

Embodying The Pioneers:
Handcart Pioneers, Mormon Trail Re-Enactments, And Sensory History

by
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DEDICATION

To Madeline and my children, Tate, Simone, Quincy, and Fiona. It took years to finish this project, and I tried to be a good partner and father as I immersed myself in my research. Your support meant the world to me; you are my compass and my light.

I quoted Albert Camus far too many times to all of you in my justifications:

“It takes time to live.”

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ABSTRACT

Sensory history provides scholars with a deeper understanding of the past by allowing them to tease out people's visceral experiences. The popularity of re-enactments also points to the value of sensory history. People create deeper connections to the past as they try to physically embody the past. Although there is great value in sensory history as a methodology to historians and those who engage in re-enactments, its use has been limited. By focusing on sensory history, historical accounts can reignite history for those who have turned away from the discipline. It can provide greater detail for those attempting to re-enact historical events. This dissertation calls for professional historians to take sensory history and re-enactments more seriously. The sensory history of the Martin and Willie handcart companies and the attempts to re-enact those events are an excellent case study. Latter-day Saints consider bodily refinement through trials essential for salvation. In October of 1856, two Mormon handcart companies became the quintessential example of enduring suffering to reach God. They became stranded in blizzard-like conditions 60 miles outside Casper, Wyoming at a place called Martin's Cove. Before a rescue party was able to reach them, over two hundred emigrants perished on the Mormon Trail. Today, thousands of young Latter-day Saints (Mormons) return to this place to re-enact their sensory experience for spiritual enlightenment. This dissertation argues that their attempts to recreate the pioneers' bodily experiences allow them to create a deeper connection with the past.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation began in August 2018 when I exited the passenger side of a Dodge Durango and walked towards Martin's Cove, the site of the worst overland trail disaster in American history. Thousands of Latter-day Saint youth now flock to this location each year to participate in re-enactments to become spiritually enlightened. In October 1856, heavy snowstorms trapped the two handcart companies in the area. While an organized rescue saved many, hundreds died in the Wyoming prairie as snow buried their carts. As a sensory historian, I was interested in experiencing these re-enactments. I eventually convinced the historian Gene Sessions, a professor from Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, to accompany me to the site.

Our objective was to embed ourselves in a Mormon Trail re-enactment group and trek with them. Our cell phones had spotty service. The only signs of modern America were the cars and busses in the parking lot adjacent to an unassuming visitor center. As we entered the area, two seasoned LDS missionaries greeted us warmly with friendly smiles as we inquired about the events that run through the summer months. Inside the visitor center, we observed several pictures depicting handcart pioneers and a large map highlighting the places they struggled to survive in 1856. We inquired if we could tag along and observe one of these re-enactments (called trek by believers). The missionaries were hesitant about us joining because young people would be engaged in theatrical performances. Gene and I assured them that our intentions were not to mock or criticize. Eventually, we received reluctant permission from one of the multiple trek groups for us to observe. We both eagerly grabbed our water bottles and packed lunches and headed toward a group of fifty or so young men and women already walking toward Martin's Cove.

Although we were acquainted with these Mormon Trail re-enactments, Gene and I had never physically witnessed one. We were interested in using an ‘emic’ approach, where we became not only spectators but participants. While we traversed the rough landscape with young believers who varied in age from thirteen to eighteen, we were impressed with their dedication to the effort. It appeared that their re-enactments were not merely pretending but something different; something more intimate that engaged their senses as much as their minds. In one striking re-enactment, the young men carried the young women across the slow-moving Sweetwater River to re-create a popular story in Mormon lore. According to legend, three young men carried the feeble handcart companies across the icy Sweetwater only later to die from the feat. Later, the young women were charged with pushing their cumbersome handcarts up a steep hill without the aid of the young men who stood quietly with their nineteenth-century period piece hats on their chests. In all, the day proved to be very illuminating as we became fascinated with the complexity of the re-enactment.

That evening, we reached the climactic moment for young Latter-day Saints as they pondered the handcart pioneer’s suffering at Martin’s Cove. Believers have identified a canyon within the Rattlesnake Range as the location where the Martin company, the last emigrant group that had left with their handcarts, were trapped in 1856 during a vicious storm. Many eventually perished from malnourishment and hypothermia. The young trekkers clustered around a podium erected for guest speakers to share details about the company stranded in the canyon. On that day, however, the podium remained empty. Instead, young Latter-day Saints were instructed to remain reverent and contemplate their own struggles as compared to the trials of the pioneers.

As I recalled the handcart story in my mind, I focused on how my senses responded to the surrounding environment. The early autumn sun crept closer to the horizon as we paused on the well-cut path. The barren, craggy rocks and the Wyoming wind's chill allowed us to feel powerful emotions as we participated in experiential history. It seemed as if all my senses were operating at full capacity. I felt more alert to the surrounding environment: my eyes focused on the landmarks; my ears were attuned to the low hum of the wind and the subtle clatter of footsteps; I was aware of every rock and stick under my feet; the smell of the Wyoming environment became clearly noticeable. At one point, I looked at Gene and said something about the color of the rocks, only to be hushed by an older gentleman. As I turned around, I could see the seriousness in his face when he gently reminded me, "there are spirits resting in these rocks, it's best we not disturb them." I apologized and refocused. It was evident that the trek leaders intended for the participants to have a strong sensory experience.

As I contemplated my experience at Martin's Cove, I kept coming back to how these re-enactors were attempting to tap into the multisensory world of the pioneers. I often replayed in my mind the reprimand I'd received. The canyon's auditory environment was sacred and silent. I started paying attention to how leaders monitored the trail's sounds, sights, smells tastes, and bodies. I became convinced that there was something about how they re-enacted the sensory experiences that was at the core of the entire experience—both for those in the past and the present.

A major aim with this dissertation is to argue that the field of sensory history can spark needed interest in history. This isn't a unique claim. Scholars who utilize this methodology have presented a plethora of reasons why there is something beneficial about studying history through

each of the five senses. I am convinced that when a historian includes thick descriptions of something sensorial, it can create intimate connections with past people.¹ As humans, we are affected every day by not only sights, but sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. They dictate how we navigate our world. Past people were no different. These senses, historically, link us together. Consequently, sensory descriptions can profoundly increase our understanding of history.

While sensory history as a respectable field stands on its own merits, this dissertation provides further evidence of its significance by considering re-enactments. My experience with Mormon Trail re-enactors in 2018 sent me on an academic journey and influenced the development of this dissertation. I've been a high school social studies teacher for over a decade and have used an array of pedagogical practices to pique interest in history. I insist that the senses should be incorporated into how we write and teach history. To warrant this claim, I turn to re-enactments. I discovered when my students interact with what past people saw, smelled, heard, tasted, it created meaningful connections to historical people. In one example, a student's father had built a replicated WWII Jeep and loaded it with supplies used during the War. He parked the vehicle outside the school and encouraged students to put on the helmet and jacket, feel the canteens and boots, and listen to the Willy's motor as he revved the engine up. I observed students who would otherwise sit uninterested in a classroom, become enthralled by living

¹ "Thick description" is an anthropological term used to extract the complex layers of meaning that constitute a culture. This cannot be achieved through a mere factual account and must include detailed examples that describe the complexities of human behavior. Clifford Geertz articulated this theory of "thick description." He implored anthropologists to provide contextual information about the cultural phenomena they study. Anthropologists often investigate the specific sensory responses of their subjects to tease out the intimate connections they have with each other and the environment. For further reading, see Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *Daedalus*, 101, no. 1 (Winter, 1972).

history. One student, following the demonstration, remarked that he appreciated how I introduced stories about how the average WWII soldier experienced the environment. “It helped me,” he said, “appreciate the Jeep more.”

As I researched this project, I knew Mormon Trail re-enactments needed to be the case study to validate sensory history. I could have chosen from countless examples, but “trek,” as believers call it, inspired me personally. I went into the archives hoping to understand how the senses influenced the handcart pioneers as they marched towards their tragic experience in Wyoming. What follows is my attempt to advocate for sensory history as a more utilized methodology.

Within the field of Mormon history, I hope to place this dissertation into a larger conversation about bodily progression. The handcart emigrant’s journey becomes an example for Latter-day Saints on how to overcome the weaknesses of temporal bodies. Their transition from England to America involved a deeply embodied experience which challenged the pioneers every step of the way. By looking at their sensory experiences during this transition, it verifies why thousands of Latter-day Saints re-enact their experiences for a similar bodily refinement.

Historical Context

To better understand the connection between the handcart story and contemporary re-enactments, I need to contextualize Mormon history within sensory history. Joseph Smith, a farmer’s son from Upstate New York, claimed that he had revelations as a teen and later organized a church around a restored gospel. Smith’s religion appeared during the Second Great Awakening and deviated from the Protestant revivalists of the day. These preachers claimed salvation was obtainable through the grace of Christ and the Bible. To the ministers proselytizing

in New York, they were troubled by Smith's radical approaches. He claimed prophetic revelations, introduced new scripture (the Book of Mormon), and organized a complex new religious movement. The Book of Mormon influenced believers to embrace a religion where the body is essential for salvation. A passage in the Book of Mormon, "You are saved after all you can do," clarified a dispute about grace and works. Smith's teachings emphasized the universality of Jesus' grace while hinting at an expectation that followers engage in corporal commandments.

By the 1830s, Smith instructed his followers to enact their faith by physically building the Kingdom of God. He moved his people out of New York and partitioned his people in Kirtland, Ohio, and Western Missouri. He promoted egalitarianism among his followers and required the physically capable to construct homes and businesses for new converts. He sent missionaries with no financial assistance to convert white settlers in the East and Indigenous people in the West. By the 1830s, Mormonism was a religion built upon the bodies of the followers.

Smith also emphasized the importance of sensory experiences to recognizing the presence of the Holy Ghost. Gary Ettari's recently published book on the relationship between bodies and Mormonism sheds light. He argues that Smith taught early believers that "bodily sensation is evidence of spiritual truth."² Smith identified spiritual experiences to be trustworthy (if it did not contradict Smith's teachings) and reminded followers the God uses sensations to guide worthy disciples. To access these experiences, one must use their sensory capabilities.

² Gary Ettari, *Mormonism, Empathy, and Aesthetics: Beholding the Body* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 188.

Listening for the spirit or perceiving the countenance of the Prophet depended on the senses.

“We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the Celestial Kingdom.” Smith taught, “The great principle of happiness consists in having a body.”³

While Joseph Smith emphasized spiritual experiences outside the body, at other times he taught the Lord validates his church through their senses. The Three Witnesses (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris) to the Golden Plates proves this. An angel of God appeared to them and showed the plates containing the Book of Mormon. The men heard the voice of the Lord and felt the plates with their hands. In this instance, three different senses validated one of Smith’s claims.⁴

Smith tested the physical and spiritual loyalty of his followers as he moved his church into Missouri. During the 1830s, he funneled thousands of believers into Western Missouri. This location became the New Zion and the heart of the Latter-day Saint movement. The newly arrived Mormons incited backlash from Missourians who saw the presence of Northerners in the territory as a threat to Southern frontier society. Over time, skirmishes between Missourians and Mormons led to chaos. In 1836, Smith tested the loyalties of his followers by instructing them to walk 1,000 miles from Kirtland to protect the Missouri Mormons in their fight against armed mobs. While Smith failed to broker peace, this march, called Zion’s Camp, became a testing ground. Those who willingly strained their bodies without complaint were elevated to a higher status in Smith’s eyes. On October 27, 1838, Governor Lilburn Boggs issued an Extermination

³ Ibid.,27.

⁴ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2005), 76-79. Bushman has written what most historians believe is the definitive biography on Joseph Smith. He used sources unavailable to previous researchers and argues that Smith’s religion hinges on his claimed notions of revelations.

