

# Francis Webster

## The Unique Story of One Handcart Pioneer's Faith and Sacrifice

*Chad M. Orton*

One of the best-known and best-loved stories of the Mormon pioneers is the testimony of Francis Webster, a member of the Martin Handcart Company. Although his name has increasingly become associated with his statement, he is still better known as the unnamed old man in the corner of a Sunday School class who arose to silence criticism directed toward those who allowed that company to come west:

I ask you to stop this criticism. You are discussing a matter you know nothing about. Cold historic facts mean nothing here for they give no proper interpretation of the questions involved. Mistake to send the Hand Cart Company out so late in the season? Yes. But I was in that Company and my wife was in it. . . . I have looked back many times to see who was pushing my cart but my eyes saw no one. I knew then that the Angels of God were there.

Was I sorry that I chose to come by hand cart? No. Neither then nor any minute of my life since. The price we paid to become acquainted with God was a privilege to pay and I am thankful that I was privileged to come in the Martin Hand Cart Company.<sup>1</sup>

When William R. Palmer initially recounted this testimony, he reported that one class member after hearing Webster speak arose and voiced the sentiments of all in that Cedar City, Utah, Sunday School class,

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1. William R. Palmer, "Francis Webster," typescript of a radio address broadcast by KSUB (Cedar City, Utah), April 25, 1943, 1–2, William R. Palmer Collection, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Church Archives); William R. Palmer, "Francis Webster," *Instructor* 79 (May 1944): 217–18; David O. McKay, "Pioneer Women," *Relief Society Magazine* 35 (January 1948): 8.

## Chad M. Orton

The real story is often better than the popularly told tale. Such is the case with Francis Webster, the famous old man in the corner of a Sunday School class who arose to silence criticism directed towards the Willie and Martin handcart companies. While his statement is a moving tribute to the faith and sacrifice of handcart pioneers, it becomes an even more inspiring testimony, and takes on an added significance, when understood in light of the rest of the story.



His obedience and sacrifice extended beyond the handcart companies' well-documented struggles, to his personal commitment to follow counsel and to reach out to his fellow men. While Latter-day Saints today may never encounter circumstances similar to what the handcart pioneers endured, all face situations where they have to make choices similar to those that Francis Webster encountered both before and during the journey.

The Bible recounts that Jesus told a rich young man, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Matt. 19:21). Although we do not know what became of that young man who went away sorrowful, we do know what became of Francis Webster when faced with a similar decision. Webster's story is a reminder that testimonies grow largely through personal actions and choices, and not simply because an individual is part of a journey, even if that journey is notable because of tragedy and suffering.

"I would gladly pay the same price for the same assurance of the eternal verities that Brother Webster has."<sup>2</sup> More than a century later, Church members continue to be moved by this powerful testimony and likewise desire a similar assurance.

2. Palmer, "Francis Webster," radio address, 2; Palmer, "Francis Webster," *Instructor*, 218.

Although Webster's statement is well known, the real story behind the words he spoke that Sunday long ago is generally unknown. His declaration has largely been interpreted to be the virtual voice for every member of the Willie and Martin handcart companies stranded by an early winter storm, but his statement should be considered a personal testimony. While there were those in both companies who echoed in deed and word Webster's sentiments that these pioneers were blessed for what they endured as a group when tragedy overtook them in October 1856, his moving testimony is also an acknowledgment that he and his wife were further blessed because of individual choices they made to follow counsel and to sacrifice for their fellow Saints during the journey.

By attempting to make his testimony the universal sentiment of each member of these companies, a valuable and inspiring lesson has been lost. In its place has arisen a common perception that the price he paid to gain his powerful testimony simply involved pulling a handcart and enduring the hardships of an early winter.<sup>3</sup> The lesson at the heart of his statement, however, goes beyond having to endure the cold and snow that all in the company experienced. This lesson involves his willingness to travel a harder path than simply pulling a handcart. It speaks to the fact that at several points along the journey that took him from England to Utah he made choices that led him onto the road less traveled. His testimony is evidence that, in the final analysis, these choices indeed made a great difference in his life.

If Francis and Ann Elizabeth Webster (better known as Betsy) did not pay a greater price to emigrate to Zion than most in the Willie and Martin

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3. In 1906, Albert Jones, a member of the Martin Company, described what continues today to be a popular perception of handcart pioneers: "I have heard that a lady well known among the saints, once said, while the surest way of getting to Heaven was under discussion, 'When I approach the Golden Gate, Peter will at once grant me admission when I cry, "Hand Carts!"'" Although not ready to accept this position as a guarantee of exaltation, Jones concluded, "If pulling a hand cart a thousand miles shall help in opening the Golden Gate, I shall urge my claim." Albert Jones, "Utah Heroes Who Pulled Their All Across the Plains," *Deseret Evening News*, September 1, 1906, 20.

The general perception that the handcart pioneers were more faithful than other pioneers has grown over time and is fueled largely by the tragedy encountered by the Willie and Martin handcart companies. The one generalization that can be drawn about handcart pioneers is that they largely were poor individuals reliant upon the resources provided by the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, which in 1856 meant the added labor of pulling handcarts. The first three companies that traveled by handcarts in 1856 experienced few problems and reached Salt Lake quicker than if they had traveled by wagons.



Ann Elizabeth (Betsy) Webster, though expecting a baby, chose with her husband to sell their wagon and travel by handcart, taking the proceeds to buy handcarts for destitute pioneers. Courtesy Special Collections, Sherratt Library, Southern Utah University.



Francis Webster is best known for the time when he arose to silence criticism of those who allowed the Martin and Willie handcart companies to come west. The rest of his story gives compelling insights into what was involved. Courtesy Special Collections, Sherratt Library, Southern Utah University.

companies, they at least paid a different one. Before the journey began, they had to make a choice that few others in the company had to face. Specifically, while most in the company were unable to fund their own way to Zion and thus were reliant upon the means provided by the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF), which in 1856 meant that they had to travel by handcart, Francis and Betsy Webster had the option to travel by wagon. During the early portion of the journey, they also evidenced a different attitude than some in the company when things did not go according to plan. While they may have had as much or more reason to feel sorry for themselves as any other member of the company, they instead looked for ways to better the situation rather than dwelling upon the negative. Through it all, they were a prime example of President Spencer W. Kimball's observation that "God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another mortal that he meets our needs."<sup>4</sup>

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4. Spencer W. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 252.

