

# The PIONEERING MORMON

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**The greatness of a people consists not so much in what they suffer as in what they do about it. So much emphasis is placed upon the privations and hardships endured by the Mormon pioneers that we are apt to think that their sufferings constitute their best claim to greatness.**

Pioneering has always imposed hardships, but examination of some of the specific obstacles and problems the pioneers had to face and the methods and means they adopted to master every situation will reveal a sounder basis for the homage we pay.

Mormon emigration across the plains to Salt Lake City and from there out to the widely scattered colonies where the new converts were to find homes is a story that has no parallel in history. The great trek of the first company led by Brigham Young in person from Illinois to the valley of the Great Salt Lake was truly of heroic proportions, but that was only the beginning of a movement that was destined to transplant to this new western soil by the primitive means of ox teams and handcarts one thousand times their number within two decades.

Every year after the trail was broken the road across the plains was choked with the primitive conveyances of Mormon converts on their way to Zion. How these bedraggled, poverty-stricken Saints were received, cared for, assimilated into the body politic and converted into self-sustaining, independent citizens is a story of cooperation and leadership that is unmatched.

As a yardstick of measurement for the achievements of Mormon colonization let us write down here the conditions that our government feels today are essential in a country to justify its opening for settlement. An area which does not measure up satisfactorily under all the following surveys is classed as "sub-marginal land" and is withdrawn from entry. This yardstick is called by the government a "Resource Survey":

## 1. Soil Survey

- a. profile, mountains, hills, valleys, washes, drainage, etc.
- b. chemical content determined by soil borings on every forty acres
- c. Adaptability to farming or other uses
- d. Effects of and possibilities for irrigation
- e. Acre costs of providing irrigation water
- f. Water courses and their seasonal flow

## 2. Climatic Survey

- a. Length of time for which records are available
- b. Mean and maximum temperatures over the year
- c. Number of frost free days in a year
- d. Length of growing season
- e. Annual and seasonal precipitation
- f. Susceptibility to hailstorms, cyclones, floods, frosts, drouth, etc.

## 3. Cover Survey

- a. Types of native vegetation
- b. Kinds and varieties of forage plants
- c. Noxious weeds and plants
- d. Clearance problems and costs
- e. Grazing capacity of the area
- f. Season of use for grazing or other uses
- g. Types of livestock the country best adapted to sustain

## 4. Wild Life Survey

- a. Game—list of all wild animals found in the area
- b. Game which might be successfully planted there
- c. Fish and fishing streams and lakes
- d. Wild fowl
- e. Predatory animals
- f. Insect pest

## 5. Agricultural Economic Survey

- a. Marketing facilities and possibilities
- b. Transportation facilities in and out
- c. Economic unit — size of farm or ranch advisable
- d. Types of agricultural enterprise best suited for

## 6. Sources of Supplemental Income

- a. Forest — lumbering, logging, fuel wood, etc.
- b. Mining — opportunities for employment and markets
- c. Fisheries
- f. Tourist attractions and recreational facilities
- g. Industrial and business

## 7. Sociological Survey

- a. Schools
- b. Churches
- c. Private resources and past experiences of proposed settlers
- d. Compatibility of nationalities who settle there
- e. Best types of settlers to admit on the project

Under the present Resettlement and Land Utilization program the government has set down certain hard and fast minimum conditions which must obtain before a tract of land is thrown open for entry. Moreover, Uncle Sam is disposed to hand pick, for sociological reasons, those he admits upon his projects. These conditions, in the eyes of our government, are considered both elemental and fundamental.

Before a settler enters upon the land, Uncle Sam must go first and determine by depth borings and chemical analyses on every forty acre tract that the soil is fertile and satisfactory. The kind of crops it is best adapted for must also be determined by the experts. Climatic conditions by at least ten years of weather observations must be favorable. There must be accessible markets with good roads, railroad transportation, and other marketing facilities for the surplus commodities that may be produced on the project.

