

The Willie & Martin Handcart Companies

A day to day explanation, taken from various journal entries

The Saints come to America



In spring of 1856 there were thousands of saints who had joined the Church over in Europe, and desired to join the saints who were gathering in the Salt Lake Valley. Many of them were very poor and were selling their possessions and sending one family member over at a time. The Prophet Brigham Young, in order to help these saints, had set up the Perpetual Emigration Fund four years before. However, by this time the cost was rising and many new members were waiting for their turn to come. So, Brigham Young sent a letter to Franklin D. Richards who was head of the European Missions. It stated:

"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 handcarts, and let the emigration fund 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 and can start earlier and escape the prevailing sickness which annually lays so many of brethren in the dust. . . . Fifteen miles a day will bring them through in 70 days, and after they get accustomed to it, they will travel 20, 25, and even 30 with all ease."

In addition, Wilford Woodruff said, "It would require more gold than all the Saints possess upon the earth, to gather the Saints unto Zion from all nations in the way they have been gathering, but now the hand-cart operation has been introduced to this people, it will bring five here to where one has been brought heretofore."

In 1856, four ships left Europe carrying saints who, after a six week journey, would begin a handcart trek across the plains of America. Two of these ships left in March and April, and two left in May. The Saints who will cross with Willie and Martin are on the ships that left in May.

After the ships had arrived in America, the saints would take trains as far west as they could - which at this time was Iowa City. On June 26th, the Willie Company arrived ready to begin their trek, but found that their handcarts were not ready. There had been three other handcart companies who had departed before them which had taken the lumber that they needed. Handcarts needed to be made of older lumber in order to have the strength needed to endure such a long and hard journey. However, all they had available was new or green lumber which would easily split and break. For nineteen days the men built new carts out of the green wood hoping that it would dry out as they journeyed towards their new Promised Land.



The Leader of the Willie company



James G. Willie was born in England and came to America when he was 21 years old. He joined the church in Connecticut and served his first mission in that same area. He was gone during the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith and joined the saints who had been exiled from Nauvoo in Winter Quarters, Nebraska. He returned to England to serve another mission. While on his mission he inherited a large sum of money when his brother (who owned a shipping business) died. James used a small amount of his inheritance to help pay for his mission and gave the rest to the PEF fund to help pay the passage for many emigrants. James had a wife and four children in Salt Lake City, and he was returning from a 4 year mission in England when he was chosen captain. Elder Willie had been over the plains and knew the road. He was fluent speaker and liked by the people and was made captain of the fourth handcart company.

The Leader of the Martin Company



Edward Martin was born in England. After he joined the Church he came to America and joined the Mormon Battalion who fought in the Mexican War. He was returning from England again and was made captain of the fifth handcart company.

What to Cart Along

There were 500 members of the Willie Company made up primarily of Scotch, Scandinavians and English. They had a captain, who was James G. Willie, and sub-captains who were each over 100 members of the company. There were five round tents for each sub-captain and his party so twenty persons per tent. Each sub-captain also had twenty handcarts – so one for every 5 individuals, and one large wagon for food and supplies. With five people per handcart, you were only allowed seventeen pounds of luggage to bring along for your new life in the Salt Lake Valley. With everyone's luggage, and some additional cooking and eating supplies, each cart would be around 160 lbs.

Ann Rowley Journal

Willie Company, July 1856

"There were many keepsakes that I wanted to take but couldn't. But there was one thing I didn't consider a luxury and that was my feather bed. I had hung onto that beloved item from the time of the auction in England and now clearly there was no room for it. It wouldn't be bad to walk 1300 miles if one had a feather bed to sleep on at night, but no matter how I folded it, it was too bulky.... But a featherbed is a featherbed and when it came to choosing between Zion and a featherbed, well it was a little too late to turn my back on Zion, so I ripped it open and emptied the feathers on the ground and used the tick to cover the supplies on the handcart."

The Beginnings of the Trek

On July 16, 1856, the Willie handcart company began their trek from Iowa City. The Willie Company will have 500 in their group. The Martin Company will have 575.

John Chislett Journal,

Willie Company, July, 1856

"As we traveled along, we presented a singular, and sometimes affecting appearance. The young and strong went along gaily with their carts, but the old people and little children were to be seen straggling a long distance in the rear. Sometimes, when the little folks had walked as far as they could, their fathers would take them on their carts, and thus increase the load that was already becoming too heavy as the day advanced."

The Great Decision

When the Willie company arrived in Nebraska on August 11th, they had undergone a 277 mile journey that had taken them almost a month to make, and now they had a big decision ahead of them. They were now way behind schedule because they had to wait for their handcarts to be made in Iowa and it was now late in the season. They needed to decide whether to stay there for the winter, or to take the chance and continue their journey to Salt Lake.

John Chislett Journal:

Willie Company, August 13, 1856

"The elders seemed to be divided in their judgment as to the practicability of our reaching Utah in safety at so late a season of the year, and the idea was entertained for a day or two of making our winter quarters on the Elkhorn, Wood River, or some other eligible location in Nebraska; but it did not meet with general approval. A monster meeting was called to consult the people about it. The emigrants were entirely ignorant of the country and climate – simple, honest, eager to go to 'Zion' at once. There were but four men in our company who had been to the valley: Willie, Atwood, Savage, and Woodward; but there were several at Florence superintending the emigration. These men all talked at the meeting just mentioned, and all, with one exception, favored going on. Levi Savage used his common sense and his knowledge of the country. He declared positively that to his certain knowledge we could not cross the mountains with a mixed company of aged people, women and little children, so late in the season without much suffering, sickness, and death. He therefore advised going into winter quarters without delay, but he was rebuked by the other elders from want of faith. Savage was accordingly defeated, as the majority were against him. Savage then added 'Brethren and sisters, what I have said I know to be true; but seeing you are to go forward, I will go with you, will help you all I can, will work with you, will rest with you, will suffer with you, and, if necessary, I will die with you. May God in his mercy bless and preserve us.'"

