



FIGURE 1. The Pioneer Jubilee parade on July 21, 1897, in Salt Lake City, included veterans of 1856–1860 handcart companies pulling carts. This parade celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of Brigham Young’s company in the valley. Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society.

Handcart Trekking

From Commemorative Reenactment to Modern Phenomenon

Melvin L. Bashore

From an early date, Mormons have remembered and celebrated their history with jubilees, commemorative celebrations, pageants, markers, and reenactments. Only two years after the first Mormons arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, several thousand Church members celebrated the event with the first Mormon Pioneer Day on July 24, 1849. There was a procession, speeches, songs, prayers, and a bounteous feast reminiscent of the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving.¹ By the second half of the nineteenth century, the Pioneer Day celebration had been firmly established throughout the Mormon corridor.

Why do we, as Mormons, memorialize our history so much? Why are we so interested in pageants and reenactments? Why do we choose to remember our past in these different ways? While these celebrations are interesting to examine intrinsically, they also reveal as much about the participants as they do the events and histories being memorialized.

This article reviews the history of handcarts in reenactments, both as part of Pioneer Day activities and the recent growth of treks as multi-day youth activities, as a step toward understanding what handcart history means to Mormonism. Historical reenactments in general can be traced as far back as the early Roman period and the Middle Ages,² and

1. Journal History of the Church, July 24, 1849, 1–8, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE282783.

2. For example, many Roman *naumachia*, naval combats performed in an arena, were reenactments of battles.

Melvin L. Bashore

In 1975, when I first began working in the Church Historical Department, I was tasked with the job of creating finding aids and indexes to help researchers looking for accounts of pioneer journeys by ship and on land. Today these accounts are fully text-searchable in two databases: Mormon Migration (<https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/>) and Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel (<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/>).



Although I don't have any Mormon pioneer ancestors, my great-grandmother's family stopped in Salt Lake City briefly to get supplies on their way to California in 1864. Compared with the richness of the Mormon immigration accounts, I know precious little about her journey. The Mormon accounts are fascinating. I began writing articles about different aspects of Mormon Trail history. In the beginning, I consciously avoided writing about handcart history because I thought that topic had been overworked.

But it may have been a handcart trek that I went on in 1997 that changed my thinking about handcart history. The Church had just purchased the Sun Ranch and opened up Martin's Cove to public visitation. A relative, Brent Bills, lived in Lander, Wyoming. He was storing some Amish-built handcarts in his barn that were going to be used at the visitors' center in Martin's Cove. He invited us and other family members to push a couple of those handcarts up over Rocky Ridge to Rock Creek Hollow. I had previously gone out exploring on the Mormon Trail with LaMar Berrett, Roy Tea, and others. I had walked in the ruts, smelled the sagebrush, and fallen in love with those places in Wyoming that many consider to be barren and bleak. But something different happened to me when I pushed a handcart up Rocky Ridge. Even though I don't have any handcart pioneer ancestors, something about what they had done pierced my heart that day. That family handcart trek changed a part of me, just like it seems to do for many of our Mormon youth.

the modern popularity of reenactments is widespread. Living history demonstrations, mountain man rendezvous, and Civil War reenactments are just parts of this modern phenomenon. Handcart treks are a modern Mormon equivalent of these reenactments.

In his study of the nineteenth-century Pioneer Day observance, Steve Olsen observes that “community celebrations provide one of the most insightful and concise windows into the soul of a people.”³ His observations, though centered on the role of Pioneer Day, also apply to handcart treks and what they reveal about the Mormon identity. First, handcart treks show how Mormons feel “about themselves as a religious and social group.”⁴ Many trek participants have written about their experiences in online blogs. Kristen Duke, living in Austin, Texas, for example, wrote about her experience on a trek undertaken in central Texas in 2015. She is a descendant of Rebecca Burdick Winters, an 1852 pioneer who died of cholera while trekking across the plains and whose grave was marked with an engraved wagon wheel in Nebraska. All participants were asked to walk in memory of an ancestor or pioneer, and Kristen dedicated her trek journey to Rebecca. Recognizing her story might be read by those not of her faith and uninformed about its history, she explained that modern handcart treks harked back to the Mormon pioneers, who traveled across the country to escape persecution and settle in a place where they could worship freely. She said, “We tried to put ourselves in their places as much as possible. To remember how they suffered so much for their faith, but still experienced joy in the journey.”⁵

Steve Olsen’s second observation is that Pioneer Day (and, correspondingly, handcart treks) “reinforced the nature and meaning of Mormon social organization and cohesion.”⁶ Handcart treks are organized similarly to the old pioneer companies’ structure, with captains, assistants, commissaries, etc. The young people are organized into small family groups with married couples, called “Ma’s” and “Pa’s,” taking

3. Steven L. Olsen, “Celebrating Cultural Identity: Pioneer Day in Nineteenth-Century Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996–97): 161.

4. Olsen, “Celebrating Cultural Identity,” 161.

5. Kristen Duke, “Mormon Pioneer Handcart Trek,” *Capturing Joy* (blog), June 29, 2015, <https://www.kristendukephotography.com/mormon-pioneer-handcart-trek/>.

6. Olsen, “Celebrating Cultural Identity,” 161.

the lead.⁷ And Olsen's final observation is that pioneer commemorations help "create and preserve a strong consciousness of the Mormon past."⁸ Marco Dal Zotto, the leader of a 2011 Mormon handcart trek in Milan, Italy, said, "In the end, our young people developed a lot of respect for early Mormon pioneers and for the things that they went through."⁹

Each year, thousands of youth participate in organized Mormon handcart treks around the world. In Wyoming in 2010, over fourteen thousand trekkers participated in 183 treks, conducted at the historic trail sites Martin's Cove, Sixth Crossing, and Rock Creek Hollow.¹⁰ Thousands of others have participated in treks at Church-owned farm and ranch properties located in Utah, Washington, Florida, California, Oklahoma, and Argentina.¹¹ Although handcart treks are not a required activity in the Church's youth program, treks have been organized in such far-flung locales as Taiwan, Alaska, and Chile. In 2015, in response to the growing number of treks around the world, the Church issued a thirty-two-page handbook to help wards and stakes conduct successful, safe handcart trek reenactments.¹² Who could have foreseen the phenomenal popularity of handcart treks today?