Now read the above list of surveys carefully again and then lay the yardstick over the Great Basin as it was known in 1847, when Brigham Young looked down upon its barren reaches and said, "This is the place." It will be seen at a glance that the Mormons in settling here cut squarely across every condition that our government today considers indispensable to successful colonization.

Of all the colonizing in America the Mormons had the least reason to hope for success. They chose the hardest land of all to subdue and they were the poorest equipped of all pioneers both from the standpoint of experience and of material supplies. They had been driven in abject poverty into the wilderness to perish. They had largely consumed their meagre stores in a long nomadic ox team journey through a wild country where there was no possibility of replenishing them. They reached their chosen land in midsummer when it was too late to hope to plant and mature a crop. There was no base of supplies to which they could look for relief. The ground was so parched and hard that it had to be flooded before it could be plowed, and untried irrigation must be relied upon to substitute for the rainfall that had always in the past supplied moisture for their crops.

Consider each of the above listed seven surveys in the light of what was known of the Great Basin in 1847, and it will be seen that if our present paternal old Uncle Sam had been on the job then, he would have padlocked against entry practically all of Brigham Young's State of Deseret, a vast territory out of which seven states have since been carved.

Not a single soil boring had been made between the Rocky Mountains and the Sierras, and if chemical analysis had been thought of, the great patches of land that were white with alkali would have foredoomed the country for settlement.

The Great Basin had been much more extensively frequented by white men than is commonly supposed, but they were not the kind of men who made careful observations or records. They were trappers, and Indian slave traders, and squaw men, and a few migratory missionaries who passed occasionally over the old trails. They told of a country of mountains and plateaus too high and too cold to produce crops, and of deserts too hot and dry.

Even as late as 1859, Horace Greeley, after a trip across the continent, wrote these terse sentences concerning Utah:

In places the sage bush for miles in extent is dead and withering, seemingly parched up by the all-pervading drouth. . . . Frost is very destructive and occurs in every month in the year. . . . The climate is severe and capricious. . . . But little rain falls in the summer and that little is speedily evaporated from the hot earth leaving the clay as thirsty as ever. . . . I fear it [the country] is doomed to perpetual barrenness. . . . This land of desolation seems, therefore, utterly irredeemable.

"Parched, glistening, blistering, blinding, sterility," were his favorite adjectives. Speaking of a country running two hundred miles south from Great Salt Lake and as far west, he said: "If ever Uncle Sam should sell that tract at one cent an acre he would swindle the purchaser outrageously."

The concensus of those plainsmen who knew the country best was that it was wholly unsuited for colonization. Jim Bridger told Brigham Young that he would give a thousand dollars to know that corn could be matured in Salt Lake valley. Even the savages, inured as they were to the hardships of a desert land and familiar with every plant and bird and animal that could be eaten to sustain life, found it necessary to grub for worms to subsist in its uncompromising

sterility. Stable markets for any products the Mormons might produce did not exist within a thousand miles, and the road across the plains could not be considered by any stretch of imagination an adequate marketing transportation facility.

One of the first major problems that the Mormons in the Great Basin had to solve was that of isolation. They were one thousand miles from the Missouri River — their nearest point of supplies. The narrow ribbon of road they must travel to reach there was open only about half the year. Ox teams were the most practical mode of travel, and one thousand pounds was the standard load for a yoke of cattle. An ox, therefore, pulled less than his own weight. It required large herds of cattle to bring any considerable amount of goods or to take back any surpluses the people here might produce. The animals had to pick their living, and there was a limit to the amount of grass that grew by the roadside. Transportation, therefore, had to be balanced against the forage resources of the highway. There was not one commercial feed yard where hay could be purchased between Florence, Nebraska, and Great Salt Lake City.

Average sized companies that crossed the plains had five to eight hundred cattle and the larger companies had from one thousand to three thousand head. It sounds like a lot of ox power but it took eighty head, plus some reserves, to bring as much freight as we ship today in one minimum freight car. Under conditions of this kind it will be seen that there was a constant shortage in Utah of what we today consider indispensable necessities.