The Continued Trek

August, Willie Company

They continued their journey making between ten to twenty miles a day. Soon, they found out that their new handcars made with the green lumber would not be strong enough to hold up their heavy carts. The axles were braking and the saints would try to fix them with leather from their boots and pounded tin ware and they would grease the wheels with their precious bacon fat, which would only cause more difficulties by attracting dirt which would grind out the wood.

John Chislett Journal

Willie Company

"When a cart collapsed it was difficult for the owner to see the long line move on without him while he remained behind with a few crude tools, struggling to repair the damage."

The Indians

One fear among all the companies was their fear of the Indians, so being left behind was a serious matter since they didn't want to be separated from the group. At the end of August, the Willie Company came upon the remains of the Almon Babbit party, who had been attacked and massacred by the Indians just four days prior. The remains of the party had been buried and then uncovered by wolves, so the Willie party stopped and reburied their dead.

Buffaloes

September, Willie Company

One day after the Willie Company had left Nebraska, a herd of buffaloes stampeded towards them and turned just as they reached their camp. This caused a reaction in their wagon-pulling oxen, and thirty of their precious oxen broke free to join the buffalo stampede. They were left with no choice but to hook up their beef and milk cows to pull their supply wagons which were too heavy. This caused them to lose their milk and beef.

Levi Savage Journal

Willie Company

"The Saints, recognizing the need to get on, wearily accepted another sack of flour each for their handcars, and the thin column again moved across the plain."

A welcomed visitor



President Franklin D. Richards along with many missionaries, who had preached the Gospel to some of the very people in the Willie Company, were on their way back to Salt Lake in some horse drawn carriages. They stopped and spent the evening with the saints and President Richards addressed them and encouraged and lifted their hearts. Before they left, he promised that as soon as he reached Salt Lake he would send them relief supplies.

Levi Savage's Journal

Willie Company

September 18th: *"At dinner Sister Reade... was missing... she is not in camp and no one knows where she is."*

September 21st: *"Sister Season's little boy, two years old, died at eleven o'clock last night."*

September 22nd: *"Brother Empe departed this life at half past one p.m. He has been having the ague for some time past, but no one thought him dangerous."*

September 23rd: *"The Saints slow in rising and getting breakfast early, notwithstanding Brother Wiley's repeated order to rise at the sound of the bugle (daylight). Apparently not realizing the necessity of our making as much distance as possible in order to reach the valley before too severe cold weather, some complain of hard treatment, because we urge them along. Many hang onto wagons."*

September 26th: *"Today we traveled fourteen miles without water. Sister Ann Briant, who had been ill for some time, but not thought dangerous, was found dead in the wagon in a sitting posture, apparently asleep."*

September 27th: *"The old appear to be failing consistently."*

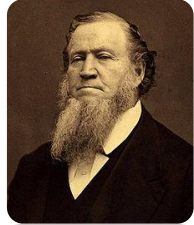
*Ague: A fever (such as from Malaria) that it marked by paroxysms of chills, fever, and sweating recurring in regular intervals.

Brigham Young organizes a Rescue

President Franklin D. Richards arrived in Salt Lake on October 4th and shared the news with Brigham Young that there were saints traveling towards Salt Lake this late in the season.

Brigham Young: "We had no idea there were any more companies upon the Plains until our brethren arrived, presuming that they would consider their late arrival in America and not start them across the Plains until another year."

The next morning was the Church's Conference and 12,000 saints had gathered to be instructed by the Brethren. Brigham Young put aside his prepared talk and said this:



"I will now give this people the subject and the text for the elders who may speak today and during the conference. It is this. On the 5th day of October, 1856, many of our brethren and sisters (approximately 1,000) are on the plains with handcars, and probably many are now seven hundred miles from this place, and they must be brought here, we must send assistance to them. The text will be, 'to get them here.' I want the brethren who may speak to understand that their text is the people on the plains. And the subject matter for this community is to send for them and bring them in before winter sets in.

"That is my religion; that is the dictation of the Holy Ghost that I possess. It is to save the people. This is the salvation I am now seeking for. To save our brethren that would be apt to perish, or suffer extremely, if we do not send them assistance.

"I shall call upon the Bishop's this day. I shall not wait until tomorrow, nor until the next day, for 60 good mule teams and 12 or 15 wagons. I do not want to send oxen. I want good horses and mules. They are in this Territory, and we must have them. Also 12 tons of flour and 40 good teamsters, besides those that drive the teams....

"I will tell you all that your faith, religion, and profession of religion, will never save one soul of you in the Celestial Kingdom of our God, unless you carry out just such principles as I am now teaching you. Go and bring in those people now on the plains. And attend strictly to those things which we call temporal, or temporal duties. Otherwise, your faith will be in vain. The preaching you have heard will be in vain to you, and you will sink to Hell, unless you attend to the things we tell you...."

