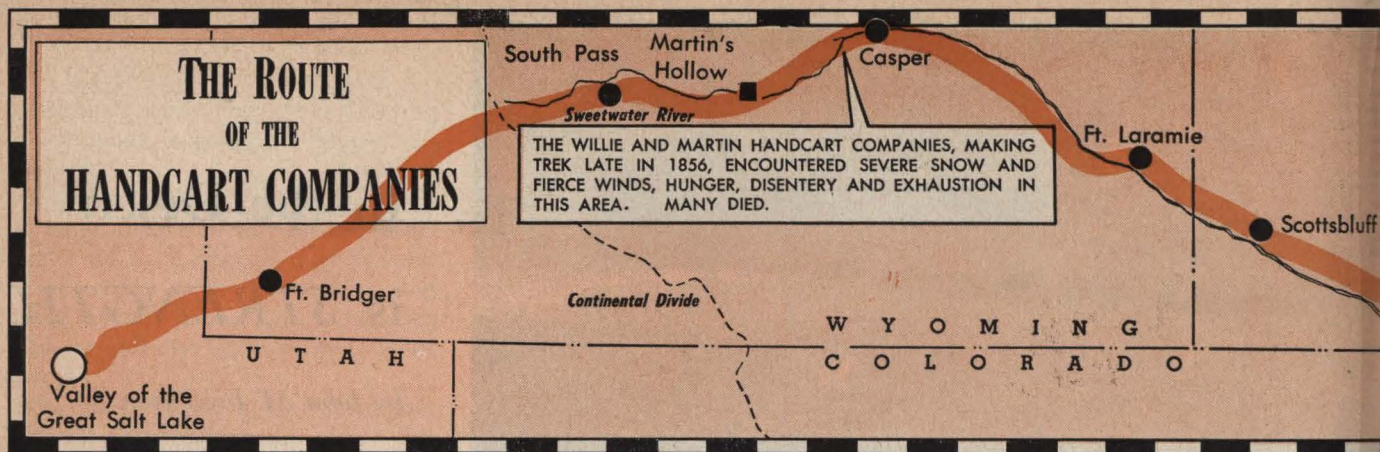


The IMPROVEMENT ERA

JULY 1956

Historic Hole-in-the-Rock





THE HANDCARTS OF '56

by *Gustive O. Larson*

PROFESSOR CHURCH HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; . . .

Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked. (D & C 29:7-8.)

DID A PEOPLE ever devote themselves more assiduously in performance of divine commission than did members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in gathering Israel out of Babylon to help build God's latter-day kingdom? To that end the Perpetual Emigrating Fund was created in Salt Lake City in 1849 and incorporated as a company two years later. Its first objective was to bring in the Nauvoo exiles who were stranded at the Missouri River, virtually without means to continue their flight to Zion. Even before that task was completed in 1852, the Fund became available for the rescue of the "Lord's Poor" from their European homelands.

Tens of thousands from overseas had responded to the message of the restoration, universally accompanied by the spirit of gathering. While the Nauvoo refugees had remained on the Potawatamie lands in Iowa, their settlement had served as a stopover base for the European converts who

could not make the through journey to Salt Lake Valley. But when the Iowa base was abandoned, the Presidency instructed, "Let only those leave England who can go through either on their own means or by means of the Emigrating Fund."¹

Such instructions were disappointing to the thousands of poor Saints heavily charged with the spirit of gathering. Wrote Orson Pratt as he turned the British LDS Mission presidency over to Franklin D. Richards in the fall of 1851:

We would hardly judge that there were a hundred families among the Saints in Great Britain who are able to go direct from this to the Salt Lake basin. . . . We are in hopes that the time will soon come when there will be capital sufficient to enable the Saints to pass on to the place of their destination without any delay.²

When President Richards introduced the subject of assisted emigration to the British Saints, there was enthusiastic response. Contributions to the Emigration Fund reached a total of 1440 pounds in 1852, which amount equaled that raised in Utah. Nearly seventeen thousand Zion-bound emigrants sailed from Liverpool between 1848 and 1855, with the number reaching 4225 in the last single year. London and Liverpool bank deposits available to the LDS Emigration agent amounted to thirty thousand pounds (\$150,000) between 1852 and 1855, and President Richards drove favorable bargains with the shipping companies.

But in spite of prodigious exertions, the objectives of the emigrating program failed to measure up to expectations. Transportation costs increased rapidly from year to year, and the emigrating company became financially embarrassed through failure of its beneficiaries to repay their loans. Unless some new method could be devised, the gathering of the Lord's poor would soon come to a standstill.

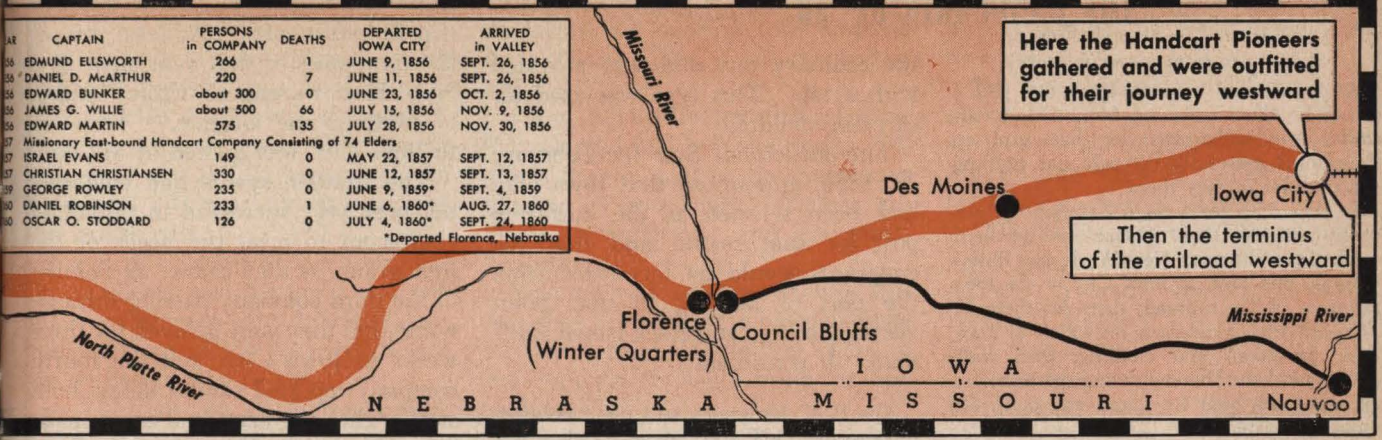
In this crisis the handcart experiment was born. It was neither new in concept nor practice for it had been discussed since 1851, and wagon train emigrants often demonstrated that by walking they could outdistance the ox-teams. Novelty lay in encumbering the walking emigrant with a load to push or pull across the plains.