Francis and Betsy likely would have preferred that their journey to Utah be as easy as possible, but they afterwards came to cherish the lessons they learned under adverse circumstances.<sup>5</sup> Francis's testimony is even more extraordinary when understood in light of the events that led him to become a member of the Martin Company and the decisions he made during the first portion of the journey—decisions that led him into the refiner's fire.

Four statements in Webster's testimony need to be placed in context to fully understand his comments. The four statements will be addressed in the order in which they appear in the account as told by William R. Palmer, which account is included at the end of this article: "He said in substance"; "Not one of that company ever apostatized or left the Church"; "I have gone on to that sand and when I reached it, the cart began pushing me"; and "Was I sorry that I chose to come by handcart?"

### Recounting the Story

While Webster's statement has been presented as his actual words, Palmer did not make that claim. Rather, he included a caveat: *He said in substance*.

It is not known exactly when Francis Webster made his comments. It is also not known when Palmer put those comments on paper, although it is likely he did not take them down word for word when Webster uttered them.

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5. There were those who went through similar trials as Francis Webster who did not have, or did not recognize, the same experience that he did. In 1879, Martin Handcart veteran John Jaques used the following example in an attempt to gain sympathy for the idea that mercy should be shown to members of the company who still had not repaid their PEF loan: "If we must walk through this vale of tears with peas in our shoes, whether all or part of our allotted time, we need not have the peas raw and hard. We need not parch them and make them harder. We may just as well take the liberty to boil our peas and keep them as soft as we comfortably can, so as to make our walking as easy as possible." J. J. [John Jaques], "Some Reminiscences," *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, January 19, 1879, 3.

While Webster likely would have agreed with this sentiment, his testimony given in that Sunday School class suggests that he also understood the benefit of having to deal with the hard peas that occasionally find their way into shoes. Thus if the response of company members to their experiences is considered, simply being on the journey and enduring its hardships was not what brought about Webster's testimony. Some individuals, for whatever reason, simply endured the journey. The refining fires failed to burn away some of the dross in their own lives in part because they had not been tried to the same degree.

From available evidence, it appears that Webster made his comments in 1904, two years prior to his death at the age of seventy-six. Although no Cedar City Sunday School records from that time are extant, Palmer mentioned two other individuals by name—Nathan T. Porter, whom Palmer identified as the teacher of the class, and Charles R. Mabey, who later served as the governor of the state of Utah. Porter served as principal of the Normal School (teacher training program of the Branch Agricultural College) from 1901 to 1904, while Mabey was an instructor at the same school from 1904 to 1906. Mabey later recalled that either he or Howard R. Driggs, not Porter, was the teacher of that Sunday School. The question of the teacher does little to change the time frame. Driggs was the assistant principal of the Normal School in 1904.

Nearly forty years later, Palmer recounted what had transpired in that Sunday School class in a radio address over station KSUB in Cedar City, Utah. Between March and July 1943, he delivered a series of weekly radio addresses focusing on pioneers of southern Utah entitled “Men You Should Know.” He recounted the life of Francis Webster on April 25, 1943, the eighth of twenty-one addresses. Edited versions of some of these radio addresses were subsequently published in the *Instructor*, with the story of Francis Webster appearing in the May 1944 issue.

The famous quote was not the entire story told that day but served as Palmer’s introduction to Webster’s life. Although the major portion of the address focused on Webster’s handcart experience, Palmer also briefly looked at some of Webster’s experiences while living in Cedar City before concluding his remarks this way:

The life of Francis Webster was so full of useful and unselfish effort, and the scope of his endeavors was so wide and diversified that it is difficult to boil his life story down to the allotted time of this program. Man of superlative faith, man of action, man of sterling dependability his place is secure among the honored pioneers of Southern Utah.<sup>6</sup>

The most frequently cited version of Francis’s testimony is the one given three years later by President David O. McKay, while a counselor in the First Presidency, at the annual Relief Society General Conference held on October 2, 1947, and which was subsequently published under the title “Pioneer Women” in the January 1948 *Relief Society Magazine*. McKay included only a portion of Palmer’s introduction and did not mention Webster by name. Nor did he mention any of the other pioneers he talked about by name since names were not critical to the point he was trying to

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6. Palmer, “Francis Webster,” radio address, 7.

make. Nevertheless, it is evident that McKay knew of whom he quoted, as he reported in his address that he had met with Webster's daughter.<sup>7</sup> Since that time, Francis Webster has largely been identified simply as the "old man in the corner of the Sunday School class."

Around the time that President McKay retold Webster's story, Palmer sent a copy of his radio address to Charles Mabey. On October 13, 1947, Utah's former governor wrote to Palmer about it: "Thanks for letting me read the manuscript regarding Brother Francis Webster. I wish to congratulate you on the manner in which it is written, the clearness and sincerity of the presentation." In the letter Mabey reminisced about the Branch Agricultural College Normal School before returning to the manuscript:

Getting down to the point at issue, i.e., the testimony spoken of in your article. Either Howard R. Driggs, or I must have been the teacher at the time. I recall that I did teach a class in Sunday School during both school years I was in Cedar City. I know that Dr. Driggs did also. My memory is that my tour of duty as a teacher began shortly after my arrival there and that I had an adult class.

One's memory becomes rather dull after forty years. But I do recall Brother Webster's testimony.<sup>8</sup>

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7. That President McKay knew of whom he spoke in recounting Webster's testimony is evident by his introduction to the quote:

In the month of September, at the close of the day's march, a bride of twelve [nine] months gave birth to a baby girl. . . . The young mother would have to trudge along carrying in her arms, or placing it on the handcart, her newborn babe. What a picture for an artist! What an appeal to the skeptical, indifferent world today! What an illustration of heroism and faith!

Illustrative of this last thought, I am going to tell you what that father said about it, years afterward, for the father, mother, and baby came to Utah, and it was my privilege to sit at the table of that little baby girl when she was grown, and hear the story from her own lips. She was living in a comfortable home with nine lovely children around her. (McKay, "Pioneer Women," 7-8)

The same month that President McKay addressed the Relief Society conference, the *Improvement Era* published an article by McKay that noted that "I think it was about 1907 that I sat at the table as a guest of that little baby girl born on the plains, and around her, crowning her with glory, were nine children. . . . She was Mrs. Leigh of Cedar City." David O. McKay, "The Ideals of True Womanhood," *Improvement Era* 50 (October 1947): 640.

8. Charles R. Mabey to William R. Palmer, October 13, 1947, William R. Palmer Collection, Special Collections, Gerald R. Sherratt Library, Southern Utah University, Cedar City, Utah.