Brigham Young Speaks Again the Following Morning

"I feel disposed to be as speedy as possible in our operation with regard to helping our brethren who are now on the plains. Consequently, I shall call upon the people forthwith for the help that is needed. I want them to give their names this morning, if they are to start on their journey tomorrow. And not say, 'I will go next week, or in ten days, or in a fortnight hence.' For I wish to start tomorrow morning.

"I want the sisters to have the privilege of fetching in blankets, skirts, stockings, shoes, etc. For the men, women, and children that are in those handcart companies... hoods, winter bonnets, stockings, skirts, garments, and almost any description of clothing... I now want brethren to come forward, for we need 40 good teamsters to help the brethren on the plains. You may rise up now and give your names.

"I tell you that the person that keeps his eye upon the mark never considers what he passes through, never thinks about it, whether it be in walking and pulling handcars, or traveling on foot, going without food and shelter, wandering to and fro, to labor for the people. Saints never think of what they suffer or pass through, it never comes into their minds."

After this plea from the prophet, the saints in Salt Lake loaded 16 wagons of food and supplies, and on October 7th 16 four-mule teams as well as 27 men headed off toward the Willie and Martin companies to be the first to their aid. The brethren in Salt Lake continued to ask for more men to join the rescue.

A Rescuer's Journal



Redick Newton Allred – Rescuer

October 6, 1856

"I attended conference in Salt Lake City but as the handcart emigration was belated and likely to be caught in the mountains in the snow without provisions and the necessary clothing, I responded to a call upon the brethren to assist them in and on the 7th about 50 men and 20 four-horse wagons with 10 ton flour with other provisions and clothing left the city. I got a pony to ride from William B. Pace. George D. Grant camped at the foot of big mountain with 10 wagons and I camped at the east foot of the little mountain with 10 wagons. On the 8th we crossed the big mountain and overtook Brother Grant on the East Canyon at the cottonwood grove. Encamped for the night where we joined his camp and organized. George D. Grant had been appointed by letter from the President to lead the company and R.T. Burton, clerk. Charles Decker captain first 10. William

H. Kimball, sergeant of guard and C.H. Wheelock, chaplain.

"It snowed all afternoon and evening so that I took cold and it gave me a severe pain in my breast that lasted one month that was almost like taking my life."

Saints in Salt Lake

October 7, 1856

Saints continued to gather their things and work towards preparing supplies to be taken to the saints on the plains. Wagons, tents, cooking supplies, clothing, food – it was all gathered and eventually more wagons were loaded up and sent off towards the Willie and Martin companies. By the end of this month 250 teams were on the road to offer their help.

Hungry Enough to Eat Nails

John Jacques Journal

Martin Company, October 9, 1856

“Up to this time the daily pound of flour ration had been regularly served out, but it was never enough to stay the stomachs of the emigrants, and the longer they were on the plains and in the mountains the hungrier they grew. It was an appetite that could not be satisfied. At least was the experience of the handcart people. You felt as if you could almost eat a rusty nail or gnaw a file. You were ten times as hungry as a hunter, yea, as ten hunters, all the long day, and every time you woke up in the night. Eating was the grand passion of the pedestrian on the plains, and insatiable passion, for he never got enough to eat.”

A Rescuer's Journal



Redick Newton Allred – Rescuer

Sunday, October 12, 1856

“We reached Bridger where we got 7 beef cattle”

Monday, October 13, 1856

“Met Captain A.O.Smoot in advance of the Church train, in order to obtain supplies.

October 16, 1856

“Left with Brother Wheelock, Joseph a. Young, S.Taylor and A.Garr who were sent ahead to met the trains. We crossed Green River and on the 16th met Captain Smoot's team on the Big Sandy where we camped. I suffered much from the pain in my breast and side.

October 18, 1856

“We arrived at the South Pass and camped on the Sweetwater 3 miles from the Pass. It snowed and was quite cold.

Weakened Forces

John Chislett Journal

Willie Company, October 17, 1856

“Each death weakened our forces. In my hundred I could not raise enough men to pitch a tent when we encamped, and now it was that I had to exert myself to the utmost. I wonder I did not die, as many did who were stronger than I was. When we pitched our camp in the evening of each day, I had to lift the sick from the wagon and carry them to the fire, and in the morning carry them again on my back to the wagon. When any in my hundred died I had to inter them; often helping to dig the grave myself. In performing these sad offices I always offered up a heartfelt prayer to that God who beheld our sufferings, and begged him to avert destruction from us and send us help.”

Starving and Freezing

George Cunningham Journal

Willie Company, Sunday October 19, 1856

“Our captain intended to keep his word, and commenced to kill off the cattle but they were nearly as poor as we were. We used to boil the bones and drink the soup and eat what little meat there was. We greedily devoured the hides also, I myself had took a piece of hide when I could get it, scorched off hair, roasted it a little on the coals, cut it into little pieces so that I could swallow it and bolted it down my throat for supper and thought it was most delicious. Many were frozen to death. I think that there were only five or six men in camp towards the last but what were frozen. Our captain drove all he could and did his duty. He was badly frozen and came very close to dying. Some would sacrifice themselves by giving their food or perhaps some old blanket that covered them. In common cares, we cannot tell what our friends and neighbors are, but there are circumstances which undoubtedly proved them.”

The Last Ration of Flour

John Chislett Journal

Willie Company, October 18th and 19th 1856

“As we were resting for a short time at noon a light wagon was driven into our camp from the west. Its occupants were Joseph A. Young and Stephen Taylor. They informed us that a train of supplies was on the way, and we might expect to meet it in a day or two. More welcome messengers never came from the courts of glory that these two young men were to us. They lost no time after encouraging us all they could to press forward, but sped on further east to convey their

glad news to Edward Martin and the fifth handcart company who left Florence about two weeks after us, and who it was feared were even worse off than we were. As they went from our view, many a hearty 'God bless you' followed them.