Order requiring Mormons to leave Missouri or be destroyed. Three days later, dozens of Mormons were massacred at Haun's Mill and others \were burned out of their homes. By 1839, most Mormons had exited the State.⁵

Smith expected his followers to use their bodies to advance Mormonism as he established another settlement on the banks of the Mississippi River in Illinois. His burgeoning city, called Nauvoo, grew exponentially as British and Scandinavian converts flocked to the area. During the early 1840s, Smith introduced doctrines that involved the body, including baptism for the dead, a soteriology based on works, and bodily engagement inside temples. Persecution re-emerged as rumors arose of Joseph Smith engaging in polygamy. Smith had introduced the practice to a handful of believers, and former disgruntled followers spread rumors of adultery to the public. By 1844, his enemies plotted to detain Joseph Smith. He and others were arrested and on June 27, Smith was murdered along with his brother Hyrum in a small jail.⁶

After a contentious succession crisis, many followers sided with Brigham Young, who like Smith, tested believer's bodies, and sensory capabilities. By 1846, continued attacks on the Mormon community drove the Saints from Nauvoo to Iowa and the surrounding territory. After deliberation at their temporary camp in Winter Quarters, Nebraska, Young announced a mass exodus to the Intermountain West. Young informed his people that believers would walk the 1,300 miles to the Salt Lake Valley. In this way, Mormons validated their loyalty to the Church with their feet. In 1847, Young sent a letter to the Saints before departing. He reminded them that

⁵ Ibid., 237, 364-366.

⁶ Benjamin E. Park, *Kingdom of Nauvoo* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020), 57-58, 96-97.

the first wagons West were prepared to “take our full share of trouble, trials, losses and crosses, hardships and fatigues.”⁷ Young warned the trekkers to be alert with their senses on the trails.

One of Brigham Young’s few public revelations came in January 1847. The revelation urged the Saints to be spiritually prepared for the journey. It included language that called for “well-abled” and “strong” men to accompany the Saints. Like many LDS commandments, the promise of God’s protection hinged on an ability to be physically able and mentally awake. On July 24, the first vanguard of pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley.

As settlements grew in the Great Basin, Brigham Young envisioned the handcart plan as an economic way to bring European converts to Utah. With debt piling up, in 1851 he contemplated a potential immigration by handcart:

You have been expecting the time would come when you could journey across the mountains in your fine carriages, your good wagons, and have all the comforts of life that heart could wish; but your expectations are vain, and if you wait for those things you will never come Some of the Saints now in our midst, came hither with wagons or carts made of wood, without a particle of iron, hooping their wheels with hickory, or rawhide, or ropes, and had as good and safe a journey as any in the camps ... and can you not do the same?⁸

By 1855, Young was calling for the "gathering" to begin in earnest:

We are sanguine that such a train will out-travel any ox train that can be started. They should have a few good cows to furnish milk, and a few beef cattle to drive and butcher as they may need. In this way the expense, risk, loss and perplexity of teams will be obviated, and the Saints will more effectually escape the scenes of distress, anguish and death which have often laid so many of our brethren and sisters in the dust.⁹

⁷ Stanley B. Kimball and Violet Kimball, *Villages on Wheels: A Social History of the Gathering to Zion* (Sandy, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Young's adoption of handcarts confirmed the believers' expectation that they would be required to use their bodies to partake in the splendors of Zion. While salvation was not contingent on followers residing in the Great Basin, Utah was delegated as gathering place for God's people. Finding a way, regardless of financial means, to emigrate to Utah became a priority for LDS leaders and believers. Converts were instructed in publications and sermons to seek opportunities to come Zion. The distance, however, separating Europe from Utah was considerable. The physical requirements for emigration included a strong body and a healthy immune system. Those who were physically incapable attempted the journey and often perished along the trail.

The handcart migration began in 1856 with three successful companies arriving in Utah in record time. The converts were issued handcarts at an embarkment point in Iowa. Edmund Ellsworth and Daniel D. McArthur led the first companies. Ellsworth's company had 266 people and 52 handcarts. McArthur's was a similar size with 220 people and 44 handcarts. Edward Bunker led a third company, which left Iowa City on June 23. In July, the first weary emigrants stumbled into the Salt Lake City with their dilapidated handcarts. Crowds lined the streets to welcome the companies, and Brigham Young personally greeted them with a smile. Edmond Ellsworth proclaimed, "I am persuaded that if there had been no wagons for such people, there would have been none sick, or weak, but their faith would have been strong in the name of the Lord."¹⁰

¹⁰ Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 236.

The last two handcart companies were less prepared for the arduous journey. James Willie and Edward Martin captained the remaining companies of 1856. 980 immigrants prepared to leave on June 26. However, their tents and handcarts were not finished. Huddled together in Iowa, the emigrants were already worn down from their journey across the Atlantic. LDS Apostle Franklin D. Richards reported that Martin's Company had a "disproportionate number of women, children, aged and feeble emigrants,"¹¹ Patience Loader of the Martin company later felt that not wintering in Iowa City was a mistake. She wrote in her journal that they should have "staid in Iowa which would have been better for us."¹² Their faith in God and the Church's leaders provided the confidence they needed to push them forward.

The Willie company quickly witnessed the hardships that often-accompanied trail life. The company trundled across Iowa to Winter Quarters (since renamed Florence), Nebraska, in twenty-six days. They debated whether to continue so late in the season and risk mountain storms or spend the winter in Florence. Those who decided the issue pushed the Saints forward. Willie's company departed Florence on August 19th and made 265 miles by September 5th. They lost, however, thirty head of cattle along the way. At the Platte River they experienced the first severe frost. As both companies reached Fort Laramie—five hundred miles from their destination—there was little on the shelves to resupply the companies.¹³

By October, at Willow Creek on the Sweetwater River in Wyoming, fierce storms trapped the Willie company and swept them into drifts until they were rescued. Dysentery broke out in

¹¹ Brigham Roberts, *Devil's Gate: Brigham Young and the Great Mormon Handcart Tragedy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 23.

¹² Sandra Ailey Petree, *Recollections of Past Days: The Autobiography of Patience Loader Rozsa Archer* (Logan, Utah State University Press, 2006), 60.

¹³ Roberts, *Devil's Gate*, 207.

the camp, frostbite was common, and death and burials were daily occurrences. Howling storms smothered the emigrants. Each morning they crawled out of their tents, numb, exhausted, and starved. As they steadily weakened, John Chislett, later confided, "Life went out as smoothly as a lamp ceases to burn when the oil is gone."¹⁴ Captain Willie started out alone to find help, and fortuitously stumbled on the relief train and returned with fourteen wagons.¹⁵ Once over South Pass and descending into Green River Valley, the weather moderated, and the disabled were loaded and carried in wagons. Willie's company arrived in Great Salt Lake City on November 9. The Willie company endured 77 deaths or about 19 percent of the group.¹⁶

Martin's company fared even worse. They were bogged down with young children along with the aged and feeble. They left Florence on August 25th, one week after Wille's group. Their delayed start and poorly made handcarts impeded their movement. Once in Wyoming, they could not overcome the snowdrifts and ice. Children who tried to ride in the carts only caused them to break down more readily. As Martin's company shivered in their tents at a canyon in the Rattlesnake Mountains, death came quickly to the starved emigrants who had exhausted their rations. Martin and his company reached Green River by November 21st and by the 28th made it to the Weber River. Two days later they struggled into Salt Lake City. Chislett said of Martin's company that of six hundred who started, more than one-quarter perished. Chislett wrote "Their campground [on the North Platte] became a veritable graveyard before they left. Frostbite

¹⁴Harold Schindler, *In Another Time* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998), 67.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶ Melvin J. Bashore, "Mortality on the Mormon Trail, 1847–1868," *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 53, no. 4 (2014): 117.

survivors without feet, toes, or fingers could be seen in the territory-many crippled for life.”¹⁷

Among the Martin Company of 576, a total of 145, or close to 25 percent, died of exposure.¹⁸

While only 4% of all Mormons trekking West used handcarts, their experiences, and the heroic rescue that saved them, became one of the most memorialized stories in Mormon history. As the Church accepted modernism and integrated American values into their religion, they kept the handcart story close by; guarding it and celebrating the story which promotes sacrifice and heroism. By the twenty-first century, leaders began implementing re-enactments to test young believers who are expected to live like the handcart pioneers. They engage in theatrical performances which replicate the sensory experiences to test their bodies.

Sensory History and Re-enactments

This dissertation suggests that re-enactments validate the methodology of sensory history. This mode of studying the past can elicit visceral reactions. While sensory historians are dedicated to traditional archives, re-enactors attempt to connect to past people through theatrical performances. Both, however, claim there is something significant about smells, textures, sights, sounds, and tastes which trigger cultural memories. When re-enactments occur, participants shape the environment and engineer events to be multisensory. Like sensory historians, re-enactors are determined to recover the intimate details of past people’s sensory experiences. One therefore obtains a clearer picture about the routine decisions people chose in past societies through the examination of the senses.

¹⁷ Schindler, *In Another Time*, 67.

¹⁸ Bashore, “Mortality on the Mormon Trail,” 117.

A theme throughout this dissertation is a call for sensory history to become less peripheral and more central to historical research. Paying attention to how the senses are the catalyst for how people navigate the world, takes readers closer to understanding the historical world re-enactors yearn for—a more intimate feeling of propinquity with historical people. A sensory approach is useful for understanding both the original pioneers as well as those who seek to re-enact their experiences.

A major obstacle is to convince historians performative history-making can stimulate interest in history. The chance of hearing the wind aboard a historic ship or gripping a sword on a medieval battlefield is alluring to many. The popularity of historical reenactment confirms that people search for immediate and personal experiences available with bodily history. Re-enactments take place on virtually every continent and by a variety of different cultures. For example, more than 10,000 people participated in a sesquicentennial Civil War reenactment at Gettysburg in 2013.

Historians, unfortunately, often fail to consider how re-enactments, as sensory experiences, become the medium where people learn, connect to, and appreciate history. As the scholar Katie King puts it, “they [are] too readily dismissed by academics.”¹⁹ Living history and performance have become popular ways to study history. Even the most ardent critic must recognize re-enactments as a competitor to the monographs and articles professional historians publish.

¹⁹ Vanessa Agnew, Introduction: What is Re-enactment?” *Extreme and Sentimental History*, 46, no. 3 (2004): 330.

Peter Hoffer's important monograph *Sensory Worlds in Early America*, for example, dedicates four pages in his introduction to the relationship between sensory history and re-enactors. Yet it has been 20 years since *Sensory Worlds in Early America* was published, and few historians have addressed Hoffer's underdeveloped claims. Consequently, I intend to open the door Hoffer started to unlock. On the final page of his book, Hoffer challenged sensory historians to do their part: "the museum and archive may house the evidence of the past," Hoffer contends, "but it is up to historians and the readers of history to breathe sensuous life into the sources."²⁰ This dissertation proposes that it is re-enactments that have successfully "breathed sensuous life" into history, and it's time for professional historians to tune in.

Access to living history continues to increase as participants are encouraged to step back in time with their bodies and senses. Re-enactments are not the only example of living history. In many museums, people practice traditional handicrafts, speak in historical dialects, and wear period clothing. In each of these cases, they rely on sensory experiences to help bridge the living with the dead. The power of imagination plays a role in each of these instances. There are opportunities to embody Puritans, revolutionaries, soldiers, Western gunslingers, and 1960s astronauts. One expectation during these events is that the participant uses their bodies and senses to indulge in the experience. One spectator at a Tombstone re-enactment recalled, "The scenes they recreate are very interesting and you are so close to the action you can almost feel the recoil of the pistols."²¹ One innovative startup company called "The Zero-G Experience"

²⁰ Peter Hoffer, *Sensory Worlds in Early America* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 2003), 253.

