

Come Listen to a Prophet's Voice



# A Priceless Heritage

*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).*



**President James E. Faust was deeply moved when he visited the route of the handcart pioneers. These are some of his thoughts.**

**I**n celebration of July 24th several years ago, I joined the Saints of the Riverton Wyoming Stake. . . . The youth and youth leaders of that stake reenacted part of the handcart trek which took place in 1856. We . . . went first to Independence Rock, where we picked up the Mormon Trail. We saw Devil's Gate a few miles





up the road. Our souls were subdued [quieted] when we arrived at the hallowed ground of Martin's Cove, the site where the Martin Handcart Company, freezing and starving, waited for the rescue wagons to come from Salt Lake City. Numerous members of the Martin Handcart Company perished there from hunger and cold.

It was an emotional experience to see the Sweetwater River crossing, where many of the 500 members of the company were carried across the icy river by several brave young men.

We went farther along the trail where members of the Willie Handcart Company were rescued. We felt that we were standing on holy ground. Many members of that party died from starvation and cold there. We continued to travel up over Rocky Ridge, 7,300 feet (2200 m) high. . . . It was very difficult for all of the pioneers to travel over Rocky Ridge. It was particularly agonizing for the members of the Willie Handcart Company, who struggled over that ridge in the fall of 1856 in a blizzard. Many had worn-out shoes, and the sharp rocks caused their feet to bleed, leaving a trail of blood in the snow. . . .

We went on to Rock Creek Hollow, where the Willie Handcart Company made camp. Thirteen members of the Willie Company who perished from cold, exhaustion, and starvation are buried in a common grave at Rock Creek Hollow. Two additional members who died during the night are buried nearby. Two of those buried at Rock Creek Hollow were heroic children of tender years: Bodil Mortinsen, age nine, from Denmark, and James Kirkwood, age eleven, from Scotland.

Bodil apparently was assigned to care for some small children as they crossed Rocky Ridge. When they arrived at camp, she must have been sent to gather firewood. She was found frozen to death,

leaning against the wheel of her handcart, clutching sagebrush.

Let me tell you of James Kirkwood. James was from Glasgow, Scotland. On the trip west, James was accompanied by his widowed mother and three brothers, one of whom, Thomas, was nineteen and crippled and had to ride in the handcart. James's primary responsibility on the trek was to care for his little four-year-old brother, Joseph, while his mother and oldest brother, Robert, pulled the cart. As they climbed Rocky Ridge, it was snowing and there was a bitter cold wind blowing. It took the whole company twenty-seven hours to travel fifteen miles (24 k). When little Joseph became too weary to walk, James, the older brother, had no choice but to carry him. Left behind the main group, James and Joseph made their way slowly to camp. When the two finally arrived at the fireside, James, "having so faithfully carried out his task, collapsed and died from exposure and over-exertion. . . ."

I have wondered why these [courageous] pioneers had to pay for their faith with such a terrible price in agony and suffering. Why were not the elements tempered to spare them . . . ? I believe their lives were consecrated to a higher purpose through their suffering. Their love for the Savior was burned deep in their souls and into the souls of their children and their children's children. . . .

Francis Webster, a member of the Martin Company, stated, "Everyone of us came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives for we became acquainted with him in our extremities [greatest suffering]." I hope that this priceless legacy of faith left by the pioneers will inspire all of us to more fully participate in the Lord's work of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of His children.

(See *Ensign*, July 2002, pages 2-5.)