## Faithfulness of the Martin Company Members

Palmer reported that Webster made the following claim: “Not one of that company ever apostatized or left the Church.” It is not clear if Webster really made this comment or if this is simply how Palmer remembered or interpreted Webster’s words, but the statement does not stand up to historical scrutiny. Nevertheless, this statement has frequently been repeated and has contributed greatly to the aura and veneration directed towards the Martin Company and the other handcart company trapped by an early winter storm, the Willie Company.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Martin Company truly exemplified the motto “Faith in Every Footstep,” its members were not unlike any other disparate group of Latter-day Saints, such as those who made a similar journey at a different time or those found in a modern ward. There was a majority of the company, including Francis and Betsy Webster, whose faith seemed to grow with every step they took. There were also those who trudged along the trail, their faith little changed by what they experienced. Finally, there were those whose faith seemed to weaken along the way. Why was that the case? As a general rule, what is true now was true then. People tend to get out of an experience what they put into it. For instance, those who focused primarily upon their own challenges came away from the journey with something different than those who turned to the Lord for solace or reached out to fellow emigrants in need.<sup>10</sup>

The Martin Company was comprised of more than 600 individuals brought together from different locations for the journey to Zion. Realistically, Webster probably did not know all of the company during the journey and likely did not have much contact with them afterwards, since the company was scattered throughout Utah within days of reaching the Salt Lake Valley. He likely was speaking about the small number of handcart

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9. One common belief surrounding the handcart pioneers is that the truth of the restored gospel can be seen by the fact that Latter-day Saints were willing to leave their homes in England. While it took great faith to answer the call to gather to Zion, it should not be overlooked that there were many more thousands of non-LDS people who made a similar journey in 1856. For many individuals, both LDS and non-LDS, the decision to emigrate to America, even if by handcart, was less a sacrifice than an opportunity. A little more than a decade removed from the Dickensian England of *Tiny Tim* and *Oliver Twist*, many emigrants welcomed the chance to escape the poverty that likely would have been their life-long lot in England for the promise of a better life and land ownership.

10. The Book of Mormon recounts that both Nephi and Laman undertook the same journey and hardships. The journey produced different outcomes for these two individuals based largely upon their attitudes.

pioneers that ended up in Cedar City, those with whom both he and the members of the class were acquainted, not the entire company, and his words were misinterpreted. “Did you ever hear a survivor of that company utter a word of criticism?” he is reported to have asked.<sup>11</sup> In a day and age before radio and television and easy travel between distant locations, the number of handcart pioneers personally known to his audience would have been fairly small. These individuals included the faithful Saints Nellie Unthank, who is mentioned by name in the account and who had lost portions of her legs to frostbite as a result of the journey, and William and Amy Middleton, also well-known Cedar City residents.

Webster’s reference to Unthank was no doubt particularly humbling to his audience. Despite having the lower portion of both legs amputated when ten years old because of frostbite, she later bore and reared six children. Moving about on stumps that never fully healed, she served her family, neighbors, and Church without complaint even though she was in almost constant pain.<sup>12</sup>

If Webster in fact referred to the entire company rather than to specific individuals, he misspoke. The evidence is clear that not everyone came through the experience with the same certainty that he did. While it is not known that anyone in the company apostatized directly as a result of the trials they endured in the cold and snow, there were Martin Company members who subsequently left the Church. Henry Augustus Squires and members of his family returned to England in 1867, where Henry again became a Baptist minister, a position he held until his death in 1914.<sup>13</sup> Both Henry Kemp and Deborah Jane Chapman joined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the 1860s, eventually ending up in Iowa, where Kemp served a number of years as a local leader of that church.<sup>14</sup> During this same time period, Elizabeth Whittear Sermon Camm withdrew from the LDS Church as a result of plural marriage, but

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11. Palmer, “Francis Webster,” radio address, 1; Palmer, “Francis Webster,” *Instructor*, 217; McKay, “Pioneer Women,” 8.

12. Palmer, “Nellie Pucel Unthank,” typescript of a radio address broadcast by KSUB (Cedar City, Utah) April 18, 1943; Palmer, “Ellen Pucell Unthank,” *Instructor* (April 1944): 152–55; Palmer, “She Stood Tall On Her Knees,” *Instructor* (July 1956): 196–97.

13. Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, “The Martin Handcart Disaster: The London Participants,” *Journal of Mormon History* 21 (1995): 196–97.

14. Susan Easton Black, comp., *Early Members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1830–1848*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 2:134, 3:841.

did not join another church.<sup>15</sup> There were others, but no concerted effort has been made to identify what became of all members of the company.<sup>16</sup>

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15. E. C. [Elizabeth Whittear Sermon Camm] to “My Dear Children,” March 16, 1892, typescript, 1–8, Church Archives. Camm’s four children, ages two to eight at the time of the journey, asked her to share her recollections of the trip. She began her letter, “As I approach the end of my earthly career—and according to your request, I will try and write a few lines of my journey across the plains; although this brings back to my mind many painful remembrances and caused me many tears.” She then explained how she and her husband had paid to emigrate by mule team, but were forced to abandon their plans at Iowa City—and join the Martin Company instead. A subsequent quarrel with Captain Edward Martin concerning the increased load of flour that was placed on the handcarts outside of Florence, Nebraska, led Elizabeth to note in her letter, “I was wounded and a severe wound it was.” She proceeded to report that “many trials came to me after this,” including additional disagreements with company leaders and members, and the problems associated with food shortages and cold weather that contributed to the death of her husband. Once in Utah she married Robert Camm, a middle-aged bachelor whom she described as a “soldier of fortune” to avoid polygamy. “The rest of my life, you all know,” she wrote, “and it was not a bed of roses, I assure you.”

A note included with her letter written by a grandson reported that a disagreement Robert and Elizabeth had with local Church leaders over plural marriage caused Robert to write out “both their resignations from the Church.” According to her grandson, Robert eventually worked his way west from Utah to San Francisco and “in due time” Elizabeth joined him there, where she died in 1893.

16. The various rosters that have been produced of Martin Company members not only differ from each other, but they also do not match the different numbers frequently reported as the total membership of the company. The problem of identifying members and what became of them is exemplified by the 1877 list of individuals who owed money to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund sent by officers of the PEF to the bishops in the Church. These local leaders were asked to review the nearly nineteen thousand names of individuals living in their area and then to try and square the debt with them. The list contained around 350 members of the Martin Company, including many individuals who had died during the journey. In several instances, a family member is listed as having incurred a PEF debt along with other family members yet that one individual does not appear in any of the company rosters even though the rest of the family does. See *Names of Persons and Sureties Indebted to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company from 1850 to 1877 Inclusive* (Salt Lake City: Star Book and Job Printing Office, 1877), Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company, Financial Accounts, 1849–85, Church Archives.