Foreshadowing the advent of handcart transportation came a general epistle addressed to the Saints in October 1851:

The voice of the good Shepherd is to all Saints, even the ends of the earth; gather yourselves together, come home; . . . Some of the children of the world have crossed the mountains and plains from Missouri to California with a pack on their backs to worship their god—Gold! . . . Some of the Saints now in our midst came here with wagons or carts made of wood, without a particle of iron, hooping their wheels with hickory, or rawhide or ropes, and had as good and safe a journey as any in the camps, with their well-wrought iron wagons; and can you not do the same? Yes, if you have the same desire, the same faith. Families might start from the Missouri River with cows, hand-carts, wheel-barrow, with little flour and no unnecessary and come to this place quicker, and with less fatigue, than by following the heavy trains with their cumbrous herds, which they are often obliged to drive miles to feed. Do you like this way of travelling? Do you think salvation costs too much? If so, it is not worth having.³

The financial strain upon the emigrating company in 1855 made con-

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tinuance under the old plan impossible. Brigham Young, as president of the company, wrote to Franklin D. Richards in England as follows:

I have been thinking how we should operate another year. We cannot afford to purchase wagons and teams as in times past, I am consequently thrown back upon my old plan—to make hand-carts and let the emigration foot it, and draw upon them the necessary supplies, having a cow or two for every ten. They can come just as quick if not quicker, and much cheaper—can start earlier and escape the prevailing sickness which annually lays so many of our brethren in the dust. A great majority of them walk now even with the teams which are provided, and have a great deal more care and perplexity than they would have if they came without them. They will only need 90 days' rations from the time of their leaving the Missouri River, and as the settlements extend up the Platte, not that much. The carts can be made without a particle of iron, with wheels hooped, made strong and light, and one, or if the family be large, two of them will bring all that they will need upon the plains.

If it is once tried you will find that it will become the favorite mode of crossing the plains; they will have nothing to do but come along, and I should not be surprised if a company of this kind should make the trip in sixty or seventy days. I do know that they can beat any ox train crossing the plains. I want to see it fairly tried and tested, at all events, and I think we might as well begin another year as any time and save this enormous expense of purchasing wagons and teams—indeed we will be obliged to pursue this course or suspend operations, for aught that I can see at the present. . . .

It will become important for you to forward us a list of their names and advise brothers Taylor and Spencer that they may make arrangements accordingly. If they will do this, nothing doubting, I can promise them that they will be met with provisions and friends far down on the plains, perhaps as low as Laramie if we get their names in time; you know almost everybody has friends and relatives, here now, that when they find their friends are coming will go out and meet them.⁴

wrote to John Taylor, receiving agent for the company in New York:

We propose settling colonies at every suitable location along the route of travel where grain can be raised, that in their migration hither the Saints can travel from settlement to settlement and find friends and provisions. The project has also in view the establishment of a daily express arrangement which we ultimately design to have out from the Missouri to California.

The Church leaders' enthusiasm

for the new plan was more than matched by the impatience of European converts who begged for the privilege of coming to Zion under almost any conditions. The plan was therefore announced in *The Millennial Star* as follows:

Let the Saints who can, gather up for Zion, and come while the way is open before them; let the poor also come, whether
(Continued on following page)



"The Handcarts," by J. Leo Fairbanks, a mural in the Bureau of Information, Salt Lake City.

The president had further plans to safeguard the walking emigrants. He
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THE HANDCARTS OF '56

(Continued from preceding page)

they receive aid or not from the [P.E.] Fund; let them come on foot, with hand-carts, or wheelbarrows; let them gird up their loins and walk through and nothing shall hinder or stay them.

In regard to the foreign immigration another year, let them pursue the northern route from Boston, New York, or Philadelphia, and land at Iowa City or the then terminus of the railroad; there let them be provided with hand-carts on which to draw their provisions and clothing; then walk and draw them, thereby saving the immense expense every year for teams and outfit for crossing the plains. . . .

