

REMEMBERING IOWA

Handcarts and the pioneers who walked to Zion have become a symbol of the Latter-day Saint migration and the building of the Church.

BY CAROLINE H. BENZLEY

One summer morning in 1856, 16-year-old Janetta McBride started walking from Iowa to the Salt Lake Valley.

Her journey had begun months earlier when she left England with her family and sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. Once in the United States, they continued by rail to Iowa City, Iowa, where a westbound railroad line ended.

In Iowa City Janetta's family joined the Latter-day Saints as they gathered their strength and supplies for the final part of the journey—a 1,300-mile (2,090-km) walk with handcarts. Janetta McBride was assigned to the Martin handcart company, one of seven companies that left Iowa City between 1856 and 1857.

Looking West

Now 150 years later, the date is June 9, 2006. One more handcart company is leaving Iowa City.

This time the company is made up of about 70 young men and young women from the Iowa City Iowa Stake.

Dressed in pioneer clothing, with their handcarts full of supplies, these youth are gathered at the Mormon Handcart Park just outside of Iowa City—the same place from which the first handcart company left exactly 150 years earlier on June 9, 1856. Looking west, they can't help but think of the original pioneers who stood here so long ago.

Kameron Hansen of the Iowa City First Ward thinks of his fourth great-grandmother, Janetta McBride. Kameron, 14, is almost the same age Janetta was when she started walking to Zion.

"I like to think how happy she would be to see me doing this," says Kameron. "I hope she is proud that her family is still faithful in the Church." Kameron knows his journey will be much shorter and easier than Janetta's, but he still feels grateful for this chance to remember and honor his ancestors.

Anna Shaner of the Fairfield Branch is also grateful to honor the pioneers. She is amazed they walked into the frontier not knowing whether they would live through the experience. Anna gains a lot of strength from the people who, as she puts it, "had faith in what they were supposed to do and the courage to do it."

This trek is a great opportunity for all the Iowa City youth to honor their ancestors. Whether they have handcart pioneers in their family line or not, the youth are members of the Church, so the handcart pioneers are their spiritual ancestors.

LEFT: ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC P. JOHNSON; PHOTOGRAPHS BY RILEY M. LORIMER AND JANET THOMAS, EXCEPT AS NOTED



Teens in the Iowa City Iowa Stake start pulling their handcarts in the same spot the handcart pioneers started from in 1856. The trail is now protected as a state park.



Although their modern trek lasts just one day, it is enough for the youth to appreciate the struggles of the handcart pioneers. *Opposite page: Jeff Fillmore tries to replicate the clothing that a young pioneer his age might have worn. Allison Engle and Summer Burch give bonnets a try.*

Why Iowa?

Today Iowa City, Iowa, is in the heart of the midwestern United States, but 150 years ago it was on the frontier—as far west as the train could take you. Most of the early converts who camped outside Iowa City in 1856 were emigrants from Europe. They had already traveled far and had little money to buy wagons and supplies. The people in Iowa City were tolerant of the Latter-day Saints, and pioneer journals recount the Iowans' acts of kindness.

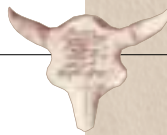
When President Brigham Young announced

handcart travel as a cheaper and faster option for traveling to Zion, these Saints were eager to try it. The first handcart company left Iowa City on June 9, 1856.

Most handcart companies made the exhausting journey safely to the Salt Lake Valley, but it was more difficult for Janetta McBride's group, the Martin company, and the Willie company. Both companies were caught in early snowstorms, and more than 200 people died. Their journeys required a great sacrifice, which was possible to endure only through faith in Heavenly Father and in His plan. This same faith motivated all the handcart companies that pushed and pulled their way to Zion.

In 2006 the handcart trek was part of a sesquicentennial celebration to honor this faith. Members of the Iowa City stake hosted events such as an academic symposium, a pioneer festival, and an interfaith devotional. These events honored not only the handcart pioneers but also the Iowans who helped them.