In 1906, the jubilee year of the first five handcart companies, the first attempt was made to bring together surviving handcart company members. The reunion was held in October 1906, nearly five months after Francis Webster’s death. Handcart Veterans Association Scrapbook, Church Archives.

## Divine Intervention

Webster's testimony has long been associated with the latter part of the journey, specifically the snows the handcart company encountered on the high plains of Wyoming.<sup>17</sup> Palmer, however, mentioned sand, which the company encountered during the first part of the journey through Iowa and Nebraska: "I have gone on to that sand and when I reached it, the cart began pushing me." Given the tragic circumstances in which the company found themselves near the end of the journey, one might suppose that the mention of sand is another instance where Palmer got it wrong. Surely Webster mentioned snow rather than sand. While a misquote is possible, it is more than likely that Palmer got it right.

Those who kept daily diaries of the Martin Company's journey described the trail across Iowa and Nebraska in terms of heavy, sandy roads.<sup>18</sup> John Jaques later wrote of the difficult circumstances the pioneers faced during the first portion of the journey because of the sand:

In starting from Iowa city with the handcarts and dragging them over the sandy roads, it seemed like pulling the very pluck out of one, the pluck physical and corporal. . . .

For a man to draw his handcart and his own baggage is bad enough, but for him to draw the effects of five or six others, and perhaps draw one of his family, also, is a killing business.<sup>19</sup>

Not only did the sand make pulling a handcart harder, it also intensified the heat of the sun, greatly adding to the discomfort.

When the company left Florence, Nebraska, things became harder for the emigrants as they had to deal with an additional challenge. In addition to the sand, they had to pull extra weight on their carts:

The loads on the handcarts were greater than ever before, most carts having 100 pounds of flour on, besides ordinary baggage. The tents also were carried on the carts. The company was provisioned for sixty days, a

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17. A popular painting based upon Webster's comments shows angels helping beleaguered pioneers push both covered and uncovered handcarts through nearly waist-deep snow.

18. James G. Bleak, *Journal*, August 22, September 23 and 27, 1856, Church Archives; William S. Binder, *Biography and Journal*, photocopy of typescript, August 30–31 and September 8, 18, 20, 23–27, Church Archives.

19. J. J. [John Jaques], "Some Reminiscences," *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, December 8, 1878, 1. While the early portion of the journey was hard on emigrants unused to such an experience, Jaques noted that the later portion was hard on the handcart: "In the Black Hills [of Wyoming] the roads were harder, more rocky and more hilly and this told upon the handcarts, causing them to fail more rapidly, become rickety, and need more frequent repairing."

daily ration of one pound of flour per head, with about half a pound for children, being the principal item.<sup>20</sup>

Patience Loader Rosa Archer later recalled that, shortly after leaving Florence, the company “had a very hard Journey as we had to travel through the sandy bluffs it was very hard pulling so much up hill and deep sand.”<sup>21</sup>

Given the circumstances, Webster needed assurance and assistance as much, if not more, during the early part of the journey in the sand and heat as he did in the snow and cold. In fact, there were few days where he needed more divine help than on September 15, when his actions took on the realm of heroic. During one of the sandiest portions of the journey, when the load on his handcart was near its heaviest, he took upon himself the added burden of pulling one of his fellow pioneers on his handcart for the majority of the day’s travel.

It is clear that Webster’s testimony was indeed about the difficulty experienced at the beginning of the journey, for no other members of the Martin Company make specific mention of angelic assistance during the later storm and cold. If there was mention of angelic intervention, it was when the first three rescuers from the Salt Lake Valley reached the snow-bound company two weeks after winter set in, after more than one hundred in the company had already died. Some of the pioneers referred to them as “angels from heaven.” One of the relief party, Daniel W. Jones, later recounted what transpired:

When we rode in, there was a general rush to shake hands. . . . Many declared we were angels from heaven. I told them I thought we were better than angels for *this* occasion, as we were good strong men come to help them into the valley, and that our company, and wagons loaded with provisions, were not far away. I thought this the best consolation under the circumstances.<sup>22</sup>

### Francis Webster’s Choice

The key phrase to understanding Francis Webster’s testimony is likely the one relating to choice: “Was I sorry that I chose to come by handcart?” While each member of the company chose to come by handcart, Francis

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20. J. J. [John Jaques], “Some Reminiscences,” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, December 8, 1878, 1.

21. Patience Loader Rosa Archer, Diary [ca. 1890], typescript, 150–51, Church Archives.

22. Daniel W. Jones, *Forty Years among the Indians. A True Yet Thrilling Narrative of the Author’s Experiences among the Natives* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1890), 66.

and Betsy Webster faced additional choices that extended beyond simply whether or not to remain in England. These additional choices played an important role in the development of his strong testimony.

Francis Webster was born February 8, 1830, in Wymondham, Norfolkshire, England. By his own account he was a sickly child, and his parents held little hope that he would live to adulthood. When eighteen years old, Francis was baptized a member of the Church on April 17, 1848. The following month, “knowing but little about my duties as a Saint of God,” he left England to seek his fortune.<sup>23</sup> Initially setting out for Australia, he eventually ended up in the California gold fields.<sup>24</sup>

Returning to England in the spring of 1852, he again came in contact with the LDS Church while in London. It was at this time that he met his future wife, Ann Elizabeth (Betsy) Parsons, a recent convert to the Church. He remained in England until the latter part of 1853, when he again went to California, this time with the hope of making enough money so that he and Betsy might rise above their working-class background. “She promised to wait for him until she was 21 and he had made a fortune,” their daughter recalled.<sup>25</sup> With Betsy’s encouragement, he took with him several of the works of the Church, including the Book of Mormon.

Francis returned to England during the summer of 1855. His time in California had been both financially profitable and spiritually beneficial. He reportedly had accumulated over \$2000 in gold dust. When not working in the mines he had also developed an unshakeable testimony through his study. Shortly after he returned to England, Francis and Betsy married on December 5, 1855.<sup>26</sup>

Like thousands of other Latter-day Saints in England and continental Europe during this time, Francis and Betsy determined to answer the call to gather to Utah and build up Zion. With the money Francis had made in the gold fields, the young couple could afford to travel in relative comfort, purchase long-desired household items, and still have means left to begin their life in Utah. Consequently, Francis arranged for a good wagon with two yoke of oxen and full camp equipment for their journey across

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23. Francis Webster, Journal [ca. 1881], holograph, 3, Church Archives.