We purpose sending men of faith and experience with suitable instructions to some proper out-fitting point, to carry into effect the above suggestions; let the Saints therefore, who intend to immigrate the ensuing year, understand that they are expected to walk, and draw their luggage across the plains, and that they will be assisted by the Fund in no other way.⁵

In his letter of September, President Young promised to forward instructions to Daniel Spencer, agent at Iowa City, regarding the building of handcarts. These vehicles were to be completed before the arrival of the immigrants at that place so that there should be no delay in continuing the journey. An early start was emphasized, and there was ground for the belief expressed that the handcart company could outtravel the ox-team train since it would be unencumbered by large numbers of cattle.⁶

The carts themselves were very simple in construction. They were made of wood, and when properly selected and seasoned, the material proved serviceable enough. However, experience in their use brought improvements in their construction and greater durability. The box construction was usually of Iowa hickory or oak with the shafts of the same material, but the axle was uniformly of hickory. One who had experience with them wrote:

In length the side pieces and shafts were about six or seven feet, with three or four binding crossbars from the back part to the fore part of the body of the cart. Then two or three feet space from the latter bar to the front bar or singletree for the lead horse or lead man, woman, or boy of the team. . . . Across the bars of the bed of the cart we usually sewed a strip of bed ticking or a counterpane. On this wooden cart, with thimbleless axle, having about two and one half inch shoulder and one inch point, were often loaded 400 to 500 pounds of flour, bedding, extra clothing, cooking utensils, and a tent.⁷

Another type known as the family cart was made a little heavier than

the ordinary one and was provided with a top. This type was used for carrying children.

The *Millennial Star* for February 23, 1856, announced that Iowa City had been selected as the outfitting post for that season and that the emigrants would be forwarded from the port of landing to that point via the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad. It continued:

The P. E. Emigrants will use hand-carts in crossing the Plains, in which they will convey their provisions, tent, and necessary luggage. . . . There will of course be means provided for conveyance of the aged, infirm, and those unable for any cause to walk. . . . The first two hundred miles of the journey from Iowa City will be through a settled grain growing country where it is expected that supplies of provisions can be obtained without labor of hauling them any considerable distance. By traveling this distance with carts lightly loaded the Saints will have an excellent opportunity of becoming accustomed to camp life, and walking and thereby be better prepared for starting out on the plains.⁸

It was anticipated that the cost of transportation under the new plan would be nine pounds for each adult and four pounds, ten shillings for those under one year of age.⁹ This practically cut the per capita cost of the previous year in half.

Five companies, including more than 1600 European converts, came to Utah the handcart way in 1856. They included English, Welsh, and Scandinavians. The first two companies, led by Edmund Ellsworth and Daniel McArthur, included 266 and 220 persons. They left Iowa City early in June, followed soon after by a smaller company led by Edward Bunker. The fourth and fifth companies had been delayed in their departure from Liverpool, and after further delay on the American frontier, left Iowa City on July 15 and 26. Although forty percent of their membership remained on the frontier, these companies led by James G. Willie and Edward Martin, still numbered 404 and 576 respectively.

With New York and Boston as ports of landing the majority of the Mormon immigration proceeded from the latter city by rail via New York to Iowa City, Iowa, a distance of nearly 1300 miles. In keeping with the aim to pare expenses, the trip by rail did not permit many comforts. One who crossed the plains in the third company of the season wrote that her

ship's passengers made the railway trip in cattle cars.¹⁰ At least one of the companies of that year slept in a New York warehouse while waiting to continue the journey.¹¹ The fare to Iowa City was quoted at \$11.00.¹²

The frontier agents had evidently not been very successful in providing equipment to meet the needs of the immigrants as they came. A member of the third company passing through wrote that they were delayed for three weeks in Iowa City, and the fourth company reported similar delay, both stating that the carts had to be made as well as yokes, tents, etc.¹³ With the information at hand, it would be difficult to place responsibility for this delay, but it became a contributing factor towards tragedy which awaited the last two companies of the season.¹⁴

The next stopping place was Florence, Nebraska, located on the site of old Winter Quarters, nearly 300 miles west of Iowa City. J. H. Latey, in a letter from Florence to John Taylor on August 14, said of the first two companies:

They were singing as they came along, one would not think that they had come from Iowa City, a long and rough journey of 275 to 300 miles, except for their dust stained garments and sunburned faces. The first company boasted of what they called the Birmingham Band. One of their songs, as they marched was entitled, "Some must push and some must pull,"

Ye Saints who dwell on Europe's shore
Prepare yourselves for many more,
To leave behind your native land,
For sure God's judgments are at hand.
For you must cross the raging main
Before the promised land you gain,
And with the faithful make a start,
To cross the plains with your hand-cart.

Chorus:

For some must push and some must pull,
As we go marching up the hill;
So merrily on the way we go
Until we reach the Valley, oh!

* * *

And long before the Valley's gained
We will be met upon the plains
With music sweet and friends so dear
And fresh supplies our hearts to cheer.
And then with music and with song
How cheerfully we'll march along,
And thank the day we made a start
To cross the plains with our hand-cart.¹⁵

Latey continued in his letter:

The companies are much alike. They do not need separate description. The first Handcart Company left the ground on Thursday, July 16, went out three and a half miles and camped. On the 20th I

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The Handcarts of '56

(Continued from page 502)

went out to settle up with Captain Ellsworth and saw them start off in good earnest to the tune of "some must pull, etc." (Can't move without that.)

The second company left Florence on July 24th. The third company, composed almost entirely of emigrants from Wales under the direction of Edward Bunker, arrived at Florence on the 19th of July and set out across the plains on the 30th. Latey's comment on the delays caused in Florence is significant as related to the two remaining companies of that season:

The companies stay here longer than they otherwise would in consequence of the carts being unfit for their journey across the plains; some requiring new axles, and the whole of them having to have a piece of iron screwed on to prevent the wheel from wearing away the wood.¹⁷

The optimism of those directing the handcart movement is reflected in a letter from Erastus Snow to John Taylor written on September 15.