The Earliest Pioneer Day Reenactments: Wagons and Handcarts

In Mormon history, the fascination with handcarts as a two-wheeled moving van to transport one's possessions extends back to as early as the Saints' exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois. In 1846, one woman, who was part of a non-Mormon, California-bound company that passed

7. *Handcart Trek Reenactments: Guidelines for Leaders* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015), 6, <https://www.lds.org/youth/activities/bc/pdfs/stake/Handcart-Trek-Guidelines-June-2015.pdf?lang=eng>.

8. Olsen, "Celebrating Cultural Identity," 161.

9. Quoted in Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Mormons around the Globe Re-enact Pioneer Trek," *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 10, 2012.

10. Historic Sites Files—Wyoming, Historic Sites Division, Church History Library.

11. For trek locations currently operated under Church guidance, see "Trek Locations," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://www.lds.org/locations/treks/list-of-treks?lang=eng>.

12. *Handcart Trek Reenactments: Guidelines for Leaders*, <https://www.lds.org/youth/activities/bc/pdfs/stake/Handcart-Trek-Guidelines-June-2015.pdf?lang=eng>.

the Mormon outcasts moving west, noted with amazement that some were pushing their loads in wheelbarrows: "This is an actual fact," she wrote, "some trundled wheelbarrows before them, containing all of their worldly possessions."¹³ When Mormons first started using handcarts to cross the plains in 1856, the carts attracted attention and interest. "It was certainly the most novel and interesting sight I have seen for many a day," reported an observer in the *Nashville Daily News*.¹⁴

While the handcarts were an attraction for many because of their novelty, for Mormons the carts were infused with conflicting emotions. During Brigham Young's lifetime, there was a reluctance to speak freely about the handcarts because so many handcart travelers had died along the way.¹⁵ Even before the last handcart and wagon companies had reached the Salt Lake Valley in 1856, Brigham Young lashed out at those who blamed him for the poor management of that season's emigration. At the Sabbath meeting in the Old Tabernacle on November 2, 1856, Heber C. Kimball said, "There is a spirit of murmuring among the people, and the fault is laid upon br. Brigham."¹⁶ In that same meeting, Brigham Young spoke frankly on who he thought shouldered blame for the disaster. "There is not the least shadow of reason for casting such censure upon me," he said. "I never thought of my being accused of advising or having any thing to do with so late a start." He severely reprimanded Franklin D. Richards and Daniel Spencer for not holding the late companies back. "If, while at the Missouri river, they had received a hint from any person on this earth, or if even a bird had chirped it in the ears of brs. Richards and Spencer," scolded Brigham Young, "[they] would have stopped those men, women and children there until another year."¹⁷

13. Margaret M. Hecox, *California Caravan: The 1846 Overland Trail Memoir of Margaret M. Hecox*, ed. Richard Dillon (San Jose, Calif.: Harlan-Young Press, 1966), 24.

14. "The Massacre on the Plains," *Nashville Daily News*, November 25, 1857.

15. In my years of research in Mormon pioneer documents, I have found very few critical comments about the handcart calamity uttered by faithful Church members. People were loath to speak about the handcart experiment, which resulted in disaster in 1856.

16. Heber C. Kimball, "Remarks," November 2, 1856, *Deseret News*, November 12, 1856, 282.

17. Brigham Young, "Remarks," November 2, 1856, *Deseret News*, November 12, 1856, 283.

President Young was deeply hurt that some were blaming him for the deaths of so many. Perhaps because of this, people avoided speaking or writing about the 1856 handcart tragedy until after Brigham Young's death. Apparently, the only person who wrote anything about the handcart tragedy before Brigham Young's death was John Chislett. He had been a subcaptain in the Willie handcart company but apostatized from the Church about 1864. His account of the handcart journey was published in 1873 in T. B. H. Stenhouse's anti-Mormon book, *The Rocky Mountain Saints*.¹⁸ The memory of the late-season disaster in 1856 was too fresh and too suffused with thoughts that the human suffering may have been brought on by mismanagement and poor judgment. But sentiments about the handcarts evolved with the passage of time. After Brigham Young died, people began to talk and write more openly about their experiences traveling in handcart companies. The accomplishments they achieved in their hard journey began to be admired and, in time, celebrated. Handcart pioneers began to be singled out and honored in parades and community celebrations.

By the time of the 1897 Pioneer Jubilee, the public sensed more than ever before that they were fast losing the pioneer generation, their human touchstone to the great overland migration and to the settlement of Utah. Although the celebration focused on the surviving pioneers from 1847, the later handcart companies of the pioneer story were also recognized in the festivities. J. T. Harwood designed an enameled steel souvenir cup for the event that featured a handcart train along the rim's border and other iconic emblems such as the state flower and the beehive.¹⁹ One of the highlights of the four-day celebration was a wagon train reenactment of the 1847 pioneer entrance into the valley out of Emigration Canyon. In the parade that passed through Salt Lake City, a "hand-cart brigade" was included in the line of march behind Utah's first stagecoach (figs. 1, 2).²⁰

A few decades later, after the turn of the century, the Handcart Veterans Association and the Daughters of Utah Handcart Pioneers were organized.²¹ Trekking the Mormon Trail on foot was a popular LDS Boy

18. T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York: Appleton, 1873), 311–32.

19. "The Pioneer Jubilee," *Salt Lake Herald*, February 11, 1897, 6.

20. "Programme for Today," *Salt Lake Herald*, July 21, 1897, 2; "Utah's Growth Illustrated," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 22, 1897, 9.

21. The Handcart Veterans Association was formed in 1906 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of handcart immigration. It was active until about 1914,



FIGURE 2. Pioneer Jubilee parade in Salt Lake City on July 21, 1897, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the first pioneer company in the Salt Lake Valley. Veterans of handcart companies pulled handcarts. Photo is one half of a stereograph taken by the Keystone View Company. Courtesy Church History Library.

Scout activity from just before World War I into the 1950s.²² Confined principally to troops along the Wasatch Front, the treks would generally

holding periodic gatherings and reunions. For a published report of its first reunion, see “Grizzled Veterans Talk of the Past,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 5, 1906, 10. At a Handcart Veterans Association reunion in 1910, it was proposed that a women’s auxiliary organization called the Daughters of Handcart Veterans be formed. The women’s group, called the Daughters of Utah Handcart Pioneers, was organized on April 14, 1910, with fifty charter members. This organization evolved into what is today the Daughters of Utah Pioneers. “Handcart Veterans Unite to Strengthen Old Bonds,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, April 6, 1910, 1, 7; “Lapish, Hannah Settle,” in Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1901–36), 2:527.

22. For example, see “Boy Scouts Travel over Pioneer Trail,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 22, 1912, 12; and “Youths to Hike from Henefer,” *Ogden Standard Examiner*, December 15, 1947, 5.