24. Webster, Journal, 4; Palmer, “Francis Webster,” radio address, 3; Palmer, “Francis Webster,” *Instructor*, 218.

25. Amy Elizabeth Parson Webster Leigh to Dr. George W. Middleton, n.d., cited in Amy L. Van Cott and Allen W. Leigh, *Generations of Websters* (Cedar City, Utah: Thomas Webster Family Organization, 1960): 53.

26. Webster, Journal, 5, 9; Palmer, “Francis Webster,” radio address, 3; Palmer, “Francis Webster,” *Instructor*, 218.

the plains in 1856.<sup>27</sup> The desire for a mode of comfortable travel weighed heavily on the young husband. Betsy was pregnant and would give birth in September, around the time the couple would reach Utah.

While Francis and Betsy could afford to pay their way to Utah, the majority of Saints in England could not. To help these less-affluent Saints emigrate, Church leaders had established the Perpetual Emigrating Fund in 1849. Under the provisions of this fund, emigrants would have their way to Utah paid in advance, then they in turn would repay their debt so that others might have the same opportunity to come to Zion. By 1855, however, the PEF was in financial trouble. The number of individuals answering the call to gather to Zion was greater than the funds available to finance the traditional means of emigrating by wagon and ox team.

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27. Palmer, "Francis Webster," radio address, 3; Palmer, "Francis Webster," *Instructor*, 218.

On December 27, 1856, the *Millennial Star*, an LDS periodical published in England, ran the following notice concerning those who intended to travel by wagon:

To all Saints, proposing to go through to Utah on their own means, we say that teams can be ordered through us, and will be supplied at the point of outfit for the Plains by our agent. We think £55 will cover the cost of one wagon—with bows, yokes, and chains, four oxen, and one cow—perhaps two. All who wish us to order for them, must inform us immediately, and send the needful [money] that we may transmit the same by our agent. . . .

For those planning to pay their own way and travel by handcart instead of wagon, the paper noted:

It will . . . be indispensably necessary, if you intend crossing the Plains, to have hand-carts, teams, provision wagons, cows, beef cattle, provisions, tents, &c., in readiness at Iowa City, so as not to be detained a day, for anything. To accomplish this, you can order all these things through us, and they will be supplied at the point of outfit for the Plains, by our agent. We do not know exactly the cost of all these articles; but we think £3 per head for all over one year old, will supply the out-fit from where you leave the railroad, at Iowa City. . . .

All, therefore, who intend going in this manner, should send to our Office £1 per head, as the usual deposit to secure a passage over the ocean; and £3 per head additional, to be forwarded to our agent to secure your out-fit, on or near the frontiers.

It is intended to have this season's emigration leave the frontiers in May and arrive in Utah in July. This will give the Saints several months after their arrival to make preparations for winter. ("Emigration," *Millennial Star* 18 [December 27, 1856]: 822)

Initially, a call went out for those with means to donate to the PEF.<sup>28</sup> As the shortfall continued, Church leaders, looking for a cheaper way to keep the gathering in operation, determined to implement a plan they had considered for a number of years. Beginning in 1856, those traveling by means of the PEF would journey by handcart.<sup>29</sup> Thus, while Francis

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28. In late November 1855, Elder Franklin D. Richards, at the encouragement of Brigham Young, addressed the problems faced by the PEF in an editorial in the *Millennial Star*:

[God] has thus opened the way for the wealthy to use their means for the benefit of the poor without detriment to themselves, and the responsibility of their not doing so now rests upon them.

The Saints who have property are also required to tithe their substance, that it may be used for gathering of the poor. . . . It simply amounts to this—it determines which a man loves best, his wealth and its enjoyments, or the kingdom of God and its blessings; the good things of this life, or of that which is to come. . . .

We hope that this feeling will find a warm response in the hearts of all Latter-day Saints throughout the length and breadth of this county who have surplus means at their disposal. (Franklin D. Richards, “Emigration,” *Millennial Star* 17 [November 24, 1855]: 746–47)

For more on the PEF, see Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), 91–106.

29. In September 1855, Franklin D. Richards of the Council of the Twelve and editor of the *Millennial Star* wrote of the decision to use handcarts:

The Lord never yet gave a commandment to His people, but what, if they would go to with full purpose of heart and try to obey it, they could do so. . . . If the Saints would lay hold of the subject with the faith that is their privilege to exercise, the very elements would be moved upon to accomplish their deliverance. . . . Make it your business to see how many of those who are desirous to emigrate can do so. . . . It is the business of a Saint to keep the commandments of the Lord, and leave the consequences with Him. (Franklin D. Richards, “Emigration,” *Millennial Star* 17 [September 22, 1855]: 601–2)

In March 1856, Richards again addressed the issue of handcart travel:

Just as fast as [the Saints] learn to trust implicitly on His power, and confide in Him as the only hope of their deliverance, will He open the way before them. . . .

The Lord can rain manna on the plains of America just as easily as He did on the deserts of Arabia. . . .

The Saints in these days . . . have barely begun to live by faith, or draw forth such manifestations of the power of God for their deliverance, as did ancient Israel. . . .

and Betsy made preparations to go by wagon, most of the Saints in their London branch who planned to emigrate that year were gearing up for a handcart journey.

Church leaders also undertook an additional step to address the PEF's financial shortfall. They encouraged those planning to travel by wagon to emigrate by means of handcart instead and donate the difference to the PEF. Trusting in their Heavenly Father, Francis and Betsy determined to obey this counsel. They cancelled their plans for a wagon and elected instead to join with other British Saints who would travel by handcart.<sup>30</sup>

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Before the Lord can do these mighty works, the Saints have to exercise a faith in Him which will lead them to undertake greater things than crossing the plains on foot. . . . It is full reliance in God and His servants, that the Saints must attain to, before they can be proper instruments for the accomplishment of His mighty purposes. . . .

No matter what the results may appear to be to the natural man, it is the first great business of the Saints to keep the commandments of the Lord, and leave the consequences with Him. (Franklin D. Richards, "The Gathering," *Millennial Star* 18 [March 1, 1856]: 138–40)

30. In addition to Francis and Ann, other members of the London Branch also forsook traveling by wagon in favor of handcarts, including James G. Bleak, who was president of the branch and later wrote of his decision:

In 1856, after five years active labor in the ministry, the writer was honorably released from the presidency of the then largest branch of the London Conference, that he might gather to Zion.

He forwarded to the office of the British Mission in Liverpool, funds, with instruction to purchase an ox-team outfit to convey himself and wife and their four children from the outfitting point, Iowa City, to Great Salt Lake City.

About this time the subject of making the journey across the plains by handcarts was submitted to the Saints in the European missions; accompanied by the suggestion that those able to emigrate that season by ox or horse teams would be blest if they had faith to go by handcarts, costing so much less than teams and wagons and would use the means thus saved to emigrate other faithful Saints who did not have means to gather to Utah that year.

The writer confesses, that, in view of his wife being unused to travel, and that the four children were of tender years, ranging from six years, the oldest, to eleven months, the youngest, he hesitated, indeed made up his mind not to adopt the suggestion requiring a journey of thirteen hundred miles on foot, from Iowa City to Salt Lake, by hand-cart.

As the time for beginning the season's emigration approached, others were preparing to emigrate who had been co-laborers with, and under the presidency of this branch-president. They declared they were going in the same company, and in the same way that he was going.

They chose this course knowing that they would not be able to bring with them many of the goods they had worked so hard to obtain and that Betsy would be well along in her pregnancy during the journey.

Concerning their sacrifice, Webster later simply noted that he paid “the fare for 9 persons besides myself and wife to Salt Lake City.”<sup>31</sup> Given the cost differential between traveling by handcart versus by wagon, paying the fare for eleven individuals meant that Francis and Betsy not only donated the difference to the fund, they also contributed an additional amount, bringing their total donation to nearly twice what they would have paid to travel by wagon. Not only would these nine individuals not face a debt at the end of the journey, but the money they would have used from the PEF account was now available for others who wished to emigrate.

On May 23, 1856, Francis and Betsy left England on the ship *Horizon* in a company of Saints under the direction of Edward Martin. When this company reached Iowa City, Iowa, on July 9, they discovered that their promised handcarts were not ready. After nearly a three-week wait, there were still not sufficient handcarts for each family to have its own. Inasmuch as the company could delay no longer if it hoped to reach the Salt Lake Valley that year, members were asked to share handcarts. Francis and Betsy chose to share a cart with William and Amy Middleton, Betsy’s mother and stepfather, and William’s fifteen-year-old son John.

Not only had Francis and Betsy gone from a wagon of their own to sharing a handcart, but also the promised wagons in which they could ship additional baggage failed to materialize. As a result, they had to further reduce the items they could take with them. Like others in the company, what they couldn’t sell they were forced to abandon. “They had japan[n]ed tin Boxes made to carry their cloths in, but the Boxes were left standing on the prairie,” their daughter Amy later reported.<sup>32</sup>

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Finding this condition of affairs, and realizing that he had always striven to set a example in temporal and spiritual matters to the brethren and sisters entrusted to his care, he hesitated no longer, but at once wrote to President Franklin D. Richards, asking to be numbered on the hand-cart list. . . .

After receiving the approval of President Richards, this change was announced in public meeting; and, to the credit of those who emigrated from that branch that season, all adopted the same method of gathering. (Scribo, “An Item of Hand Cart Experience,” *Juvenile Instructor* 37 [June 15, 1902]: 365–66)

31. Webster, Journal, 9. The identity of these nine individuals is not known for certain.

32. Leigh to Middleton, *Generations of Websters*, 53. An editorial in the February 23, 1856, *Millennial Star* promised

In a further effort to help the company, Francis allowed William and John to assist with the provision wagons and livestock that accompanied the company. Consequently, the lion's share of the pulling of the handcart fell upon Francis. Nevertheless, he was no doubt thankful for this arrangement as it allowed Betsy to have her mother close by to assist her.

On July 26, the Martin Company finally left Iowa City. Francis wrote little about the trip itself. His few notations—and what we can glean from the writings of others—indicate that the journey was not an easy one for him and Betsy. Like many in the company, he suffered from dysentery. At one point during the early portion of the journey between Iowa City and Florence, he was so sick that he “sat down on the road,” unable to continue. Only after he received a priesthood blessing was he able to continue the trek. “[I] got up and pulled my hand cart with renewed vigor,” he wrote.<sup>33</sup> His purpose in telling the story seemed more to praise God than to complain about his illness.

In late August, the Martin Company finally reached Florence, formerly known as Winter Quarters, Nebraska. While there were those at this time who suggested the company postpone their journey until the following year, the desire of company members to join with the Saints that year was strong. Upon leaving Florence, the loads on the handcarts were greater than before.

By the first week of September, the challenges of the journey were taking their toll upon some company members. Following a hard day's

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those who *prepay* their passage, or those whose passage has been *prepaid* in Utah, who may have more luggage than will be allowed . . . will be able, if they have the means, to take the excess across the States at about ten shillings per 100 lbs., and can doubtless arrange at the point of outfit for the conveyance across the Plains by ox-teams of that which they are unable to haul in their handcarts.

The reality of the situation the pioneers encountered at Iowa City turned out differently, as noted by John Jaques:

As only a very limited amount of baggage could be taken with the handcarts, during the long stay on the Iowa city camping ground there was a general lightening of such things as could best be done without. Many things were sold cheaply to residents of that vicinity, and many more things were left on the camping ground for anybody to take or leave at his pleasure. It was grievous to see the heaps of books and other articles thus left in the sun and rain and dust, representing a respectable amount of money spent therefor in England, but thenceforth a waste and a dead loss to the proper owners. (J. J. [John Jaques], “Some Reminiscences,” *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, December 1, 1878, 1)

33. Webster, Journal, 9.

travel with limited water, there was “considerable murmuring in camp” during the evening of September 8th. The following morning before the company started, “President Martin and Elder Tyler gave the murmurers a good chastising.”<sup>34</sup>

A week after the murmuring incident, Francis and others evidenced a different spirit from the complainers. On September 14, James Bleak, who had served as president of the branch Francis attended in London, became seriously ill. The next day, September 15, the company made its longest one-day march since leaving Florence—twenty-two miles. Bleak started pulling his handcart but could not continue. He reported what transpired:

I began to draw the Handcart this morning but was obliged to leave it. Br. Francis Webster very kindly persuaded me to get on his handcart and drew me 17 miles. Elder Hunter and the two sisters Brown very kindly drew me about 4 miles. For which kindness I feel grateful, and pray God to bless them with health and strength.<sup>35</sup>

Although this act of kindness added a tremendous burden to the regular load of Francis and the others who came to Bleak’s assistance, this service meant that Bleak’s wife and four young children did not have the added responsibility of caring for their father. With a day’s rest, Bleak recovered enough to resume pulling his handcart the following day, although he was “still very ill.”<sup>36</sup>

Two weeks later, on September 27, while the company camped on Wolf Creek, Betsy gave birth to a daughter, who was given the name Amy Elizabeth.<sup>37</sup> Bleak reported that the delivery followed a hard day’s journey of only seven miles because the “sand [was] very soft and deep.”<sup>38</sup> Unable to wait for Betsy to regain strength because of the approaching winter season, the company pushed on the following morning, traveling sixteen miles that day.