So far as is yet known the experiment with hand-carts is likely to succeed quite as well as the most ardent advocate of the measure could have anticipated. At our latest advices the advance companies were in the regions of Fort Laramie and all were in excellent health and spirits, moving on finely and far outstripping the ox train.¹⁸

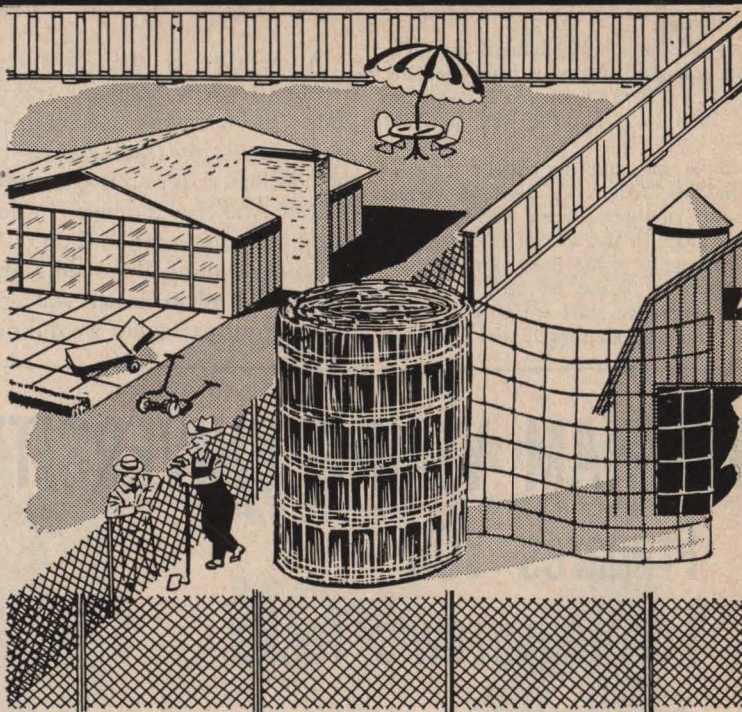
The new experiment, however, did not always present a picnic prospect. There were those who weakened and withdrew from the ranks along the way, and those who hesitated on the borders of the plains to undertake the journey at all. An interesting contrast in the feelings of some of those who faced the prospects of a thousand mile overland journey on foot appears in contemporary correspondence. Writes one of a family that hesitated at the sight of the handcarts:

We think it will be better to remain here [Williamsburg] or at St. Louis for a time until we are able to help ourselves to a wagon. . . . Why, we would have to sell nearly all our clothes! And what shall we do for things to wear when we get to the Valley? Seventeen pounds weight each is but very little.¹⁹

The answer from a relative remaining in England represents the other extreme and is sharp in its rebuke. Expressing pleasure at receiving the

(Continued on following page)

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THE HANDCARTS OF '56

(Continued from preceding page)

letter from which the foregoing was taken, the writer goes on:

But my pleasure was changed to great pain and unfeigned sorrow when I read the contents. . . . There is not one atom of the spirit of Zion in it but the very spirit of apostasy. . . .

You invite me and my family to stay awhile in New York. . . . Brothers, sisters, fathers, or mothers, when they put a stumbling block in the way of my salvation are nothing more to me than Gentiles. As for me and my house we will serve the Lord and when we start we will go right up to Zion if we go ragged and barefoot.

. . . There are hundreds in England who have begged and prayed with tears for your privilege of going to Zion but have been unable to get it. And now you slight it!²⁰

A member of the third company wrote that her husband was offered many inducements to remain in Iowa to work at his trade for as high as ten dollars a day, but concluded that money was no inducement for they were anxious to get to Zion.²¹ "Many of settlers along the road," she said, "made fun of us as we walked along pulling our carts, but we did not care;

the weather was fine and the roads were excellent; and although I was sick and we were all tired out at night we thought it was a glorious way to come to Zion."

In contrast again is the report from J. H. Latey writing from Florence:

There are others, for I have seen both sides of the picture. . . . [who] are allured by fine promises and high wages; others there are whose faith is not of that nature to stand the trials they are called upon to undergo, and back out from five to fifty in a company of three hundred.²²

No doubt the delay in Iowa City and Florence set many to serious consideration of what course to take and led to withdrawals, either temporary or permanent, from the ranks of the migrating companies.

CHILD IN THE CHAPEL

By Remelda Nielsen Gibson

SHE FOLDED her arms and bowed her head When prayer was offered and blessings were said;

She reverently sat without a sound While the Sacrament was passed around.

She looked at the book when hymns were sung

But seemingly uttered a different tongue. Surely God watched her approvingly, For the fine example was only three.

The first two companies arrived in Salt Lake Valley on the 26th of September. They were met near the mouth of Emigration Canyon by Presidents Young, Kimball, and Wells, with military and band escort. Captain Ellsworth's company arrived first, closely followed by Captain McArthur's. "The line of march," reported the *Deseret News*, "was scarcely taken up before it began to be met by men, women, and children, on foot, on horses, and in wagons, thronging out to see and welcome the first hand-cart companies, and the numbers rapidly increased until the living tide lined and thronged South Temple Street."²³ An eyewitness wrote:

As they came down the bench you could scarcely see them for the dust. When they entered the City the folks came running from every quarter to get a glimpse of the long looked-for hand-carts. . . . I shall never forget the feeling that ran through my whole system as I caught the first sight of them. The first hand-cart was drawn by a man and his wife. They had a little flag on it, on which were the words, "Our president, may the unity of the Saints ever show the wisdom of his counsels."

THE IMPROVEMENT ERA

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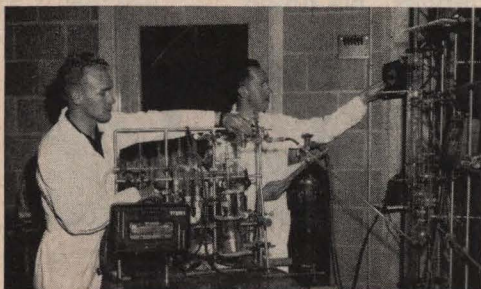
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The next hand-cart was drawn by three young women. . . . The tears ran down the cheeks of many a man who you would have thought would not, could not, shed a tear.²⁴

The third company joined the others in the valley on October 2. Summarizing the journey of these companies, the *News* reported that the mortality rate had been less than the average attending the ox trains; that they had often traveled twenty-five and thirty miles a day and would had they not been obliged to wait upon the slow progress of the ox teams carrying the tents and supplies.