²¹ gary426, "Education and Fun," *Trip Advisor*, January, 2020, accessed on December 4 2023, https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g31381-d2653988-Reviews-or20-The_Gunfight_Palace-Tombstone_Arizona.html.

modified a Boeing 727 which flies in parabolic arcs to create a weightless environment.

Participants float, flip, and soar as if they were in space. Regardless the event, the senses must be activated to ensure the experience feels authentic.

Sensory history can detect the accuracy of re-enactments based on proper historical research. Of course, re-enactments are not all equal. Some dedicate resources to make re-enactments accurate while others focus on spectacle over authenticity. However, just like media historians can determine the accuracy of a historical film, a sensory historian can speak to the precision of re-enactments. If re-enactors are claiming to embody past people through the senses, it is helpful to study the sensory history that provides rich descriptions and a deeper understanding of these historical people. Sensory historians are the first to agree that it's impossible to recreate exact sensory experiences. We may listen to composers from the eighteenth century or smell horse manure like someone from 1880, but it is impossible to consume or experience those sensations in the same way as those who heard the music and smelled the dung. Our experiences with contemporary music and our expectations surrounding cleanliness have fundamentally transformed how we hear and smell.

Mormon Trail re-enactments are a logical example to validate the merits of sensory history. As I trekked with re-enactors at Martin's Cove, I witnessed the power of living history. Trek attempts to control the sensory environment for the purposes of embodiment. Youth leaders manage the memories of the Willie and Martin handcart companies to create visceral and meaningful re-enactments. When the youth engage in history this way, they foster enduring relationships with past people.

Young re-enactors often return home dedicated to further studying their past ancestors. A trek participant named Parley Kovach validates this theory. He claims, “it made history come alive. Everyone just thinks the stories are stories. They know about the pioneers and how they came across, but I don't think they realize how hard it was for them.”²² Another trekker reported, “you know, I see what these pioneers did, and every time we come, it's almost like you can feel their presences here saying, Look what we did, and we did it for you?”²³ Increased apathy towards our field concerns professional historians; conversely, re-enactments like trek re-ignites interest. As the sensory historian Mark Smith reminds us, “the desire to re-enact tells us more about our desire to consume—to experience—the past.”²⁴ In order to consume history, people's interactions with past objects and situations must not be passive but active. People connect most strongly to the past through a direct re-creation and bodily enactment of the past using the senses.

Using sensory history provides new insights about both the 1856 handcart pioneers as well as those who re-enact their experiences. I scoured the journals and monographs and became familiar with how people have written about the tragic story. I examined the emigrant's sensorial transition from England to the American West, and how that transition determined decisions on the trail. It seemed every page revealed how what the emigrant heard, tasted, felt, smelled, and saw informed their decisions on the Mormon Trail. By considering the handcart story in this way, I discovered an important link between the handcart pioneers' multisensory experiences

²² Micah Schweizer, “Mormon Teens Re-Enact Handcart Disaster to Bring History to Life,” *Wyoming Public Radio*, October 24, 2014.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mark M. Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4.

and the re-enactors who attempt to embody the emigrants. While many stories are anachronistic, the trekkers are dedicated to learning history by replicating the sensory world of the pioneers.

While historians agree that humans use multiple senses to interact with their environment, sensory historians highlight each sense respectively. Trained scholars often include loud sounds, foul or pleasant fragrances, the tastes of pleasurable and unappetizing foods, and the feelings of noticeable textures and surfaces in their works. However, sensory historians go one step further. They isolate the empirically accepted “five senses” to tell history. For example, instead of sprinkling references to how sound influenced pioneers in 1856 throughout the text, a whole chapter is dedicated to the changing aural worlds of white settlers. Another chapter is dedicated to sight, a third to touch, and another focuses on smell and taste (which I combine for brevity).

There are essential arguments within the chapters about the benefits of sensory history and re-enactments. A sensory history of the handcart pioneers provides new perspectives on how they moved from Industrial England to the American West. The chapters that follow consider the handcart pioneer’s journey through one of the five senses and how re-enactors interpret sensory history by embodying the past. While the idea of separating the senses may seem strange given their interrelation, the idea of letting each sense (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) drive the narrative separately opens new insights about how the handcart pioneers immigrated to the Great Basin, and how re-enactors mimic that experience.

This dissertation argues that re-enactments and subsequently sensory history should be taken seriously. Some might be apprehensive linking sensory history with re-enactments believing it delegitimizes their field. Indeed, most sensory historians are still fighting for a place

at the table. As a sensory historian, I understand this concern and proceed cautiously. I do not argue re-enactments are tantamount to sensory history. Sensory history is a genuine methodology in its own right, and the sensory historians referenced here have aided many historiographies. However, this dissertation asks historians, regardless of their subfield, to consider how sensory history, whether practiced by re-enactors, or professional historians, can elevate interest in history. Scholars should peer deeper into the archives and pay closer attention to the sensory experiences often overlooked.

Mormon History and Sensory History. While this project makes a strong methodological point about sensory history, the research is grounded in Mormon history and seeks to enlarge the understanding of the handcart story and the Mormon experience generally. The handcart pioneers are far from a neglected case study. However, there is abundant room to expand the story leading to a deeper understanding of Mormon history. I seek to place my interpretation of history in a larger corpus of work. While this project asks the reader to look beyond Martin's Cove and note the value of sensory history, my intentions are to provide new insights about the handcart story and those who re-enact their experience.

Mormon historians have yet to contextualize the handcart pioneers with the re-enactors who embody their experiences. Sara Patterson's *Pioneers in the Attic* is a valuable case study about modern-day trek, but she dedicates little attention to the handcart pioneer's lived experience. Others, including Stanley Kimball, David Roberts, and Candy Moulton, have provided social histories of handcart companies but do not address the phenomenon of trek.

Additionally, Will Bagley, Donald Grayson, and Chad Orton have written about the handcart story in different contexts, but rarely address re-enactments.²⁵

I hope to join the historians who call for unity between disciplines by linking the handcart pioneers with modern-day re-enactors. Mark Fiege reminds historians that we might do well to “find kindred spirits and make friends across fields, disciplines, and national boundaries.”²⁶ As a Western historian, I stepped outside my wheelhouse with this project and often relied on anthropologists, biologists, and performance scholars. This allowed me to write a history that offers insights about Mormon pioneers and re-enactors through their sensory experiences.

Recently, historians focusing on commercially popular topics like the Salem Witch Trials or the Civil War have analyzed the sensory experiences of historical actors. For the Mormon historian, I suggest there is value in going to the archives for a closer look. A sensory history of Mormons in Missouri, for example, would be instructive. It would raise new questions: what types of sounds frightened the Missouri Mormons as mobs attacked them? How did the smells and tastes in Liberty Jail influence Joseph Smith’s experiences and his thoughts? How did those

²⁵ Sara Patterson, *Pioneers in the Attic: Place and Memory Along the Mormon Trail* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Candy Moulton, *The Mormon Handcart Migration: "Tounge Nor Pen Can Never Tell the Sorrow"* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019); LeRoy Reuben Hafen and Ann Woodbury Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion: The Story of a Unique Western Migration, 1856-1860* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1992); Stanley B. Kimball and Violet Kimball, *Villages on Wheels: A Social History of the Gathering to Zion* (Sandy, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2011); David Roberts, *Devil's Gate: Brigham Young and the Great Mormon Handcart Tragedy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008); Donald K. Grayson, “Human Mortality in a Natural Disaster: The Willie Handcart Company,” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Summer, 1996); Will Bagley, "One Long Funeral March": A Revisionist's View of the Mormon Handcart Disasters” *Journal of Mormon History*, 35, no. 1 (2009).

²⁶ Mark Fiege “The Nature of the West and the World,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 42, no. 3 (Autumn 2011), 312.

who marched at Zion's Camp talk about their bodies? Historians have touched on these but not with the same attention sensory historians recommend.

This work is about senses, and senses are about the body. My research joins a cohort of Mormon scholars, including Amanda Hendrix-Komoto, W. Paul Reeve, and Taylor Petry who are already considering the body as essential to Latter-day Saint theology. As the historian Richard Bushman once commented, "There's a lot of body in Mormonism."²⁷ One way to look at the body is to look closer at the senses. Hendrix-Komoto points out that Mormons view God as a physical being. "Contained within the vision of the divine," Hendrix-Komoto notes, "was a promise that Latter-day Saints would go through the same progression."²⁸ Latter-day Saints believe the bodies they perfect in this life will be the same bodies they take with them during the resurrection. It's time to take seriously the Latter-day Saint theological tenet of bodily progression, including the senses. Mormon doctrine teaches there will be physical and spiritual trials. Mormons, on the first Sunday every month, share testimonies verifying this. They stand up before a congregation and recount their hardships with gratitude. They are on a progression from being weak and fallen to godly.

²⁷ Matthew Bowman, Susanna Morrill, Richard Lyman Bushman, Robert Orsi, "Finding the Presence in Mormon History: An Interview with Susanna Morrill, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Robert Orsi," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 3 (2011): 187.

²⁸ Amanda Hendrix-Komoto, *Imperial Zions: Religion, Race, and Family in the American West and the Pacific* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 26. See also, Taylor G. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay: Sexuality and Gender in Modern Mormonism* (Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 2020). W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Hendrix-Komoto, Petry and Reeve look at bodies in context of race and sexuality.

The archetype in this dissertation is the handcart pioneer's body. In a matter of months, they transitioned from the dirty streets of Liverpool to the blue skies and fresh fields of Iowa, to the hellish blizzard conditions of Wyoming. Eventually, they transitioned to the desert and vistas of Utah. For those fortunate emigrants who were rescued, their bodies had been tested and they became venerated for their trials. When contemporary Latter-day Saints stand at Martin's Cove and embody the pioneers, they are attempting to test their senses and move their bodies closer to the refinement the emigrants experienced. Here is an example of how LDS belief, which has a material element, is practiced by believers. The handcart pioneers progressed from Industrial England to Utah in an earthly, embodied, and sensorial way. They exemplified to Latter-day Saints what it means to move through the refiner's fire and towards divinity.

As the Apostle James E. Faust once taught:

In the heroic effort of the handcart pioneers, we learn a great truth. All must pass through a refiner's fire, and the insignificant and unimportant in our lives can melt away like dross and make our faith bright, intact, and strong. There seems to be a full measure of anguish, sorrow, and often heartbreak for everyone, including those who earnestly seek to do right and be faithful. Yet this is part of the purging to become acquainted with God.²⁹

Embodying and Sensory History

In this project, I use embodying and re-enacting in similar ways, so it is helpful to clarify the term embodying. To embody comes from the Latin word "in" and "corpus" (body), which translates to "in the body." Yet, this simple definition raises more questions than answers. What does "in the body" mean? And how should historians, who insist on clarity, use this phrase? Here

²⁹ James E. Faust, "Faith in Every Footstep," *Ensign*, 27, no. 5 (May 1997), 62.

I take my guidance from scholars in anthropology, sociology, and performance studies who use the term when studying how the body interacts with material spaces and substances to engender meaning. To be specific, I suggest that bodies can become agents for present people to connect, in a sensorial way, to past people. This connection is achieved through replicating the multisensory world of those they are attempting to embody.

Until recently, historians have overlooked the embodied experience in history. In the twentieth century, many scholars embraced the “linguistic turn” which uses language (words, phrases) to give meaning to our world over the material. This turn allowed historians to understand history as a text and to analyze how meaning was created through symbols. It de-emphasized, however, material, and embodied experiences. This project doesn’t reject the linguistic turn. What I suggest instead is that the object of historical study is not just the events, ideas, and social structures of the past; it’s also the modes of perception and feelings, which are collective and historically variable. Certainly, ideas, events, and social structures are crucial in understanding the past and appear within the pages of this dissertation. Still, the emphasis and driving force will be about a deeper connection with past people in which beliefs, values, and states of feeling, are best understood through analyzing the senses.

