

# **Belated Emigrants of 1856**

by  
Solomon F. Kimball

To describe conditions surround the old fort at Devil's Gate during the first few days of November 1856, would be a difficult task. About twenty-five out of the nine hundred emigrants who had arrived there since the 2nd of the month, had already perished, and others were lying at the point of death. Their food supply was nearly exhausted and there were no signs of help. The snow was eighteen inches deep on the level and the weather intensely cold. Feed was scarce and cattle were dying by the score. Wood was almost out of the question and the more feeble among the Saints were literally freezing to death. Unless immediate steps were taken to relieve the situation, all would perish together.

Captain Grant, thoroughly conversant with these facts, ordered his men to make a start for the west in charge of the Martin company even if they accomplished no more than to find a better camping ground where wood and feed could be secured in greater abundance. Those of the handcart people who were unable to walk were crowded into the overloaded wagons and a start was made; the balance of the company hobbling along behind with their carts as best they could.

When the boys came to the first crossing of the Sweetwater west of Devil's Gate they found the stream full of floating ice, making it dangerous to cross, on account of the strong current. However, the teams went over in safety and continued on their way until they came to a sheltered place, afterwards called "Martin's Hollow." Here they camped for the night and, after burying a number of Saints who had died during the day, busied themselves in getting ready to receive the remainder of the company who were expected at any moment.

When the people who were drawing carts came to the brink of this treacherous stream, they refused to go any further, realizing what it meant to do so, as the water in places was almost waist deep, and the river more than a hundred feet wide by actual measurement. To cross that mountain torrent under such conditions to them meant nothing short of suicide, as it will be remembered that nearly one-sixth of their number had already perished from the effects of crossing the North Platte, eighteen days before. They believed that no earthly power could bring them through that place alive, and reasoned that if they had to die it was useless to add to their suffering by the perpetration of such a rash act as crossing the river here. They had walked hundreds of miles over an almost trackless plain, pulling carts as they went, and after making such tremendous sacrifices for the cause of truth, to lay down their lives in such a dreadful manner was awful to contemplate. They became alarmed, and cried mightily unto the Lord for help, but received no answer. All the warring elements of nature appeared to be against them, and the spirit of death itself seemed to be in the very air.

After they had given up in despair, after all hopes had vanished, after every apparent avenue of escape seemed closed, 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 snowbound 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, worlds without end."

On the morning of November 6, Captain Grant had the rooms in the old fort, at Devil's Gate, cleaned out, and during the next three days about forty loads of baggage were stored in them. The remainder of the wagons were banked, just back of the building where they remained until spring. These eighty-three loads of baggage belonged to that year's emigration which

Captains Hunt and Hodgett had contracted to haul across the plains.

During the afternoon of the 9th, the best oxen belonging to the two trans were hitched to the forty empty wagons, and as soon as the emigrants and their belongings were loaded into them, another start for the valley was made. They reached Martin's Hollow that evening and camped for the night. Three of the relief party and seventeen of the wagon train teamsters remained at Devil's Gate in charge of the baggage left there. The provisions that could be spared and all the cattle that were unable to travel were left for them to subsist upon until other arrangements could be made.

The next morning the Hodgett and Hunt train picked up all emigrants who were unable to walk and continued on their way, the balance of the three companies following along behind. This ended the pulling of carts for that season, the wagon train having taken their place.

On the evening of the 11th, the food supply was found to be nearly exhausted and no signs of relief in sight. A half dozen or more deaths were occurring daily and the strongest emigrants in camp were fast becoming discouraged. The snow was badly drifted and the weather bitter cold. Not a word from the Valley had reached the ears of Captain Grant since the company of rescuers left there thirty-six days before, and unless substantial aid reached them within the next few days, that region of country would become a veritable grave-yard.

Just before sundown, a dark something in the distance was seen working its way through the deep snow. It was thought to be a wild beast of some kind. At first but little attention was paid to it, but as it drew nearer, all eyes were turned in that direction. It finally took the form of a man, and two animals, which caused a general sensation throughout the camp. Everybody by this time was on the tiptoe of expectancy and in a few moments their surprise was complete when the chief scout of all scouts, Ephraim K. Hanks, came limping into camp with two horses loaded with buffalo meat.

In substance the following is the story told by Elder Hanks and verified in many instances by those who were well acquainted with most of the circumstances:

"I was down to Provo on a fishing expedition and felt impressed to go to Salt Lake, but for what reason I knew not. On my way there, I stopped overnight with Gurney Brown of Draper. Being somewhat fatigued after a hard day's journey, I retired to rest early, and as I lay wide awake in my bed, I heard a voice calling me by name and then saying: 'The handcart people are in trouble, and you are wanted; will you go and help them?' I turned instantly in the direction from whence the voice came, and beheld an ordinary-sized man in the room. Without any hesitation I answered, 'Yes, I will go.' I then turned over to go to sleep but had slept only a few minutes when the voice called a second time, repeating almost the same words as on the first occasion. My answer was the same as before. This was repeated the third time.

"When I got up the next morning I said to Brother Brown, 'The handcart people are in trouble and I have promised to go out and help them.'

"After breakfast I hastened on to Salt Lake and arrived there on the Saturday preceding the Sunday on which the call was made for volunteers to go and help the last handcart company in. When some of the brethren responded by saying that they would be ready to start in a few days, I spoke out at once, saying, 'I am ready all now.'

"The next day I was wending my way eastward over the mountains with a light wagon, all by myself. About ten miles east of Green River I met quite a number of teams that had been sent to the relief of the belated companies but had turned back on the account of the deep snow. Those in charge had come to the conclusion that the emigrants, as well as the twenty-seven heroes who had gone to their relief, had all perished, and they did not propose to risk their lives by going any further.

"I helped myself to such things as I was in need of and continued on my way. Just before I reached South Pass, I was overtaken by one of the worst storms that I ever witnessed. Near the summit I came to a wagon partly loaded with provisions in charge of Redick N. Allred. After enjoying a needed rest, I secured from him a saddled horse and pack animal, and continued my

way in snow almost to my waist.

"After travelling a day or two, I met Joseph A. Young and one of the Garr boys on their way to Salt Lake with an important message for Brigham Young. The next evening as I was making my bed, I thought to myself, how nice it would be to have a nice buffalo robe to lie on and some fresh meat for supper. I knelt down and asked the Lord to send me a buffalo. Looking around, imagine my surprise when I beheld a big, fat buffalo bull within fifty yards of my camp. As soon as I could get my gun I brought him down with the first shot. After eating tongue and tenderloin to my heart's content, I went to sleep while my horses were loading up on sagebrush.

"The next day I reached Ice Springs Bench, about sixty miles west of Devil's Gate, and killed another big, fat, buffalo. I cut the meat into long, thin, strips, and lashed it onto my horses. I travelled on until towards evening when I spied in the distance a black streak in the snow. As I drew nearer, it seemed to move, and then I knew what it was.

"About sundown, I reached the ill-fated handcart camp and the sight that met my eyes was enough to rouse the emotions of the hardest heart. The starving forms and haggard looks of those poor dejected creatures can never be blotted from my mind. Flocking around me, one would say, 'Please give me some meat for my hungry children.' Shivering urchins with tears streaming down their cheeks would cry out, 'Please mister, give me some,' and so it went. In less than ten minutes the meat was all gone, and in a short time everybody was eating bison with a relish that did ones eyes good to behold.

"During the evening, a woman passed by the fire where I was sitting and seemed to be in great trouble. Out of curiosity I followed her to Daniel Tyler's tent, some distance away. She asked him if he would please come and administer to her sick husband. Brother Tyler accompanied her, and when he looked at the man he said, 'I can't administer to a dead man,' and returned to his tent, as he was almost sick himself. I went over to the campfire where Captain Grant and Heber C. Kimball were sitting and asked them if they would assist me for a few moments, which they consented to do. We washed the man from head to foot with warm water, and then administered to him. During the administration I commanded in the name of Jesus Christ to breathe and live. The effect was almost instantaneous and he immediately sat up in bed and sang a song. His wife was so overjoyed that she ran through the camp crying, 'My husband was dead but the man who brought the meat has healed him.'

"This event caused a general sensation throughout the camp and many drooping spirits took fresh courage from that very moment. After that, the most of my time was spent in looking after the sick and afflicted. Some days I anointed and administered to as many as one or two hundred, and in scores of instances they were healed almost instantly.

"Not with understanding these wonderful manifestation of God's power, many of the Saints lost their limbs either whole or in part. Many I washed with warm 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 their limbs with my scissors. Some lost toes, some fingers, and others whole hands and feet. One woman lost both of her lower limbs to her knees.

"As the company moved on from day to day, I would leave the road with my pack animals and hunt for game. On those trips I killed many buffaloes, and distributed the meat among the hungry Saints. The most remarkable thing about it was that I had travelled that road more than fifty times and never before saw so many buffaloes in that part of the country. There was not a member of the party but what believed that the Lord had sent them to us in answer to prayers."

On the 17th, the emigrants were filled with delight when they met William H. Kimball at the head of another relief party. It will be remembered that Elder Kimball took charge of the Willie company, at Rocky Ridge, on the morning of October 22, and remained with it until it reached the Valley on the 9th of November. After remaining in Salt Lake one day, he started back with several light wagons loaded with provisions, clothing and medicines. Brothers James Furgeson, Hosea Stout and Joseph Simmons, were among those who came with him.

The company reached South Pass on the 18th, after facing a terrible snow storm all day. There was considerable wailing among those of the emigrants who were compelled to walk, as their feet, by this time, were in a dreadful condition. From there on, they met teams almost every day and soon had wagons enough to carry them all.

On November 30, the four hundred and thirteen survivors of the Martin company reached Salt Lake, and the emigrants that belonging to the Hunt and Hodgett wagon trains, came straggling along until the middle of the next month. Nearly all the cattle that were taken from Devil's Gate, perished before they reached Fort Bridger.

Probably no greater act of heroism was ever recorded in the annals of history than that performed by the twenty-seven young men who, on the morning of October 7, 1856, went from the city of the Great Salt Lake to the relief of the 1,500 belated emigrants, who were caught in the early snows of a severe winter, hundreds of miles from human habitation, without food and without shelter. By their indefatigable labors these brave mountain boys were instruments in the hands of the Lord in saving 1,300 of that number. Had it not been for their heroic efforts, not enough emigrants would have been left to tell the dreadful tale.

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