







HANDCART PIONEERS, BY MINERVA TEICHERT © IRI, COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM



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# THE STRENGTH OF **Our** HERITAGE

*Pioneer faith is needed as much in the world today as in any period of time.*

I've always been excited about pioneer stories. My grandmother lived next door to us when I was a child. At the age of eight she had walked most of the way across the plains. She could remember enough pioneer experiences to keep me fascinated by the hour as I would sit and listen to her.

President Brigham Young (1801–77) has always been one of my special heroes. His answers to problems were basic and fundamental and benefited the people. I marvel at his spirit and enthusiasm as he led the Saints west.

When it became apparent that the cost of moving new converts from Europe to Utah would be prohibitive, the idea was presented to President Young that they use handcarts

to cross the prairies. President Young could immediately see the advantage, not only in the cost savings but also in the physical benefit it would be to the people to walk that far and arrive in the Salt Lake Valley full of vigor and vitality after such an experience. He said:

“We are sanguine [confident] that such a train will out-travel any ox train that can be started. They should have a few good cows to furnish milk, and a few beef cattle to drive and butcher as they may need. In this way the expense, risk, loss and perplexity of teams will be obviated [avoided], and the saints will more effectually escape the scenes of distress, anguish and death which have often laid so many of our brethren and sisters in the dust.

“We propose sending men of faith and experience, with suitable instructions, to some proper outfitting point to carry into effect the above suggestions; let the saints, therefore, who intend to immigrate the ensuing year, understand that they are expected to walk and draw their luggage across the plains, and that they will be assisted by the [Perpetual Emigrating] fund in no other way.”<sup>1</sup>



*Pioneer faith is needed as much in the world today as in any period of time. We need to know that heritage. We need to teach it, we need to be proud of it, and we need to preserve it.*

Between 1856 and 1860 a few thousand Saints successfully made the 1,300-mile (2,090 km) journey by handcart. The success of their travel was marred only by two fateful trips, the Willie and Martin handcart companies, which left too late in the year to avoid the early winter snows. Again, notice the genius of President Young. At the October 1856 general conference, he devoted the entire conference to organizing the relief effort to assist those distressed Saints. And he instructed the brethren not to wait a week or a month before they went. He wanted several four-horse teams

ready the following Monday to go and relieve the suffering of the Saints caught in the snows. And that's exactly what happened.

The first relief parties were on their way the following Monday. The description of the Willie company's joy upon receiving that first relief party brings emotions close to the surface. Captain Willie had left his small band and gone out with a single companion in search of the relief train.

History records: “On the evening of the third day after Captain Willie's departure, just as the sun was sinking beautifully behind the distant hills, on an eminence, immediately west of our camp, several covered wagons, each drawn by four horses, were seen coming towards us. The news ran through the camp like wildfire, and all who were able to leave their beds turned out *en masse* to see them. A few minutes brought them sufficiently near to reveal our faithful captain slightly in advance of the train. Shouts of joy rent the air; strong men wept until tears ran freely down their furrowed and sunburnt cheeks, and little children partook of

the joy which some of them hardly understood, and fairly danced around with gladness. Restraint was set aside in the general rejoicing, and as the brethren entered [the] camp the sisters fell upon them and deluged them with kisses. The brethren were so overcome that they could not for some time utter a word, but in choking silence repressed all demonstration of . . . emotions. . . . Soon, however, feeling was somewhat abated, and such a shaking of hands, such words of welcome, and such invocation of God's blessing have seldom been witnessed!”<sup>2</sup>

## Building Strong Families

Out of that hardy pioneer stock have developed traditions and a heritage that have built strong families that have contributed much to the western United States and to the rest of the world.

I was invited to a luncheon years ago sponsored by a retail firm that was announcing the opening of four stores in the Salt Lake City area. Having had retail experience, I asked the president as I sat at the table with him how he was brave enough to open four stores at the same time in a brand-new market area. His reply was just about what I expected. He said his firm had made a demographic study of all the major metropolitan areas in the United States. The firm was interested in finding out which of these areas offered the greatest potential for a department store appealing to young families. The Salt Lake area, destination of those early pioneers, ranked first in the nation.

The firm also found as a result of its study that the workforce in the Salt Lake area is noted to be honest and industrious. You see, a pioneer heritage is still evident down to the third and fourth generations in the area.

However, I was shocked by a statistic that crossed my desk recently. It stated that only 7 percent of the children being reared in the United States today come from traditional homes consisting of a working father, a stay-at-home mother, and one or more children.<sup>3</sup> Each day we see the effects of the breakup of the traditional home. There is an alarming increase in the number of battered wives, physically and sexually abused children, vandalism in schools, teenage crime rates, pregnancies among unmarried teenagers, and elderly people growing old without the solace of an extended family.

The prophets have warned us that the

home is the place to save society.<sup>4</sup> A proper home, of course, is not created automatically when a boy and girl fall in love and marry. It takes those same virtues that were taught in pioneer homes—faith, courage, discipline, and dedication—to make a marriage successful. Just as the pioneers made the desert blossom as a rose, so too our lives and families will blossom if we follow their example and embrace their traditions. Yes, pioneer faith is needed as much in the world today as in any period of time. Once again, we need to know that heritage. We need to teach it, we need to be proud of it, and we need to preserve it.

How blessed we are. What responsibilities our knowledge and our understanding carry. Arnold Palmer, a great American golfer, is reported to have said, “Winning isn’t everything, but wanting to is.” What a great statement: “Wanting to is.”

God grant us the desire to want to win the greatest of all the gifts He has given His children—the gift of life eternal. May God bless us that we will understand our potential, that we will learn and grow and develop an understanding of our heritage and determine to preserve those great gifts that have been given to us as His children. I bear my solemn witness that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that His way will lead us to life eternal. ■

*From a fireside address delivered on August 3, 1980, at Brigham Young University. For the full text in English, visit [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu).*

### NOTES

1. Brigham Young, in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 4:85.
2. John Chislett, in *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 4:93–94.
3. See Population Reference Bureau, [www.prb.org/Articles/2003/TraditionalFamiliesAccountforOnly7PercentofUSHouseholds.aspx](http://www.prb.org/Articles/2003/TraditionalFamiliesAccountforOnly7PercentofUSHouseholds.aspx). In 1980, when this address was delivered, the figure was 13 percent.
4. See, for example, Thomas S. Monson, “Heavenly Homes, Forever Families,” *Ensign*, June 2006, 98–103; Spencer W. Kimball, “Home: The Place to Save Society,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1975, 3–10.

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