In 1849, a carrying company was organized in Salt Lake City to carry freight and passengers across the plains. The passengers were taken in a light wagon drawn by mules and the freight by oxen. Passenger fare was three hundred dollars to Florence (now Omaha) and the freight rate was two hundred fifty dollars a ton. The company operated only in the summer months and the travel schedule was sixty-five to seventy days one way.

The old prairie schooners, those giant wagons of the plains, with a box twenty feet long, five feet deep and six feet wide, with wheels six and one-half and seven feet high and eight feet apart on the axle, were loaded five thousand to seven thousand pounds and were drawn by six to eight yoke of cattle. This is about the load that our freighters of a few years ago used to bring from Lund to Cedar City with one team.

In 1860, Russell, Majors and Waddell organized the pony express and they brought special mail through to Salt Lake City in ten days. They also organized a passenger service which cut the rate from Omaha to Salt Lake City to one hundred eighty dollars, but when the Civil War broke out they raised the rate to three hundred fifty dollars a passenger. (See Abstracted Indian Trust Bonds, July Era, p. 430, and this issue, p. 502)

There was so much outfitting for the plains at St. Louis and other towns along the Missouri River that these places became great livestock marts. During the fifties, however, the California Gold Rush and the Mormon immigration was so great that the country for three hundred miles back from these outfitting points was drained of its cattle. Oxen at these points became scarce and high priced and hard to get in appreciable numbers.

Most of the Mormon European converts were from the poor working classes. They were from the shops and factories of London and Sheffield, from the coal mines of Scotland and Wales, and peasant farmers and craftsmen from England, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, and Germany. There was a rich harvest of converts from these countries, and when they joined the Church they immediately became imbued with a burning desire to come to Utah.

They were not the kind who could pay three hundred dollars for a ride from Florence to Salt Lake City, nor pay the commercial rate of two hundred fifty dollars per ton freight on the necessary supplies they must have to make a start here. If they came to Zion some other means of travel must be found for them.

In the light of all these conditions, the greatest transportation feat in history was accomplished by the Mormon Pioneers in bringing more than one hundred thousand such converts to Utah. Assimilating them after they came was an even greater achievement, for they were of all nations and tongues and habits and customs and prejudices. The polyglot assemblage of nationalities with their conflicting traditions and customs had to be amalgamated into a harmonious working society. Today our Uncle Sam would see trouble in Mormondom under such a situation for the principle of "compatibility of nationalities" had not been taken into consideration.

This transportation of converts was accomplished largely through two media — organization in Europe of what was called "Ten Pound Companies," and in Utah and Europe of the "Perpetual Emigrating Company." For ten pounds sterling (less than fifty dollars in American money) the Church undertook to bring one person, not from the Missouri River to Utah, but from Liverpool, England, to Great Salt Lake City, and with them their necessary personal effects. This sum was found to be inadequate and was later raised fifty percent.

If the converts were unable to raise the ten pounds and had relatives or friends in Utah who would sign with them as surety, they could borrow the money from the Perpetual Emigrating Company. They were expected to repay their loan with a nominal interest when they could, and the money went back into the fund to help someone else to Zion. Perpetual Emigrating money was therefore a revolving fund that was used to help the poor over and over many times.

Through the late fifties, those cattle which had grown scarce on the Missouri River had been moved in large numbers through the process of immigration to Utah. They accumulated here, for there was little market for them in this country. By this time also the peak of immigration was on and the Church found it cheaper to send outfits back from here to bring the immigrants in than to purchase outfits in Florence or St. Louis.

The process of immigration was reversed and teams were sent from here back to meet the poor Saints and bring them to the Zion of their hearts' desire. From 1860 to 1868 inclusive, five hundred wagons each year were sent back. With these caravans went many surplus cattle. Families of the immigrants who could afford to buy a wagon were encouraged to do so and the surplus cattle were either sold or lent to them to pull their wagon to Utah. In this way the immigrant-carrying capacity of the caravans was greatly augmented.