The handcart episode has been remembered popularly by the tragedy that unfortunately crept into it. The disaster that befell the last two companies of 1856 must receive due attention as part of the handcart story, but the movement as a whole must not be lost sight of. The experiment was not without success and would likely have continued over a longer period had not other developments in transportation methods brought it to a close. It should be kept in mind also that the Mormon immigration for 1856 was not made up entirely of handcart members. Out of a total of 3756 immigrants, only about half, or 1978, were P.E. (perpetual emigration) passengers listed to travel by handcart; three hundred and eighty-five were booked to go through on their own means, and the balance was to remain in the states for the season.

(To be concluded)

REFERENCES

- ¹*Millennial Star* XIV:27.
²*Ibid.*, XI, 278.
³Sixth General Epistle, October 1851, *Millennial Star* XIV:23.
⁴*Ibid.*, XVII:813-814.
⁵*Ibid.*, XVIII:54.
⁶*Ibid.*, XVII:813-814. Quoting from Florence *Courier*, which described an eastbound party of missionaries with handcarts: "... General impression upon the mind of the public is that the handcart is the slowest and most laborious mode of conveyance that can be used. From the report of this party and of others we are inclined to think it exactly the reverse. This party was but 19 days in coming from Fort Laramie, a distance of 520 miles—an average of over 27 miles per day—some days they made 25 miles. This is certainly not slow traveling and when we reflect upon the many inconveniences to which a traveller is subjected with his horses, mules, and oxen in crossing the Plains; the crossing of streams, danger of stampedes, selection of camping place for the cattle, tethering and working with them morning and night, we are inclined to think that for a California or Salt

Lake trip, we would give the handcart the preference over any other mode, unless we had fine teams and so few of other traps as to enable us to take plenty of corn for the animals."

- ⁷*Latter-day Saints Journal History*, November 9, 1856.
⁸*Millennial Star*, XVIII:122.
⁹*Ibid.*, XVIII:713.
¹⁰*Latter-day Saints Journal History*, October 2, 1856. From Miss Priscilla Merriman Evans' diary.
¹¹*Ibid.*, November 9, 1856. J. G. Willie's Narrative.
¹²*Ibid.*, November 9, 1856. Wm. Woodward letter.
¹³*Ibid.*, October 2, 1856; November 9, 1856.
¹⁴Stenhouse, T. B. H. *Rocky Mountain Saints*, p. 342. Stenhouse attributes the

handcart disaster to "misunderstanding between the Liverpool and New York offices." His account, based largely on the John Chislett diary, and an anonymous "eyewitness" account reflects considerable bias.

- ¹⁵*Millennial Star*, XVIII:637.
¹⁶From Pioneer Songs—21 Pub. by Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1932.
¹⁷*Millennial Star*, XVIII:638.
¹⁸*Latter-day Saints Journal History*, September 15, 1856.
¹⁹*Millennial Star*, XVIII:369.
²⁰*Ibid.*, XVIII:369-371.
²¹*Latter-day Saints Journal History*, October 2, 1856.
²²*Millennial Star*, XVIII:637.
²³*Deseret News*, VI:236.
²⁴*Latter-day Saints Journal History*, September 29, 1856.



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The IMPROVEMENT *ERA*

AUGUST 1956

The Handcarts of '56

by Gustive O. Larson

PROFESSOR CHURCH HISTORY AND
PHILOSOPHY
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY



Photograph courtesy "The Instructor"

A handcart company facing a blizzard, from a sketch by George M. Ottinger.

(CONCLUSION)

YOU WILL go forward this season at your own risk." The speaker faced a crowd of immigrants who had just crossed the Missouri River and paused to recondition their handcarts at Florence, Nebraska. In spite of hazards caused by repeated delays, they were clamoring to set out across the wilderness for the Great Basin. Having sounded the warning of an experienced guide, Levi Savage turned to kick the dust from a curious wooden cart wheel and stooped to adjust a loosened spoke.

It was late August in 1856. The immigrants were wholly ignorant of the country ahead and unused to the rigors of camp life. Should they attempt to cross the Rockies before winter snows set in or delay until the following spring? Four of their number who acted as captains of hundreds in the company had been in Utah; also two others, G. D. Grant and W. H. Kimball, who were superintending the season's emigration. When the company captain, J. G. Willie, called for a decision on whether to remain or go, all of these except one commended their charges to the beneficence of Providence. Some were disposed to express confidence that the elements would be tempered in their behalf and see them safely through. Thus reassured, most of the foreign band paid little heed to Levi Savage's warning. Had not Providence brought

them safely from far-off England, Scotland, Wales, and Scandinavia: Would not his protecting hand be over them even in the mountains? As the vote was called, these sons and daughters of foreign lands, simply clad, travel-worn and dusty, pressed eagerly upon their leader to render a decision in the affirmative.

Echoes of their ill-fated enthusiasm had hardly died away in the distance when members of the Martin Company began pouring into the Florence camp. As they emerged from the dust clouds, it was noticeable that able-bodied men were in a minority among large numbers of aged and children. Again there was delay to repair broken carts, another council called, and on August 27, five hundred and seventy-six others began moving hopefully toward the western horizon.