If Betsy and her newborn daughter rode in the provision wagon driven by her father-in-law, it appears to have only been for a brief period of

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34. Bleak, Journal, September 8–9, 1856.

35. Bleak, Journal, September 15, 1856. The Brown sisters mentioned are thirty-five-year-old Elizabeth Brown and twenty-five-year-old Jane. There are three individuals in the company who could be the Elder Hunter: twenty-three-year-old James Hunter, or brothers George and John Hunter, ages nineteen and eighteen respectively.

36. Bleak, Journal, September 16, 1856.

37. Webster, Journal, 10. David O. McKay visited this child when she was a grown woman and heard her first hand account of her family’s journey across the plains. McKay, “Ideals of True Womanhood,” 640; McKay, “Pioneer Women,” 8.

38. Bleak, Journal, September 27, 1856.

time. Josiah Rogerson fondly remembered that during the journey across Nebraska, William and John Middleton “would pick up the children that were walking with their mothers and take others from the arms of their parents and put them in their wagon.”<sup>39</sup> Amy later wrote that her grandmother Middleton “walked to keep mother company, and to help carry me, the latter part of the journey, I have no doubt.”<sup>40</sup>

A little more than a month after the Amy’s birth, the Martin Company had to endure the trials associated with that year’s early winter. While the company was able to buy additional supplies at Fort Laramie on October 9, they were unable to obtain enough to last them to Salt Lake City. Consequently, on October 16, rations of flour were reduced from one pound to twelve ounces per day for an adult. Company members were also ordered to lighten their loads to help hasten their march. After traveling ten miles on October 19, the progress of the company came to a near stop as a result of a heavy snowstorm. Winter came with a vengeance of “cold wind, sleet and snow,” Bleak wrote. During the day the company crossed the Platte, a crossing which was “very trying in consequence of its width and the cold weather.”<sup>41</sup> Between the twentieth and twenty-eighth of October, the company traveled only five miles as a result of the storm. With the company snowbound, rations were further reduced in an effort to make them last. What little rations Francis received, he shared with his wife and mother-in-law to supplement their meager allotment.<sup>42</sup>

In early October, Church leaders in Salt Lake City learned that there were still companies of emigrants on the trail. They quickly arranged for Latter-day Saints from the valley to assist their brothers and sisters. Within days, relief wagons full of clothing and food were dispatched to assist the Saints still on the trail.

On October 28, the first rescuers reached the company. “When they first made their appearance I do not think there was one in Camp but shed tears of joy,” Bleak noted.<sup>43</sup> Three days later on October 31, the first of the relief wagons reached the company. One of the rescuers, George D. Grant, reported to Brigham Young that by the time his relief party met the company the snow was “from 6 to 10 inches deep” and the weather

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39. Josiah Rogerson, “Tells Story of Trials of the Handcart Pioneers,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 30, 1913, 11.

40. Leigh to Middleton, *Generations of Websters*, 53.

41. Bleak, Journal, October 19, 1856.

42. Leigh to Middleton, *Generations of Websters*, 53.

43. Bleak, Journal, October 28, 1856.

very cold. . . . You can imagine <between> five and six hundred Men, Women, & Children, worn down by drawing their hand carts through snow and mud; fainting by the way side; falling, chilled by the cold; children crying, ~~from~~ the cold their limbs stiffened by cold, their feet bleeding, and some of them bear to snow and frost. The sight is almost to much for the stoutest of us.<sup>44</sup>

By November 4, the uncovered handcarts had been abandoned. On November 9, almost all the covered handcarts were left behind. During this time many in the company still had to walk because of a shortage of wagons, which were used primarily to carry those who could no longer walk. “I have suffered very much to day with my feet, which are frost-bitten. I walked the 5 miles not wishing to burden the teams,” Bleak wrote of his experiences of November 9.<sup>45</sup> Eventually, all members of the company finished the journey riding in wagons sent from the Salt Lake Valley.

Francis’s assurance that his Heavenly Father was mindful of him and his situation, a knowledge he gained while willingly giving of himself during the first part of the journey, no doubt helped him through the ordeals associated with that harsh winter that the company endured. In spite of his sacrifice, Francis Webster was not spared the effects of the winter snow and cold. “My own feet where [*sic*] badly frozen on the journey,” he afterwards noted.<sup>46</sup>

Later in life neither Francis nor Betsy dwelt on the trials they endured as a result of their decision to forsake traveling by wagon and emigrate by handcart. They felt that what they had given up paled in comparison to what they had received in return. The fact that their handcart was the only one to finish the journey with more family members than when it began was evidence enough that the Lord had blessed them for their faith and sacrifice. William Palmer noted, “Francis Webster and Elizabeth felt that the Lord had rewarded them and blessed them for the help they had given so unselfishly to others.”<sup>47</sup>

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44. George D. Grant to Brigham Young, November 2, 1856, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives.

45. Bleak, Journal, November 9, 1856. Bleak’s selfless attitude continued after the journey. Four months after reaching the Salt Lake Valley, he attended the April 1857 general conference at which a “collection was made to raise \$125 for President B. Young.” Concerning this request, Bleak noted that “as I had no cash, I gave my [wedding] ring.” When Brigham Young had raised the needed money he blessed Bleak in the name of the Lord and gave the ring back. Bleak, Journal, April 8–9, 1857.