FIGURE 3. A group of reenactors stand by an original pioneer wagon, circa 1900–1925. Although this vehicle is not a typical handcart, it has two wheels like a handcart. Church History Library.



FIGURE 4. A group of reenactors pull a handcart, circa 1900–1925. The woman on the right (with an arrow pointing to her) is a daughter of Hannah Crossley Winn, who was in the Martin Handcart Company. Church History Library.



FIGURE 5. A group of people gather around an original handcart. There are five original pioneers in the photo: three standing on the far right and two seated to right and left of the handcart. The photo was taken in Woodland, Utah, circa 1920. Church History Library.



FIGURE 6. An undated photo may show a reenactment or a re-creation for publicity or illustration. Photo circa 1900–1925. Church History Library.



FIGURE 7. In the early 1900s, a reenactment of the pioneer experience included this group of descendants of Archer Walters. Church History Library.

involve hiking, biking, or even snowshoeing the last thirty-six miles of the Mormon Trail, from Henefer, Utah, over Big and Little Mountains, and down through Emigration Canyon. While photos from the Church History Library (figs. 3–7) show pioneer and handcart reenactments by adults and children circa 1900 to 1925, my research turned up no commentary about these events or activities. Figure 7 shows a family reenacting the handcart trek of their ancestor Archer Walters; the sign on the wagon reads, “Handcart Pioneers 1856–60, Family of Archer Walters, As they left Iowa June 7th, 1856, Children Walked 1200 Miles.”

In 1947, an auto-tour trek was one of the highly publicized events of Utah’s Pioneer Centennial Celebration. In this one-hundredth anniversary reenactment of the pioneer trek, 148 people in 72 automobiles caravanned from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City. They drew national attention as they replicated the pioneer trek in cars affixed with canvas tops to look like covered wagons.²³

23. D. James Cannon, ed., *Centennial Caravan: Story of the 1947 Centennial Reenactment of the Original Mormon Trek from Nauvoo, Illinois, to Salt Lake Valley, July 14 to 22, 1947* (n.p.: Sons of Utah Pioneers, 1948).

Handcarts in Reenactments, 1960s and 1970s

In 1966, seventy-two Boy Scouts from Phoenix, Arizona, made carts and brought them to Utah to reenact a handcart trek on the last thirty-six miles of the original Mormon trail, from Henefer to Salt Lake City (figs. 8–12). Their adventure had been in planning and preparation for a year. Wayne Green, the stake Young Men's president, came up with the idea for the outing. He said, "It just sounded like an adventuresome, fun thing to do and at the same time, the opportunity to teach a little church history."²⁴ They transported eleven homemade carts and traveled by bus and car from Arizona. Their carts used fifty-four-inch metal wheels scavenged from old hay wagons. It took two days to drive from Arizona to Henefer. Andrew McInnes drove a two-seated pickup truck, carrying five boys and some handcarts. He kept a journal of the trip and handcart trek.²⁵ After stopping to camp that night in Zion National Park, they reached Henefer the next day, Sunday, at 6:00 pm and drove from there to East Canyon Reservoir, where they camped.

After breakfast the next morning, they broke camp and returned to Henefer. They signed their names in a logbook at a small log house before setting out to start pushing their carts. They were able to travel in old trail ruts for a short distance but had to move onto the highway because the old trail was so badly washed out. Their first camp was in a large meadow just east of the East Canyon Reservoir. The next day's trek took them south up East Canyon to Little Emigration Canyon, where they had to clear a path to enable the carts to get through on the way up to Big Mountain. "Going is rough, axmen ahead of carts cutting trees, and removing brush," wrote McInnes, "also removing large rocks from the trail." McInnes wrote, "We were told we are the first handcart co. to pass this way since the Saints passed this way so long ago!"²⁶ That expression indicates the sense of history they were experiencing.

David Koutz, a fifteen-year-old scout from the Phoenix Nineteenth Ward, served as scribe for the group. Going up Big Mountain taxed their

24. Wayne Green, recorded telephone conversation with the author, April 7, 2012.

25. Andrew McInnes, *Journal of the Handcart Trip*, June 11, 1966, copy sent to author by Dennis Schaub, and subsequently donated to Church History Library. Delbert Dennis Schaub, Phoenix Tenth Ward Handcart Trek Records, 1966, MS 25641, Church History Library.

26. McInnes, *Journal*, June 14, 1966. This group may not have been the first reenactors since the 1850s.



FIGURES 8–12. In 1966, Boy Scouts from Phoenix, Arizona, brought handcarts to trek the original Mormon trail leading into Salt Lake City. They posed with a monument along the way. They used the original trail as much as possible but sometimes had to use the highway. Courtesy Dennis Schaub; photos in Church History Library.

carts. "One axle broke and had to be left until we could fix it," the young scribe wrote. "Another axle bent and had to be straightened. One wheel went flat when it landed on a rock . . . and at evening camp we heated it and pounded it out."²⁷ They used aspen branches to make a very hot fire. "When the coals were red hot," wrote McInnes, "we placed the damaged wheel in the coals and when the metal was just right, we straightened the wheel with a single bit ax, and then tempered it with cold water."

They had to lower their carts with chains and ropes much of the way down the steep western slope of Big Mountain, not unlike the handcart pioneers in the 1850s. "The going [is] extremely rough," McInnes wrote. "We had to cut our way through a thorn thicket, one cart tipped over . . . the footing very bad to say the least."²⁸

That night they held a testimony meeting in their camp at the place marked as the Last Creek Camp, the same place where the main group of Brigham Young's Vanguard Company had camped on July 21, 1847. "How I wish all of the loved ones of these young men and their leaders could have heard the beautiful, humble testimonies given this night," wished McInnes.²⁹

Although footsore and tired, they set off early the next morning, finishing the final five-mile leg, all downhill, on a paved road. As they exited Emigration Canyon, they saw the This Is the Place Monument. "Monument in sight," McInnes wrote, "we can see the reception party from SLC. TV cameras as we push to meet them." They enjoyed a big party in Salt Lake City that night, all the trekkers receiving pins upon which was written, "I have walked the Pioneer Trail."³⁰

Two years later, forty-four teenage LDS girls in the Campcrafter program from East Long Beach Stake in California traveled by bus to take a handcart trek over the same stretch of trail taken by the young men from Phoenix. The handcarts they brought, made by one of the men in the stake, were disassembled for the trip and reassembled in Utah. Each of the girls made her own pioneer clothing and soap and baked bread

27. "Some Push, Some Pull," *Church News*, published by *Deseret News*, July 2, 1966, 9.