Use of the outfits was donated by the people in Utah for the duration of the trip to Florence and return, and the teamsters were called by the Church as missionaries to drive them. The compensation for all of this service was a labor tithing receipt given to those who participated in the expedition.

In 1862, the stakes of Parowan, Beaver, and St. George (comprising the southern mission) filled such a call for fifty-seven wagons with three yoke of good cattle to each, with provisions for a six months' journey for the teamsters and the poor immigrants they would bring back. There was to be a teamster for each wagon and one extra man on horseback for each four wagons to look after the loose cattle and hunt for game for the company.

The stories of the assembling of those outfits are meaty morsels of history to us today. Here is one from the records of the Harmony Ward:

March 16, 1863. 8 o'clock a. m. A messenger arrived with letter from Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow requesting Harmony Branch to furnish three outfits of wagons with four yoke of cattle to each, to go down to Florence and assist in bringing out the poor Saints. Each wagon to be outfitted for a six months' journey and each team to carry one thousand pounds of flour to feed the poor on the road.

The three teams from this place were said to be the best rigs in Washington County.

March 26th. In a meeting M. H. Darrow, George Woolsey and Benjamin Redd were sustained by vote to make the trip and were formally blessed and set apart for this mission. Benjamin J. Redd requested a dance before leaving which was granted and a good time had.

Thus in the days of their poverty, the little town of Harmony, with less than a hundred people, raised in one day by donation an outfit that could scarcely be raised in any small Mormon town in these days of our comparative prosperity.

The handcart companies were also, in the main, of the "ten pound" emigrants. But whether they were in the handcart companies or with the ox trains, very few of the Mormon converts ever expected to ride across the plains.

Mormons from the old country, regardless of their financial status, crossed the ocean as a rule as steerage passengers on sailing vessels. They cooked their own food and cared for themselves in every way. Usually they came in large companies of from three hundred to a thousand on a boat, with two or three missionaries returning from a foreign mission, to look after them. They were always organized into a traveling branch of the Church, holding their meetings regularly on shipboard and exercising the functions of an organized ward. As a result of this practice they administered comfort and assistance to each other, and they escaped many of the disagreeable things that usually fell to the lot of steerage passengers. There were even many conversions to the Church of officers and sailors who saw in the conduct of these happy passengers a practical Christianity they had never seen before.

Mormon immigrants to America became known as the most desirable type of passengers, and shipping companies bid for them and gave them many privileges on shipboard that were usually denied to steerage passengers.

When they reached the place of outfitting for the plains, they were divided up into groups of two or three families — eight to ten persons to one wagon. The wagon carried only their food, bedding, and necessary camp equipment. The people themselves walked by the roadside and most of them came through the long journey happy and well. As they marched along they sang the hymns they loved, "Oh Babylon, Oh Babylon, we bid thee farewell," and "Come, come ye Saints, no toil nor labor fear." They were a happy lot despite their discomforts. My mother used to say she danced her way across the plains.

Eighty-five thousand of the early Utah pioneers got their passage money through the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, and another twenty to thirty thousand were able to pay down for their ten or fifteen pound fares. Divine Providence watched over them, for not one of those sailing vessels went down with a Mormon on board.

Thus the Church solved the high cost transportation problem and built its commonwealth in the Great Basin. Through the ways outlined above, it brought to this intermountain territory in two decades over a hundred thousand of the best type of settlers any country ever had. Poor they were, and "greenhorns," from many foreign lands, but they had in them the stout fibre of real pioneers. Green they were to the conditions they must live in but they were stripped and willing fighters, ready to meet the challenge of the desert, "fight or die."

**Why were the Mormon pioneers great? Because through faith and prayer and industry, and unity and spartan perseverance they redeemed "the irredeemable" and converted a desert of "all pervading drouth" into a fertile land of abundant harvests. The Mormons had the wisdom and good sense to organize and to plan collectively and through unity of purpose they succeeded where any other methods of colonization in this parched and arid purgatory would have been foredoomed to failure.**

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