"We pursued our journey with renewed hope and after untold toil and fatigue, doubling teams frequently, going back to fetch up the stragglers carts, and encouraging those who had dropped by the way to a little more exertion in view of our soon-to-be improved condition, we finally, late at night, got all to camp – the wind howling frightfully and the snow eddying around us in fitful gusts. But we had found a good camp among the willows, and after warming and partially drying ourselves before good fires, we ate our scanty fare, paid our usual devotions to the Deity and retired to rest with hopes of coming aid.

"The morning before the storm, or rather, the morning of the day on which it came, we issued the last ration of flour. On this fatal morning, therefore, we had none to issue. We had, however, a barrel or two of hard bread which Captain Willie had procured at Fort Laramie in view of our destitution. This was equally and fairly divided among all the company. Two of our poor broken-down cattle were killed and their carcasses issued for beef."

A Rescuer's Journal



Redick Newton Allred – Rescuer

October 19, 1856

"Captain Grant left me in charge of the supplies of flour, beef cattle, 4 wagons, the weak animals and 11 men for guard. I killed the beef cattle and let the meat lay in quarters where it froze and kept well as it was very cold and storming almost every day. We were reinforced by 3 wagons and 6 men loaded with flour.

A Storm Hits

Heber R. McBride Journal

Martin Company, October 19, 1856

"...we had to ford all the rivers but one, and that was Loupe Fork of the Platte but the evening we crossed the Platte for the last time it was very cold and the next morning there was about 6 inches of snow on the ground and then what we had to suffer can never be told. Father was very bad this morning – could hardly sit up in the tent we had to travel that day through the snow. I managed to get Father in to one of the wagons that morning and that was the last we ever saw of him alive. We only made one drive as it began snowing very hard. When we camped the snow was getting deep and my sister and me had to pitch our tent and get some wood but that was handy as there was plenty of dry willows on the bank of the river. After we had made Mother as comfortable as we could we went to try and find father but the wind was blowing so bad that we could not see anything and the wagons had not got into camp and it was then after dark so we did not find him that night and the next morning the snow was about 18 inches deep and awful cold, but while my sister was preparing our little bite of breakfast I went to look for Father and at last I found him under a wagon with snow all over him and he was stiff and dead. I felt as though my heart would burst. I sat down beside him on the snow and took hold of one of his hands and cried "Oh Father, Father", there we was away out on the Plains with hardly anything to eat and Father dead and Mother sick and a widow with 5 small children and not able to live from day to another. After I had my cry out I went back to the tent and told mother. Now to try and write to tell the feelings of Mother and the other children is out of the question. Now we were not all the family that was called upon to mourn the loss of a Father this morning, for there was 13 men dead in camp. The men that was able to do anything cleaned off the snow and made a fire and thawed out the ground and dug a big hole and buried them in one grave, some side by side and on top of one another, any way to get them covered, for I can assure you that the men had no heart to do any more than they had to. We never knew how Father died. Whether he died in the wagon and was lifted out or he got out himself and fell down exhausted and froze to death."

Terrible Circumstances

John Chislett Journal

Willie Company, October 21, 1856

"We killed more cattle and issued the meat; but, eating it without bread, did not satisfy hunger, and to those who were suffering from dysentery it did more harm than good. This terrible disease increased rapidly amongst us during these three days, and several died from exhaustion. Before we renewed our journey the camp became so offensive and filthy that words would fail to describe its condition, and even common decency forbids the attempt. Suffice it to say that all the disgusting scenes which the reader might imagine would certainly not equal the terrible reality. It was enough to make the heavens weep. Those three days! During that time I visited the sick, the widows whose husbands died in serving them, and the aged who could not help themselves, to know for myself where to dispense the few articles that had been placed in my charge for distribution. Such craving hunger I never saw before, and may God in his mercy spare me the sight again.

*Dysentery: an inflammatory disorder of the intestine, especially of the colon, that results in severe diarrhea

The Rescue

John Chislett Journal

Willie Company, October 21, 1856

“Just as the sun was sinking beautifully behind the distant hills, immediately west of our camp, several wagons, each drawn by four horses, were seen coming towards us. The news ran through the camp like wildfire, and all who were able to leave their beds turned out enmasse to see them. A few minutes brought them sufficiently near to reveal our faithful captain slightly advance of the train. Shouts of joy rent the air; strong men wept till tears ran freely down their furrowed and sun-burnt cheeks, and little children partook of the joy which some of them hardly understood, and fairly danced around with gladness. Restraint was set aside in the general rejoicing, and as the brethren entered our camp the sisters fell upon them and deluged the brethren with kisses. The brethren were so overcome that they could not for sometime utter a word, but in choking silence repressed all demonstrations of those emotions that evidently mastered them. Soon, however, feeling somewhat abated, and such a shaking of hand, such words of welcome, and such invocation of God’s blessing have seldom been witnessed.”

A Rescuer’s Journal



Redick Newton Allred – Rescuer

October 23, 1856

“I received an express from William H. Kimball in charge of Captain Willey’s handcart company then at Stoney Point 40 miles below in a deplorable condition.”