28. McInnes, *Journal*, June 15, 1966.

29. McInnes, *Journal*, June 15, 1966.

30. McInnes, *Journal*, June 16, 1966. See also "Phoenix Scouts Pull Carts on Mormon Trail," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 17, 1966, B-9. This story was also reported in "Arizona Scouts Trek Up Mormon Trail," *Arizona Republic*, June 17, 1966, C-4.

over a campfire. Some of the girls even made their own sleeping bags out of water-repellant nylon with Dacron filler. They had to fulfill numerous requirements beforehand: earn a physical fitness award, hike twenty-five miles, complete a one-mile run, pass a written exam on handcart history, and write two book reports. Apostle Mark E. Petersen and Seventy S. Dilworth Young visited their camp on a Sunday rest stop.³¹

I interviewed three people who participated in that trek over forty years ago—two leaders and the camp scribe. Marlene Bellamy, a public school P.E. teacher, was the energetic stake leader who got the idea for the trek after reading about the last forty miles of the original trail leading to the valley in a small booklet. She thought, “Well, gee, why can’t girls do this?”³² She had not heard about the feat of the Arizona scouts two years before. Elaine Moniz Peters, the camp historian, wrote, “We left Long Beach by Greyhound bus with forty girls from our Campcrafter Program, ages twelve to eighteen, six handcarts, two fathers and three Camp Directors and a Unit Leader per handcart. We arrived in Henefer where the weather on our first day was 104 degrees.”³³ Thelma Tolhurst, a nurse, was tasked with making sure the girls were in good health and fit to do the activity. The girls fared well on the trek, no more than minor blisters and sunburns spoiling their fun. “They were elated and proud of themselves,” Tolhurst remembered.³⁴ One of the fun memories happened near the end of the journey as the group neared the mouth of Emigration Canyon. Bellamy recalled, “These college guys went by in a convertible and screamed at us, ‘Hey! You’re too late. They’ve already settled the Valley.’”³⁵

It was almost another ten years before the next handcart trek on the old pioneer trail was held. In 1976, 107 young men and women in the Salt Lake Emigration Stake pulled carts for three days over the Mormon Trail from Henefer to Salt Lake. Girls sewed their pioneer dresses, and both boys and girls made dried fruit that they packed for trail lunches. They were organized into ten companies with ten young people and

31. “Some Must Push . . . Some Must Pull,” *Church News*, June 29, 1968, 8–9, 14.

32. Marlene Bellamy, recorded telephone conversation with author, April 20, 2012.

33. Elaine Moniz Peters, email note to author, April 21, 2012.

34. Thelma Tolhurst, recorded telephone conversation with author, April 6, 2012.

35. Bellamy, recorded telephone conversation, April 20, 2012.

an appointed youth captain in each company. Enid Greene, who later served in the US House of Representatives, was a teenager on that trek. She learned lessons in teamwork. "We've had some hard times getting places, but we've helped each other," she said. "We've also discovered a few of our limitations."³⁶ At the camp spots, they enjoyed a variety of entertainment. The first night, three mountain men regaled them with stories of life in the wilderness. They let some of the youth shoot their muzzle-loading rifles. On the second night, James Arrington, arriving in a buckboard, performed his one-man show *Here's Brother Brigham*. At the final camp, the youth engaged in a square dance followed by a testimony meeting. While the evenings were filled with fun and entertainment, during the day the youth were challenged by the hard work of pulling heavily laden carts. Teenager John Stevens had reason to think about his handcart pioneer ancestors. "I pulled that handcart and thought, 'Wow! This is hard work. . . .' I pulled it for only one hour and was exhausted," he said. "My great-grandmother pulled one for three months."³⁷ It was these kinds of hard experiences that gave young people a real, if brief, connection with their pioneer heritage and an appreciation for the personal sacrifices each made to make the journey to Zion. Nine years later, the Emigration Stake organized another handcart trek on the same stretch of historic trail and with the help of some of the same trek leaders.³⁸

These two handcart-trekking events in the 1960s and several in the 1970s—including an energetic 270-mile handcart trek in England and a large Boy Scout trek in Virginia—were the genesis of what would turn into almost a rite of passage for Mormon youth. Although I unfortunately unearthed little about the England trek,³⁹ details about the Virginia trek were written up in the *Church News*. Nearly four hundred Boy Scouts from the Capitol and Potomac regions of the Church camped for five days at a US Army installation at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, in August 1979. Leaders planned events that would tie Scouting skills to the Church's pioneer heritage. Harking back to the times of persecution

36. "In Footsteps of Pioneers," *Church News*, July 24, 1976, 13.

37. "In Footsteps of Pioneers," 13.

38. "Trek along Original Trail Gives Taste of Pioneer Trial," *Church News*, July 21, 1985, 8, 10.

39. The 270-mile handcart trek in England is mentioned only in passing in "Lamanite Way of Worship Sparked His Interest," *Church News*, February 19, 1977, 6.

in early Church history, leaders staged a dramatic attack on the boy's campsite by an angry "mob." The boys were forced to flee into the dark night with just what they could hurriedly gather together and throw into thirty homemade handcarts. During the rout, the carts had difficulty holding up as they were pushed over rough terrain. Several axles were bent and wheels fell off as the scouts hastily fled from the mob over muddy ground. "If we ever have to evacuate again," trek director Corbett Aamadts said, "I hope the handcarts will be in better shape." After their exciting night, they did what they could to repair broken carts and pushed ahead on a one-day trek simulating the pioneer handcart journey across the plains. With temperatures soaring near one hundred degrees Fahrenheit, the ground quickly dried out. They crossed a ravine on a monkey bridge built by the scouts, lowered their carts by rope over a cliff, and at one point were attacked by "Indians" who overturned their carts and mortally wounded their guide.⁴⁰ When the day ended, the boys were tired. A young scout from a Washington, DC, ward said, "I'm sure glad we don't have to pull these handcarts for four months. It's hard enough making this one-day trek!"⁴¹

One other handcart trek in the 1970s that deserves notice was a one-day, four-hour handcart trek in which over four hundred students from Brigham Young University participated. The students made their own carts and traveled over a ten-mile course in late March 1974 in southern Utah County near the town of Goshen. Steve Shallenberger, the student chairman of the activity, said, "I'm dead tired, and we only went ten miles."⁴² The terrain was rough and taxed the hastily made carts, many of which rolled on bicycle wheels.