The 1856 handcart story becomes the narrative for re-enactors because of the visceral and an engaging story. The handcart has become the visual symbol; the material representation for Mormons, perhaps even rivaling the honeybee. When re-enactments occur, a replica handcart often accompanies the group. I explore this rise of the handcart as a symbol. The memory of the handcart emigrants, specifically the Martin and Willie companies, is a sacred story to Mormons. There is something vivid and powerful about the handcart story. As Aristotle astutely noted,

“Those things that are essentially memorable are also those of which there is imagination.”

Eventually, it was easier for the progeny of the pioneers to *imagine* the handcart emigrant’s life as the one worth emulating. The perseverance through suffering, the communal egalitarianism that emerged among the companies, and the bravery displayed by the rescuers who brought the emigrants to Zion, are all coveted qualities Latter-day Saints strive for.

Historiography

This manuscript is a sensory history, and thus, belongs under the large umbrella of environmental history. Environmental history has an uncanny ability to adapt many disciplines within the sciences and the humanities into historical thinking. Throughout the chapters, the reader will recognize sources from various fields, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, biology, and geology. I lean heavily on the works of these scholars to help contextualize the functions of our human senses and what it means to embody the past while re-enacting it.

Before writing another book on the overland trails, I needed to become familiar with the historians who preceded me. Michael Tate, Will Bagley, John Mack Faragher, William Unruh each provided context to this dissertation. Keith Meldahl’s *Hard Road West* was particularly helpful for me as I considered the overland trails in an environmental and geological context. He describes the flora, fauna, and geology along the 2,000-mile California Trail. He uses the diaries and letters of the settlers as they traverse the landscape. His rich details aided me as I considered the sensory experiences of the handcart pioneers. Wallace Stegner’s *The Gathering of Zion* was one of the first to capture the ideas and voices on the Mormon Trail.³⁰

³⁰ Michael L. Tate, *Indians and Emigrants: Encounters on the Overland Trails* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014); John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland*

It's unjust to write a book about the American West without acknowledging the historians who encouraged Western and environmental history that expands beyond a Turnerian framework. The influence of New Western Historians is riddled throughout the pages of this dissertation. Specifically, Donald Worster's *Rivers of Empire* showcased how to approach Western history by looking at water and the environment. His book was a model how write in a provocative and significant way.

Modern historians of the West influenced me to be a historian who considers the region in a global way and with sensitivity to marginalized communities. Contemporary historians who have expanded my understanding of what it means to be a twenty-first-century historian in an age where global interconnectedness and social justice deserve a place in all histories. Amanda Hendrix Komoto's *Imperial Zions*, and Margaret Jacobs *White Mother to a Dark Race* showed scholars how to break down the walls which has isolated American Western history. Their approach to different cultures in context of the American West have further showed the multicultural elements of the region.³¹

Trail (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Will Bagley, *South Pass: Gateway to a Continent* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014); Keith Heyer Meldahl, *Hard Road West: History and Geology Along the Gold Rush Trail* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

³¹Amanda Hendrix-Komoto, *Imperial Zions: Religion, Race, and Family in the American West and the Pacific* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022); Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009). Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Benjamin J. Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

Along those lines, environmental historians shaped how I consider nature not as a static background, but as an integral part of the handcart story and those who re-enact that experience. Mark Fiege's *Irrigated Eden* and *Republic of Nature* became standards by which I could gauge my chapters. Fiege's ability to weave intriguing narratives within an environmental context demonstrates how engaging environmental history can be. Other works were always close by. I referenced them frequently as I learned to integrate environmental history into my work.³²

Some of the more important environmental histories looked at how bodies and the environment can shape historical accounts. Nancy Langston's *Toxic Bodies*, which examines "the landscape of exposure that begins in our own bodies and connects us across generations, across species, and across ecosystems."³³ Her works have influenced how I look at bodies to retell this story of the handcart emigrants. Daniel Smail, Linda Nash, and Christopher Sellers have built off Langston's work by looking at the hybridity of biology to culture and place. These historians look at the body critically, and their respective works paved the way for me to dabble in the world of biology as a historian.³⁴

³² Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1999); Mark Fiege, *Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012); Timothy J. LeCain, *The Matter of History: How Things Create the Past* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2017); Edmund Russell, *Greyhound Nation: A Coevolutionary History of England, 1200-1900* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2017); Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Paul Sutter, "The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History," *The Journal of American History* 100, no. 1 (2013).

³³ Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), xiii.

³⁴ Daniel Lord Smail, *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006);

Mormon history has been a flourishing field for some time now. New Mormon historians inspired me early in my career and stressed how to write about a religious community both respectfully and honestly. Today, scholars such as Benjamin Park, Jonathan Stapley, Quincy Newell, Cristina Rosetti, Taylor Petry, W. Paul Reeve, and Patrick Mason have taken on the mantle from New Mormon historians. They have repositioned Mormon studies in a more contextualized and global setting. Angela Pulley Hudson's powerful book *Real Native Genius* became an inspirational to me as she uses Mormons to engaging narrative about nineteenth-century America. Her book helped me develop many ideas.³⁵

Finally, sensory history and performance studies informed and shaped this dissertation. Sensory history has a long and rich history which dates to the Annales School. In the twentieth century, other historians took this field to new heights. Alain Corbin's, *The Foul and the Fragrant*, opened the doors to the importance of sensory history. His research on silence and the wind made aural history something to take seriously. By the twenty-first-century, sensory history wasn't a "fringe" sub-field, but a bona-fide methodology. Mark Smith's powerful book *The Smell*

Conevery Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Christopher Sellers, "Thoreau's Body: Towards an Embodied Environmental History," *Environmental History*, 4, no. 4 (October, 1999), pp. 486-514.

³⁵ For New Mormon historians, see: Leonard Arington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956); Ronald Warren Walker, *Wayward Saints: The Godbeites and Brigham Young* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950); Maxine Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1992); Gene A. Sessions, *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant* (New York: Greg Kofford Books, 1982).

*of Battle, the Taste of Siege*³⁶ became the quintessential example on how sensory history can shed light on “over researched topics.” The already mentioned Peter Hoffer’s *A Sensory History of Early America*, gracefully argues how sensory history can provide new details about early America’s history. Other contemporary sensory historians including Evan Kutzler, Melanie Kiechle, Karin Bijsterveld, and Constance Classen played a significant role in my growth as a sensory historian. Similarly, Performance Studies was an unfamiliar discipline for me when I started this project. However, the further I researched trek, the more I learned from about how and why people perform in specific ways. Megan Sanborn Jones, Lindsay Livingston, Viola Spolin, Diane Taylor, Jill Dolan, and Esther Fernandez provided much-needed context on a subject that was foreign to me. If they read this, I hope they forgive me if my myopia as a scholar fails to do justice to their field.³⁷

³⁶ Mark Michael Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2015).

³⁷ For other Sensory historians, see Peter Hoffer, *Sensory Worlds in Early America*. Melanie A. Kiechle, *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017); Alain Corbin, *A History of Silence: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018); Evan Kutzler, *Living by Inches: The Smells, Sounds, Tastes, and Feeling of Captivity in Civil War Prisons* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2008). For theater and performance history see, Megan Sanborne Jones, *Contemporary Mormon Pageantry: Seeking After the Dead* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018); Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press);³⁷ Vanessa Agnew, “Introduction: What Is Reenactment?” *Criticism*, 46, no.3 (Summer, 2004); Jonathon Lamb, “Sublime,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*, ed. Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, Juliane Tomann (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2019).

Organization. This dissertation considers this important relationship between sensory history and re-enactments. The first two chapters trace how Latter-day Saints favored the handcart emigrant as the pioneer worth emulating during trek. The later chapters consider the handcart pioneer's journey through one of the five senses and how re-enactors interpret that sensory experience for the purposes of embodiment.

Chapter One argues that throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, "the handcart pioneer" was re-imagined and mythologized as *the* Latter-day Saints who embodied heroic strength and spiritual integrity. While the memory was too close and painful for nineteenth-century believers to re-enact, they still expected believers to stay dedicated to the Church and the handcart memory. They did this by engaging in physical activities while serving the Church. In the twentieth century, Solomon Kimball's Sweetwater Rescue elevated the status of the handcart pioneers. By 1947 a major re-enactment developed that replicated the sensory experiences of pioneers. Re-enactors mimicked what pioneers saw, heard, tasted, smelled, and felt. Mormon Boy Scout troops in the twentieth century normalized youth re-enactments by participating in events like the handcart emigrants. Eventually, trek built upon the influence of these events to implement theatrical and sensorial re-enactments for young believers.

Chapter Two examines how trek connects re-enactors to the Mormon pioneers through the senses. Latter-day Saints believed participating in bodily re-enactments inspire future generations to adhere to their faith and the faith of their fathers. Mormon Trail re-enactors understand their engagement in sensory activities as they embody the pioneer. One goal of trek is to reach a sublime connection with their pioneer ancestors. They believe they are forging lasting relationships with their pioneer forebearers as they recreated the sensory world of 1856. The

1997 sesquicentennial ignited a cottage industry of trekkers who focused on embodying what the pioneers saw, heard, touched, smelled, and tasted.

Chapter Three examines the visual world of the handcart pioneers and how trek groups mimic what pioneers saw in Wyoming. Handcart participants injected visual memories into their journals. These events both inspired and frightened them. As migrants from Industrial Britain, the handcart pioneers were introduced to a host of different sights in the American West. These new visual experiences, both manmade and natural, affected how they navigated the Mormon Trail. While modern-day re-enactors manipulate the visual world to be authentic, there are modern sights that disrupt the re-enactment. Trek directors ensure that there are enough visual replicas of the past, including clothing, natural landmarks, and food, to allow participants to believe they inhabit the nineteenth-century pioneers environment.

Chapter Four considers both re-enactors and the handcart pioneers within the context of sound. Re-enactors reproduce the aural world of the handcart pioneers and monitor the soundscape to prevent modern noises. For the handcart pioneers, the sounds in the Wyoming environment played a role in how they traveled. This aural world included not only the natural sounds common on the trail but also the absence of human and mechanical noises in industrialized England. This chapter claims that soundscapes can help inform our understanding of a particular group in a place and time. In this instance, the tragic story of the Martin and Willie handcart companies is better understood in the context of the changing sounds these pioneers encountered as moved from the industrial noise to the natural sounds and silences of the American wilderness.

Chapter Five looks the body sense of both re-enactors and the handcart pioneers. Re-enactors are pre-occupied with testing their body sense like the pioneers. One strategy is to keep the handcart close as they interact with the Wyoming environment. For the handcart pioneers, factory work initially shaped their bodies, but as they adapted to the trail, they eventually co-evolved with their vehicles. British believers at first rejoiced in the freedom of the prairies. However, as they pushed into Wyoming, the lightweight handcarts failed them and inhibited their ability to navigate the landscape. On the trail, they became dependent on their handcarts, until they became entangled with them. Eventually, this new technology shaped their disposition and behavior. Their hands and feet were contingent on their handcarts which moved across the Mormon Trail.

The final chapter considers smells and tastes of the re-enactors and handcart pioneers. Re-enactors keep their food bland and minimal to tap into the emigrant's diet. Their calorie intake is often low, and they experience hunger fatigue like the emigrants. This chapter also documents the smells of urban poverty and unpleasant tastes plagued England by the 1850s. Handcart pioneers initially described the smells and tastes along the Mormon Trail as pleasing. However, Wyoming storms masked smells and tastes. The snow, cold air, and the lifelessness of winter made it difficult to smell the aroma of plant life or find wild game. By late October, the stink of decay surrounded the handcart pioneers, making it difficult for them to sustain their will to live.