Rocky Ridge

John Chislett Journal

Willie Company, October 23, 1856

“A few days of bright freezing weather were succeeded by another snow storm. The day we crossed the Rocky Ridge it was snowing a little – the wind hard from the north-west – and blowing so keenly that it almost pierced us through. We had to wrap ourselves closely in blankets, quilts, or whatever else we could get, to keep from freezing. Captain Willie still attended to the details of the company’s traveling, and this day he appointed me to bring up the rear. My duty was to stay behind everything and see that nobody was left along the road. I had to bury a man who had died in my hundred, and I finished doing so after the company had started. In about half an hour, I set out on foot alone to do my duty as rear guard to the camp. The ascent of the ridge commenced soon after leaving camp, and I had not gone far up it before I overtook a cart that the folks could not pull through the snow, here about knee deep. I helped them along, and we soon overtook another. But all hands getting to one cart we could travel; so we moved one of the carts a few rods, and then went back and brought up the other. After moving in this way for a while, we overtook other carts at different points of the hill, until we had six carts, not one which could be moved by the parties owning it. I put our collective strength to three carts at a time, took them a short distance, and then brought up the other three. Thus by traveling over the hill three times – twice forward and once back – I succeeded after hours of toil in bringing any little company to the summit. The six carts were then trotted on gaily downhill, the intense cold stirring us to action. One or two parties who were with these carts gave up entirely, and but for the fact that we overtook one of our ox-teams that had been detained on the road, they must have perished on that Rocky Ridge.”

Only 4 oz of Flour a Day

John Jaques Journal

Martin Company, October 23, 1856

“In this camp the company stayed, resting and recruiting as well as could be under the circumstances, the snow remaining on the ground and the frost being very keen at nights. Here the flour fell to four ounces per day. In addition to the flour ration, considerable beef was killed and served to the company, as had been the case most of the journey. But the cattle had now grown so poor that there was little flesh left on them, and that little was as lean as could be. The problem was how to cook it to advantage. Stewed meat and soups were found to be bad for diarrhea and dysentery, provocative of and aggravating those diseases, of which there was considerable in the company, and to fry lean meat without an atom of fat in it or out of it was disgusting to every cook in camp. The outlook was certainly not encouraging, but it need not be supposed that the company was in despair, notwithstanding the situation was rather desperate. Oh! No! A hopeful and cheerful spirit pervaded the camp, and the ‘Songs of Zion’ were frequently heard at this time, though the company was in the very depths of privation. Though the bodies of the people were worn down, their spirits buoyant, while at the same time they had become so accustomed to looking death in the face that they seemed to have no fear of it.”

A Slap on the Face

Jens Pederson Journal

Willie Company, October 1856

“One man decided he didn’t want to put up with any more so just said he wasn’t going another step. Different ones tried to talk to him and urge him to go on, but had no effect upon his decision. Grandpa Jens O. Pederson asked for permission to talk to the man. Some told him it wouldn’t do any good, so they went on and grandpa tried to reason with him, but that did no good. Finally he said, ‘Well, if you are not going, I’m going to give you a whipping before I don on,’ and he slapped him quite hard on the face, and started running to catch up with the company. It made the man angry and he started after grandpa and both of them caught up to the company. The man went on and later thanked grandpa for saving his life.”

A Rescuer’s Journal



Redick Newton Allred – Rescuer

October 24, 1856

“I took six teams and met them 15 miles below in such a hard west wind that they could not travel facing the drifting snow even if they had been ready for duty. I found some dead and dying laying over the camp in the drifting snow that was being piled in heaps by the gale and burying their dead. We set in with the rest to make them as comfortable as possible and remained in camp till the next day.

13 Bodies in 1 Grave

John Chislett Journal

Willie Company, October 24, 1865

“There were so many dead and dying that it was decided to lie by for the day. In the forenoon I was appointed to go round the camp and collect the dead. I took with me two young men to assist me in the sad task, and we collected together, of all ages and both sexes, thirteen corpses, all stiffly frozen. We had a large square hole dug in which we buried these thirteen people, 3 or 4 abreast and three deep. When they did not fit in, we put one or two crosswise at the head or feet of others. We covered them with willow and then with the earth. When we buried these thirteen people some of their relatives refused to attend the services. They manifested an utter indifference about it. The numbness and cold in their physical natures seem to have reached the soul, and to have crushed out natural feeling and affection. Had I not myself witnessed it, I could not have believed that suffering would have produced such terrible results. But so it was. Two others died during the day, and we buried them in one grave, making fifteen in all buried on that camp ground. It was on Willow Creek, a tributary of Sweetwater River. I learned afterwards from men who passed that way the next summer, that the wolves had exhumed the bodies, and their bones were scattered thickly around the vicinity.

A Rescuer’s Journal



Redick Newton Allred – Rescuer

October 25, 1856

“The wagons were all filled with the most infirmed and we made my camp although many did not arrive until late at night. Fifteen were buried on the ground below and 3 at my camp. On our return to camp we found one of the men sick with the smallpox and to avoid any further outbreak if possible, I sent him homeward with one man alone to obtain a physician.

Brother Horrocks Died

Elizabeth Horrock Jackson

Martin Company, October 25, 1856

“On the 20th of October we traveled, or almost wallowed, for about ten miles through the snow. We were visited with three days more snow. The animals and immigrants were almost completely exhausted. We remained in camp several days to gain strength. About the 25th of October, I think it was – I cannot remember the exact day – we reached camp about sundown. My husband had for several days previous been much worse. He was still sinking, and his condition now became more serious. As soon as possible after reaching camp I prepared a little of such scant articles of food as we then had. He tried to eat but failed. He had not the strength to swallow. I put him to bed as quickly as I could. He seemed to rest easy and fell asleep. About nine o’clock I retired. Bedding had become very scarce so I did not disrobe. I slept until, as it appeared to me, about midnight. I was extremely cold. The weather was bitter. I listened to hear if my husband breathed – he lay so still. I could not hear him. I became alarmed. I put my hand on his body, when to my

horror I discovered that my worse fears were confirmed. My husband was dead. He was cold and stiff – rigid in the arms of death. It was a bitter freezing night and the elements had sealed up his mortal frame. I called for help to the other inmates of the tent. They could render me no aid; and there was no alternative but to remain alone by the side of the corpse till morning. They wrapped him in a blanket and place him in a pile with thirteen others who had died, and then covered him up in the snow. The ground was frozen so hard that they could not dig a grave. He was left there to sleep in peace until the trump of the Lord shall sound, and the dead in Christ shall awake and come forth in the morning of the first resurrection. We shall then again unite our hearts and lives, and eternity will furnish us with life forever more.

“I will not attempt to describe my feelings at finding myself thus left a widow with three children, under such excruciating circumstances. I cannot do it. But I believe the Recording Angel has inscribed in the archives above, and that my sufferings for the Gospel’s sake will be sanctified unto me for my good....”

A Rescuer’s Journal



Redick Newton Allred – Rescuer

October 26, 1856

“Brother Kimball sent an express to the city for more help as the other companies had not been yet heard of and went on himself with Captain Willey’s company leaving me with a few men (7) to keep up the station till the last train should arrive. Captain Grant had said that he would send me back with the first train but he sent word by Brother William Kimball that he would not feel satisfied unless I stopped at the station as their lives depended on it being kept up.

Rescue of the Martin Company

October 28, 1856

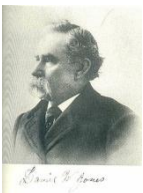
Joseph Young, Abel Garr, and Dan Jones went ahead of the rescue party and were the first ones to arrive at the camp of the Martin Company. The members of the company were almost entirely out of food and their arrival was expressed by one woman who said, “I see them coming. Surely they are angels from heaven!” Over fifty members had perished, and more would die that evening.

The rescuers were overcome as they arrived to the camp. Patience Loader remembers Joseph Young coming to her and asking, as he wept, “How many are dead and how many are still living?”

Daniel Jones encouraged them to keep moving each day as far as they could in order to keep them alive.

A Rescuer’s Journal

Daniel w. Jones



“A condition of distress, here my eyes that I never saw before or since. The train was strung out for three or four miles. There were old men pulling and tugging their carts, sometimes loaded with a sick wife or children – women pulling along sick husbands – little children six to eight years old struggling through the mud and snow. As night came on, the mud would freeze on their clothes and feet. There were two of us, and hundreds needing help. What could we do? We gathered on to some of the most helpless with our riatas (lasso) tied to the carts, and helped as many as we could into camp on Avenue Hill. This was a bitter, cold night and we had no fuel except very small sage brush. Several died that night. Next morning, Brother Young having come up, we three started for our camp near Devil’s Gate.”

The Rescue

John Jaques Journal

Martin Company, October 28, 1856

“The 28th of October was the red letter day to this handcart expedition. On that memorable day Joseph A. Young, Daniel W. Jones and Abel Garr galloped unexpectedly into camp amid the cheers and tears and smiles and laughter of the emigrants. Those three men being the most advanced relief company from Salt Lake, brought the glad word that assistance, provisions, and clothing were near, that then wagons were waiting at Devil’s Gate for the emigrant.. All was now animation and bustle in the handcart camp, everybody was busy at once in making preparations for a renewed start in the morning. The revived spirit of the company were still exhilarated by an increased ration of flour that day.”

A Rescuer’s Journal

Daniel w. Jones



“Game soon became so scarce that we could kill nothing. We ate all the poor meat; one would get hungry eating it. Finally that was all gone, nothing now but hides were left. We made a trial of them. A lot was cooked and eaten without any seasoning and it made the whole company sick. Many were so turned against the stuff that it made them sick to think of it. . . .

Starving

John Jaques Journal

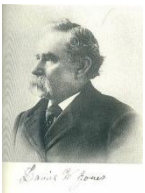
Martin Company, October 29, 1856

"I remember well poor Brother Blair. He was a fine, tall man, had been one of the Queen Victoria's life guards in London. He had a wife and four children. He made a cover for his cart and put his four children on the cart. He pulled his cart alone, his wife helped by pushing behind. The poor man was so weak and worn down that he fell several times that day but still he kept his dear little children on the cart all day. This man had so much love for his wife and children that instead of eating his morsel of food himself he would give it to his children. Poor man, he pulled his cart as long as he could, then he died and his wife and children had to do the best they could without his help. The children got frozen. Some parts of their bodies were all sores, but they got to Salt Lake City alive.

"Poor William Whittaker. He and his brother, John occupied one part of a tent. In the other part another family was sleeping. There was a young woman sleeping and she was awakened by poor Brother Whitaker eating her fingers. He was dying with hunger and cold. He also ate the flesh of his one fingers that night. He died and was buried at Willow Springs before we left camp that morning.

A Rescuer's Journal

Daniel w. Jones



"Things looked dark, for nothing remained but the poor raw hides taken from starved cattle. We asked the Lord to direct us what to do. The brethren did not murmur, but felt to trust in God. We had cooked the hide, after soaking and scraping the hair off until it was soft and then ate it, glue and all. This made it rather inclined to stay with us longer than we desired. Finally I was impressed how to fix the stuff and gave the company advice, telling them how to cook it; for them to scorch and scrape the hair off; this had a tendency to kill and purify the bad taste that scalding gave it. After scraping, boil one hour in plenty of water, throwing the water away which had extracted all the glue, then wash and scrape the hide thoroughly, washing in cold water, then boil to a jelly and let it get cold, and then eat with a little sugar sprinkled on it. This was considerable trouble, but we had little else to do and it was better than starving. We asked the Lord to bless our stomachs and adapt them to this food. We hadn't the faith to ask him to bless the raw-hide, for it was 'hard stock.' On eating now all seemed to relish the feast. We were three days without eating before this second attempt was made. We enjoyed this sumptuous fare for about six weeks"

A Rescuer Finds His Family

John Jaques Journal

Martin Company, October 31, 1856

"A brother from the valley asked if I knew of a certain family. I told the brother that there were two children living in this company, but the father had become discouraged and stayed at Laramie and the mother had died. At this the poor man broke down and said, 'She was my poor dear sister. As soon as I heard of the trouble and distress of this handcart company, I made ready to come in search of my sister and family. Where are the children?' I directed him to the wagon they were in as he wanted to take them to his wagon. He said he had fetched provisions and a feather bed and good warm blankets and quilts for his sister. I told this brother how these two poor boys had suffered severely with cold and hunger since their poor mother had died. One morning as we were getting ready to leave camp, I saw these dear boys, one eleven and the other not more than four or five years old. The older boy was crawling along on his hands and knees. His poor feet were so frozen the blood ran from them into the snow as the poor thing made his way along to the sick wagon. The other poor dear child was crying by his brother's side, and his poor little arms and hands all covered with sores from chilblain [inflammation caused by exposure to cold], and scarcely anything on to cover his poor little body. Many years later I heard that they were still living and doing well.

Devil's Gate

John Chislett Journal

Willie Company, End of October

"It was too late for some of our number. They were already prostrated and beyond all human help. Some seemed to have lost mental as well as physical energy. We talked to them of our improved conditions, appealed to their love of life and showed themselves; but all to no purpose. We then addressed ourselves to their religious feelings, their wish to see Zion; to know the Prophet Brigham; showed them the good things that he had sent out to us, and told them how deeply he sympathized with us in our sufferings, and what a welcome he could give us when we reached the city. But all our efforts were unavailing; they had lost all love of life, all sense of surrounding things, and had sunk down into a state of indescribable apathy.... Within a few days after [the Martin] company arrived at the Devil's Gate mail station the remaining wagon emigrants came in, making some twelve hundred persons assembled here."

Three 18 year old Boys

The companies continued on and reached a river that was freezing cold with ice floating down it. The saints were brought to tears at the realization of the courage and strength it would require even a healthy, strong person to cross in such circumstances. Some saints were able to bring themselves to cross, but others couldn't muster up the strength.

John Chislett Journal

Willie Company, November 3, 1856

"Three eighteen year old boys belonging to the relief party, came to the rescue; and to the astonishment of all who saw, carried nearly every member of that ill-fated handcart company across the snow-bound stream. The strain was so terrible, and the exposure so great, that in later years all the boys died from the effects of it. When President Brigham Young heard of this heroic act, he wept like a child, and later declared publicly, 'That act alone will ensure C. Allen Huntington, George W. Grant, and David P. Kimball an everlasting salvation in the Celestial Kingdom of God, world without end.'

Patience Loader Journal

Martin Company, November 3, 1856



"I could not keep my tears back. When the handcart arrived at the bank of the river, one of these men who was much worn down, asked in a plaintive tone, have we got to go through there? On being answered yes, he was so much affected that he was completely overcome. That was the last strain. His fortitude and manhood gave way. He exclaimed, 'Oh dear! I can't go through that,' and he burst into tears. His wife, who was by his side, had the stouter heart of the two at that juncture, and she said soothingly, 'Don't cry Jimmy. I'll pull the cart for you.' But in the end, few of the immigrants would pull their own carts through, for four young men of the rescue party, C. Allen Huntington, George W. Grant, David P. Kimball, and Stephen W. Taylor spent their day in the freezing water carrying people and hauling carts across."

Gettin' Some Buffalo Meat



There was a point when Ephraim Hanks and some fellow rescuers had run out of provisions and their ammunition was wet from crossing a river, so they were unable to hunt meat. There was a lot of buffalo near them, but without ammunition they were unable to hunt in order to enjoy some fresh meat. Ephraim decided to chase after a buffalo by running his horse up to the buffalo's side, took his hands and grabbed the mane of the buffalo, and jumped aboard – all while the buffalo was running at its top speed. Ephraim then took his knife and drove it into its heart. They took the buffalo and jerked the meat, and repeated this hunting technique sixty more times.

Ephraim Hanks Journal

Rescue Party, November 10, 1856



"I think the sun was about an hour high in the west when I spied something in the distance that looked like a black streak in the snow. As I got near to it, I perceived it moved; then I was satisfied that this was the long looked for handcart company, led by Captain Edward Martin. I reached the ill-fated train just as the immigrants were camping for the night. The sight that met my gaze as I entered their camp can never be erased from my memory. The starved forms and haggard countenances of the poor sufferers as they moved about slowly, shivering with cold, to prepare their scanty evening meal was enough to touch the stoutest heart. When they saw me coming, they hailed me with joy inexpressible, and when they further beheld the supply of fresh meat I brought into camp, their gratitude knew no bounds. Flocking around me, one would say, 'Oh please, give me a small piece of meat;' another would exclaim, 'my poor children are starving, do give me a little'; and the children with tears in their eyes would call out, 'Give me some, give me some.' At first I tried to wait on them and handed out the meat as they called for it; but finally I told them to help themselves. Five minutes later both my horses had been released their extra burden – the meat all gone, and the next few hours found the people in camp busily engaged in cooking and eating it, with thankful hearts.

"Many of the immigrants whose extremities were frozen, lost their limbs, either whole or part. Many such I washed with water and Castile soap, until the frozen parts would fall off, after which I would sever the shreds of flesh from the remaining portions of the limbs with my scissors. Some of the emigrants lost toes, others fingers, and again others whole hands and feet; one woman who now resides in Koosharen, Piute, Utah, Lost both her legs below the knees, and quite a number who survived became cripples for life.

A Rescuer's Journal

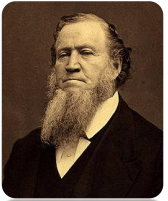
Redick Newton Allred – Rescuer
November 13-17, 1856



“Ephraim Hanks arrived from Salt Lake City and reported 150 wagons on the way to relieve us but nothing having been heard from the trains I sent a man with him to meet them. They started the next morning and it was very cold and the wind blowing a gale from the west back he set a sail behind his wagon and struck out at the rate of 10 knots. Brother Spencer tried to induce me to break up camp and return to the city. I declined his proposition and he said he would return. I advised him to stay for the lives of the company depended upon us. He then said that he moved that as I was president of the station they center their faith on me, that I should get the word of the Lord to know what we must do, to this I objected as he already said what he would do. They returned the next day. I sent a letter by them to the companies on the road for them to come on as fast as the condition of their teams would allow, but he failing to present the letter all the companies turned back with them until they got to Bridger where Lewis Robinson prevailed on them to stop until he could send a messenger to President Young, the result of which was to turn them all back again with instructions to go until they met Captain George Grant. Spencer’s team, after reaching Big Mountain, was turned back and arrived at my camp the same evening that Captain Grant arrived with the last handcart company. The team was in an exhausted condition, reminding them of my words to them, that ‘if they wanted to save the team, leave it with us, or keep it there to help the needy.’ But C.V. Spencer would not consent. President Young told William Kimball that he did not care if he turned some so quick that it would snap their neck. But I saved my neck by sticking to my post. Joseph A. Young came to my camp with the first intelligence from the last companies and went on to the city the next day. Captain Grant got into my camp on the 17th of November just 30 days since he left me and saluted me with ‘hurrah for the bulldog good for hanging on.’”

Arriving

After the rescue wagons reached the handcart companies, the handcarts were left behind and everyone loaded up and began the over 300 mile journey to Salt Lake. They arrived on Sunday, November 30th in 104 wagons. The saints had been gathered in the Tabernacle and knew of their coming. Brigham Young addressed the Salt Lake saints and said:



“When those persons arrive I do not want to see them put into houses by themselves; I want to have them distributed in the city among families that have good and comfortable houses; and I wish all the sisters now before me, and all who know how and can, to nurse and wait upon the new-comers and prudently administer medicine and food to them. To speak upon these things is a part of my religion, for it pertains to taking care of the Saints....”

“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. You know that I would give more for a dish of pudding and milk, or a baked potato and salt, were I in the situation of those persons who have just come in, than I would for all your prayers, though you were to stay here all the afternoon and pray. Prayer is good, but when baked potatoes and pudding and milk are needed, prayer will not supply their place on this occasion, give every duty its proper time and place.”

“Some you will find with their feet frozen to their ankles; some are frozen to their knees and some have their hands frosted.... We want you to receive them as your own children, and to have the same feeling for them. We are their temporal saviors, for we have saved them from death.”

A Rescuer's Journal

Redick Newton Allred – Rescuer
November 18, 1856



“The teams having arrived we were again organized into companies of tens by wagons each 10 taking up a company of 100 as they were organized in their handcarts – my 10 wagons hauling Captain Mayo’s Company. All could ride although much crowded. We then set out for the city with his half-starved, half-frozen and almost entirely exhausted company of about 500 saints. But from that time on they did not suffer with hunger or fatigue, but all suffered more or less with cold. As well as I was provided I even lost my toenails from frost. I had a good tent and took in 5 brethren including Captains Tyler and Martin and the 3 sisters Quinn to do our cooking. After getting well started Captain Grant with a number of others started ahead to the city leaving Robert T. Burton in command with me to assist him and after hard marches and much suffering which was however lessened by assistance from Salt Lake City in the shape of cooked provisions, and men to clear the snow on the mountain passes – making it possible for our much exhausted teams to get along with their heavy loads we arrived in the city in triumph. Captain Burton leading one and I the other as we moved up the street in two lines to the tithing yard where we were greeted with much praise and a hardy welcome to the city of the Saints where we as well as the newcomers could rest from our labors and our work could follow us.”

“Thus ended one of the hardest and most successful missions I have ever performed for although the mission with the Mormon Battalion was a long, hard, tedious and therefore very severe yet this was short and sharp in the extreme.”

“President Kimball blessed me from the standard with a multiplicity of blessings for my integrity and labors in not leaving my post but sticking by to the last under trying circumstances.”