Following the Prophet

After a long day of trekking through the hills of Iowa, the youth now have a moment to reflect on their experience. Emma Pauley rereads Ether 12, a chapter on faith that she remembers learning about in seminary.

“I don’t know if I could have walked the whole way to Utah,” says Emma, “but the pioneers were able to do it, and I know that it was because of their faith. All great things are done by faith.”

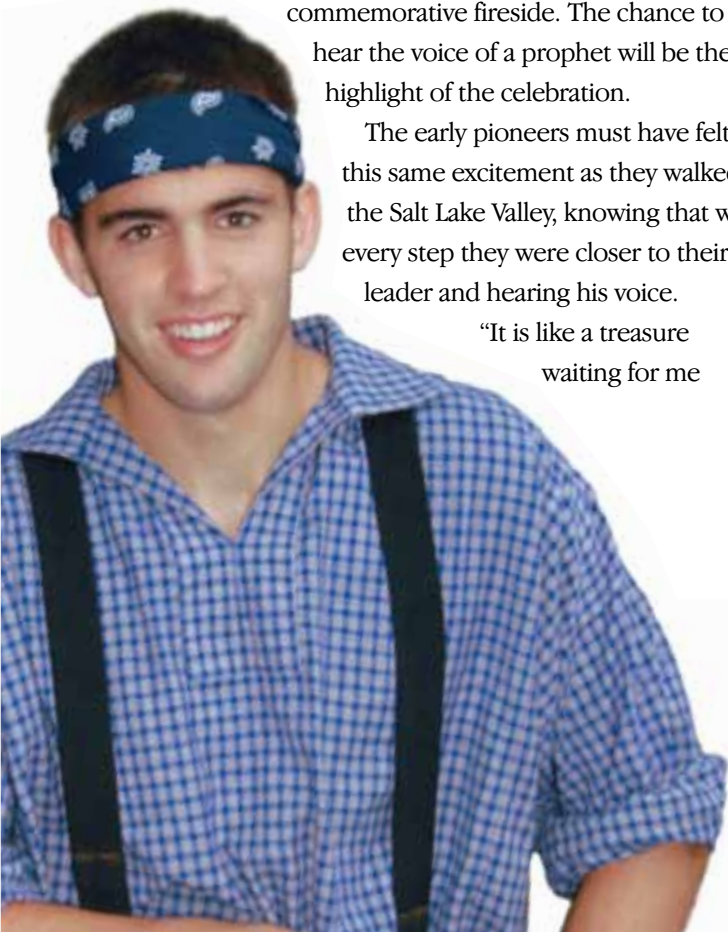
The faith of the handcart pioneers enabled them to respond to President Young’s call to gather to the Salt Lake Valley. Their example makes it easier for the Iowa City youth to follow the counsel of the prophet today.

One way young men like Kameron Hansen can follow the prophet is by completing the Duty to God program. As he explains, “When I think of the pioneers and their sacrifice, it makes me want to finish my requirements so I can follow the prophet too.”

Following the prophet is important to these youth, and they look forward to seeing him the following Sunday at a commemorative fireside. The chance to hear the voice of a prophet will be the highlight of the celebration.

The early pioneers must have felt this same excitement as they walked to the Salt Lake Valley, knowing that with every step they were closer to their leader and hearing his voice.

“It is like a treasure waiting for me



TELL ME A TALE

BY RILEY M. LORIMER

Church Magazines

The Beehives of the Iowa City First Ward were too young to participate in the youth handcart trek, but they were determined to be involved in the commemoration of the handcart pioneers. On a recommendation from one of their leaders, these young women volunteered to be storytellers at the Handcart Festival.

The girls decided to use this experience as a Personal Progress project. Each girl sewed her own bonnet as part of the authentic pioneer costume for the festival. They practiced for hours to memorize the story they had chosen—the story of Fanny Fry, who traveled with the George Rowley handcart company in 1859.

