

# The Martyrs of the Plains



John Y. Smith, President of the Handcart Company

**HANDCART SONG.**  
By William Hobbs.

Ye Saints that dwell on Europe's shores,  
Prepare yourselves with many more  
To leave behind your native land,  
For sure God's judgments are at hand,  
Prepare to cross the stormy main  
Before you do the valleys gain,  
And with the faithful make a start  
To cross the plains with our hand carts.

Chorus:  
Some must push and some must pull  
As we go marching up the hill  
As merrily on the way we go  
Until we reach the valley oh.



S. S. Jones, President of Handcart Veterans



James Gardner, Goshen, Utah



Thomas Dobson, Forest Dale, Iowa



John R. Haines, Member of Martin and Willey Handcart Co.

ONE of the most thrilling, yet tender and pathetic chapters in the history of the Church is the story of the handcart veterans, whose devotion to a principle led them to sacrifice personal comforts, surmount difficulties and endure hardships even to the yielding of their lives for a cause which they believed to be right.

The story of the handcart pioneers will be handed down to future generations as the record of a people who were willing by their acts to prove the sincerity of the faith that animated their actions, and by attempting and carrying out in the face of almost insuperable obstacles a pilgrimage scarcely paralleled in the annals of history.

What shall be said of the heroic souls who braved the dangers of an ocean voyage on sailing vessels, the discomforts of a ride across 1,500 miles of country in box cars, covered up like so many cattle; faced the perils and hardships of a journey on foot for 1,200 miles, in which each man, woman and child was compelled to do his or her share in pushing a handcart which contained their all in this world's goods—were these people guided by blind fanaticism in their struggles for religious emancipation, or was it the voice of inspiration impelling them to sacrifice their friends and their worldly possessions in an effort to insure the salvation of their souls? The sequel must answer. And it can be said of the great majority of those who encountered the privations of that memorable journey, their sacrifices were rewarded by a peace of mind and contentment in spiritual and temporal blessings that were a complete vindication of the faith which bore them up in the hour of trial, and a fulfillment of the promises made them by those whose words had influenced their acts.

### Many Survivors Living.

Although 54 years have elapsed since the memorable handcart journey of 1856, when out of nearly 600 people who started out to reach the vales of the mountains by pushing a handcart across the forbidding plains, a third of their number perished on the way, there are yet many survivors of that fateful trip who are among the best citizens of the state today, and whose tales of the experiences of that eventful year are the inspiration and admiration of their posterity. And it would be difficult to find a single man or woman of that noble band who attributed any unworthy motive to the men who were responsible for their embarking on that journey, or who failed in the hour of critical trial to fulfill his or her duty in carrying out to the utmost the strenuous requirements of the time.

The unanimous sentiment of the surviving members of the company of 1856, and of all other companies for that matter—there were 10 handcart companies in all—that Brigham Young was actuated by the one desire to gain for them their temporal and spiritual welfare when he advised them to leave their homes in Europe and brave the rigors of an uninhabited land for the building up of Zion. His purpose was to inhabit the waste places of the west; to construct a commonwealth which should become a material factor in the development of the country; to give to those who had been downtrodden in their former lives the inestimable privileges of religious and political liberty which had not theretofore been their portion, and now, after half a century has softened the memories of the hardships endured only the noblest of motives is ascribed to the leaders whose counsels resulted in the undertaking which forms one of the most pathetic and inspiring chapters in the entire history of the Church.

While many difficulties were encountered by many of the other companies which crossed the plains with handcarts, the company which suffered most and which will perhaps be remembered longest was the ill-starred company of 1856, known as the Edward Martin company. There were five companies in all which crossed during 1856, and that captained by J. G. Willey started out and arrived in Salt Lake valley only a few weeks prior to the Martin company. The Willey company encountered the early storms of the fall of 1856, and there were some deaths and a great deal of suffering among the members; but the valley was not so far away when the storms came, and the long and arduous journey was successfully concluded without the loss of life or disastrous experiences suffered by the Martin company.

### Anchor Weighed at Liverpool.

It was on Sunday morning, May 25, 1856, that the good ship Horizon cleared from Liverpool with 856 passengers on board, all of the Mormon faith, bound for Boston harbor. Edward Martin was captain of the company, with Jesse Haven and George P. Waugh as his counselors. In this company were the men, women and children who dared the perils of the plains, still under the captaincy of Edward Martin, and who yielded up in death one-third of their number as a testimony to the hope that was within them and as a monument to their unflinching faith.

The voyage across the ocean was without particular incident, the ship casting anchor in sight of Boston harbor on Saturday evening, June 28, 1856. On Monday, June 30, the passengers were towed into port and debarkation was made. According to the story of Thomas Dobson, who made the entire journey, and now resides at Forest Dale, the members of the company rode from Boston to Iowa City, the outfitting point for that year's emigration, in box cars, with seats built up inside very much like seats in a circus tent. But the Saints were cheerful and happy in the thought that they were approaching the goal of their hopes, and the inconveniences of the box car trip did not distress them.

On Tuesday, July 8, the company crossed the Mississippi river by ferry, and again took the cars and reached Iowa City the same afternoon. The company set up tents here and began preparations for the long march across the prairie. Carpenter shops were improvised for the manufacture of handcarts, and as many as could handle a saw and a plane were

put to work on the carts. The implements for this work were scarce, and most of the carts were made from green, unseasoned timber, with wooden axles and wooden boxings. As the journey progressed and the timber dried out, the framework began to crack and the wheels to shrink, and the tires came off and the axles broke, rendering many of the carts useless and throwing the burden of many loads onto the already overcrowded carts that remained serviceable.

### Cherished Articles Thrown Away.

The members of the company were told that the 100 pounds of luggage and personal belongings allowed each person on the sea voyage would be reduced to 17 pounds for each cart, and this caused many heartaches for many of the cherished articles brought from the old country were disposed of at great sacrifice, and often valuable pieces of clothing, etc., were thrown away. Captain J. G. Willey's company started from Florence, Neb., about the 10th or 12th day of July, 1856, about the time the Martin company arrived there.

After completing the manufacture of the carts and loading them with the 17 pounds of luggage for each person, including bedding, utensils and supplies, the historic journey was commenced, and the long train of hand carts rolled out of Florence, Neb., at 2:30 in the afternoon of July 25, 1856. The companies of Capt. John Toone and Jesse C. Haven which started a week or 10 days earlier, were blended with the Martin company at Florence, and continued the journey to Salt Lake as one company.

It was with happy hearts that the members of that ill-starred company started upon their long journey that bright afternoon, with no premonition of the sufferings and trials, the struggles against wild animals, still wilder savages and the rigors of an unusually severe western winter which claimed one-third of their number in death coming to them in warning note. Little did they reckon that they should face starvation, that their feet and hands should be frozen, that their limbs should become weary and that some of their number should lag behind the caravan and pray that they might be released from further sufferings by death. Their hearts were light and they lifted up their voices in gratitude and song that they were at last on their way toward the gathering place of God's people, and they cared not what was before them, so that the end of their tollings was in sight and that they might come to Zion.

### No Tops to Hand Carts.

The more aged and infirm of the company were placed in the half dozen wagons which accompanied the train, and the more youthful and able-bodied men, women and children, put their hands to the progress of the company in helping to push or pull their carts. Most of the carts had no tops as owing to the lateness of the season all the haste possible in making a start was deemed necessary. The carts, therefore, in most instances consisted simply of two wheels with a framework covered with boards for a bottom and a handle extending out in front, and the

goods and supplies of the cart owners were strapped on to the frame, exposed to the storms and the weather. Scarcely a change of clothing or an extra pair of shoes was allowed in the 17 pounds allotted to each person, and much suffering on account of the failure of the wearing out of their shoes, and from being so lightly clad, was the result.

But little attention was paid to these details at the start, and as the days went by the spirits of the company were cheered by the strains of the hand cart song, which was, according to S. S. Jones of Provo, composed on route by one of their number, William Hobbs, whose memory will be honored by every member of that company as long as life lasts, for giving to them the words of the song which kept heart among them when almost all else failed. And as the long line of carts stretched its way across plain, up hill and down dale, along the length of the procession could be heard the enlivening swing of that cherished chorus:

"For some must push and some must pull  
As we go marching up the hill,  
As merrily on the way we go  
Until we reach the valley, oh."

### First Deaths on the Trail.

It was on the 11th day of August that a male member of the company, and a child were buried by the wayside, these being the first deaths. On the 18th of August the second death occurred, Mary Scott, from the Manchester conference, dying in one of the wagons. The body was sewed up in a counterpane and buried by the side of the road.

The company arrived at Fort Laramie Oct. 8, and cold weather was encountered here. Franklin D. Richards, who was returning from Europe from presiding over the mission, purchased 100 buffalo robes at Laramie, and these were eagerly secured by the members of the company, many of whom were already suffering from the cold. The first snow storm was encountered on Oct. 20, when the Platte river was reached, and here two more were added to the death roll. The snow continued falling for three days, enveloping the camp in gloom and apprehension. At this point occurred the death of Aaron Jackson, and deaths began to multiply until a "burying squad" was appointed, it being the duty of these men to prepare graves each night for those who passed away during the day. Provisions began to be very scarce and the appetites of the people became correspondingly stronger. It was along about this time when the terrible experiences of three members of the company, two men and a woman, who left the company in the middle of the night and returning several miles through the heavy snow and bitter cold to a spot where they had seen the carcass of an ox lying not far from the road, almost gave up their lives in an effort to secure the meat of the ox to appease their hunger and thus preserve their lives. On this trip the men and the woman were almost frozen to death, each in turn giving up to the influence of the cold and each in turn being saved

only through the efforts of the others through whipping, or slapping, being thus aroused into a condition of anger and frenzy which was the means of restoring circulation to their frozen veins. The adventures of this party are recorded in a story written by Albert Jones, entitled, "A Night on The Plains," the names of the participants, however, being suppressed.

### Death of Aaron Jackson.

Josiah Rogerson, who was a member of the company and who resides in this city, has written a book on the experiences of the Martin hand cart company, and he describes the death of Aaron Jackson as follows:

"Aaron Jackson, whose widow and several children have resided in Ogden since our arrival (the widow, Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson Kingsford, having passed away, however, about two years since) was found so weak and exhausted before crossing (the Platte river) today that he could not make it, and after being carried across the ford in a wagon, the writer was again detailed to wheel the dying Aaron on an empty cart, with his feet dangling over the end bar, to camp, and after putting up our tent, assisted his wife in laying him in his blankets, the last time on earth.

"It was one of the bitter cold, black frost nights, near the Black hills, and notwithstanding the hard journey the day before, I was awakened at midnight to go on guard again till 6 or 7 in the morning. "Putting jacket or coat on, for both sexes had for weeks past laid down at night in the clothing we had traveled in during the day, and passing out in the middle of the tent, my feet struck those of poor Aaron. They were stiff and rebounded at out accidental stumbling against them, and reaching my hand to his face, I found that he was dead. The faithful and good man Aaron had pulled his last cart."

### One-Third Perished.

It has been claimed by some historians that about 300 deaths occurred in the company, but it is unanimously agreed that at least one-third of those who started from Iowa City passed away from exposure, freezing, starving, and from natural causes during that terrible pilgrimage. Mr. Rogerson in his writings, says that six or eight bodies were buried every night, and never less than three. "On the Monday evening of Oct. 27," Mr. Rogerson's narrative continues, "previous to Wednesday when we again started west (from Red Buttes) 18 adults were buried in three graves, side by side. How easily death came to some of those exhausted souls is shown by the following incident: One morning while at the Buttes the wife of Samuel Pucell, about 55 or 60 years of age, from the Ashton-Under-Tyne branch, Lancashire, England, came to our tent and pushing aside the door said, calling to my mother, 'Mary, our Sam (her husband) is dead and I'll not be long after him. When I am dead, do thou take good care of my lasses when they gets to the valley, I'll not reach there.' No words of mother

## Personal Reminiscences by Surviving Handcart Veterans

### S. S. Jones.

S. S. Jones, of Provo, and his brother, Albert Jones, are survivors of the Martin hand cart company. Both have been honored by the Society of Hand Cart Veterans, S. S. Jones being president of that association, and Albert Jones being treasurer. "While the journey was a hard one," said S. S. Jones, "we have nothing but the best of feelings for the men who advised us to make the trip. The purpose was a glorious one, and the motive which inspired the advice for the hand cart company to make the pilgrimage was a noble one. We have nothing but unstinted praise for the men who came to our rescue, and met us at Devil's Gate with relief train and supplies. By the emigration of the hand cart companies, thousands were gathered to Zion who would not have come otherwise. The hand of God was in it all, and we today are grateful that it all happened just as it did."

### Albert Jones.

Albert Jones, also of Provo, was a young man of 19 when the hand cart company crossed the plains. With his brother, S. S., his mother, and Lydia Elizabeth Hooker and Mary Ann Greening, making five in company, he helped push and pull the cart containing their worldly possessions. Mr. Jones has written many articles and recently delivered a lecture before the students of the B. Y. University at Provo giving a history of the experiences of the Martin hand cart company, with many interesting personal reminiscences in his own recollection. He, like his brother, is still hale and hearty, and is a fund of information regarding the historic journey of the handcart company.

### Thomas Dobson.

Thomas Dobson, who for 30 years was a watchman on the streets of Salt Lake City, was a member of the Martin hand cart company. He was one of the "burial squad," and did guard duty every night, and went through the hardships and experiences common to the undertaking. His mother, sister, brother and he were in the company from one family. Mr. Dobson tells the story of the joys and sorrows

of the company in graphic detail, and how, after all their sufferings the men, women and children in camp shouted with joy on beholding the rescuers from the valley ride into their camp beyond Devil's Gate. His shoes gave out on the journey, and in traveling with sacks wrapped about them, his feet were frozen. Eph. K. Hanks, who was one of the relief party, promised him he should not lose his feet if he would exercise faith, and at Fort Bridger he got some socks to wear. The toes on his feet turned black, and though it was thought they would have to be amputated, they were healed and according to Mr. Dobson, are as serviceable today as they were in 1856.

### Langley A. Bailey.

Langley A. Bailey, now a resident of Nephi, and first vice president of the Hand Cart Veterans' organization, was also a member of the company. Mr. Bailey tells of an experience of the emigrants after they had completed the 1,500-mile journey from Boston to Iowa City. "When we arrived at Iowa City," Mr. Bailey says, "we were informed when we left the train that we must travel four miles on foot to the camping grounds. All felt delighted in having the privilege of a pleasant walk, and we all took up our beds and started to walk the four miles. We had not gone far before it started to thunder and terrific bolts of lightning shot across the sky, followed by a downpour of rain. The roads became very muddy and slippery, and progress became very difficult. There were 500 of us and we trudged along with our beds on our backs. It was night before we reached the camp. We were conducted to tents, and packed very close together we stood up all night in our wet clothes.

### James Gardner.

James Gardner, now a resident of Goshen, was a member of the hand cart company headed at first by Edmund Ellsworth and D. D. McArthur, but which was later divided and made into two companies, Edmund Ellsworth captaining the English members of the company and Mr. McArthur being

chosen captain of the Scotch members. This company, Mr. Gardner says, left the old country on the good ship Enoch Train, with 775 passengers on board, on March 19, 1856, landing in Boston harbor on May 1. Not being able to get railroad rates from that point the company went to New York, starting from that point for Iowa City. Hand carts were built and the company left Iowa City for the 1,300-mile journey about the middle of June. There were about 900 persons in the company and it was soon discovered that the company was too unwieldy for advantageous traveling, and on arriving at Florence the company was divided, the Scotch people traveling under the leadership of Capt. D. D. McArthur and the English people under Capt. Ellsworth. The English people came into the valley first, followed closely by the Scotch people who were traveling behind, but caught up in the canyon and raced with the members of the lead company to be first in the city.

Mr. Gardner and his wife, who is also a hand cart veteran, will celebrate their golden wedding anniversary on Christmas day. They were united in marriage Dec. 25, 1860. Mr. Gardner says: "If we both live till Christmas we intend holding a golden wedding; and we want all the old hand cart veterans to be present."

### Jane Haines James.

Jane Haines James, for many years a resident of Provo, was a member of Capt. J. G. Willey's hand cart company. She was born Jan. 1, 1815, and was married to William James, in August, 1835, at Brittle Hampton, Worcester, England. She embraced the gospel in 1837, and left England in the spring of 1856 for Utah, one of her children dying on the ocean. She crossed the plains in Capt. Willey's hand cart company, her husband, William James, being frozen to death on the journey sometime in November. Reuben James, her son, was badly frozen and was thought to be dead, but he recovered and is alive today. The company arrived in Salt Lake City Sunday, Nov. 9, after experiencing many hardships and privations on the plains. Mrs. James is identified with the Relief society in Provo, and although she is in her 96th year she is still in the enjoyment of good health.

could cheer her up or dispel her conclusion. Not later than the second morning afterward, true enough she had gone to her Sam, and they were laid side by side at my mother's request. The two daughters came to Utah and have resided for 45 years at Cedar City, but the younger of them had her feet frozen and amputated soon after arriving in Salt Lake."

### Story of the Rescue.

Trying as had the hardships of the journey been, with a long, hard winter staring the pilgrims in the face, with scarcely any clothing to keep them warm, in many instances no shoes at all, with the scanty provisions rationed out on a starvation basis, and with nearly 400 miles travel before them, hope never entirely left the breasts of those hardy men and women. While snowstorms beat them in the face and frozen ground was their nightly couch, their overmastering faith bore them up until the deliverance, which was even then hastening toward them, should arrive. Mr. Rogerson's narrative relates a dream had by one of the members of the company named Rodwell, while the company was camped at Red Buttes. Rodwell said: "I dreamed that it was Tuesday or Wednesday, and about noontide, as near as I could judge, I saw a mule, packed with cooking utensils, come right into the middle of our camp as we are now, followed by three Californians, wearing blue soldier overcoats, riding mules or horses. They stopped and told us of teams and relief from the valley, after which we started again on our journey. Rodwell said we should see this dream come true, and we felt then every member in that snowbound camp, every word of that vision."

It was Sunday morning when Rodwell told of his dream. Mr. Rogerson's narrative continues: "Monday passed and the dream, as yesterday, was the theme of the camp. Tuesday morning came. Prayer meeting was called with remarks of hope, comfort, and cheer. One member bite for breakfast over, the sun shone again a few minutes at a time, and noontide was approaching, when all of a sudden the stillness of the camp was broken by a shout of joy and gladness; the mule was in camp, the mute messenger of a Shetland pony, surrounded by a score of women and aged men, all in tears, and several of the mothers' arms around his neck. God was praised, and the heavens were thanked. We saw all this, and we had been looking for it for three days. After a few minutes of this frantic joy, in due order rescuers, Joseph A. Young, Dan Jones and Abo Garr. Handshakings, thanks and praises followed for some time, and if there was a dry cheer in that company there was not among the three of the relief express. Immediately a meeting was called, the news and particulars of the whereabouts of the relief teams from the valley made known; a pound of flour per head was ordered issued to every adult and a proportionate amount for the children and the balance of the day was spent in cooking, baking and getting ready for another start in the morning to reach the mule and horse relief teams, some 6 miles to the west of us, near the first crossing of the Sweetwater and a few miles east of Devil's Gate."

### President Young's Call.

Dan Jones, who was one of the advance guard of the relief train, in his "Forty Years Among the Indians," tells of the rescue and the rescue party and the men who composed it. He says: "I attended the October conference in 1858. When conference opened President Young arose and said, 'There are a number of our people on the plains who have started to come with hand carts; they will need help and I want 20 teams to go out and meet them. If the teams are not voluntarily furnished, there are plenty of good ones in the street and I shall call upon Brother J. C. Little the marshal, to furnish them. Now we will adjourn this conference until tomorrow; Brother Young was in earnest. He seemed moved by a spirit that would admit of no delay.'

### Volunteers to the Rescue.

The organization of the relief train was as follows: George D. Grant was selected captain, with Robert T. Burton and William Kimball as his assistants; Cyrus Wheelock, chaplain, Charles Decker guide, and Daniel W. Jones, cook. The rest of the company was made up of the following persons: Joseph A. Young, Chauncey Webb, H. H. Cluff, D. P. Kimball, George W. Grant, Ed Peck, Joel Parrish, Henry Goldborough, Thomas Alexander, Benjamin Hampton, Thomas Ricks, Abe Garr, Charles Gray, Al Huntington—"Handsome Cupid," Stephen Taylor, William K. Broadhead, Ira Nebeker, Reddick Alfred, Amos Fairbanks and Tom Bankhead. "These," said Dan Jones in his book, "are all the names that I remember, if there were more I have been unable to find them."

While the sufferings of the belated company were not over, much cruel, cold weather was yet to be encountered between Devil's Gate and the valley, and many graves were yet to be filled from the decimated ranks of those footsore toilers, yet their spirits were cheered by the presence of the relief train and the fact that they had not been forgotten. They were given renewed courage to again take up the journey and determination to carry it out to a successful conclusion, which they did, arriving over the mountains into Salt Lake valley on Sunday, Nov. 30, just as the afternoon meeting had been dismissed, and were welcomed by the people.

In honor of those intrepid souls who braved the dangers of the plains and the elements to reach the gathering place of the Saints, a movement has been started among the younger generation of the descendants of the hand cart pioneers of all the companies, to build a monument to "The martyrs of the plains," and to give their ancestors place among the roll of those who through their heroic actions and noble sacrifices are remembered with honor and noble sacrifices are remembered with Zion's Camp, the Mormon Battalion, and the Hand Cart Veterans.