died.
- 3rd — Met 4 wagons; Henshaw from Nottingham, John Barnes from Sheffield. Traveled 15 miles.
- 4th — Traveled 10 miles.
- 5th — Rested. Rained all day.
- 6th — Lost Cattle.
- 7th — Traveled 26 miles. Bro. Nipras died. Left on road.
- 8th — 11 miles. Had dinner at Devils Gate.
- 12th — Sarah very poorly. Harriet quite well.
- 13th — Traveled 28 miles. Camped at Paciffick Springs. Tucked a blanket with a brother from the valley

who came from Rotheham, named Goldsmith, part of Bro. Banks' wagon company.

14th — Traveled 3 miles. Camped to mend handcarts and women to wash. Sister Mayer died.

The journal of Archer Walters ends abruptly on September 14th. Twelve days later the first handcart detachment reached Salt Lake City where they were met by a delegation of church officers, a large number of citizens, an escort of cavalry, and the Nauvoo legion band. Despite the intense sufferings endured along the way church officials considered the "divine plan" of transporting converts a great success.

Archer Walters had gained "the Valleys of the Mountains" but he was not destined to personally share the joy of his new home in the "land of Zion." A fortnight after his arrival in Salt Lake City he died from dysentery caused by "eating cornmeal and molasses aggravated by his weakened condition and lowered resistance resulting from exposure, under-nourishment, and physical exhaustion." His five children, however, married in the Church and their descendants live on to bless his name.

The two later companies were not so fortunate. The fourth detachment, commanded by James G. Willie, was detained at Iowa City for three weeks while the carts were being made for them and did not leave until the middle of July. The fifth and last company for the year '1856, led by Captain

Edward Martin, began its long march on July 28th. The trials and vicissitudes through which members of the fourth and fifth handcart expeditions passed are among the most harrowing in the history of the West. The old, the weak, and many of the young were frozen to death as they stubbornly attempted to cross South Pass in the towering Rocky Mountains. Sixty-seven of the fourth company perished while the fifth and last detachment lost even more heavily: about one-fourth of the party died enroute, most of them in crossing the mountains. The heavy death toll inflicted on the handcart expeditions of 1856 led to their discontinuance after 1860.

It should be observed in closing that Mormons were leaving by other routes and by other means of transportation between 1856 and 1860. The *Burlington Daily Hawk Eye & Telegraph* of March 1, 1856, noted the arrival by rail of 450 Norwegian converts and another group of 200 Mormons from Sweden, Norway, and England, all bound for Salt Lake City. On March 31st the same paper noted that eastern exchanges were giving the Rock Island Railroad to Iowa City as the preferred route. The *Hawk Eye* promptly called the attention of eastern editors to their ignorance of distances and geography and urged all immigrants to take the Burlington route.

The flood of converts, westward bound to their new Zion, is one of the most dramatic stories in



the annals of the West. Their courage, faith, and resourcefulness, their spirit of cooperation and their inspired leadership, all combined to spell success for an adventure which most Americans would have marked off from the start as doomed to failure. The history of Iowa is greatly enriched because Iowa City served as the starting point for those bold adventurers — the intrepid souls who made up the Mormon Handcart Expeditions.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN