

HEROES in

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Have you ever been really cold? Maybe your fingers felt numb or your nose and ears stung. What about hungry? Have you ever not eaten for so long that your stomach hurt and made funny noises? Have you ever been so tired that your legs could hardly move?

Peter McBride was a six-year-old boy who was probably hungrier, colder, and more exhausted than you have ever been. But he couldn't go inside to warm up or buy food at the store. He could only go inside his tent, which collapsed on him one night and froze to his hair. He could only eat whatever he could find, like boiled ox hide and tree bark. Peter was a member of the Edward Martin Handcart Company.

Members of this company had come from faraway England. Problems delayed their journey to the Salt Lake Valley, and by October they were running out of food. All Peter and his baby sister were given to eat was a little flour each day. Early winter storms came, making pulling a handcart very difficult. Many were dying from cold and exhaustion.

When they came to the North Platte River, Peter said his father "worked hard all day pushing and pulling handcarts through the icy waters of that dangerous river," helping people reach the other side. Peter's father had a beautiful singing voice, and before he went to bed that night, he sang about how he longed to be in Zion. "The wind was blowing very cold," Peter described. "The snow drifted in and covered our tent."¹ The next morning, Peter's father was dead. Peter cried as he watched his father's body being buried beneath the snow.

Peter's older sister Jenetta was left in charge because their mother was sick. Jenetta often walked to the river to get water for cooking, even though her shoes had worn out. Her bare feet left bloody footprints in the



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snow wherever she went. Realizing they could go no further, the company camped near the Sweetwater River and hoped that help would arrive before it was too late.

A group of missionaries returning home to the Salt Lake Valley passed the struggling pioneers and told Brigham Young about them. Immediately, he called for 20 rescue wagons to be sent. At last, Peter and the pioneers joyfully caught sight of the wagons approaching. Peter said that “men, women, and children knelt down and thanked the Almighty God for [their] delivery from certain death.”²

The rescue teams could not carry enough food and supplies to relieve all the suffering, but they helped give the pioneers courage to continue. Together, they

crossed the Sweetwater River and found shelter amid the rocks now known as Martin’s Cove. There, most of the company left their handcarts behind. The weakest pioneers rode in the wagons, and others walked until more wagons came, giving enough room for everyone to ride the rest of the way. On November 30, 1856, Peter and the handcart pioneers arrived safely in the Salt Lake Valley—where they remained faithful Church members for the rest of their lives. ●

1. Susan Arrington Madsen, *I Walked to Zion* (1994), 45.
2. Madsen, 46.

For more information on the handcart pioneers, see Kate B. Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West*, vol. 1, 72–87; Susan Arrington Madsen, *I Walked to Zion: True Stories of Young Pioneers on the Mormon Trail*, 41–47; Paul H. Peterson, “They Came by Handcart,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1997, 30–37.

This month marks 150 years since the Edward Martin and James G. Willie Handcart Companies arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. Between 1856 and 1860, eight other Latter-day Saint handcart companies crossed the plains successfully. Only the Martin and Willie Companies suffered such tragedy. Out of 576 people in the Martin Company, at least 145 died. Approximately 67 out of 500 Willie Company members died. Yet members of these companies were grateful for the Spirit they felt and the testimony they gained through their experiences. Francis Webster, a member of the Martin Company, said, “We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation, but . . . every one of us came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives” (Quoted by Gordon B. Hinckley, “Our Mission of Saving,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 54).