40. Though Indian raids have sometimes been reenacted in handcart treks, the extent of the raids have been somewhat exaggerated. Pioneers during the westward migration rarely experienced difficulties with the Indians, and many encounters were friendly. When there was an occasional raid, the greatest loss the pioneers usually suffered was the theft of some of their cattle. It was largely after the pioneers settled in Utah Territory that tensions grew between the Saints and Indians and resulted in episodes of violence. "Life on the Trail," Heritage Gateways: Official Sesquicentennial K-12 Education Project, Utah Education Network, accessed February 14, 2018, <http://heritage.uen.org/resources/Wc85c7aa9c851.shtml>.

41. "Pioneer Trail Comes to Life for Virginia Boys," *Church News*, August 18, 1979, 6-7.

42. "Students Re-Enact Cart Trek," *Provo Daily Herald*, April 1, 1974, 4.

Survival Courses and Treks in the 1970s

In the mid-1970s, a handcart trekking program for LDS youth conference groups began being offered at BYU, sponsored by the Special Courses and Conferences Department. Doug Cloward, a professor in the Department of Youth Leadership, developed and administered the program. It drew upon elements in the curriculum of a thirty-day survival course offered to BYU students majoring in youth leadership. In 1974–75, Cloward and his colleague Stephen R. Covey pared down the thirty-day survival course into, first, a ten-day, then a five-day, course called Survival Adventure, which was offered in the summer to LDS youth groups. In 1975, the San Bernardino Stake in California participated in the survival program for their youth conference activity. Leaders from that stake wanted to return to BYU for their youth conference the next year, but only on condition that a different kind of program could be offered. “They concluded that it would be difficult to go back to that kind of, what they described, as a babysitting and games kind of a program,” said Cloward. “They wanted something that was a powerful, impactful experience for their youth and asked me if there wasn’t some other kind of program we might conduct that they could bring their stake to again.”⁴³

This led Cloward to develop the pioneer handcart trek program. It was conducted under Cloward’s direction for three summers from 1976 through 1978. The first BYU-sponsored pioneer trek program was launched for the youth of the San Bernardino Stake in 1976. It was conducted on Boulder Mountain in southern Utah. Upon arrival, the youth were divided into “family” groups, separated, as far as possible, from any of their other ward members or friends. Isolating the youth from their former acquaintances was meant to offer the individuals, according to Cloward, an “opportunity for a new identity and expectations.”⁴⁴ As the program matured, a credit course was offered in the university Youth Leadership Department to train BYU students to serve as the staff members for the treks. The treks were staffed by forty-five to sixty-five students, and their pay was based on experience and position of responsibility. Each family group had a male and a female BYU student leader assigned to them, called “Pa” and “Ma.”

43. Doug Cloward, interview with author, April 29, 2016.

44. Cloward, interview with author, April 29, 2016.

After the “family” groups were established, staff members then went through the students’ gear bags, weeding out all candy, gum, soda pop, radios, and other distracting materials. In the first years of the program, the youth wore pioneer clothing. “We wanted it to be as basic as possible,” said Cloward. The youth were to bring a sleeping bag, ground cloth, their journal, scriptures, and a camera. Utensils, food, handcarts, and safety supplies were all provided by the BYU course. Cloward described the program’s general routine:

The first part of the program was a full day of strenuous pulling of the carts. We’d usually go from about 1:00 o’clock in the afternoon when we got to the location we were beginning the trek from until about midnight. That night, with a warm cup of broth, a hard biscuit or hard roll, a piece of jerky as a reward at the end of that long, hard day. The process of going without food, while not fasting per se, was a part of the designed difficulty of the program. It wasn’t an ice cream party. It was to be difficult and challenging. The second day of that pioneer trek process was a long pull that ended up in what we called a base camp location. Typically the distance on that first day pull was in the neighborhood of fifteen to twenty miles. Then the next day, somewhere in the neighborhood of ten to fifteen miles to the base camp. Once arriving at the base camp, we got involved with the young people in doing pioneer skills, washing clothes with a scrub board, a metal washtub, activities of cooking, pioneer skills, setting up shelters, those kind of things. Following those activities, we had, the next day, a day of thanksgiving essentially. We brought in live turkeys, and we had the young people participate in what we called a turkey hunt. Those activities were both fun, challenging as they caught their turkey, and then butchered the turkey, and learned how to cook the turkey in steam pits. Also how to bake bread in the Dutch ovens and various kinds of desserts. So it was an in-camp camp skills and pioneering skills day. That was followed by a Sunday of morning worship with girls and guys separated, then come together for a Sunday School program usually conducted by the adults who were there with the youth. That Sunday School program concluded about noon or a little after. And then the youth went from there into assigned solo locations where staff members placed the students at a significant enough distance where they wouldn’t be bothered or hear any of the other students. They were to spend that time with their scriptures and their journals reflecting on their experiences and feelings and writing those in their journals, reading their scriptures until about dusk, when the staff members then gathered them back up from that solo experience, and returned to the campfire program for a meal together and a

testimony meeting that often went late into the evening. The following morning, they would pull their handcarts approximately five miles to a location where they were met by the bus and the carts were disassembled and moved to prepare for the next week's group coming in.⁴⁵

While today's handcart trek reenactments are focused on the handcart pioneers, that was not the central focus of the BYU treks. They used LeRoy and Ann Hafen's *Handcarts to Zion* as a resource for evening campfire stories, but other than that, handcart history was a minor aspect of the program.⁴⁶ "The overall focus of the trek, initially, was not focused on connecting directly to specific pioneer ancestors," explained Cloward, "but rather it was the vehicle or mechanism to provide hard experiences that required dependence upon each other: pulling the carts, preparing the food, gathering the firewood. And sharing the skills in connection with this community building, and self-reflection opportunities for those who participated in the program."⁴⁷ The BYU trek program simply used the handcarts as a tool in an activity that tested and challenged the youth:

We were truly looking for ways to provide the kind of things we had found in the survival program, which, when you take the handcarts away, the bonnets, and the dresses, and the skills, all of that away, it was essentially an opportunity for young people to do something very, very challenging. Something where they had to depend on one another and where they have the real gratification of doing something on their own. It was the value-forming process. It is my impression that that, in large measure, is part of what we're here on earth to do, to go through this difficult sojourn in the carnal, sensual, devilish kind of world and learn from our experience. And learn to choose the right path. I think the wilderness trek, the survival program, and certainly the handcart trek provided a mechanism, a framework, for those kinds of experiences and perhaps a different flavor with the handcarts, but under the same focus of providing difficulty, reflection, and determination of how people would live their lives.⁴⁸