The conclusion of this dissertation returns to the question of what we can learn from re-enacting and what the connection that people make with their ancestors as they try to embody their experiences tells us about history. It also reconsiders how the handcart pioneer's bodily

progression has become the example of how Latter-day Saints must test and perfect their bodies and senses in their hopes of reaching exaltation with God.

Conclusion

There is an argument woven within this manuscript about the power of living history. I have read numerous trek stories, immersed myself in the literature, and consulted with scholars to put my finger on trek. I'm afraid despite my efforts, eyebrows will rise as people try to make sense of Mormon Trail re-enactments. I've had people ask me to explain trek, and while I provide important context, my final words are often, "You have to experience it to believe it." This came to fruition when I asked the Civil War historian Alan Guelzo his thoughts about trek at a Gettysburg Conference some years back. After a long pause, he replied, "It sounds like Civil War re-enactments, but something different, something more spiritual, and something that needs to be observed to truly understand."

In Stanley Kimball's book on the Mormon Trail, he opened with R. H. Tawney's quote: "What historians need is not more documents, but stronger boots."³⁸ Kimball spent years studying the Mormon migration by standing where they once stood. He once wrote that discovering, mapping, and following the Mormon Trail was rewarding.³⁹ I relate to Kimball's experience as I stood in a Wyoming canyon with a group of young LDS believers. The feel of the wind on my neck, the taste and smell of the Wyoming desert, the sights of the auburn sunset reflecting on the landscape, and the sounds and silences of nature directly inspired me to learn

³⁸ Stanley B. Kimball, *Discovering Mormon Trails: New York to California, 1831-1868* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books Publishing, 1979), v.

³⁹ Ibid.

more about these people who sacrificed all for their God. For a fleeting moment, I thought about my pioneer ancestor, Edward Bunker who led the third handcart expedition. I have since contemplated if my sensory experiences were like Edward Bunker's as he pushed his cart through the same area, and if through our sensorial experiences we became connected.

Despite my sentimentality for places, some historians and readers will prefer their history to be grounded in libraries and archives. At a time when our field is under scrutiny, and history majors are rare, it is time to consider why living history and re-enactments are successful in generating interest. The backbone to these re-enactments is the sensory accounts recorded by historical people. A goal of this dissertation is to nudge historians to look at how senses can help understand historical societies. The following pages demonstrate that there's a lot to learn from Mormon Trail pioneers and the re-enactors and who attempt to embody them. Trek organizers study the stories like a sensory historian before re-enactments begin. They look for thick descriptions about the senses and how to replicate the experience for participants. In this way, the bond connecting the two is important.

CHAPTER ONE

BECOMING LIKE THE PIONEER

Introduction

After transporting Latter-day Saints into the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young gathered his followers for the first Pioneer Day celebration on July 24th, 1849. With cannons booming and spirit-stirring music, Young ushered in a grand procession. Bishops escorted large congregations with distinctive banners into Salt Lake City. The crowd gathered in the southeast corner of Temple Square under a bowery constructed for the occasion. While the speakers varied in age and gender, they all prioritized one message: commemorate the trials of the pioneers through deeds and actions as well as words. It had only been two years since a group of 143 men, including three women, two children, and three enslaved men entered the Salt Lake Valley. However, Young wanted to recognize the journey that delivered the Saints to the Great Basin. The procession that day set a precedent for how Latter-day Saints remembered the pioneers. Over the pulpit, leaders told members that they had to earn the right to be counted among the pioneers even though it had only been a few years since the first contingents of Latter-day Saints had arrived in the valley. Pioneer Day would be, according to Young, the most important holiday Mormons would celebrate.

Nine years later in 1856, Brigham Young called the attention of the Saints to the suffering of the handcart pioneers and asked them to build a Zion worthy of the suffering these people had endured. He invited attendees to ponder their warm homes and fresh bread. He then asked them to consider the condition of the handcart emigrants who were now suffering in Wyoming. The

time had arrived, according to Young, for those in the comfort of Zion to prove their dedication as the handcart pioneers had:

My mind is yonder in the snow, where those immigrating Saints are, ... I have a great many reflections about them. Have any of you suffered while coming here? .. Yes, you had to endure anguish and pain from the effects of cholera, toil, and weariness. Do you live your religion when you get here, after all the trouble, afflictions, and pains you have passed through to come to Zion? and to a pretty Zion! Men and women start across the Plains for this place, and are they willing to wade through the snow? Yes. To travel through snowstorms? Yes. To wade rivers? Yes. What for? To get to Zion. And here we are in Zion, and what a Zion! where it is necessary for the cry of reformation to go through the land, both a spiritual and temporal reformation. God is more merciful than man can be, and it is well for us.⁴⁰

Brigham Young's sermon planted the seeds for how future generations would venerate the memory of the handcart pioneer. Celebrated on July 24, Pioneer Day is a large spectacle with parades, floats, and activities. Each year, crowds commemorate the Saints who walked the 1,300-mile journey. The handcart companies, however, emerged as the pioneer worth emulating. Some years are more dedicated to the handcart memory than others. Nevertheless, communities often retell, embellish, and re-enact their tragic story, suffering, and the rescue that followed. The handcart pioneers have become the quintessential pioneer, which people measure others against.

This chapter traces why Mormon Trail re-enactors try to embody the Willie and Martin handcart pioneers. It focuses on four major periods in Mormon history and how each understood the body and the senses. These events build on each other. During two decades of the nineteenth century, the 1850s and 1880s, leaders pressured believers to be physically engaged with building the Kingdom of God by participating in Church-funded construction projects and aiding less fortunate Latter-day Saints. Next, Solomon Kimball immortalized the handcart pioneer with his article which emphasized the emigrant's bravery and strength. Their story emerged as the symbol

⁴⁰ Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 239.

of hard work and pioneering. The handcart pioneers represented these values. Third, the 1947 centennial normalized re-enactments, and demonstrated the benefits of living history to Latter-day Saints. Finally, Mormon Boy Scouts validated to Church leaders the value of youth re-enactments. These four events created the social environment that catapulted trek after the 1997 sesquicentennial. A topic I cover in the next chapter, as I emphasize the importance of the senses and body in Mormon re-enactments.

During the nineteenth century, leaders instructed believers to dedicate themselves to physically sacrificing for the Church like handcart pioneers had. During the 1850s and 1880s, white Protestants frequently alleged that the Church was full of immorality and cowardice. Leaders hoped to create an image of the Church that instilled confidence in its integrity even as the federal government tried to curtail its power. Leaders strategically used the handcart memory to highlight the heroic characteristics of the pioneers and encouraged believers to use their bodies for the Kingdom of God. Physically enacting their faith could include assisting a neighbor with farm chores or recommitting to the Gospel through rebaptism. The suffering of the handcart pioneers initially challenged the Church as anti-Mormon writers like Ann Eliza Young used the story to accuse Brigham Young of incompetence and cruelty. Latter-day Saint leaders, however, shaped and re-imagined the narrative of the handcart companies to emphasize the sacrifice and heroism of the participants. They emphasized the rescue and perseverance of the handcart emigrants over macabre suffering and leadership blunders.

As a result, the handcart pioneers became an archetype of heroic strength and spiritual integrity. Solomon Kimball's monumentally significant 1914 article recounted the handcart pioneer's Sweetwater Rescue within the cultural context of muscular Christianity, a byproduct of

Victorian masculine values. Kimball claimed three young men carried the handcart company one by one across the icy river and then died. While Kimball's account of the rescue is largely inaccurate, his retelling of the story challenged members to push themselves physically and spiritually. Twentieth-century Mormonism incorporated these ideas into a muscular Mormonism that emphasized the importance of physicality.

As the 1947 Centennial commenced, the Church established an intricate reenactment that engaged the senses beyond the passive experience of reading the handcart story. The first organized "trek" engineered activities that replicated how the original pioneers saw, heard, felt, tasted, and smelled the Mormon Trail. While the 1947 Centennial re-enacted the westward movement of Mormon pioneers in general, many of the poignant events it attempted to re-enact were related to the handcart experience. Building off the success of the 1947 reenactments, the BSA (Boy Scouts) and Latter-day Saints further strengthened their ties to each other. Mormon scouts believed that the activities they did as a troop helped them to develop into responsible, physically fit young men. They also attempted to replicate the multisensory world of the pioneers in historical re-enactments. The eventual focus of the BSA re-enactments on the handcart tragedy yielded positive results. The youth who engaged in these pioneer re-enactments were spiritually uplifted and further dedicated to their pioneer ancestors. Their experiences influenced the Church to introduce trek during the sesquicentennial of 1997.

From 1856 to 1997, the imagined connection between Latter-day Saints and pioneers in historical reenactments became more deeply rooted in the body over time. In the nineteenth century, the experience of moving across the Plains was too recent for Latter-day Saints to become heavily invested in trek historical re-enactments. Leaders, nevertheless, encouraged

believers to imitate the pioneers who had arrived in the first companies. The first wave of pioneers constructed their own houses, built stockades, and sometimes subsisted on little more than dandelions and sego lilies. In the twentieth century, Latter-day Saints embraced the idea of historically reenacting the experiences of the pioneers as they became further removed from the tragedies of the nineteenth century.

Eventually, they concluded the best way to show their dedication to the Church and the Willie and Martin companies was to participate in deeply embodied reenactments. They continued to expand their theatrics to make the reenactments seem more authentic. A theme running through this chapter is the reliance of those who retold and eventually re-enacted the pioneer experience on the sensory history of the handcart experience. The years that followed the handcart tragedy witnessed a re-imagining and mythologizing of the pioneers who used their bodies and senses to experience the Mormon Trail. Ultimately, Latter-day Saints came to believe that deeply embodied, sensory experiences brought them closer to God and the experiences of their ancestors.

The 1850s and 1880s and the Handcart Memory

By 1850, Latter-day Saint leaders already separated newly arrived Saints from those who had come just a few years earlier. “To the stranger within my hearing I need add no more,” proclaimed Willard Richards, “and yet I will say...the ease and luxuries of your life you are indebted under God to the toil, sufferings and labors of the Mormons.”⁴¹ At the July 24th celebration in the same year, Alice Young, a General Conference speaker humbly confessed her inability to properly thank the early pioneers: “Can we express our gratitude: No, not in words;

⁴¹ Willard Richards, “Oration” *Deseret News*, July 27, 1850.

but it shall be the business of our future lives to express it by our works...we hope to prove ourselves worthy of them.”⁴² In the span of a decade, Latter-day Saint communities had already seen themselves as the inheritors of the original pioneers’ sacrifice.

The Saints could not earn this right through contemplative mental exercise. The new arrivals in the Great Basin needed to demonstrate physicality to earn the respect of the first pioneers. One way to show true dedication was for Mormon settlers to be cognizant of how they indulged their senses. Excessive eating, dancing, and singing, if not done within the correct venue, disrespected memory of the first pioneers whose precarity had forced them to focus on survival instead of pleasure. Leaders regulated leisure, even though they expected it to be a part of the Latter-day Saint experience. Commemorations of the Mormon pioneer experience focused on trailblazers, which included not only Brigham Young but Joseph Smith as well. Often, these early celebrations conflated early Mormonism with Brigham Young’s vanguard who led the way to the Salt Lake Valley.

The myths that surrounded the earliest pioneers did not necessarily reflect their actual experiences. Other than the occasional misfortune, the Saints who arrived in Utah in the 1850s did so with few problems. This they attributed to God’s mercy. Believers saw the low death rate in the first companies as evidence that God sheltered His people as they moved West. Young’s reputation grew and believers crowned him a “Modern-day Moses.”⁴³ Thousands of anxious

⁴² Alice Young, “Grand Juvenile Celebration of the 24th of July 1854,” *Deseret News*, July 7, 1854.