They formed a colorful spectacle as the winding train of vehicles, drawn or pushed by men and women, moved forward between occasional supply wagons and small herds of milk cows. Many of the carts were tastefully painted to suit the fancy of the owners, while here and there appeared inscriptions such as "Truth will prevail," "Zion's Express," "Blessings follow sacrifice," and "Merry Mormons." Snatches of the marching song, "Some must push and some must pull" served to lighten the monotony of the daily routine. Self-imposed discipline and strict camp

regulations facilitated progress permitting an advance of from twelve to fifteen miles a day. Men, women, and children alike tramped patiently forward. The fatigued and ill, alone, received whatever comforts were afforded by riding in the supply wagons.

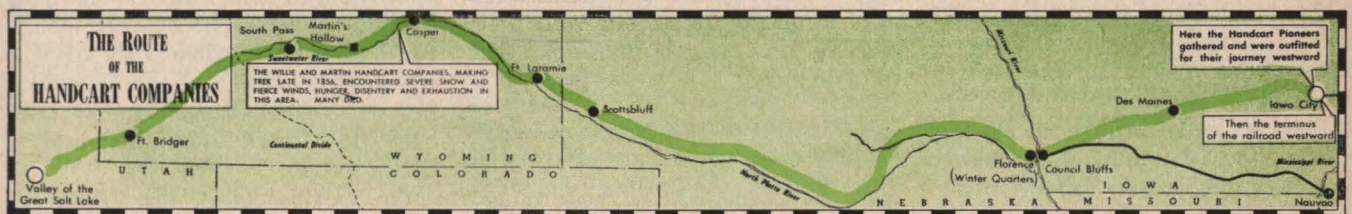
Evening brought rest and recreation. Family fires smoldered after supper while the community blaze mounted as a signal for a general gathering. Young folk sang and made merry in impromptu programs. Untamed muscles strained for supremacy in wrestling, jumping, and camp stunts, for the entertainment of the gentler sex. With song and story the older ones, too, joined in the evening's diversion until the hour for retirement approached.

The noise subsided as a circle closed around the fire. Then softly across the dying embers all voices joined in singing those lines which encouraged thousands to go on when enthusiasm lagged. "Come, Come, Ye Saints"¹ had been bequeathed by the pioneers of a decade earlier to the thousands who would follow them into the west. It became the common heritage of foreign as well as native tongues.

With the closing words of the song each sought his covers, and when the last echoes of taps died away in the darkness, the emigrants slept with the wilderness.

Fall came early with frosty nights. Aspen groves turned yellow on the

(Continued on following page)



Map showing the trail over which the handcart pioneers traveled.

The Handcarts of '56

(Continued from preceding page)

mountain slopes, and crimson patches of oak held forebodings of approaching winter. Far down on the plains of Wyoming the Willie and Martin companies moved hopefully up the Platte. Emigration agents, including Franklin D. Richards returning from England, having closed the business of the season at Iowa City hurried westward. With horse teams, they passed the Martin Company at Loupe Fork and found them in good spirits and health. Later they met two members of the Willie Company returning for thirty head of strayed cattle. Purchasing a few buffalo robes for this latter company at North Fork of the Platte and promising that supplies would await them at Laramie, the agents hastened on to Salt Lake City.

The morning of October first dawned upon a disappointed camp of men and women on the outskirts of Fort Laramie. Provisions of food and clothing, upon which they depended, were not awaiting them. The scant seventeen pounds of clothing permitted each member of the Willie Company gave little comfort on that frosty morning. As they gathered, shivering, around the campfires to prepare a meager breakfast, there was lacking the usual banter and song. The consciousness of threatening storms, decreased rations, and insufficient clothing was not easily shaken.

Day after day they pushed painfully forward. A brave heart responding to a moment of sunshine brought back "Some must push and some must pull," and for a brief hour it revived their spirits as the tramp, tramp, tramp, fitted into its rhythm. The clouds grew darker and lowered. A breeze from the north rustled through the last oak leaves clinging crisply to barren twigs. Naked aspens stood in columns of somber whiteness. A coyote slunk through the underbrush, and a moment later, silhouetted for an instant against a gray skyline, howled a melancholy, unearthly challenge. Strong men cast anxious glances toward their mates. Instinctively, children trudged more closely upon parental heels. A flutter of leaves broke through the moving line, and women drew their shawls a little more closely about them, bowed their heads a trifle lower, and plodded onward.

YEAR	CAPTAIN	PERSONS in COMPANY	DEATHS	DEPARTED IOWA CITY	ARRIVED in VALLEY
1856	EDMUND ELLSWORTH	266	1	JUNE 9, 1856	SEPT. 26, 1856
1856	DANIEL D. McARTHUR	220	7	JUNE 11, 1856	SEPT. 26, 1856
1856	EDWARD BUNKER	about 300	0	JUNE 23, 1856	OCT. 2, 1856
1856	JAMES G. WILLIE	about 500	66	JULY 15, 1856	NOV. 9, 1856
1856	EDWARD MARTIN	575	135	JULY 28, 1856	NOV. 30, 1856
1857	Missionary East-bound Handcart Company Consisting of 74 Elders				
1857	ISRAEL EVANS	149	0	MAY 22, 1857	SEPT. 12, 1857
1857	CHRISTIAN CHRISTIANSEN	330	0	JUNE 12, 1857	SEPT. 13, 1857
1859	GEORGE ROWLEY	235	0	JUNE 9, 1859*	SEPT. 4, 1859
1860	DANIEL ROBINSON	233	1	JUNE 6, 1860*	AUG. 27, 1860
1860	OSCAR O. STODDARD	126	0	JULY 4, 1860*	SEPT. 24, 1860

*Departed Florence, Nebraska

Table showing the years handcart companies made their journey and number of persons who traveled to the Salt Lake Valley.