45. Cloward, interview with author, April 29, 2016.

46. LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1960).

47. Cloward, interview with author, April 29, 2016.

48. Cloward, interview with author, April 29, 2016.

Upon Cloward's departure from BYU in 1979, BYU initially thought it would get out of the handcart trek business. No handcart trek outings were offered in 1979. But upon reconsideration, the university restarted the program. Kevin Henson was hired to direct it. He ran the program in summer 1980, then, as he wrote, "passed it off to others."⁴⁹

From the mid-1970s until the early 1990s, BYU sponsored youth handcart treks and offered for-credit coursework that incorporated instruction on conducting handcart treks. In 1981–82, BYU offered a pioneer handcart trek for youth through its Conferences and Workshops department.⁵⁰ There was a lapse of a few years until 1989, when again a pioneer trek was offered as a part of the Church Educational System's Continuing Education Youth and Family Program.⁵¹ In 1992, the pioneer trek was discontinued, while more popular programs like Especially for Youth and Wilderness Trek continued to be offered.⁵² For a decade beginning in 1981, the Department of Recreation Management and Youth Leadership offered a one-credit course titled Agency Skills Training that included a pioneer trek.⁵³

In the mid-1970s and for a few years thereafter, Ricks College (now BYU–Idaho) conducted handcart treks as part of the curriculum in their outdoor recreation program.⁵⁴ Students at Ricks College could earn five hours of college credit for the pioneer skills they acquired as they pushed handcarts on a ninety-eight-mile stretch from Rexburg, Idaho, into Montana. Although the route mostly followed Jeep trails, the terrain included desert, timber country, stream and river crossings, and mountains. Prior to embarking on the trek, the students spent five days in instruction and physical preparation. They were taught outdoor cooking, made their own soap and candles, dried fruit, and slaughtered cattle to make jerky.

I interviewed two of the men who started that program: Ed Malstrom, a psychology professor, who had the idea for the program, and geology

49. Kevin Henson, email message to author, July 21, 2012.

50. Brigham Young University, *Winter 1981 Class Schedule*, 42.

51. Brigham Young University, 1988–89 *General Catalogue*, 260.

52. According to an employee in the Priesthood Department, the BYU treks stopped "when BYU was asked to discontinue them." Dale R. McClellan, email message to author, July 6, 2012.

53. Brigham Young University, *General Catalog of Courses 1981–82*, 260.

54. "Students to Relive Handcart Journey," *Church News*, July 16, 1977, 12.

professor Glenn Embree, who offered it as a summer program in 1979. The students learned survival skills, Church history, geology, and human relations in an outdoor setting. About three-fourths of the participants were young women. "Some of them were pretty prim and proper when they started," Embree recalled. "By the time they got done, they knew how to rough it." For instance, one hot day after pulling their carts, they halted at some small lakes to camp. "Everybody put their bathing suits on and dove in with bottles of shampoo and soap and were having a good time," Embree said. "One of the gals climbed out onto the bank and looked down and she said, 'Ed. What's this?' He said, 'That's just a leech.' He picked that off her leg. They all gathered around to look at it and we thought, 'Boy! They'll come unglued.' They examined it carefully and all dove back in the water and finished their bath."⁵⁵ The young women displayed spunk and an inquisitive disposition in learning new things. They brought along several crates of live chickens to slaughter for food. Ed Malstrom remembered, "There were a couple of girls that were just horrified of the idea of having to cut a head off and actually clean a chicken. Then one of them found eggs in the chicken. That really piqued their curiosity, and they went through the chickens and had a whole series of eggs—a whole developmental sequence of egg production. They were proud of that."⁵⁶

As the group neared the end of that 1979 trek, they were pushing their carts on a short stretch of paved road through a small community of homes near Island Park Reservoir. As Glenn Embree recalled, "As we got a little further down the road, all of a sudden this great commotion went off. Yelling and screaming behind me." They were ambushed by whooping little boys in Indian costumes who had hidden themselves in bushes beside the road. On the way, they had been passed by a mother driving a station wagon full of young Mormon boys. Having just had a lesson in Sunday School on the handcarts, the boys were excited to insert themselves into the activity. In Embree's memory, "It was one of the neat, spontaneous moments of the trip."⁵⁷

55. Glenn F. Embree, recorded telephone conversation with author, April 20, 2012.

56. Ed Malstrom, recorded telephone conversation with author, May 3, 2012.

57. Embree, recorded telephone conversation, April 20, 2012.

Handcart Treks in the 1980s and 1990s and the 1997 Pioneer Sesquicentennial Reenactment

The courses and treks offered at Ricks College and BYU may have provided the training and impetus for locally organized handcart treks that were conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s in such far-flung locations as Alaska, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Washington, Ohio, Vermont, Tennessee, Alberta (Canada), England, and California. One place where handcart treks were conducted periodically on historic trails was in Wyoming. The youth in the Riverton Wyoming Stake held handcart treks over segments of a historic trail in 1980, 1988, 1992, and 1996.⁵⁸

In 1987, the Taber Alberta Stake conducted a two-day handcart trek, pulling carts that they had assembled to their base camp, where they enjoyed various activities. Kevin Livingstone remembered, “The first few miles weren’t bad; then we began to get hungry and tired. A couple of miles later we considered rebellion.”⁵⁹ Their experience was briefly written up in the *New Era* magazine. Church publications in the 1980s and early 1990s periodically reported on these youth handcart treks. Articles frequently mentioned that although the treks were challenging for the youth (for example, it rained during the Alberta trek in 1987), they enjoyed treks immensely and found that trekking provided a testimony-growing experience.

In 1996, the Iowa Pioneer Mormon Trails Association led a wagon and handcart trek—celebrating the sesquicentennial anniversary of the pioneers’ journey—that traipsed across the route of the original trail in Iowa. One hundred people traveled in seventeen wagons and about fifteen handcarts. Utah rancher Montell Seeley was the principal leader of the handcart contingent. It was their plan to complete the remainder of the trek to Salt Lake City in 1997.⁶⁰ NFL quarterback Steve Young, a descendant of Brigham Young, was a participant in the trek.⁶¹ This Iowa trek was the spark that initiated the big wagon and handcart celebratory trek the next year.

In 1997, the Church celebrated the 150th anniversary of the pioneers, which was called the Mormon Pioneer Trail Sesquicentennial Celebration. Although not sponsored by the Church, a wagon train

58. Riverton Wyoming Stake, *Remember* (n.p., 1997), 209.

59. Kevin Livingstone, “Pioneer Trek,” *New Era* 17 (October 1987): 41.

60. “Wagon Train Leaves,” *Burlington Hawk Eye*, June 18, 1996, 1A, 8A.