⁴³ Francis M. Gibbons, *Brigham Young, Modern Moses, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1981). Gibbons was employed by the Church and released this hagiographical biography on Brigham Young. He used nineteenth century documents to demonstrate how Young was often referred to as the modern day Moses to Mormons.

Saints waited their turn in temporary camps along the Missouri River before leaders systematically brought them to the Great Basin.

Following the U.S.-Mexico War, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo placed Utah in America's hands and reignited the conflict between Mormons and the federal government. U.S. Senators debated the very nature of property rights and slavery's role in the newly acquired territories. California became the focal point for the United States as Henry Clay and Congress tried to negotiate a compromise to keep the country intact. In the same conversation, Americans grew further skeptical of the Mormon empire that had nestled itself in the Rocky Mountains. Although Brigham Young hoped hiding his people would assuage anxieties, the Mormon problem reemerged as a key debate among American Protestants.⁴⁴

By the 1850s, Mormons established a string of settlements stretching south from Salt Lake City to San Diego in a geo-political area later called by historians the "Mormon Corridor." Brigham Young described it as a plan "to plant the standard of salvation in every country and kingdom, city and village, on the Pacific and the world over, as fast as God should give the ability."⁴⁵ Young's idea to populate the territory hinged on a fervent missionary program that tapped into a Biblical admonition to preach the gospel to all the world. During the 1850s, General authorities began calling missionaries over the pulpit during the Church's semiannual general conferences held in April and October in Salt Lake City. Thousands left their homes and families to preach.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Brian Q. Cannon, Clyde A. Milner, *Reconstruction and Mormon America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 161-62.

⁴⁵ Nels Anderson, *Desert Saints: The Mormon Frontier in Utah* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1966), 136.

⁴⁶Ibid.

The Church felt the weight of the U.S. Government press against them in the 1850s. As a U.S. army marched to Utah, Mormons went through their own self-identified “Reformation” where Mormon leaders commanded the faithful to refocus their dedication to not only the Church but to the memory of past and present prophets. Leaders quickly snuffed out criticism. Young’s closest advisors, including Jedediah Grant, George A. Smith, and John Taylor traveled through the Territory preaching physical recommitment.⁴⁷ Re-baptizing their bodies became a way to prove rededication. On September 21, 1856, while the handcart Saints cresting higher towards the Continental Divide in Wyoming, Jedediah Grant declared, “I am speaking to you in the name of Israel's God and you need to be baptized and washed clean from your sins from your backslidings, from your apostacies, from your filthiness, from your lying, from your swearing, from lusts, and from everything that is evil before the God of Israel.”⁴⁸ Throughout 1856, leaders admonished members to silence their tongues and prove themselves to be more than just empty platitudes.

In the fall of that year, concerning news appeared around handcart companies stranded in Wyoming with snowstorms impeding their progress. Once the tragic story spread, the handcart plan which seemed foolproof earlier caused further problems for Young who now had an overland tragedy on his hands. While it’s difficult to know if grumblings from Latter-day Saints

⁴⁷ John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2012), 254. LDS Church Leaders commenced a program of purification or reformation. During the Reformation, Church Members were expected to comply with the commandments and to renew their covenants through rebaptism. For further readings, look at Will Bagley’s *Blood of the Prophets*, and Paul Peterson’s *The Mormon Reformation*.

⁴⁸ Gene A. Sessions, *A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant* (New York: Greg Kofford, 2008), 267.

occurred in homes and storefronts during and after the handcart disaster, Brigham Young used forceful rhetoric to keep such accusations private. In one sermon he declared:

If any man or woman complains of me or my counselors, in regard to the lateness of some of this season's immigration, let the curse of God be on them and blast their substance with mildew and destruction until their names are forgotten from the earth. I never thought of my being accused of advising or having anything to do with so late a start.⁴⁹

Leaders quickly downplayed the handcart story. When they told the story, they emphasized the rescue of the embattled Saints over their suffering. Young strategically shifted the narrative to praise the heroic rescue. Apostle Franklin D. Richards sermonized that the true spirit of reformation had been evident in the brethren who volunteered to go save the handcart pioneers. One article published in the *Deseret News* in 1857 claimed that George Grant, one of the first rescuers to locate the companies, discovered that “the brethren and sisters appeared to be in good health and spirits.”⁵⁰ Later in the same periodical, the authors claimed that the Martin Company was “comfortable, stowed in wagons” as they made good time towards Utah. Journal entries later contradicted Grant's record, as many in the relief party wept once they encountered the poor Saints. Regardless, thousands of Latter-day Saints at home and abroad read Grant's account. The *Millennial Star* republished the story for British Saints. Two years later, in 1859, Brigham Young informed English converts that it was a “privilege” for them to gather and immigrate as a handcart company.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Brigham Young, “Council Concerning Immigration—Benefits to be derived from an Early Start—Crossing the Plains with Handcarts Etc.” Watt, G.D. et al., eds. (1854-1886). *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 3-4 (1856): 68.

⁵⁰ Parley P. Pratt, “News From Utah,” *The Millennial Star*, 19, (1857): 186.

⁵¹ “Correspondence,” *The Millennial Star*, 21, (1859): 11.

The American Civil War shifted the public's attention away from Utah. Within the territory, the Church guarded the handcart story from internal and external criticism. While leaders encouraged local Saints to preach about the handcart pioneer, they believed that the focus should remain on the rescue and subsequent deliverance of the trapped pioneers. Ephraim Hanks and George Grant were given platforms by Brigham Young and other apostles to recount the miraculous events as they were able to locate the pioneers based on divine intervention. Among the 70,000 Mormons reaching the Great Basin, the handcart emigrants received the most attention. In Springville, Utah, one celebration focused on the wagons that carried the belabored Saints into the valley.⁵²

In 1869, four months after the Central and Union Pacific railroads converged at Promontory Point, *The Millennial Star* published an article titled "How They Go Now," stressing the sacrifice of the earlier Mormon emigrants. The author reminded new converts that their journey, thanks to improvements in technology, was both easier and quicker than what previous Saints had endured on their journey to Zion.⁵³ Indeed, both sea and land travel had undergone notable changes since the first vanguard traveled from Nebraska to Utah. Although in 1869, emigrants still experienced a perilous journey, the author criticized the languid lifestyle associated with modern travel. The pioneer era ended with the Transcontinental Railroad. The Mormon migration between Iowa and Utah was an impressive feat before the completion of that railroad. It's estimated that close to 70,000 people traveled to Utah over 22 years.⁵⁴

⁵² Scott G. Winterton, "Biographies of the Original 1847 Pioneer Company," *The Church News*, October 14, 2009.

⁵³ J.J., "How They Go Now," *The Millennial Star*, 31, (September 18, 1869): 610.

⁵⁴ Daniel J McCoy, *The Popular Handbook of World Religions* (Irvine, CA: Harvest House Publishers, 2021): 271.

By the 1880s, the LDS Church was at odds once again with the federal government over polygamy. This decade witnessed the battle for marital autonomy in the American West. Polygamy with the slavery question out of the way became the target for the majority Republican lawmakers. Newly elected president James A. Garfield addressed polygamy his inaugural address in March 1881, claiming it "offends the moral sense of manhood."⁵⁵ Articles depicted Utah as a "center for unbridled sin that continues to be unabated." While the Church had taught the doctrine of plural marriage publicly since 1852, the Civil War focused people's attention away from the issue. By December 1885, President Grover Cleveland set the stage for renewed action against polygamy, calling not only for "further discreet legislation as will rid the country of this blot upon its fair fame" but also for a law to prevent Mormon immigration.⁵⁶

Senator George Edmunds wrote one of the most sweeping anti-Mormon bills in history. The severity of the Edmunds-Tucker Act left little room for leniency. Any man with several wives had to dissolve all but his original marriage. Any other wives or children from subsequent marriages were no longer his legal relatives. If a man refused to comply, he was liable for federal prosecution, imprisonment, and fines as a bigamist. The law required wives to testify against their husbands and allowed witnesses appear before the court without subpoenas for their appearance.⁵⁷ The Edmunds-Tucker Act eventually disincorporated the Church, disbanded an 1849 financial program to assist Latter-day Saint converts in Europe to emigrate, and attacked

⁵⁵ M. Paul Holsinger, "Henry M. Teller and the Edmunds-Tucker Act" *The Colorado Magazine*, 48, no. 1. (1971): 2-4.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

the economic structure of the Church.⁵⁸ Leaders went into hiding, and conference talks, no longer booming from the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, were printed from unknown locations. The sense that the pressure on the Church was unsustainable led to an increase in millenarianism. George Q. Cannon, then a member of the Church presidency, assured his people while in hiding: "We mourn for our unhappy country and those who will have to reap the whirlwind after such abundant sowing of the wind. The experience of the past and present are part of the great plan."⁵⁹

As the nation's eyes turned towards polygamy, critics emerged to tarnish the reputation of Mormons. In 1875, Brigham Young's former polygamous wife Ann Eliza Young wrote her infamous memoir of her marriage to Young and the vile wickedness she claimed to have witnessed. One chapter used the handcart tragedy or as she called it the "Handcart Scheme" to attack Young. She went for the jugular and assigned blame to Young and others in high positions. She concluded that incompetent leadership led to the death of over 200 pioneers.⁶⁰ Five years later, Fanny Stenhouse wrote another negative memoir about her experience while Mormon. The book, innocuously titled, *An Englishwoman in Utah: The Story of a Life's Experience in Mormonism*, had a section criticizing the handcart expedition. She claimed that "the Hand-cart Emigration Scheme began with a lie and ended in ruin."⁶¹

⁵⁸ Christine Talbot, *Mormons and Polygamy in American Political Culture, 1852-1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2013), 157.

⁵⁹ "A. Gentile," *Social Problems of Today; or, The Mormon Question in its Economic Aspects. A Study of Co-Operation and Arbitration in Mormondom, From the Standpoint of a Wage-Worker* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1886), 14.

⁶⁰ Ann Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19: Or The Story of a Life in Bondage, Being a Complete Exposé of Mormonism, and Revealing the Sorrows, Sacrifices and Sufferings of Women in Polygamy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 16.

⁶¹ Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse, *An Englishwoman in Utah: The Story of a Life's Experience in Mormonism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1882), 112.

These two accounts are worth considering carefully. Both hinted at patriarchal abuse, which they claimed was ubiquitous on the trail and in Utah. Victorian manhood and male-dominated leadership led to masculine arrogance and ultimately to tragedy. They pointed out that women, who made up most emigrants, had been forced to march to their deaths by abusive Mormon male leaders. Americans who read these books saw handcart emigrants in negative ways. At best, they would have identified the emigrants as naïve and blind followers. Others being more critical would have accused the handcart pioneers of being irresponsible as they dragged their families across the harsh trail.

In response, the Church carefully framed the story of the handcart emigrants to be about the loyalty of those in Zion instead of fallible mental planning and execution. Brigham Young delivered a plausible explanation of why the Lord allowed the emigrants to suffer. “If no other assistance could have been had by the companies this season,” Young sermonized, “I think they would have had hundreds and hundreds of fat buffaloes crowding around the camp.”⁶² Young’s sermon praised the handcart plan and those who saved the starving emigrants. He repositioned the story away from the suffering emigrants and aimed it towards the Utah Saints. lounging in their comfortable homes, Mormons began to take ownership of the tragedy. Instead of a horrific mistake, the handcart tragedy was a message from God to believers to be prepared to serve the Lord with body, mind, and spirit.

