

# **The Mormon Handcart Experiences**

Compiled by Glen W. Chapman - January 2001

## **George Cunningham Experience**

My name is George Cunningham. I was born in Fifeshire, Scotland, on the 17th of August, 1840. (As that day came on a Sunday, I ought to be religious!) My Father's name is James Cunningham, and my Mother's name is Elizabeth Nicholson.

### **The Faith of My Mother**

My parents joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints before I was a year old. Among the first things that I recall, is of the Elders coming to our house, where they generally made it their home. I have known my Mother to go time after time, and borrow money to give to them to help them along, though she saw no earthly chance they had to pay it back. But she was so full of faith that she would always say that the Lord would open up the way for her that she would get it back. (He invariably did, too.) My parents were the first to embrace the Gospel around our district of country. After them, nearly half of the citizens of our village joined, (probably 20 to 30 Families). Mormonism seemed to take the sway for a long time, the gifts and blessings of the Spirit following them that believed, as the Lord poured his Spirit out upon them.

I was raised in the strictest sense of the word, a "Mormon." The faith, religion, and piety that was then implanted in my mind in my infancy, has never been eradicated, and I believe never will be. (I have often thought of the two thousand young men which we read of in the Book of Mormon, who had faith instilled into them by the teaching of their Mothers, and the good effect it had on them in their later life. My experience has been much like theirs, for I know that the faith planted in me, in my childhood, has been the means of protecting me through many dangers, which I cannot here relate.)

### **Work in the Black Coal Pits**

Owing to the circumstances of my Father's Family, my chances for a school education were rather poor. Still, I attended now and then, from the time I was five years old till that of seven. I then had to leave and go to work in a coal pit to help to sustain the Family. I labored there for six years, often working twelve or fourteen hours a day, sometimes not seeing the light of day for a whole week. The air was so bad, that a lamp would not burn. No one knows the dangers and privations experienced there, only those who have gone through the same.

### **The Land of Promise**

In the spring of 1856, (at age 15), the chance opened up for us to immigrate to America, for which I was truly thankful. We sold our small effects and bade our friends farewell, took train for Glasgow, Scotland, and from there went by steamboat to Liverpool, England. We landed in Liverpool, I think, on the first of May and embarked on the sixth of that month on board the American ship "Thornton," bound for New York!

There were 700 souls on board our ship, nearly all of whom were bound for Salt Lake that same season. We had a very long passage, being six weeks on the open sea. I enjoyed the voyage very well. For the sake of health, the Captain took a northerly route. We saw at different times some very large icebergs towering up in the sky-like huge mountains. The cold was very intense for several days, before we had passed them.

Then we arrived at the banks of Newfoundland. A few more days sailing brought us to the mouth of the Hudson River.

We unshipped at Castle Garden, a very pleasant place with every accommodation for immigrants. I well can remember the first step that I made on American soil. I had been taught to believe that it was a land of promise, blessed above all other lands, and although only a boy of fifteen years of age, I felt like thanking God for the blessings I then enjoyed.

### **The Mormon Campground**

We stayed a few days in New York City, then started up the river on a steamboat for Albany, New York. We then took a train for about three hundred miles, then embarked on the Great Lakes. After sailing two or three days, we again took a rail car for Iowa City, arriving about the

latter part of June. We went about two miles out of the city to the Mormon campground, where six or seven hundred immigrants were encamped in a delightful country. Everything seemed beautiful and pleasant as far as the eye could reach.

We had not been there long ere night set in. The sky began to gleam with lightning streaks, following in rapid succession, until some parts of the firmament seemed entirely in a blaze. The rain commenced to fall in torrents, and the wind blew most terribly. Many were there without the least particle of shelter: no tents, no cover whatever. Water was swimming everywhere, and everyone in an uproar! Children were crying and Mothers sighing. Robert Burns [the Scottish poet] in his "Tam O'Shanter" hardly does the subject justice when he wrote:

The wind blew as 'twould blow its last -The rattling shower rose on the blast.  
The lightning gleams the darkness swallowed,  
Loud, deep, and long the thunders bellowed. That night a child might understand  
The devil had business on his hand.

### **Brother Willies' Handcart Company**

We camped here five or six weeks before we could get away. At last we were told that we were to go in Brother Willies' handcart company. This company consisted of about 600 persons-men, women, and children. There were 100 Scotch, 200 Danes, and about 300 English. A Captain was appointed over each 100, he being chosen from the returning LDS Missionaries. One team was appointed to haul provisions for each hundred. The cattle were wild and the teamsters were green, but we got along the best we could. We had 300 miles to travel, right through Iowa, before we could reach the permanent starting place - Winter Quarters.

While traveling along, people would mock, sneer, and [try to] degrade us on every occasion~ for being such "fools," (as they termed us), and would often throw out inducements to get us to stop. But we told them that we were going to Zion, and would not stop on any account. When we went through a town or settlement, pulling our handcarts as we always had to do, people would turn out in crowds to laugh at us, crying "gee" and "haw" as if we were oxen. But this did not discourage us in the least, for we knew that we were on the right track! That was enough.

After several weeks pulling, hauling, and praying, we arrived at Winter Quarters, but were then detained again several weeks more.

### **A Prophecy Amid Tears**

Some stayed here, and would not go any farther. In fact, we were told that if any wanted to stop, that they might do so, but the counsel was to go on to the valleys. I can remember of being at a meeting one night, when Brother Levi Savage, a returning missionary, arose and spoke. He counseled the old, weak, and sickly to stop until another spring. The tears commenced to flow down his cheeks, and he prophesied that if such undertook the journey, at that late season of the year, that their bones would strew the way.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Journey Begun**

At length, we started out, our number being greatly reduced. (About 100 staying behind.) The ox teams were loaded down, and we were delayed much by having to wait on them, yet we strove along daily.

We traveled up the Platte River, seeing immense herds of buffalo. Some places the prairie was black with them, there were so many. We could not keep them out of the train while traveling! We killed some of them and had plenty of meat.

### **Continue On or Perish**

Having continued on our journey for quite some time, [it eventu all) became] evident to all that our provisions were getting very short. WE had between six and seven hundred miles yet to travel, to accomplish our journey, which we would be compelled to do, or perish in the mountain snows. We therefore came to the conclusions to take the provisions out of the wagons, and put them on the handcarts. We had about thirty milk cows which we then hitched onto the wagons to haul the sick. The children that were not able to walk, were put on the handcarts also, and we who were able, had to haul them. Here we plodded along through the mud, with all the courage that we could muster. Our bright young Sisters helped us by doing all they could to encourage us fn

every shape, and whenever an opportunity afforded, they would try to cheer us along with their beautiful strains of vocal music. They seemed to have songs very appropriate for every occasion. This was much help to us under such stiff circumstances. Some of their words, I can well remember yet:

For some must push, and some must pull, As we go marching up the hill.

And merrily on our way we'll go,

Until we reach the Valley, Oh!

They also used to sing the following words a great deal:

Hurray for the Camp of Israel!

Hurray for the handcart scheme! Hurray, hurray, it's better by far

Than the wagon and ox team!

#### A Message of Distress

About this time Elder Franklin D. Richards and some returning missionaries came up with us, and a meeting was called. Captain Willie laid [our precarious] state of affairs before the Brethren. [Following the meeting,] Brother Richards and his company left [for Salt Lake]. (They had a splendid outfit of mules and carriages, and were able to travel very fast.)

We went along slowly, and after a few weeks more, we arrived at Fort Laramie. As our provisions were very exhausted, our Captain went to the fort and bought a ton or two of flour, for which he paid \$20 per hundred pounds.

#### Starvation Stalks Our Camp

[And so we continued on our journey.] The nights now began to be very cold and the feed was very poor. Our provisions were [again] running out fast. Starvation stared us in the face. We were put on rations of six ounces of flour per day, and nothing else. The old and the weak began to die off, and a great many of the young and strong soon followed suit. We were several weeks on this small ration. Then it was reduced to half *that* amount.

#### Survival

At last we were caught in a heavy snow storm on the Sweet Water River, and the last of our flour was gone. The Captain called us together, and said that *all* the provisions were gone, except some few crackers which he had saved for the sick and the small children. There were only one or two hundred pounds of them. He said that all hands would be treated alike, that he would kill every animal in the train [for food] before any of us should die of starvation.

The weather turned to extreme cold. Many died from the effects of want and cold. I myself helped to bury (or partly bury - as they were only put a small distance under the ground), ten to fifteen in one single day.<sup>3</sup>

Our Captain intended to keep his word, and commenced to kill off the cattle,<sup>4</sup> but they were nearly as poor [physically] as we were. We boiled the bones and drank the soup, and ate what little meat there was. We also greedily devoured the hides. I took a piece of hide, when I could get it, and would scorch off the hair by the fire, roast it a little on the coals, cut it in little pieces so that I could swallow it, and then bolt it down my throat for supper - and thought it was delicious!

#### "Greater Love Hath No Man Than This"

Many were frozen to death. Our Captain did all he could to do his duty. He himself was badly frozen, and came very close to dying. Some would sacrifice themselves, by giving their food and clothing to their friends, relatives, and children, while on the other hand, some seemed to be void of natural affection, and would let their companions and family members die off, nearly, for the sake of getting their few mouthfuls of food, or perhaps some old blanket that they could use to cover themselves! In common cares, we cannot always tell what our friends and neighbors are, but under these circumstances, it undoubtedly proved them.<sup>5</sup>

#### A Dream of Hope

While laboring under those trials and afflictions, I lay down one night and fell asleep. I dreamed that the morning had come, that the storm had subsided some, and that we had started out on the road. I thought that I saw two men coming toward us on horseback. They were riding

very swiftly, and soon came up to us. They said that they had volunteered to come to our rescue, and that they would go on farther east to meet a company which was still behind us, and that on the morrow, we would meet a number of wagons loaded with provisions for us. They were dressed in blue soldier overcoats, and had Spanish saddles on their horses. I examined them, particularly the saddles, (as they were new to me). I also could discern every expression of their countenances. They seemed to rejoice and be exceedingly glad that they had come to our relief and saved us.

At last, morning came. It had cleared somewhat, and the snow was about eighteen inches deep on the level where we were. The weather was still very cold. We made some very large fires with willows, which were abundant around the place, and everyone stood around the fires with gloomy faces. The thought of my dream entered my mind, and I told it to the crowd that had gathered around to warm themselves. My Mother spoke up and said that she knew the dream would be fulfilled, for it was promised in my Patriarchal Blessing that I would dream dreams and ~e those things come to pass.

We therefore set out. I can recall that I was on the lead of the group, feeling somewhat inspired by what I had dreamt the previous night. The day was rather blustery with alternate snow storms blowing from the North, mixed with clear spells (which lasted sometimes for nearly half an hour). During one of the clear spells, I spotted the two persons that I had dreamed of the night before, riding fast towards us!! I roared out to the attention of the crowd, "HERE THEY COME!! SEE THEM COMING OVER THAT HILL!!"

The people told me that I was a true dreamer, and we all felt that we should give thanks to God!

#### Rescue Parties

We met the wagons with the provisions on the following day. We were treated very well by the Brethren who came to meet us. The great difficulty now was of eating too much!

The feelings and senses of our people were yet dulled and numb; they seemed indifferent and stupified. It had gone too far to dread death, for the thread of life had, by this time, been nearly exhausted. Neither had the grave much victory to boast of, for many did not feel like going one step out of its way.

#### The Leadership of Love

Our Captain showed us all a noble example. He had been furnished with a mule to ride on, (at the start of our journey at Iowa City), but he had said, "I will never get on its back; I will show the example, and you follow it." And he had done so, the Captains of hundreds following his example. They would crowd on ahead to be the first into the streams to help the women and children across, and after getting the last one across, they would crowd ahead again for the same purpose. They had waded every stream, and by this time they were so completely exhausted they had to be hauled the balance of the way, (some were not even able to stand on their feet).

At last, we arrived at Salt Lake City, where we were kindly cared for, and well treated. The sick were doctored, and then sent to the various settlements. We went to American Fork, Utah, where my home has been ever since.

(This account comes from a typed copy of the *Autobiography of George Cunningham*, [BYU Library Special Collections], written in 1876. From book *Champions of Light* edited by Richard Cottam Shipp, Randall Book, Orem Utah, 1983 )

#### Mary Goble Experience

I, Mary Goble, was born in Brighton, Sussex, England, 2nd of June, 1843. My Father was William Goble, and my Mother, Mary Penford, was the Daughter of John and Sarah Penfold.

My childhood days were spent the same as most children's. When I was in my twelfth year, my parents joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On November 5th, 1855, I was baptized into the Church.

### Farewell to England

The following May, we started for Utah to be with the Saints, (leaving our home May 19, 1856, when I was 12 years of age). We came to London, England, the first day, then to Liverpool, and then boarded the ship "Horizon" that evening.

We sailed the 25th of May. (The pilot ship came and tugged us out into the open sea.) I well remember how we watched old England fade from sight. We sang, "Farewell, Our Native Land, Farewell." After we got over our seasickness, we had a nice time. We would play games, and sing the songs of Zion. We held meetings, and the time passed happily.

We were on the sea six weeks, until we finally landed at Boston. Then we took the train to Iowa City, where we had to get an outfit to cross the plains.

While on board the ship, my little Sister, Fanny, had broken out with the measles, and when we were in the Iowa Campgrounds, there came up a thunder storm which blew down our little shelter, (made of handcars and some quilts). We sat there in the rain, thunder, and lightning of the storm. Fanny got wet, (as did we all), and in a short time died, (July 19, 1856). She would have been 2 years old on the 23rd of July. (The day we started on our journey west, we visited Fanny's grave. We felt very badly to have to leave our little Sister's body buried there.)

### Our Journey West

My Father purchased two yoke of oxen, one yoke of cows, a wagon, and a tent. On the first of August, we started to travel with our unbroken ox teams, not knowing a thing about driving oxen. Father at this time had a Wife and five children, (myself, age 13, Edwin, Caroline, Harriet, and James).

We traveled through the States until we came to Council Bluffs. Then we started our journey [in Captain Hunt's Wagon Train,] of one thousand miles over the plains. It was about the last of September. We traveled from 15 to 25 miles a day. We would stop one day in the week to wash, and on Sundays we would hold our meetings and rest. Every morning and night we were called to prayers by the bugle.

The Indians were on the war path, and very hostile. Our Captain, John Hunt, had us make a "dark camp." (That was to stop and get our supper, then travel a few more miles and not light any fires, but pitch camp and go to bed.) The men had to travel all day, and guard every other night.

One night, as usual, the cattle were in the corral, (which was made with wagons), when one of the guards saw something crawling along the ground. All in a moment the cattle started! It was a noise like thunder. One of the guards shot off his gun into the air. The intruder was an Indian with a buffalo robe on. Mother and we children had been sitting in the tent. Father was one of the guards. We were surely frightened, but Father came running into our tent and told us not to be afraid for everything was all right.

We traveled on till we got to the Platte River. (That was the last walk that I ever had with my Mother.)

### The Sufferings of the Saints

We caught up with the handcart companies that day, and watched them cross the river. There were great lumps of ice floating down it. It was bitter cold. The next morning there were fourteen dead in the camp due to the cold. We went back to camp and went to prayers. Then we all sang the song, "Come, Come, Ye Saints, No Toil Nor Labor Fear." I wondered what made my Mother cry.

That night my Mother took sick and the next morning my little Sister was born, (the 23rd of September). We named her Edith. She lived six weeks and died for want of nourishment.

### Lost in the Snow

We had been without water for several days, just drinking melted snow water. The Captain said there was a spring of fresh water just a few miles away. It was now snowing hard, but my Mother begged me to go and get her a drink. So I went, (another lady going with me). We were about half way to the spring when we found an old man who had fallen in the snow. He was frozen so stiff that we could not lift him. So, the lady told me where to go for the water, and she headed back to camp for help, for we knew he would soon be frozen to death if we left him there. When she had gone, I began to think of Indians, and look~g, looking in all directions. I became confused and forgot which way I should go. I continued to wade around in the snow (which was up to my knees) until I became lost.

Later, when I did not return to camp, the men were called out and started out after me. By the time I was found, my feet and legs were frozen. They carried me to camp and rubbed me with snow, putting my feet in a bucket of water. The pain was so terrible. The frost came out of my legs and feet, but did not come out of my toes.

We traveled on in the snow, from the last crossing of the Platte River. We had orders not to pass the handcart companies. We had to keep close to them, to help them if we could.

We began to get short of food, and our cattle gave out. We could only travel a few miles a day. When we started out of camp in the morning, the Brethren would shovel the snow to make a track for our cattle. They were weak for the want of food, as the buffaloes were in large herds by the roadside, and ate all the grass.

When we arrived at Devil's Gate, [in what is now Wyoming,] it was bitter cold. There were only two or three log houses there. We stayed there two or three days. While there, an ox fell on the ice and was injured. The Brethren killed it, and the beef was given out to the camp. My Brother, James, ate a hearty supper, and was as well as he ever was when he went to bed. In the morning, he was dead.

We left lots of our things there, including our wagon, to make traveling lighter. Then we joined teams with a man named James Barnham, (he had a Sister, Mary, who had frozen to death), and headed west again.

My feet were frozen, as well as my Brother Edwin's and my Sister Caroline's feet. It was nothing but snow. We could not drive the pegs of our tents into the ground. Father would clean a place for our tents, and put snow around it to keep it down.

We were short of flour, but Father was a good shot. They called him the hunter of the camp. So, his hunting skill helped us out. We could not get enough flour for bread, as we got only a quarter of a pound per head per day. So, we would make it into a thin gruel. We called "skilly."

#### **A Living Santa Claus**

There were now four companies on the plains. We did not know what would become of us. One night a man came into our camp, and told us that there would be plenty of flour in the morning, for Brother Brigham Young had sent men and teams from Salt Lake to help us. There was rejoicing that night! We sang songs, some danced, and some

cried. The Scout's name was Ephraim Ranks. We thought he was a living Santa Claus!<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Final Descent**

We traveled faster, now that we had horse teams. My Mother had never gotten well from her illness. She lingered until the 11th of December, 1856, the day that we arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. She died between the Little and Big Mountains.<sup>2</sup> Mother was 43 years old when she died. She and her baby lost their lives while gathering to Zion in such a late season of the year. My Sister<sup>3</sup> was buried at the last crossing of the Sweet Water.

We arrived in Salt Lake City at nine o'clock, the night of the 11th of December, 1856. Three out of the four children in our Family who were still living were frozen, my Mother was dead in the wagon.

Bishop Hardy took us to a home in his Ward, and the Brethren and Sisters of the Ward brought us plenty of food. We had to be careful and not eat too much, as it might kill us, we were so hungry.

#### **A Visit From the Prophet**

Early the next morning, President Brigham Young and a doctor came to see us. (The doctor's name was Williams.) When President Young came in, he shook hands with us all. When he saw our condition - our frozen feet, and our Mother dead - tears rolled down his cheeks.

The doctor amputated my toes, using a saw and a butcher knife. Brigham Young promised me that I would not have to have any more of my feet cut off. The Sisters were dressing Mother for the last time. Oh, how did we stand it? That afternoon she was buried.

One afternoon, when we had been in Salt Lake a week, a knock came at the door. It was Uncle John Wood. When he met Father, he said, "I know it all, Bill." Both of them cried. I was glad to see my Father cry. Uncle John said for him to pack up and we would start for our new place right away. That night we got to Centerville, where Aunt Fanny was waiting for us at Brother Garn's. We stayed there that night. The next morning we went to Farmington and stayed there until the following April. My Father remarried.

Instead of my feet getting better, they got worse, until the following July. I went to Dr. Wiseman's to live with them, to pay for him to doctor my feet. But it was no use, he said-he could do no more for me unless I would consent to have them cut off at the ankles. I told him what Brigham Young had promised me, but he replied, "All right, sit there and rot, and I will do nothing more until you come to your senses!"

### **A Knock at the Door**

One day I was sitting there crying, (my feet were hurting me so), when a little old woman knocked at the door. She said that she had felt someone needed her here for a number of days. When she saw me crying, she came over to me and asked what was the matter. I showed her my feet and told her the promise of President Young. She said, "Yes, and with the help of the Lord we will save them yet!"

She made a poultice and put it on my feet, and every day after the doctor had gone, she would come and change the poultice. At the end of three months my feet were well.

One day Doctor Wiseman said, "Well, Mary, I must say you have grit. I suppose your feet have rotted to the knees by this time!" I replied, "Oh, no. My feet are well." He said, "I know better. It could never be." So, I took off my stockings and showed him my feet. He said that it was a miracle, and wanted me to tell him what I had been doing. I told him, "Never you mind," that they were now healed.

I have never had to have any more taken from my feet. The promise of Brigham Young has been fulfilled.

(This History comes from a collection of historical and biographical information entitled *Pay-Goble Pioneers of Nephi, Juab County, Utah*, [published in Salt Lake City: 1968], Arthur p. Coleman compiler. From book *Champions of Light* edited by Richard Cottam Shipp, Randall Book, Orem Utah, 1983 )

"Perhaps the most memorable pioneer stalwarts were the Saints who made the journey in handcart companies. These companies brought nearly 3,000 pioneers west between 1856 and 1860. 9 In 1856, two handcart companies, with 1,075 pioneers under the leadership of James G. Willie and Edward Martin, left later in the year than planned, and they encountered early winter storms in present-day Wyoming. 10 Peter Howard McBride, then but a boy of six years, was a member of the Martin Company. His father, after helping push handcarts through the icy river, died in the snow and freezing cold that night. Peter's mother was sick; his older sister, Jenetta, watched out for the younger children. Her shoes had worn out, and her feet left bloody tracks in the snow. On the banks of the Sweetwater River, the wind blew their tent down during the night. Everyone scampered out as the snow covered the tent—everyone except little Peter. According to his account: "In the morning I heard someone say, 'How many are dead in this tent?' My sister said, 'Well, my little brother must be frozen to death in that tent.' So they jerked the tent loose, sent it scurrying over the snow. My hair was frozen to the tent. I picked myself up and came out quite alive, to their surprise."

We find one of the most touching stories of sacrifice, faith, and loving charity in the life of Jens Neilson, who was a member of the Willie Handcart Company. Jens, a relatively prosperous Danish farmer, heeded the call to bring his family to Zion. In Iowa he wrote that he had let all of his money go to the Church [page 25] except enough to buy a handcart and stock it with 15 pounds of belongings per person. Jens wrote, "Obedience is better than sacrifice." The people for whom Jens was responsible were himself; his wife, Elsie; their six-year-old son, Neils; and a nine-year-old girl, Bodil Mortensen, whom Jens offered to take to Utah. In the early Wyoming blizzard, temperatures plummeted below zero. The Neilsons had consumed their last pound of flour days before, but somehow they made it over the treacherous Rocky Ridge, urged on by their indomitable courage and unconquerable faith. Tragically, 13 of the company died at

Rock Creek and were buried in shallow, snow-covered graves—among them, Jens and Elsie's son, Neils, and young Bodil Mortensen.

President Hinckley describes this portion of the trail as “a trail of tragedy, a trail of faith, a trail of devotion, a trail of consecration, even the consecration of life itself.”

Jens arrived at Rock Creek, 11 miles beyond Rocky Ridge, with both feet frozen. He was unable to walk another step and pleaded with Elsie, “Leave me by the trail in the snow to die, and you go ahead and try to keep up with the company and save your life.” Elsie, with her unfaltering pioneer courage, replied, “Ride, I can't leave you, I can pull the cart.” Such was the strength and the faith of many pioneer women on the trail.

(M. Russell Ballard, “Faith in Every Footstep,” Ensign, Nov. 1996, 25)

### AARON AND ELIZABETH JACKSON

Josiah Rogerson was with the Edward Martin company. He relates the following story of Aaron Jackson:

"I remember Aaron Jackson was found so weak and exhausted when he came to the crossing of the North Platte, October 19th, that he couldn't make it, and after he was carried across the ford in a wagon, the Titer was again detailed to wheel the dying Aaron on an empty cart with his feet dangling over the end bar, to camp. After putting up his tent, I assisted his wife in laying him in his blankets. It was one of the bitter cold, bleak, frosty nights near the Black Hills and notwithstanding the hard journey the day before, I was awakened at midnight to go on guard again till six or seven in the morning.

Putting jacket or coat on (for both sexes had for weeks past lain down at night in the clothing we had traveled in during the day), and passing out through the middle of the tent, my feet struck those of poor Aaron. They were stiff and rebounded at my accidental stumbling. Reaching my hand to his face, I found that he was dead with his exhausted wife and little ones by his side all sound asleep. The faithful and good man Aaron had pulled his last cart. I did not wake his wife, but whispered the fact to my mother...

Returning to my tent from the night's guarding, I found there one of the most touching pictures of grief and bereavement in the annals of our journey. Mrs. Jackson, apparently had just awakened from her slumber, was sitting by the side of her dead husband. Her face was suffused with tears and between her bursts of grief and wails of sorrow, she would wring her hands and tear her hair. The children blended their cries of 'father' with that of the mother. This was love, this was affection--grief of the heart and bereavement of the soul--the like of which I have never seen since..."

Aaron's wife, Elizabeth, writes of her experiences on this journey. It is an account which should melt the strongest of hearts.

(Oct. 8th) "Although a ration of a pound of flour had been served out daily to each person, it was found insufficient to satisfy the cravings of hunger. Shortly after leaving Fort Laramie it became necessary to shorten our rations that they might hold out, and that the company be not reduced to starvation. The reduction was repeated several times. First, the pound of flour was reduced to three-fourths, then to one-half of a pound, and afterwards to still less per day. However we pushed ahead."

(About crossing the North Platte, she continues) Some of the men carried some of the women on their backs or in their arms, but others of the women tied up their skirts and waded through, like the heroines that they were, and as they had gone through many other rivers and creeks. My husband (Aaron Jackson) attempted to ford the stream. He had only gone a short distance when he reached a sandbar in the river, on which he sank down through weakness and exhaustion. My sister, Mary Horrocks Leavitt, waded through the water to his assistance. She raised him up to his feet. Shortly afterward, a man came along on horseback and conveyed him to the other side. My sister then helped me to pull my cart with my three children and other

matters on it. He had scarcely crossed the river when we were visited with a tremendous storm of snow, hail, sand, and fierce winds."

"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 worst fears were confirmed. My husband was dead. 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. Oh, how the dreary hours drew their tedious length along. When daylight came, some of the male part of the company prepared the body for burial. And oh, such a burial and funeral service. They did not remove his clothing - he had but little. They wrapped him in a blanket and placed him in a pile with thirteen others who had died, and then covered him up with 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 God 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.

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 suffering for the Gospel's sake will be sanctified unto me for my good. My sister became sick. So severe was her affliction that she became deranged in her mind, and for several days she ate nothing but hard frozen snow.

A few days after the death of my husband., the male members of the company had become reduced in number of death and those who remained were so weak and emaciated by sickness, there were not sufficient men with strength enough to raise the poles and pitch the tents. The result was that we camped out with nothing but the vault of Heaven for a roof and the stars for companions. The snow lay several inches deep upon the ground. The night was bitterly cold. I sat down on a rock with one child in my lap and one on each side of me. In this condition I remained until morning."

#### MARY BATHGATE AND ISABELLA PARK

Mary and Isabella were members of the Captain McArthur's (second) handcart company. The company left Florence 24th of July, 1856, at 12 o'clock. MacArthur in his report to Wilford Woodruff shares the following experiences relating to Mary and Isabella.

(16 August 1856)---Sister Mary Bathgate was badly bitten by a large rattlesnake, just above the ankle, on the back part of her leg. She was about a half a mile ahead of the camp at the time it happened, as she was the~ring l~der of the foot-men, or those who did not pull the handearts. She was generally accompanied by Sister Isabella Park. They were both old women, over 60 years of age, and neither of them had ridden one inch, since they had left Iowa campground. Sister Bathgate sent a little girl back to me as quickly as possible to have ma and Brothers Leonard and Crandall come with all haste, and bring the oil with us for she was bitten badly. As soon as we heard the news, we left all things and with the oil, we went post haste. When we got to her she was quite sick but said that there was power in the Priesthood, and she knew it. So we took a pocket knife and cut the wound larger, squeezed out all the bad blood we could, and there was considerable, for she had forethought enough to tie her garter around her leg above the wound to stop the circulation of the blood. We then took and anointed her leg and head, and laid our hands on her in the name of Jesus and felt to rebuke the influence of the poison, and she felt full: of faith. We then told her that she must get into the wagon, so she called witnesses to prove that she did not get into the wagon until she was compelled to by the cursed snake. We started on and traveled about two miles, when we stopped to take some refreshments. Sister Bathgate

continued to be quite sick, but was full of faith, and after stopping one and half hours we hitched up our teams. As the word was given for the teams to start, old Sister Isabella Park ran in before the wagon to see how her companion was. The driver, not seeing her, hallowed at his team and they being quick to mind, Sister Park could not get out of the way, and the fore wheel struck her and threw her down and passed over both her hips. Brother Leonard grabbed hold of her to pull her out of the way before the hind wheel could catch her. He only got her part way and the hind wheels passed over her ankles. We all thought that she would be all mashed to pieces, but to the joy of us all, there was not a bone broken, although the wagon had something like two tons burden on it, a load for four yoke of oxen. We went right to work and applied the same medicine to her that we did to the sister who was bitten by the rattlesnake, and although quite sore for a few days, Sister Park got better, so that she was on the tramp before we got into the Valley, and Sister Bathgate was right by her side, to cheer her up...

### THE SAMUEL PUCCELL FAMILY

The Pucell family was born in England. While living there were converted to the gospel (Latter-day Saint Church) by Parley P. Pratt, Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards. The family consisted of Samuel, the father; his wife, Margaret, and their children, William, who had married Eliza Schofield; and their son Robert, also two daughters of Samuel and Margaret, Maggie and Ellen.

The family left England in May, 1856, sailing for America, with the intent of joining the Saints in the Rocky Mountains. Upon arriving at Boston, William discovered that he lacked the means to make the journey west, thus he sent his parents, sisters wife and son, while he remained behind to make the money he needed to complete the journey.

The small family reached Iowa City and remained there until handcarts could be built which would be their method of transporting their few supplies west. The family joined with the Martin Handcart Company. Following is their story as told by Wesley H. Bauer. .

... It was a difficult trip even for the most sturdy. By the time they reached Fort Laramie they had to sell clothing and even bedding to buy food.

Margaret Pucell became ill, so had to ride in the handcart part of the way. Her husband grew so weary and weakened from the lack of food that this additional burden caused him to slip and fall one day as he crossed a river. Having to travel in the cold, wintery weather with wet clothing, he too became ill and died from hunger and exposure. His wife died five days later, leaving ten-year-old Ellen and fourteen-year-old Maggie orphans.

Eliza's son was still very young. She had to pull the handcart and carry her baby on her back. When the cold became unbearable she put the baby inside her clothing that he might absorb some of her body heat. It did help, but his body was so frost bitten that his skin was cracked and chaffed all his life. Many died and many others suffered from frozen limbs, among them the Pucell girls, both having badly frozen feet and legs.

When they reached Salt Lake the whole company was scattered out in homes of the Saints who cared for them until they could care for themselves. The Pucells went to the home of Susan Richards. When shoes and stockings were removed from the girls' feet, the skin came off. Although Maggie's legs were frozen, she would not allow them to do more than scrape the flesh off the bones, but Ellen's were so bad they had to be amputated just below the knee. Eliza said it was almost more than she could bear to watch the amputation, but she stood by and held Ellen's hand, trying to comfort her during this tragic ordeal. (For another account of this see following article on Ellen Pucell Unthanks).

..Eliza and Robert were sent directly to Parowan as soon as they were rested from their journey...At Parowan, Iron County, Eliza met Joseph King Parramore whom she had known back in England. What happened between Eliza and William Pucell was never really known. Perhaps

it was a misunderstanding brought about by infrequent mail service between them, but William left the Church and later married someone else. Eliza married Joseph King Parramore as his plural wife and bore him eight children.

## FAITH OF MEMBERS OF A HANDCART COMPANY

*by*  
**JOHN WATKINS**

I had often heard my father speak of the hard times he passed through while crossing the plains in 1856 and had many times asked him to tell me the complete story. He had never seemed inclined to tell me and I had almost given up the hope of hearing it when he called me to his side one beautiful afternoon in the middle of May. It was Sunday. We had just returned from church and my father had laid down on the couch. "No, that will not do," he said. "*You* must get a rocking chair and sit comfortably for I must tell you the whole story and it will take a long time." I got my chair and settled down, eager to hear what he was about to tell me. He reclined as if in a deep reverie for a few minutes and I must describe him as he appeared to me, lying there with his head resting against the white pillow, his hair and beard once brown but silvered now by the frost of many winters. His eyes were blue and sparkled as brightly as in youth and a face beaming with intelligence which bore the lines of hardship and care through which he had passed, but with all that calm, contented look that went to show in these trials he had come off conqueror and triumphed in the end. His actions were more spry now than many a youth of twenty. This was my father, John Watkins.

He shifted a little and said, "Daughter, we must begin in England where I was born in Maidstone, the County of Kent, on the thirteenth day of April, 1834. I spent my childhood and youth in that town, marrying early, and soon found myself with a family to keep and no work in the town where I resided. I moved with my family to London in the year 1852. I soon had plenty of work and good wages, being an architect and builder by trade. While living in London a friend invited me to a teetotaler meeting and I decided to go. After meeting was over, an Elder of the Latter-day Saints was going to hold Divine Service in the same hall. I had always been very bitter against that faith and it was with reluctance that I consented to stay in response to the entreaties of friends, and after hearing him once his gospel sounded so reasonable that I went many times to hear him of my own accord, and finally after many arguments on scriptures, I became convinced of its truth in every principle except the gathering. That I could not see had anything to do with religion, and having two gentlemen's houses to build in Tuffnell Park near the Caledonian Road, and getting good wages, my native land being very dear to me, it was a hard thing for me to even think of leaving that land. I thought that I could serve God in one country as well as another, so I concluded to stay, although I had joined the church. They promised me I should want to gather after being baptized, and while being confirmed the Elder prophesied on my head in the name of Jesus Christ that I should want to gather as badly as anybody ever did, and I, being determined in my own mind not to go, thought as the Indian had said, 'Maybe so yes, and maybe so no,' but it would be maybe so no with me. But lo and behold, the Spirit of gathering, as foretold by Isaiah hundreds of years ago, rested upon me so strong that I prayed to the Lord, fervently, to open up the way for me to go under any condition, for I was willing to pass through anything to gather with the church.

"I had some houses and land in Rainham, Kent, left me by my father in reversion that would come to me at the death of my mother. I desired to sell my reversionary interest to Silversmith, a Jew by the name of Pike, who lived in Chatham. If I could only realize enough money to pay my debts! So eager was I to go that I consented to cross the plains from the State of Iowa to Salt Lake and pull a handcart hauling two little children, a son and daughter, who could

not walk through the sand and snow all the way to Salt Lake. I sacrificed my property for a song and sang it to myself after the Jew had put a double insurance on my life and on my share of the property, as I was going to a foreign country.

"I started on the fourth day of May, 1856, on the good ship *Horizon*, bound for Boston. We then went by rail to Iowa. For some unknown reason we were delayed at Iowa campgrounds four or five weeks. Probably the main reason was getting the handcarts ready, which made it so late that it threw us into the snows of winter, arriving in Salt Lake on the last day of November, 1856. While waiting on the Iowa campground, the Lord revealed to me in a vision some of the fearful experiences that would result in the death of many souls. The company had all turned in for the night and the camp had long been wrapped in slumber. I lay in bed, but not asleep, when it seemed to me that the darkness began to fade and I saw myself in a room about sixteen feet square. I was in company with the Gods who were considering what was to transpire on our journey of the handcart company from Iowa to Salt Lake. It was shown to me that so many were to die, but who were they to be? There was an octagon-shaped box placed in the center of the room, turned with a handle similar to many lotteries I have seen. Tickets were placed in this box. So many marked to die and so many marked to live. About six hundred souls were in the company and the tickets seemed to be about half of each kind. After being put in the box and mixed promiscuously together, each one of the company drew a ticket that would decide his fate. After seeing and realizing what the consequences were, they asked me if I was willing to go, seeing the risk was so great. The spirit of the gathering was still upon me. It had been filling my soul, my thoughts by day and my dreams by night were only how to get there, so I told them I was willing to take my chances with the rest. The vision faded but left its impression and I knew that the vision would come to pass as the Lord had revealed it to me. I was just as sure there as I am now, having passed through it.

"We started on our journey one fine day and raised our tents. We had a few yoke of oxen and wagons to carry the provisions and tents. We had to have on our handcarts our bedding, clothing, cooking utensils, and children. My duty was to call them up in the morning to come to prayer, when to march, pitch tents, and go to bed. We were under the presidency and leadership of Edward Martin and Daniel Tyler, veterans of the Mormon Battalion. While traveling through the state of Iowa with six hundred immigrants with handcarts and with the dust of harvest weather four or five inches deep, the sun's rays pouring down upon our heads, the perspiration and dust streaming down our faces, and getting in our throats~ choking us so we could hardly breathe, were tantalized by the people coming out of their houses to tell us "That is a damned hard way to serve the Lord," and the young hoodlums would go ahead of the company to the next river or creek to ridicule our wives and daughters, who had to raise their dresses out of the water to wade the streams as there were not many bridges in those days.

"Many of the amusing incidents of our journey through the states I must pass briefly until I come to the main incident of our journey. Our rations were one pound of flour for grown people and half rations for children. The work, being so laborious, the young people got very hungry, myself included. The roads were very heavy, being sometimes sand, sometimes mud, and sometimes dust, which made progress slow, much slower than had been calculated. Consequently, when we got out on the prairie our food ran short, our rations were then cut down one half, and finally to four ounces of flour a day to grown people and two ounces to children, which continued day after day, making the people very weak, with cold weather and winter approaching. While out on the prairie we were all frightened and a council was called at which they all decided under the circumstances to lighten the loads to a few pounds each, which was weighed out to them with a pair of scales, leaving out quilts, blankets, overcoats, cooking utensils, and everything that could be dispensed with. These were put in a heap and set afire, for fear someone would be tempted to pick out some things they needed so badly, Everything that human ingenuity could devise was tried to save the lives of the people so they could get in early and the snow would not catch them in the south pass and in the big and little mountains.

"The night after we crossed the last crossing of the Platte River, the snow started to fall and winter set in, finding us with scarcely any clothing and very little food. The cold and hunger was so intense that we stopped a day or two in camp and before we moved camp, buried fourteen people in one grave who died from hunger and cold. Up to this time a great number of our company had died from hunger and cold, the people who were to meet us from Salt Lake not arriving as expected. When at last the company arrived from Salt Lake with supplies it did not increase our rations any. The only difference it made was that our rations continued as they had been and if the relief had not come in a few days, we would have had no food at all. The company, when they started to our relief, had plenty of provisions but had met two or three other companies on the road who were out of provisions and they had divided with them. So when they reached us, comparatively speaking, there was only a little left. We had been traveling many days in the snow and the cattle, having nothing to eat, became so poor and emaciated that they would lie down and no persuasion or beating could induce them to go farther. They, being worn out with hunger and cold, were nothing but a stack of bones and were not worth the time it would take and delay it would cause to the company to kill them, so they were left for the wolves to devour.

"On one of these Occasions I noticed an ox that could not be driven and was left to perish. I conceived the idea that if I went back in the night I might kill it and thus get something that would help to sustain our lives. I told my plan to William L. Binder, who occupied the same tent with me, and invited him to help me kill the ox and bring in some of the remains, but Binder's feet were so badly frozen that he could not go, so his wife offered to go in his place. I did not like the idea of going alone, miles out on the prairie with another man's wife, so I invited a man by the name of James Hunter to help us and share the beef, if such it might be called. We waited till after dark when all the camp had retired to their beds and every sign of life had fled from camp, then we three, with a handcart, crept quietly and secretly from the camp, for if we were discovered we would not be allowed to go out to risk our lives on such an expedition. We were all highly elated to get from the camp without being discovered and began our tramp back across the prairie in the direction we had come during the day. It was a bright moonlight night; the frost and snow sparkled and gleamed, throwing back to the moonbeams reflections like the purest diamond. The wind was blowing, bitter cold it was, freezing hard, and the snow was about eighteen inches deep. No one can realize the intense cold of a night like this unless they have spent one in a similar place in mid-winter. We were all thinly-clad and armed with all implements of destruction that we could get together, which were a small rifle of about .22-calibre with one load, an old case knife with both sides broken off and only the piece of iron in the center, a small shingling hatchet with a handle seven inches long, and one corner broken *off*. They had all seen better days, but we were glad to get them.

"We traveled out on the cold bleak prairie until we were about five miles from camp when we came upon the ox, standing chilling and freezing to death. We stopped a few moments to counsel, knowing it was impossible to kill the ox where it now stood. The cold was so intense and the distance too great to haul the meat. In coming out I had noticed a deep ravine or gully, a mile and a half from camp. I thought if we could get the ox there we would be a little sheltered from the wind and much nearer to haul the meat. So we decided to drive the ox there. By this time the woman was chattering from cold. Suddenly she gave up and was determined that she could go no further. She was pleading and begging to lie down. I told Mr. Hunter that Mrs. Binder was dying and that if she did we would be hung for murder, for it was really no more or less than murder to bring a woman so thinly clothed out on such a bitter cold night. If we let her have her own way, she would certainly die, for the death sleep that precedes freezing was upon her. We did not like to leave the ox, so we decided to place the woman in the shaves of the handcart and let her lean against the braces that were there for placing the breast against when pulling. Then I got in the shaves with the woman, placed one hand on the cart and, supporting her with the other arm, made her walk in spite of her cries and entreaties, for we knew that was the only way of saving her life. Mr. Hunter took the hatchet and drove the ox, for the only way to make him more was by striking

him. When I became tired in the shaves, Mr. Hunter would take my place and I took his, changing places at short intervals until at last we managed to reach the ravine or gully alluded to - it being as we expected, a little sheltered from the wind.

"The woman by this time was a little revived by her walk so we set the handcart on end and placed her in it to protect her as much as possible from the cold. Then we made ready for the ox. I was just immigrating from London and was not a very good marksman, so I knew that I must take good aim. I pointed my gun straight at the forehead of the ox and fired. The ox moved his head and the only load I had in the world went far from its mark. We were then in a dilemma, for we did not like to leave our ox after all the trouble we had gone to, so we decided to do our best by killing him with what we had and tried to cut its throat. The snow was so deep we could not find a rock to sharpen our case knife but we went to work. I held the ox by the horns while Hunter took hold of the loose skin on his throat with one hand and with the knife in the other he began sawing on his throat. When Hunter got tired of sawing, we would exchange places, he holding the ox while I sawed for awhile. The ox would stand still until his throat began to hurt then he would run off and we had to catch him again and bring him back to repeat the operation. The knife was so dull that we could never tell where we sawed last. We continued this mode of butchering for nearly an hour without making any impression, so we gave up that scheme in despair.

"We then decided to try the hatchet, but it had one corner broken off so we could not hurt him very much with that. Hunter would hold him by the horns while I hit him on the head with the hatchet and after each blow the ox would break away and we had to catch him again~ Then Hunter would think that he could strike harder than I and he would try. Then I got out of patience with him and told him he did not half hit the ox and Hunter told me to try myself if I thought I could do better, and so we kept changing places until we had a place in the ox's head nearly the size of our hand where the hide was hacked up like mince meat. Hunter at last gave the final blow and the ox staggered and fell to the ground, taking me with him. I fell underneath his head and shoulders, hurting me terribly and pinning me to the ground so that I could not move, but I told Hunter to blaze away at him while he was down, for I was afraid that he would get up and run off again and we could only get one lick at him when he was on his feet, but he did not get up again for Hunter had killed him. When we were sure that he was dead and I was liberated from underneath him, we made ready to skin him. Now, if I could describe the skinning of that ox, I would like to but I cannot. To give you some idea of what it was like, just take a piece of hoop iron and try to skin an ox with it. Then you can realize what we passed through in skinning this one. We tried to saw through the thick skin but not being experienced butchers we could not get through the thick hair and hide. We tried to get a start at the eyes and then at the mouth, thinking the skin would be thinner in those places. Finally, we got the ox on his back and got through the skin, then we found out that it was much easier to saw on the edge of the hide, after it was started. At last we got the ox cut open and brought the woman to the side of it and she was glad to put her hands in the warm blood of the ox to keep them from freezing. By this little warmth the woman seemed to get much better. Then we all felt happy. The knife and hatchet would freeze to our hands and we would thaw them off in the warm blood and entrails, but we thought we were doing a good job and would get something to eat, so we worked away until the ox was cut up and loaded on our handcart. Mr. Hunter did not like to leave the head. He thought it would make good soup. Then he wanted the feet so we loaded them on, but they proved to be too heavy and we were so weak that we could not pull the load so we had to throw the head and feet away.

We then started on the way back to camp when all at once Mr. Hunter gave out as the woman had previously done. He begged patiently for us to let him lie down and sleep, but I knew that he was freezing to death and the only hope of saving him was to make him walk, so we put him in between us, the woman on one side and I on the other, and pulled the handcart as well for he just let his legs drag and kept begging to let him sleep. It was by very hard toil that we managed to get him and the beef to camp. When we arrived, Mr. Binder was waiting up for us. He was sitting by a few sagebrush coals, stewing a bone in a tin cup. When we reached the few smoldering coals,

we let go of Hunter and he fell prostrate towards the fire, freezing and starving. He seized the tin cup and immediately swallowed the contents. We managed to get him and his share of the beef into his tent just as day was breaking. We had been out the whole of that bitter cold night. Drinking that boiling soup made Mr. Hunter so very sick that he was not able to help himself and could not hide the meat and notified the captain, Edward Martin, about it. Being bugler for the camp, the captain sent for me and told me to call the people together, which I did. Then the captain told them he understood there was meat in the camp and that poor meat was better than none and it must be divided amongst the people. Mr. Hunter, after risking his life to obtain the meat, lost it and it was divided amongst the people. I slipped away from the crowd and hid my meat and also Mr. Binder's, wrapping it in clothes and hiding it in every available place. When they questioned Mr. Hunter he was so sick that he could give no information where he obtained the meat. Hunter from that time on had to be hauled in a wagon to Salt Lake. After suffering many hardships and losing a great number of our company, we arrived in Salt Lake on the last day of November, 1856, but with the best of nursing it took Mr. Hunter three months, after our arrival, to recover from that night's adventure on the plains.

"Years have passed since that night and Mrs. Binder and Mr. Binder have passed to the Beyond. I am getting on in years, children and grandchildren play around my door, but I have never for one single moment regretted what I have passed through for the cause for which I came. The Lord revealed to me what I had to pass through and I was prepared for the trials I had to bear, for they all transpired as I had foreseen in my vision."

John Watkins passed to the Great Beyond on the 23rd of December, 1902. Many incidents of suffering on that fateful journey have been told to me by my father. One of them was of the hardships they experienced in burying their dead. The ground was frozen so hard and the only implements they had to dig graves of so many were a short-handled shovel, an ax that had become so dull cutting the frozen ground that the edge was nearly as dull as the back, and a short-handled hatchet. The men were so weak they could only dig a short time and then someone else would take a turn. The graves were so shallow they could hardly get dirt enough to cover the bodies and they knew that the wolves which were howling nearby would soon dig them up. The people were so weak that only their courage kept them alive. One man said to my father, "I believe I'll just give up and die." Father told him to keep going and not give up, but he said, "Yes, I cannot go any farther," and laying down at my father's feet, he died.