61. “Young Joins Re-enactment,” *Ottumwa Courier*, July 15, 1996, 8.

reenactment of the one-thousand-mile Mormon pioneer journey from Winter Quarters, Nebraska, to Salt Lake City received widespread national and international media coverage. Several handcarts accompanied the wagon train.

The Boom in Treks from 1998 to 2018

While there is clear value in giving Mormon youth a small taste of pioneer life, the extraordinary Churchwide expansion of these activities since the 1997 sesquicentennial is not easily explained. These reenactments have moved beyond the borders of the United States into countries that have no historical connection to the Mormon pioneer settlement of Utah. In fact, handcart trek reenactments are conducted in countries where the Church has only just taken root. For instance, a handcart trek in Mongolia in 2012 was initiated by an American senior missionary couple. Gary and Martha Hunt, serving in the Mongolia Ulaanbaatar Mission, thought “it would be a great experience for the youth.”⁶² The *Handbook for Trek Leaders*, the Church’s first trekking manual, states that the purpose of these treks is “to provide spiritual opportunities . . . where youth can gain a deeper appreciation of the principles of faith, obedience, and sacrifice.”⁶³ Given their expense and large time commitment, parents and leaders must be observing some measure of personal growth in their youth to warrant the continuance of these trek activities.

Over time, elements of the trek have become somewhat standardized. Stakes generally plan on sponsoring a trek once every four years (fig. 13). The treks take a lot of planning, preparation, and funding. One of the largest expenses for stakes, costing thousands of dollars, has been transportation. To reduce costs, stakes have tried to find places closer to home to hold treks. It is an expensive proposition to travel to the Church’s historic sites in Wyoming to push handcarts on historic trail segments. For stakes on the Wasatch Front, the Church-owned Deseret Land and Livestock property west of Evanston, Wyoming, has become a

62. “Modern-day Mongolian Pioneers Re-enact Trek,” *Church News*, July 7, 2012, 8–9.

63. *Mormon Handcart Treks: Handbook for Trek Leaders* ([Salt Lake City]: Farmland Reserve, Inc., The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, May 2010), 2.



FIGURE 13. Members of the West Jordan River Oaks Utah Stake on a handcart trek reenactment at the Deseret Land and Livestock site in 2014. Photo by Jackie Stringham.

more affordable option.⁶⁴ Another option for the Wasatch Front stakes is the Mosida Handcart Trek Site on Church-owned land in Elberta in Utah County, Utah.

One feature often included in handcart treks has gone through a process of refinement and change. Since the beginning of modern handcart trekking, what is called the “women’s pull” has been an integral part of most treks. In this activity, young women pull the handcarts up a steep incline without the help of the young men, who stand quietly to the side (figs. 14–15). For many youth, this has been the most difficult, yet moving, part of a trek experience.

A women’s pull activity was a part of a handcart trek conducted by the Schaumburg Illinois Stake for 130 teenagers in mid-June 1997. The youth pushed handcarts for a couple of days across prairie land in eastern Iowa, just west of Nauvoo, with the permission of private

64. The Centerville North Stake was the first to conduct a handcart trek on the Deseret Land and Livestock ranch in 1990. Deseret Land and Livestock, *Trek Mission History*, 2011, MS 29195, Church History Library.

landowners. On the second day of the trek, the boys were “asked to form the Mormon Battalion and go with Colonel Thomas Kane to the southwest as soldiers for the U. S. Government in the Mexican War.” The boys left the girls and went off to do a service project for the landowner whose property they were trekking on. “The girls forged ahead and pushed the handcarts alone,” a news report of the activity stated. “At first they claimed they didn’t need the boys, . . . but after a couple of hours of forests and hills and crossing the 10-foot-wide Sugar Creek alone, they let out a cheer when the boys returned.”⁶⁵

The Church has mostly been successful in eradicating the idea that the Mormon Battalion (1846–47) took place during the handcart years (1856–60), but a few stakes persist in employing the battalion to construct a reason for why the boys can’t help the girls push the carts. The Church’s 2015 Trek Guidelines instruct, “Symbolizing the absence of the young men by calling them to serve in the Mormon Battalion is



FIGURE 14. Young Women of the Riverdale Utah Stake participate in a women’s pull in July 2014 at the Deseret Land and Livestock site near Evanston, Wyoming. Photo by Norman Baker.

65. “Schaumburg Youth Re-create Historic Mormon Journey,” *Arlington Heights Daily Herald*, August 2, 1997, sec. 5, 4.



FIGURE 15. Young women and adult leaders of the West Jordan River Oaks Utah Stake reenact a women's pull in 2014. Photo by Jackie Stringham.

historically inaccurate and is therefore inappropriate.” The guidelines offer a different option: “Before the women’s pull, leaders could establish a historical context by explaining that many women handcart pioneers pulled handcarts without the assistance of men, sometimes due to the death or illness of their husbands and sons.”⁶⁶

Despite their popularity, handcart treks continue to draw critical commentary in the blogosphere.⁶⁷ In some of those posts, treks have

66. *Handcart Trek Reenactments: Guidelines for Leaders*, 13, 14.

67. Angela C., “The Women’s Pull,” *By Common Consent*, June 9, 2015, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2015/06/09/the-womens-pull/>; Abe, “Mormon Youth Treks Are Lame,” *The Blog O’Cheese*, April 6, 2008, <http://theblogochaese.blogspot.com/2008/04/mormon-youth-treks-are-lame.html>; Jonathan Green, “Don’t Hate Me Just Because My Trek Was Awesome,” *Times and Seasons*, January 9, 2014, <http://www.timesandseasons.org/harchive/2014/01/dont-hate-me-just-because-my-trek-was-awesome/>; Tona H., “Youth Trek, Public History, and Becoming ‘Pioneer Children’ in the Digital Age,” *Juvenile Instructor*, August 7, 2013, <http://juvenileinstructor.org/trek-public-history-digital-age/>; R. Bell, “Manufacturing the Spirit,” *Millennial Star*, July 27, 2005, <http://www.millennialstar.org/manufacturing-the-spirit/>.

come under wide and general criticism for being contrived, manufacturing overtly emotional settings, producing short-term testimonies, and enforcing sexist perceptions. For instance, one woman had little good to recall about her trek experience in 2004. Regarding the women's pull, she said, "Most of the guys that talked about it after made it all about them and how it made them feel more obligated to protect and provide because of how pathetic we looked, apparently. I remember being annoyed because the boys in my 'family' hardly pulled at all anyway." She said, "I didn't hear a word about how the women's pull made anyone more appreciative of the strength that women have." Another woman who went on a trek in 1998 said, "The women's trek [pull] was awkward. Guys standing watching us. . . . Not one word was said about how we were able to do it and we were strong—just a lot of guys feeling helpless because they could have done it easier and faster and that made them emotional because it's their job to protect and provide and take care of families."⁶⁸ While the women's pull and the whole trek experience didn't resonate for these two women and many others, for many youth, treks have been a spiritually profound and testimony-nurturing experience.⁶⁹ If leaders, parents, and youth didn't find value in handcart treks, such events would have faded away years ago.