As the Church dealt with external criticism, they elevated the handcart emigrant as an example of integrity and perseverance. Clyde Milner and Brian Cannon’s edited collection

⁶² Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 250.

Reconstruction and Mormon America positions Latter-day Saints in the Reconstruction Era.⁶³

Bringing nonconformist Mormons into the American mainstream figure was part of the federal government's aims during Reconstruction. Mormons were lumped in with rebellious white Southerners and uncontrolled American Indians. The Church used the handcart story to shield itself from criticism. The handcart became a symbol of the pioneer's push West and materially manifested strength and heroism. However, there is a case to be made that the handcart would have become a symbol of failure if the Church hadn't shaped the narrative surrounding the events.⁶⁴

Latter-day Saints were not the only ones who shaped historical narratives to fit their own purposes. Richard White argues that many people saw a need to rewrite the history of the Civil War during the post-war period so that it was no longer a catastrophic event. Instead, the war became a mere interruption in the national narrative of western expansion.⁶⁵ In this period, Latter-day Saints also rewrote the history of their tumultuous relationship with the federal government. They focused on the masculine qualities of the handcart rescuers. In this new narrative, the qualities of the handcart pioneers mirrored other great American heroes who had sacrificed themselves for the poor and downtrodden. Historian Thomas Alexander postulates that the Church attempted to conform to white, middle-class culture in the nineteenth and twentieth

⁶³ Cannon and Milner, *Reconstruction and Mormon America*, 213.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 8. For further reading, see Eric Foner's *Reconstruction* and Thomas Alexander's *Mormonism in Transition*.

centuries.⁶⁶ Latter-day Saint leaders revived the story of the heroic rescue of the handcart pioneers even as they rearranged its memory.

As the twentieth century dawned, few original handcart pioneers remained. However, there is evidence that they had kept Brigham Young's instruction to guard the handcart memory close to their heart. In 1904, during a Sunday school lesson in Cedar City, UT, an elderly man named Francis Webster became uneasy as his fellow Latter-day Saints criticized the handcart plan of 1856. He stood up, addressed the critics, and scolded them with a soul-shaking tone. While the transcript of the criticizers was not recorded, historians largely interpret his rebuke as the voice for the Willie and Martin handcart companies. In line with Young's instruction, Webster asserted that it was a privilege to suffer both physically and mentally on the Mormon Trail.⁶⁷

Francis Webster's story caught on like wildfire. Believers share different versions of this account with each other. Contemporary Latter-day Saints commonly shared over pulpits when Pioneer Day falls on a Sunday. "I ask you to stop this criticism. You are discussing a matter you know nothing about." Webster insists, "Cold historic facts mean nothing here for they give no proper interpretation of the questions involved."⁶⁸ Webster then proceeded to ask the group to consider the integrity of the handcart pioneers:

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. . . . 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? I have looked back many times to see

⁶⁶ Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Sandy, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 1986). Alexander's book is pivotal in explaining how Mormons emerged out of isolation and embraced American ideals. This decision, according to Alexander, helped structure modern Mormonism.

⁶⁷ Chad M. Orton, Francis Webster "The Unique Story of One Handcart Pioneer's Faith and Sacrifice," *BYU Quarterly*, 45, no. 2 (2006): 117.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

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.⁶⁹

Leaders directed individuals how to commemorate the handcart story in the nineteenth century. It was to be story of faithful emigrants and their rescue by physically adept believers who sacrificed their bodies for the Church. LDS leaders elevated the handcart pioneers' status during the troubling decades of the 1850s and 1880s. Official discourse steered attention away from mistakes and the harrowing experiences journal entries revealed. Instead, the handcart pioneers would be forever linked with heroism and worthiness.

Solomon Kimball and the Sensory Memory of the Handcart. In February 1914, Solomon Kimball, a Mormon pioneer prone to spiritual gifts, wrote an article outlining the importance of the handcart tragedy. Published in the LDS Church's magazine the *Improvement Era*, Kimball's article spotlighted the Martin Company's daring Sweetwater River crossing. He suggested this event was the quintessential example of true heroism and sacrifice. Kimball exploited the believers' desire for bravery and valor and wove American idealism and masculine values into the narrative. He unburied the story as more than the most stressful trial the handcart pioneers endured.

Solomon was born the seventh son of the prominent leader Heber C. Kimball, but his birth came at a low point for the Church. Many Latter-day Saints huddled on the shores of the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Missouri River at Winter Quarters and waited anxiously after being driven out of Nauvoo.⁷⁰

Because of Solomon's status, however, he resided in an insulated cabin. Despite his relative privilege, Solomon still experienced his early years as ones of struggle. They left a mark on his memory as his family moved from Nauvoo to the Salt Lake Valley.⁷¹

Solomon's early life as an overland pioneer and the struggles of living in the newly settled Great Basin shaped his worldview. As a young boy, "Solley" as his mother called him, experienced firsthand the difficulty on the Mormon Trail. Kimball became sick with an illness that settled into his lower limbs while his family traveled with the Saints in one of the early vanguard companies. It weakened him so severely that he was unable to walk for nearly three years. He had a limp for the rest of his life.⁷²

While Kimball wrote about the Sweetwater Rescue; he interjected his own experiences into the story. As an adolescent, he developed spiritual gifts which impressed those around him. His father Heber, who was also prone to prophetic visions, remarked that Solley was a "spiritually gifted boy." He was often found at school prophesying for his peers. In his famous article, Kimball explained the miraculous spiritual manifestations the rescuers experiences. As an older man, Solomon claimed that the spirit moved through him in very intense ways.⁷³

Of the events that influenced Kimball's retelling of the Sweetwater Rescue, the Blackhawk War was one of the most important. It instilled an appreciation of vigorous manhood.

⁷⁰ Solomon F. Kimball, *Life of David P. Kimball, and Other Sketches* (Salt Laker City: Deseret News Publishing, 1918), 89.

⁷¹ Richard E. Kimball, *Mormons at the Missouri Winter Quarters, 1846-1852* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 140.

⁷² Kimball, *Life of David P. Kimball*, 90.

⁷³ Ibid.

Kimball was only nineteen when the war broke out. He volunteered to fight against the Native people. His company arrived quickly in Central Utah as the Saints declared war against the Ute Indian Blackhawk and his followers. As one of the earliest to arrive at the battlefield, Kimball had little to shield him from the ugly reality of war. Kimball, however, identified himself as a ‘rescuer’ sent to aid the Saints persecuted by the Indians. His regiment stood as a symbol of the civilized world to tame the Indians. As he rode through Central Utah, Kimball claimed to have been “rescuing the panic-stricken people who were being pillaged and plundered by a band of blood thirsty savages.”⁷⁴ As a fellow rescuer, he had earned his place among the handcart pioneers. Kimball rewrote aspects of the Sweetwater story based on his own experiences and spiritual expectations during the Blackhawk War.⁷⁵

Kimball engaged in a wide array of mentally and physically demanding Church positions. Kimball shaped his own identity parallel to the great Victorians of the late nineteenth century. At one point he was a mathematics professor and a rustler of wild horses. He strived to meet the masculine expectations common at the time, including strength, endurance, manners, and spirituality. Kimball in his later years focused his attention on writing for the *Improvement Era*. From 1906 until his death, Kimball wrote 30 articles for the magazine, each of them riddled with Victorian expectations mixed with Latter-day Saint values. At the turn of the century, Kimball regretted the loss of vigorous manhood. He was a survivor of the frontier days, and his articles exposed the disappearance of physicality in modern society.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁶ Kimball, *Life of David P. Kimball*, 96.

It's unclear if Kimball had convinced himself that these three 18-year-olds had rescued the Martin Company, or if he had thought that the embellishment was a small price to pay for the larger story. His brother, who had been one of the alleged rescuers had died before he could investigate the story. Regardless, while Kimball was older when he wrote his article, his experiences as a young Mormon man living in the rugged "West" shaped how he formatted the story. In his retelling of the tragedy, Kimball highlighted each of the senses of the rescuers and the pioneers.⁷⁷

He fashioned the narrative as a battle of the human body versus the harsh American wilderness. Kimball recounted the sights, movements, sounds, tastes, and smells of the three young men who carried the emigrants over the Sweetwater. He also named Ephraim Hanks as another protagonist as he battled the elements to find the starving pioneers. The narrative describes the sounds of the Wyoming storms, the weeping mothers, the smell and taste of buffalo meat, and the bodily movements, including the actions, hand gestures, horse riding, and physical struggles of the respective heroes. Examining Kimball's story closely reveals a narrative focused on what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "stylizations of the body."⁷⁸ The antagonist, however, is not a person. Instead, it's the protagonists' bodies. As the rescuers moved throughout the snowy ranges to reach the trapped emigrants, the three young men carried the emigrants across the river. Their experiences were contingent on how their bodies and senses performed in the harsh environment.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 96.

⁷⁸ Rafael F. Narváez, *Embodied Collective Memory: The Making and Unmaking of Human Nature* (Lanham, MD: The University Press of America, 2103), 27. Bourdieu's theories are particularly valuable when reading Kimball's narrative, who argues that external conditions creep up into bodies, and according to Kimball, the physicality of both the rescuers and the young men were tested to their limits.

Kimball may not have known the exact details of the rescue, but he knew his brother had lived to see Salt Lake City. A detail he omits from the narrative.

Soon after its publication, Latter-day Saints were drawn to the three young men who sacrificed their bodies to save the pioneers. Kimball's 12-page article, called "Beloved Emigrants of 1856," used melodramatic language to tug at people's heartstrings. His Victorian language captured the attention of believers transitioning out of a culture war with the United States government. Those who read the narrative were new types of Mormons, shaped less by persecution and mobility and more by modernism and comfort.

This story both thrilled and saddened these post-pioneer era Saints. Kimball's details brought the environment into the narrative. He framed the Wyoming desert as the adversary to the three young heroes who braved the blinding snow and frozen river. The young men, with no shortage of obstacles, and in Herculean fashion, overcame the bitter cold to ensure all were safely delivered to the other side. However, like all good heroic stories, it came at a cost, as the three protagonists succumbed to the storm and eventually died. Kimball's description of the falling snow, the icy Sweetwater River, and the suffering pioneers became so poignant that every summer hundreds of Latter-day Saint youth not only retell Kimball's Sweetwater story but also re-enact it by appointing three strong young men to carry other trekkers across the river.

One excerpt from Kimball's story became requoted in Latter-day Saint communities throughout congregations:

After they had given up in despair, after all hopes had vanished, after every apparent avenue of escape seemed closed, three eighteen-year-old boys belonging to the relief party came to the rescue, and to the astonishment of all who saw, carried nearly every member of that ill-fated handcart company across the snowbound

stream. The strain was so terrible, and the exposure so -ie.it. that in later years all the boys died from the effects of it.⁷⁹

While the story remains important to the legacy of the handcart pioneers, Kimball's narrative of the three young men is largely a fabrication. While the stronger did aid the Martin Company in crossing the Sweetwater, scholars have discredited the story of young heroic men carrying the helpless across the river and then dying as a result. Chad Orton's article uncovered holes in Kimball's story and debunked his claim. While Orton acknowledges that the three young men Kimball identify are real pioneers (one of them being Solomon's older brother), their stories and timelines do not match up with the journal accounts of the Martin Company. Most accounts present a less individualistic tale about the Sweetwater rescue.

Still, the reciprocity between the pioneers' bodies and the Sweetwater River is a key to understanding why this event is so popular among modern Mormons. The battle between the young heroic rescuers is set within the Wyoming environment. Masculine values continued to influence Latter-days Saints through the twentieth century. Both England and America looked for a way to combat the idleness they equated with modern life.