A sudden gust of wind brought a flurry of snowflakes. Their worst fears became a reality. Hour after hour the treacherous snow piled up its deathtrap. Shoes, worn through, exposed bare feet to its damp and chill. Scarcely a wrap was provided as a change for wet and frozen clothing. More serious still, cutting the food rations to a minimum could only preserve the supply a few days. The two scouts who had been sent to recover strayed cattle overtook the camp without them. But they had come upon the tracks of the Martin Company and reported that they led away from the main trail. Its five hundred and seventy-six members were also at the mercy of an unprecedented early blizzard.

President Brigham Young addressing the October general conference, held that year in the bowery on Temple Square, said:

[My] subject . . . is this, on this fifth day of October, 1856, many of our brethren and sisters are on the plains with hand-carts, and probably are now 700 miles from this place, we must send them assistance. The text will be, "to get them here. . ."

This is the salvation I am now seeking for, to save our brethren.²

When ox teams were volunteered, he thundered:

I do not want to send oxen, I want good horses and mules. They are in the Territory, and we must have them; also twelve tons of flour and forty good teamsters.³

Pioneer families recounted their scanty winter stores, and within three days a relief train set out with their sacrifice. The contributions up to that time included:

26,688 lbs. flour, 31¼ bushels onions, 12 lbs. dried meat, 5 bushels oats, \$8 cash, 54 teams, 6 horses, 4 wagons, 51 teamsters, 106 quilts and blankets, 8 cloaks, 51 pair of pants, 50 vests, 134 pair boots and shoes, 29 shawls, 51 dresses, 72 shirts, 67 hoods,

174 pairs stockings, 72 pairs socks, 9 pairs mittens, 14 sacks, 1 small buffalo robe, 40 bundles clothing (kind not specified), 2 over-shirts, 2 chemises, 4 neck ties, 13 hats and caps, 3 boys' suits, 8 pairs drawers, jackets, 12 bonnets, 7 shirts, 4 handkerchiefs, 1 rug, 1 victorine, 5 yards lindsey, 2 aprons, 1 pair gloves.³

By October 31st, no fewer than 250 teams had been sent to relieve the sufferers. Among the first and best-equipped were those sent by Brigham Young and others of the General Authorities.

Meanwhile the Willie and the Martin companies were trapped in the earliest snowfall in the experience of the Pioneers. The former made a forced encampment two miles below Rocky Ridge on the Sweetwater. The latter found it impossible to proceed beyond Platte Bridge. Tents and other improvised covering gave only partial shelter from the chill of winter.

Snow continued to pile up with recurrent storms. The cry of babies against the bitter cold drove men in desperation through the blinding sleet for firewood. Despite frozen feet and frostbitten fingers, the men maintained meager fires around which huddled mothers with feverish children. The daily rations were cut again, each time with a prayer that help would come on the morrow. But the morrow, instead, brought death—first one, then another, and another. It was the men who died. They were not sick, but chilled through, and among those who dug graves in the morning were some who, before night had fallen, themselves required burial. An evening came when each survivor received his portion of the remaining rations. Unaware of approaching help they faced starvation and a frozen grave.

On October 20th, the first relief wagons hove into sight of the Willie

(Continued on page 589)

to the mortal body which is made up of the elements of the earth. So long as the spirit is there, the body is active, but when the spirit leaves, the body is dead.

Here also, long before the foundations of the earth were laid, begins the story of Jesus the Christ, the Firstborn of the Father, the creator of the heavens and the earth, the Lord and Savior of this world.
(Next month: Jesus Christ, The God of the Old Testament)

The Handcarts of '56

(Continued from page 570)

Company. It presented a pathetic spectacle. One who was there wrote later, "Shouts of joy rent the air; strong men wept till tears ran freely down their furrowed and sunburnt cheeks, and little children fairly danced around with gladness." But not all rejoiced. Already twenty had perished, of whom nineteen were men. Messengers carried word of the serious condition to teamsters in the rear, and others pushed on to the Martin Company. Several days still separated the victims from effective succor, and the death toll mounted higher. When at last relief trains penetrated the snow barrier, it was only to effect a partial rescue. Over two hundred dead remained to mark the scenes of tragedy.

When the survivors arrived in Salt Lake on the ninth and last of November, respectively, no pains were spared in Zion for their relief and comfort. News of the latter company's arrival came during the Sunday morning service. Brigham Young immediately dismissed the congregation with a classic declaration of the true principles of the Christian faith:

When those persons arrive I do not want to see them put into houses by themselves. I want to have them distributed in this city among the families that have good, comfortable houses; and I wish the sisters now before me, and all who know how and can, to nurse and wait upon them, and prudently administer medicine and food to them. . . . The afternoon meeting will be omitted, for I wish the sisters to go home and prepare to give those who have just arrived a mouthful of something to eat and to wash them and nurse them up. . . . Prayer is good, but when (as on this occasion) baked potatoes and pudding and milk are needed, prayer will not supply their place. Give every duty its proper time and place.⁴

Then, setting an example for them all, the President issued instructions

(Continued on following page)