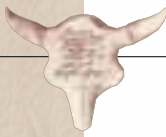


Fanny was separated from her family and endured hardships while crossing the plains. One day she fainted and was run over by her handcart. Thinking she was dead, the sisters began preparing her for burial. The Iowa Beehives love to tell how surprised those good sisters were when Fanny opened her eyes. Despite her injuries, Fanny pressed on and was later reunited with her sister.

“I love to think how brave Fanny was to have left her family and to survive,” says Summer Burch. “She was tough.”

“I admire her because she never had a bad attitude, even when things went wrong,” says Allison Engle.

On the morning of the festival, Summer and Allison, along with their fellow Beehives, Miranda Decker, Kendra Dawson, Lyssa Abel, and Jenna Abel, exhibited those qualities they admire in Fanny Fry. The day was windy, rainy, and cold. But they braved the chill with willing hearts and cheerful smiles. Every girl was at her post, dressed in full pioneer costume, ready to tell Fanny’s story to any and all who wanted to hear. ■



HANDCART HISTORY



Here's a little background on the handcart pioneers:

- President Brigham Young directed the Latter-day Saints to travel to Zion by handcart because it was less

expensive than covered wagons, and many more Saints could make the journey.

- There were 10 handcart companies in all, from 1856 to 1860.
- The Saints traveled by railroad to Iowa City, Iowa. After being outfitted, 7 of the 10 handcart companies left from Iowa City. The others left from Florence, Nebraska.
- Most of the handcart pioneers were emigrants from Europe. They came from England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, and Italy.
- Except for the Willie and Martin companies (who left late in the season and were caught in early snowstorms), the handcart companies experienced relatively few deaths along the trail.
- Although handcart pioneers endured hardships, the faith of many remained firm. Priscilla M. Evans of the Bunker company said, "People made fun of us as we walked, pulling our carts, but the weather was fine and the roads were excellent and although I was sick and we were very tired at night, still we thought it was a glorious way to go to Zion." ■

From LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, Handcarts to Zion (1960).

at the end," says Skylar Hansen of the Iowa City First Ward.

Having finished their trek, the Iowa City youth are now getting closer to their treasure, but they are not there yet. The next day is Saturday, and there is a lot of work to do.

Saying Thank You

During 2006 members of the Iowa City Iowa Stake kept busy serving those in need throughout the area. It was the members' way of saying thank you to a community that gave assistance to those early Saints.



Today the youth got their chance to serve. Although 6:30 a.m. felt early, Marc Humbert of the Iowa City First Ward said the trek the day before actually made it easier for him to get up and start serving. "Going on the trek helped me remember what was important," he said, "and it was easy to serve."

Marc was not the only one eager to serve. Despite the pouring rain, excitement was visible as the youth took turns visiting rest homes, cleaning police cars, stocking food shelves at local shelters, and cleaning up a park.

Giving this service was the least they could do to thank a city that helped the early Saints.

Handcart History Is My History

After walking all day Friday and giving service on Saturday, the youth are happy it is Sunday—time to listen to the prophet in person. Now seated with their families at the commemorative fireside, the young men and young women feel grateful for their new understanding of the handcart experience. The words of President Gordon B. Hinckley inspire them to continue the legacy of faith left by the handcart pioneers. He tells them, “We must ever look back to those who paid so terrible a price in laying the foundations of this great latter-day work.”

The pioneers who left Iowa City in 1856 would have rejoiced to hear about the modern pioneers living in the Iowa City stake. Perhaps they would be inspired by the courage of today’s youth who strive to live the gospel in such a confusing world.

Anna Shaner, for one, works hard to be a righteous example to her friends and family.



President Gordon B. Hinckley speaks at a fireside. The teens are excited to hear the prophet after a day of giving service in their community.

Her faith gives her the strength she needs to stay the course. She says, “The experience of the pioneers means a lot to me because they did it for me. It is my history.” ■