46. Webster, Journal, 10.

47. Palmer, “Francis Webster,” radio address, 5; Palmer, “Francis Webster,” *Instructor*, 219.

On November 30, the Martin Company reached Salt Lake City. Two days later, Francis, Betsy, and Amy Webster left for Cedar City, where they lived the remainder of their days. Francis continued his life of service, serving as a ward teacher, a counselor in two bishoprics, a member of the high council, and a councilor in the stake presidency. He was also active in community affairs, served as the mayor of Cedar City, and took an active role in establishing the Branch Agricultural College in Cedar City (now Southern Utah University).<sup>48</sup>

There were those members of the Martin Company that later left the Church. There were those that murmured. One company member later proclaimed that the price most of the company had paid in coming across the plains was enough, and therefore they should be forgiven their PEF debts.<sup>49</sup> There were those in the company whose faith deepened as a result

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48. Concerning some of Webster's church and civic service, Palmer reported:

Francis Webster was prominent in church work all his life in Utah. . . . His consistent yet unassuming course inspired faith and confidence among all classes. He was faithful to every trust and diligent in discharging every duty. He acted on many building committees and in fund raising campaigns and when he went after a man for donations of either money or labor there is no case on record where that man ever talked him out of it. The word "no" never registered in his ears. He was just as generous in his own giving as he expected others to be.

He was equally prominent in business, agricultural and livestock affairs. . . .

When the Branch Normal School was awarded to Cedar City and the people had to provide land and a building for it, this man was put on the most important committee—the building committee. A very large measure of the success of that herculean assignment was due to his dauntless courage and dogged persistence. Early and later, day after day, he went from house to house asking for the use of a team, a man to go on the mountain in the dead of winter for lumber, some meat or hay or other provisions—any of the innumerable things and services that were needed on the building. To every excuse or refusal he said simple "Tut tut," and just sat there talking until the man said yes. (Palmer, "Francis Webster," radio address, 6–7)

49. While Webster is quoted as saying that "the price we paid to become acquainted with God was a privilege to pay," there were other pioneers who paid a significantly less price than did Francis and Betsy Webster, and who seemingly did not find the reward they received from being a member of the Martin Company to be greater than the cost.

More than twenty years after the Martin company reached Salt Lake, a large percentage of the company who incurred a PEF debt still owed money to the fund. When John Jaques published the first history of the Martin Company in a series of 1878–79 newspaper articles, he did so in part to gain support for the idea that

of what they experienced. Likewise, the choices Francis and Betsy made had a tremendous influence on their own lives and were a blessing to others in the Martin Company. As a result they, as much as any member of the company, are proof of President James E. Faust's observation: "Here then is a great truth. In the pain, the agony, and the heroic endeavors of life, we pass through a refiner's fire, and the insignificant and the unimportant in our lives can melt away like dross and make our faith bright, intact, and strong."<sup>50</sup>

Knowing that Francis and Betsy Webster could have come by wagon but chose to follow counsel and go by handcart instead, knowing that they sacrificed their substance to help others emigrate, and knowing that they uncomplainingly accepted what came their way and focused their attention upon serving their fellow men, gives new meaning to the famous quote that William R. Palmer used to introduce to his radio audience the remarkable life of Francis Webster:

I heard a testimony once that made me tingle to the roots of my hair. It was in an adult Sunday School class of over fifty men and women. Nathan T. Porter, then Principal of the Branch Normal School, was the teacher and the subject under discussion was the ill fated hand cart company that suffered so terribly in the snow in 1856.

Some sharp criticism of the church and its leaders was being indulged in for permitting any company of converts to venture across

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he and fellow members of the Martin Company should be forgiven their debts. Jaques concluded his series with these words:

For if anybody ever worked his passage, to the uttermost farthing, these poor emigrants did. They paid not only the principal, but the interest also, with the latter rigorously compounded. They paid it in the hardest and most precious and most costly coin—by enduring daily hard labor, wasting fatigue, and pinching privations, by passing through untold hardships, by suffering cold and hunger, wretchedness and starvation, nakedness and famine, by frozen limbs and injured health and broken constitutions, and many by giving their earthly all. . . . In this most painful and most rigorous manner did these poor creatures pay dearly for the privilege of being brought over land and sea. Methinks that even stern Justice herself, inflexibly rigid and relentlessly exacting as she is, if she were to speak, would say, with no uncertain voice, that they had paid enough, and much more than enough. (J. J. [John Jaques], "Some Reminiscences," *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, January 19, 1879)

The following year as part of the Church's jubilee celebration, President John Taylor forgave all outstanding PEF debts, whether the individual had traveled by handcart, wagon, or train. In 1877 the principal of these debts was greater than \$1,000,000 plus interest. See *Names of Persons and Sureties Indebted*.

50. James E. Faust, "The Refiner's Fire," *Ensign* 9 (May 1979): 53.

the Plains with no more supplies or protection than a handcart caravan afforded.

One old man in the corner sat silent and listened as long as he could stand it then he arose and said things that no person who heard him will ever forget. His face was white with emotion, yet he spoke calmly, deliberately, but with great earnestness and sincerity.

He said in substance, "I ask you to stop this criticism. You are discussing a matter you know nothing about. Cold historic facts mean nothing here for they give no proper interpretation of the questions involved. Mistake to send the Hand Cart Company out so late in the season? Yes. But I was in that Company and my wife was in it and Sister Nellie Unthank whom you have sited was there too. We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation, but did you ever hear a survivor of that company utter a word of criticism? Not one of that company ever apostatized or left the church because everyone of us came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives for we became acquainted with him in our extremities.

"I have pulled my hand cart when I was so weak and weary from illness and lack of food that I could hardly put one foot ahead of the other. I have looked ahead and seen a patch of sand or a hill slope and I have said I can go only that far and there I must give up for I cannot pull the load through it. I have gone on to that sand and when I reached it the cart began pushing me. I have looked back many times to see who was pushing my cart but my eyes saw no one. I knew then that the Angels of God were there.

"Was I sorry that I chose to come by hand cart? No. Neither then nor any minute of my life since. The price we paid to become acquainted with God was a privilege to pay and I am thankful that I was privileged to come in the Martin Hand Cart Company."

The speaker was Francis Webster and when he sat down there was not a dry eye in the room. We were a subdued and chastened lot. Charles R. Mabey who later became Governor of Utah, arose and voiced the sentiment of all when he said, "I would gladly pay the same price for the same assurance of the eternal verities that Brother Webster has." Francis Webster, perhaps, more than any other man had reason to thank the Almighty for his protecting care.<sup>51</sup>

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51. Palmer, "Francis Webster," radio address, 1–2; Palmer, "Francis Webster," *Instructor*, 217–18; McKay, "Pioneer Women," 8; emphasis added.

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