AUGUST 1956



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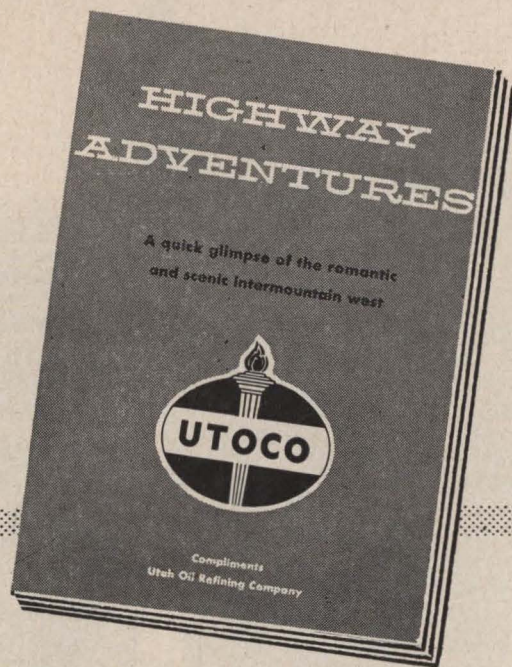
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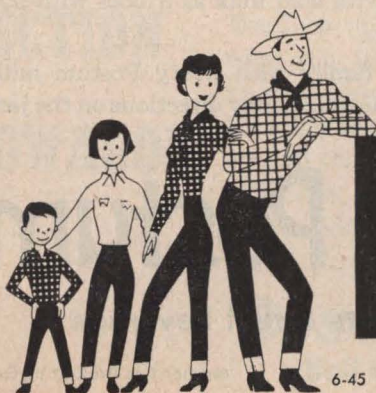


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6-45

The Handcarts of '56

(Continued from preceding page)

to the Presiding Bishop that any or all of the immigrants for whom accommodations were lacking should be sent to his own house.

He urged continually that emigration should commence early. He pointed the finger of responsibility toward the frontier agents when he stated in a letter dated October 31st, 1856: "This year's operations have eminently proved the feasibility and success of the hand-cart enterprise when the business is rightly managed and the companies leave the frontiers in anything like the proper season. Those companies that left Iowa City in the forepart of July arrived in good time and were in excellent condition and spirits."⁵ Franklin D. Richards wrote defensively in November, "The President has graciously approved of our general operations in getting the Saints off by hand-carts, the most important objectionable feature being 'too late,' concerning which I experienced as great or greater care last February and March than we can now entertain for their welfare."⁶ of

Profiting by the experiences of the preceding year, particular care was taken to insure early departure of future emigrants from Europe. "It is our intention," announced the *Millennial Star*, "to have our through emigration hereafter embark from Liverpool in the month of February so as to be able to leave the Missouri River for the plains by the middle of May or the first of June, and arrive in Utah in August."⁷

Two small companies, totaling 567, crossed the plains in 1857, led by Israel Evans and Christian Christiansen. Because of the Utah War, Mormon migration in 1858 was limited to returning missionaries. A company of 235 followed George Rowley with their handcarts in 1859, and in 1860, 349 were piloted by Daniel Robinson and Oscar Stoddard. A total of 8000 Mormon converts migrated from Europe to America in the period from 1856 to 1860. Of these, 3008 walked the entire distance from Iowa City to Salt Lake Valley pushing or pulling their worldly possessions on handcarts.⁸

The handcart episode in the Latter-day Saint "gathering" program looms larger in its spiritual significance than in its temporal achievement. Although brief in duration and involving only three percent of a hundred

THE IMPROVEMENT ERA

thousand emigrants from Europe, it typified the spirit of the gathering in its intensity. It was an expression of eagerness to escape "Babylon" to help build "the kingdom" in Zion. It represented a measure of willingness to sacrifice for "treasures in heaven." It was the answer of the "Lord's poor" to their living prophet's question, "Do you like this way of traveling? Do you think salvation costs too much? If so, it is not worth having."

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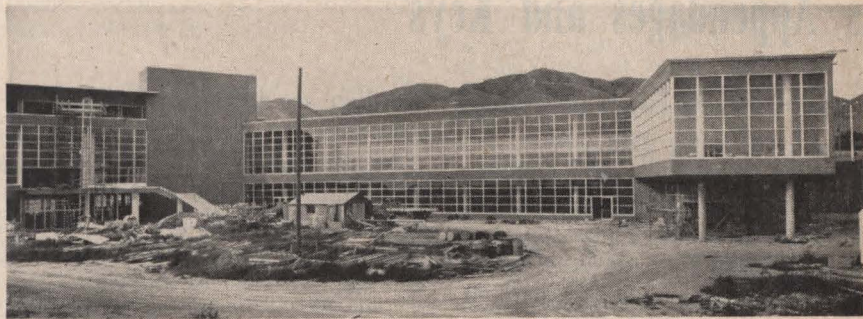
¹Clayton, William, Latter-day Saint hymn.
²*Deseret News*, VI:252.
³LDS Journal History, October 7, 1856.
⁴Roberts, B. H., *The History of the Church*, Vol. IV: 100, quoting "History of Brigham Young," MS, November 30, 1856.
⁵*Deseret News*, VI: p. 382 and LDS Journal History, October 31, 1856.
⁶*Millennial Star*, XIX: 109.
⁷*Ibid.*, 249.
⁸Emigration MS in Church Historian's Office. Compiled from *Millennial Star*.

THE EMISSARY
By F. Burton Howard

THE YOUNG man walked down the city street
In a strange land, with his own now far away,
And his newness clashed with the echoing beat
Of ox-carts, and small brown feet. And they say
That he preached a better world to those who loved their own,
And he prayed, "Oh, God, I would my good be known."
And no one understood. . . .
The young man stopped in the pitted road,
His manner not shiny now, and gazed
On tattered roofs, and backs beneath their heavy load,
And vaguely sensed the meaning of eternal days.
And preached, "Come follow me that you might have rest,"
And prayed, "Oh, God, help me to do my best."
And few men understood. . . .
The young man trudged down the country lane,
No stranger now, still searching other paths to roam,
But somehow unashamed, a little older now he came.
And deep within his heart he sang, "This earth is home."
And he preached the brotherhood of man and peace and charity;
And prayed, "Oh, Lord, that I may be worthy of such as these, in some far eternity."
And lo, He understood.

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