While the Church has emphasized making adequate preparations for health and safety issues, tragic events have happened on treks. The death of a twenty-nine-year-old mother of two in June 2016, serving with her husband as a "Ma" and "Pa" in a youth handcart trek in Oklahoma, raised questions about the overall safety of handcart treks. The report of this death in the *Deseret News* prompted several readers to question the continuance of the handcart program in the Church. A reader from Mapleton, Utah, asked, "Is this a wake-up call for re-evaluation of the use of handcart treks in the church?" Another reader from Salmon, Idaho, stated that handcart treks are a "part of the Mormon culture that needs to go away."⁷⁰ Concerned with the "needless risk" posed by these handcart treks, a *Salt Lake Tribune* reader urged Church leaders

68. Kerj and Kristine A., "The Women's Pull, Comments," *By Common Consent*, June 9, 2015.

69. John L. Hart, "Life Changing—Youth Handcart Treks," *Church News*, July 29, 2006, 6–7.

70. "Mormon Youth Leader Dies on Trek Outing in Oklahoma," *Deseret News*, June 21, 2016, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865656625/Mormon-youth-leader-dies-on-trek-outing-in-Oklahoma.html?pg=all>. See also "Woman

to discontinue the reenactments.⁷¹ While these comments call for the wholesale elimination of the handcart program, others have voiced concern about various parts of the handcart trek program. Though the death of this leader increased the volume of voices urging Church leaders to resolve questionable features and to reexamine the viability of the whole handcart trek program, it is hard to imagine that the program will be curtailed. Certainly there will be more emphasis placed on safety.

Conclusion: The Value of Treks

While youth handcart treks gained in popularity during the 1980s and early 1990s, several factors combined to launch the Churchwide explosion of interest in youth handcart treks in the late 1990s. The handcart treks sponsored by BYU and Ricks College in the 1970s and 1980s developed a pool of people who had the experience and training to conduct local treks. The Church's lease of the Martin's Cove property adjacent to the Sun Ranch and subsequent building of a trek center made it possible for stake youth groups to hold treks without having to build their own carts. And the widespread publicity attending the cross-country wagon and handcart trek during the Mormon Pioneer Trail Sesquicentennial Celebration in 1997 may have sparked local Church leaders to think about holding treks for their youth. Articles about treks featured in the *New Era* and *Church News* and the recounting of pioneer stories in general conference helped to popularize youth handcart treks. All of these factors combined to make handcart treks widespread in the Church.

For the past two decades, the handcart trek has developed into an institutionalized component of the Church's youth program. In order to understand why these treks matter so much, we must turn to the voices of the participants. Despite the high cost of time and money, so many participants, both young and old, overwhelmingly see great redeeming value in holding treks. Rebecca Ehlert, a teen who went on a four-day trek with the East Millcreek Utah North Stake in 2010, said, "I absolutely loved it, and in a spiritual sense it was very rewarding to me. . . . The whole experience is so humbling for what the Saints then went

Dies from 'Severe Heatstroke' on LDS Pioneer Trek," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 28, 2016, A-10.

71. Ben Leimbach, "Time to End Pioneer Re-enactment Treks," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 26, 2016, O-2.

through.”⁷² A teenage girl from Utah shared her thoughts about going on a trek with her ward at Martin’s Cove in 2013 in a touching thirty-minute video documentary:

It was really good, and I was able to feel the spirit. Some kind of crazy things happened along the way. Our tent broke in half. People lost shoes and just things like that. I don’t know. It was just a really good experience to have, even though sometimes I was just like, I don’t want to go any more. I was like *so* done. I want my bed. I want my TV. I was *done*. But I learned that just by pressing forward, that’s just how the pioneers did it; we just had to keep going.⁷³

As Church leaders and parents hear these kind of remarks, observe behavioral changes, and witness the beginnings of religious spirituality in their youth, they see real value and importance in these youth handcart treks. That is the driving force for the continuance of the handcart trek program.

The youth handcart trek program in the Church has continued to grow beyond all expectations. Where once the handcart was a novelty in the Mormon past, its meaning has evolved over time within the Mormon community. In the 1850s, it was a temporary expedient in Mormon emigration. After the end of the pioneer period and continuing to the present, the handcart now stands as a symbol—possibly today’s key symbol—in community celebrations to honor the Mormon past. Today it also serves another purpose. Parents and leaders employ handcart treks as a means of helping their children connect with and “appreciate some of the hardships of the early Church pioneers.”⁷⁴ But more than that, they hope and pray that their children will, by dint of pushing a two-wheeled cart, gain some measure of personal spiritual growth.

Melvin L. Bashore recently retired as a curator of historic sites with the LDS Church Historical Department. He received his BFA in modern painting from the University of Utah, his MEd from University of Missouri–St. Louis, and his MLS in library science from BYU. He worked for the Church Historical

72. Quoted in “Participants Know Popular Treks Are a Far Cry from the Handcart Pioneers’ Sufferings,” *Deseret News*, July 23, 2010.

73. Jeff Lundgren, “Mormon Pioneer Trek Documentary,” July 12, 2013, video, 28:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14Fe4x7kRr8>.

74. *Mormon Handcart Treks*, 2.

Department for thirty-eight years and conceived and developed the Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel database (<http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/>). In 2010, he received a Distinguished Service Award from the Oregon-California Trails Association for his work on this project. He has been researching trail mortality for more than a decade. He has also published numerous articles in wide-ranging historical journals. His recent publications include “‘The Bloodiest Drama Ever Perpetrated on American Soil’: Staging the Mountain Meadows Massacre for Entertainment,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 80 (summer 2012): 258–71, and “Quitting Coffee and Tea: Marketing Alternative Hot Drinks to Mormons,” *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 1 (2016): 73–104.