



A Missionary Named Wilford: Part Two

Among Strangers

By Christine Graham

(Based on an early mission of Wilford Woodruff)

In Part 1, Wilford Woodruff and his companion set out to cross Missouri, heading for Tennessee. Few people were willing to give them food or lodging, and there were wild animals. After walking all day and into the night, they found themselves in dark woods surrounded by wolves.

There's dry wood here," Henry said. "Let's build a fire to frighten the wolves away."

Henry and Wilford quickly built a roaring bonfire, and the wolves retreated.

The missionaries had walked nearly 60 miles that day, so they lay down by the fire and tried to sleep. The night grew quiet. It began to rain. A yip, yip, yip sounded through the trees.

"That's a dog!" Wilford said.

"It's a wolf," Henry said. "Go back to sleep."

The night grew quiet again. Then a bell tinkled.

"That's a cowbell!" Wilford said.

"Let's investigate," Henry said.

Each man lit the end of a thick stick in the fire to light his way and scare off wolves. Soon they found a small



cabin with a tattered blanket for a door. The missionaries looked inside. A woman, some children, and several puppies slept on a bed in the corner. A man slept on the floor with his bare feet by the fire.

“Hello,” Wilford whispered, but the man snored on.

Wilford stepped inside and put his hand on the man’s shoulder. Suddenly the man jumped up and ran around and around the room.

“Calm down!” Henry said. “We are friends.”

The man sat on the floor, panting. “I shot a panther yesterday, and I thought you were its mate come to kill me,” he explained.

“No,” Wilford said. “We are missionaries who need a place to sleep and a bit of breakfast.”

“You can sleep on the floor, but unless I shoot something, none of us will have a bite to eat,” the man said.

“We’re grateful for the roof and the fire,” Wilford

and Henry said as they lay down with their tired feet toward the warm coals.

In the morning the two hungry missionaries walked 12 miles in the rain before they came to a house. Wilford knocked on the door, and a man answered. The smell of bacon and eggs floated from the open door.

“We are missionaries traveling without purse or scrip. Could we have something to eat?” Henry asked.

“You Mormons are nothing but trouble,” the man said. “But I’m from Missouri, and we never turn away a stranger—even the likes of you. Sit down and grab a plate.”

Wilford and Henry sat down at the table and filled their plates with bacon and eggs. While they ate, the man swore and said terrible things about Mormons. Wilford and Henry ate until their stomachs were filled. Then they stood up, took their hats, and bade the man good-bye while he was still swearing.

“I trust the Lord will reward him for our breakfast,” Wilford said to Henry as they started off again.

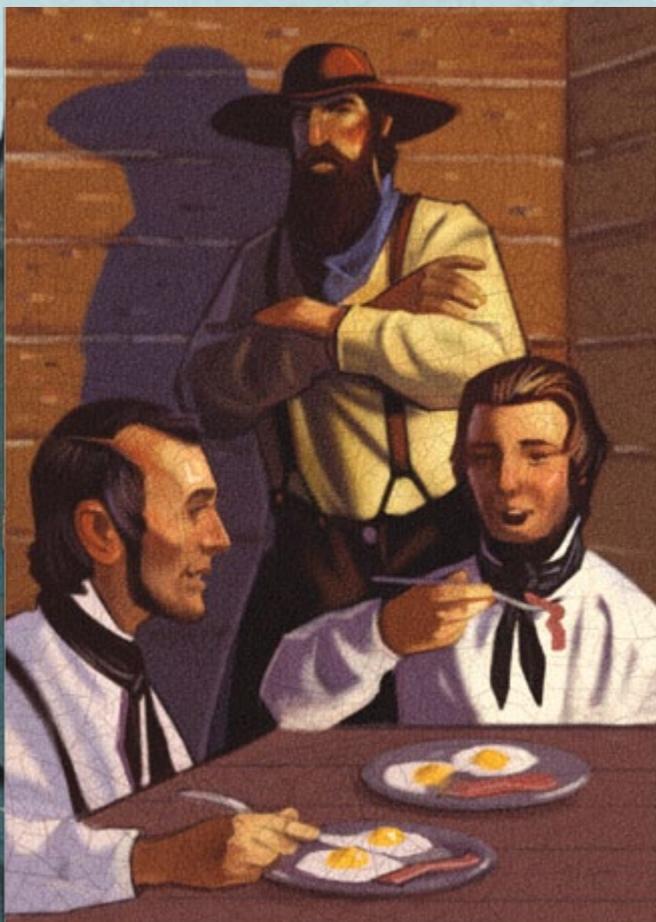
The missionaries were in a hurry to get to Tennessee, but on the way they stayed a while with members in Arkansas. Wilford’s knee was hurting, and their shoes were wearing out. Walking was slow.

“I wish we could float down the river,” Wilford said. He rubbed his knee and looked sadly at the Arkansas River.

“It’s too shallow for boats, and a raft is too risky,”

Henry said. ♦

(To be continued next month.)



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JIM MADSEN

“We as faithful Saints have been strengthened by adversity and are the recipients of the Lord’s tender mercies.”¹

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