The myth of the Sweetwater rescue relies on accuracy of the geography, climate, and other environmental elements to support its claims. W.B. Masse has argued that people often use geology to ground myths and prove their accuracy: "One can find unambiguous confirmation and field evidence of [a myth's] factual occurrence of the places indicated in the account. These accounts have structural rules and principals which shape the content and oral transmission of the

⁷⁹ Solomon Kimball, "Beloved Immigrants of Utah, *Improvement Era*, 17, (February 1914): 108.

myth.”⁸⁰ Kimball did not embellish about the harsh environment the Martin Company encountered. His description of the blinding snow and frigid temperatures were indeed a reality for the suffering handcart trekkers. Once the reader understood the environmental conditions caused by the Wyoming environment, the details became less important. What mattered was that three pioneer boys demonstrated admirable characteristics during the early twentieth century.

The Sweetwater Rescue is incorporated in most Mormon Trail re-enactments. The Church has designated a portion of the Sweetwater River for young trekkers to re-enact Kimball’s narrative. The young men are asked to read the story before arriving at Martin’s Cove. They then attempt to embody the experiences of these three young men by finding a young woman to carry across the river and demonstrate their own masculinity.

Muscular Christianity and the Handcart Pioneer

In 2006, life-size bronze statues were unveiled in the sagebrush at the base of Martin's Cove, on a rise just off the trail adjacent to the Sweetwater River. The statues are prominently located so those who hike the trail loop around Martin’s Cove could easily notice them. The names of four rescuers — George W. Grant, C.A. Huntington, David P. Kimball, and Stephen W. Taylor — are carved into a smaller stone monument near a bridge over the river further along the trail. One of the statues depicts a man carrying a woman in her hands as he gazes ahead at the daunting storms. The man’s face is chiseled with powerful but comforting features. His body

⁸⁰W. Bruce Masse, Elizabeth Wayand Barber, and Luiui Piccardi, and Paul T. Barber, “Exploring the Nature of Myth and its Role in Science” in *Myth and Geology*, ed. Luigi Piccardi and W. Bruce Masse (London: Geological Society, 2007), 10.

appears strong, and his stance demonstrates the type of masculinity that Solomon Kimball described in his article.

These statues speak to the influence muscular Christianity had on those who brought the Sweetwater story to life. A byproduct of Victorian values, muscular Christianity celebrated a combination of the physically strong and spiritually adept. More specifically, brute strength coupled with religious certainty became the identity for young men to strive for.

Charles Kingsley, who coined the term, concisely defined it as “a man who fears God and can walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours.”⁸¹ If practiced accordingly, men would become perfect Christian gentlemen. The statues towering in the sagebrush demonstrate how the ideals of muscular Christianity enchanted Latter-day Saints.

Nineteenth-century ideas about manliness focused on the body. A gentlemen’s status was derived from and is made visible through the body. The Victorian man in the flesh was a work of art; with muscular tones—chiseled and defined to capture the most aesthetically pleasing physique. Strength training, including rigorous recreation combined with a well-balanced education, produced a true Victorian man. Too much education, Victorians thought, would produce soft and spineless men.⁸²

However, someone who strove for physicality without intellectualism had no place in white, middle-class society in the nineteenth century. American and British ideas about muscular Christianity emphasized sophistication and strength. A.A. Livermore, a Unitarian clergyman,

⁸¹ Donald E. Hall, “Muscular Christianity: Reading and Writing the Male Social Body,” in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed. Donald E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 7; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 22.

⁸² Ibid.

wrote for a return to the simple Persian elements of telling the truth, and hurling the Javelin, instead of the bloodless cheeks, and lifeless limbs, and throbbing brains of our first scholars in Harvard, Yale and Princeton...How much more sound and beautiful would the masterpieces of literature have been had they proceeded from the hearty minds in healthy bodies.”⁸³ Idleness and urban lasciviousness had seeped into society destroying not only aesthetic environments but also the male body.

Advocates for muscular Christianity attempted to perfect their body and spirit by mastering the senses through intense training on dining etiquette. Numerous social instruction handbooks, household manuals, cookery books, and restaurant guides appeared to instruct those on the proper methods for dining. For those striving to become respectable, dinner was the “apogee of the social day.”⁸⁴ According to these nineteenth-century social norms, a true gentleman could show off their mastery of the senses when food arrived at the table. A cottage industry of books emerged on how to perfect eating like a gentleman. According to the book *How to Dine*, the rules were set for how a gentleman to act at the dinner table. Soup became the first course and must never “be noiselessly sipped from the side of a spoon.”⁸⁵ Other courses

⁸³ Judith Knelman, “Class and Gender Bias in Victorian Newspapers,” in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed. Donald E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 7, 32; Hilary Fraser, *Gender and the Victorian periodical* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2005), 10; James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 152; Roberta J. Park, “Biological Thought, Athletics and the Formation of a ‘Man of Character,’ 1830-1900” in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Masculinity in Britain and America*, ed. J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 18-19; Historians have argued that Victorians idolized how the Greeks appreciated the body while still cultivating a rich historical and intellectual space for enlightenment.

⁸⁴ Isabella Mary Beeton, *How to dine, dinners & dining* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1866), 138.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

followed and have similar rules, which could be daunting if the senses weren't mastered. For example, the book entitled *Don't* (1884) offered a series of injunctions, with common forthright tones. One chapter, entitled "At Table," captures this:

Don't eat soup from the end of the spoon, but from the side.

Don't gurgle, or draw in your breath, or make other noises when eating soup.

Don't ask for a second service of soup.

Don't bend over your plate, or drop your head to get each mouthful. Keep an upright attitude as nearly as you can without being stiff. Don't bite your bread. Break it off.

Don't break your bread into your soup.

Don't eat with your knife. Never put your knife into your mouth. (Is this advice unnecessary? Go into any restaurant and observe.)

Don't load up the fork with food with your knife, and then cart it, as it were, to your mouth. Take up on the fork what it can easily carry, and no more.

Don't use a steel knife.⁸⁶

Respectable families were expected to control their senses while around the dinner table.

It's not only how one eats their food, but how one *hears* while they eat. Keeping the mouth closed was imperative for proper Victorian manners. Furthermore, etiquette books further emphasized the relationship between the body and food. Drooping one's head and mishandling silverware were signs of an unrefined gentleman in Victorian America. This expectation bled over into everyday life for the modern Westerners. Posture became important for men. Loquaciousness and loud sounds were ungentlemanlike. Cleanliness became something to strive

⁸⁶ Oliver Bell Bunce, *Don't: a manual of mistakes and improprieties more or less prevalent in conduct and speech* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1884), 86.

for. Following the British, Americans attempted to overcome the natural man by mastering their senses.⁸⁷

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, masculine values pierced the isolated Great Basin and Mormon society. Heroic stories of manhood were shared in Church meetings and publications. Church leaders praised the religion's founders, including Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, for their physical characteristics.⁸⁸ Mormons accepted modern culture as their own and celebrated the qualities of muscular Christianity. While other Americans idolized Teddy Roosevelt and Buffalo Bill Cody, Solomon Kimball presented Latter-day Saints the handcart emigrants rescuers as their own heroes. His upbringing in muscular Christianity combined with his dedication to the Mormon pioneer as an archetype of American heroism to inspire him to take the Sweetwater story to a more dramatic place. Instead of an egalitarian story of Latter-day Saints working together to help the weak, Kimball reimagined the story to include elements of muscular Christianity: individualism, youth, masculinity, and sacrifice. Kimball effectively structured the handcart story around three young men who have mastered their bodies and senses like Greek gods.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Alexander L. Baugh, "Joseph Smith's Athletic Nature," in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 140.

⁸⁹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 18.

The 1947 Centennial Celebration and Embodying the Pioneer

In 1947, Utahns looked forward to celebrating Pioneer Day. The 100th anniversary of the arrival of the Mormon pioneers in the Great Salt Lake Valley was a year of pageantry, dedication, and entertainment. In an editorial in the July 19, 1947, issue of the *Deseret News*, an opinion writer praised the event:

That the whole tone and tenor of our year-long jubilee is 'peculiar' to a 'peculiar people' is evident to all. World fairs, famous expositions and Centennial celebrations there have been a plenty. But there is no record of any having the perspective and theme that are ingrained in our series of commemorative events. We are having the kind of celebration in which Brigham Young himself would rejoice.⁹⁰

A notable moment came when members re-enacted the pioneer trek from Nebraska to Utah. Planning for the centennial had begun decades earlier. The idea for centennial trek had originated in 1937 when Nephi L. Morris, the President of the Sons of Utah Pioneers, suggested a re-enactment of the same route vanguard companies used to enter the valley in 1847. Morris's plan was to replicate the 1847 caravan in exact detail. However, World War II delayed and altered how the Church initiated the event. Patriotism infused many of the re-enactments with the flag proudly displayed at camp locations. Morris and others wasted no time as they coordinated a trek from Nebraska to Utah with 143 men, 3 women, and two boys. Stops were strategically structured to allow for reflection at some of the more famous original pioneer campsites. After discussion, it was decided that 72 automobiles fitted with frames and covered with white cloth to copy the appearance of covered wagons would be used to transport the re-enactors.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Mark Haddock, "Celebrating Pioneer Day in 1947," *Deseret News*, July 2009.

⁹¹ D. James Cannon, *Centennial Caravan: Story of the 1947 Centennial Reenactment of the Original Mormon Trek* (Salt Lake City: Sons of Utah Pioneers, 1947), 2.

The participants chosen possessed the qualities of muscular Christians. According to James Cannon, editor of the memoir about the 1947 re-enactment, the event's organizers considered it important to maintain a strict selection process. John Boud, a seasoned Naval officer headed the committee, expected those who were permitted to join to possess impressive qualities. The top qualification was the "will-to-do." This included the Victorian traits which had penetrated the patriarchal society during the twentieth century. Cannon assured his reader that the right men were chosen by including short biographies about the participants.⁹²

While Cannon's book of remembrance justifies the selection process for the men chosen, the three women who accompanied the re-enactors were treated as an afterthought. They represented Harriet Wheeler Young, Clara Decker Young, and Ellen Sander Kimball, who each played a major role in assisting the first vanguard into the Valley. Still, the re-enactment largely ignored the women. Cannon refers to them as the "effeminate" trekkers and omits their contributions to the event. In a case study of gender inequality, what occurred during the Mormon re-enactment in 1947 wasn't an anomaly. Scholars insist that there are subversive problems in re-enactments regarding gender representation and historical meaning making.⁹³ The years between First Wave and Second Wave Feminism have been presented as slow moving with progress impeded by Cold War values that revived strict gender roles. The patriarchal system was firmly intact. At one-point, there were signs that post-war America could produce more equality. However, as Page Dougherty Delano argues, World War II failed to produce a more

⁹² Ibid., 3.

⁹³ Juliane Tomann, Sabine Stach, Vanessa Agnew, *Reenactment Case Studies: Global Perspectives on Experiential History* (New York: Taylor & Francis Publishing, 2022), 34.

"equal" society women had hoped for.⁹⁴ Latter-day Saints still embraced fading Victorian values. Expectations still loomed large that Latter-day Saint women stay homogeneously tied to their separate sphere. When the women were acknowledged, it was to highlight their feminine accomplishments, including sewing and cooking. The pioneer women who crossed the Plains demonstrated a physicality and determination which was largely ignored during the first major re-enactment of 1947. While contemporary re-enactments will incorporate more physically demanding events for young women, it's always under the eye of the patriarchy which is still a factor to consider.

As the caravan departed, the re-enactors were asked to contemplate the physical feats overcome by their forebears. Organizers and Church leaders directed participants to note their bodily reactions as they traced the route on the Mormon Trail. Boud and Cannon in particular encouraged trekkers to be attuned to their senses. If their food tasted bland or the meat tough, re-enactors were encouraged to contemplate trying to eat bark like the pioneers. Similarly, if their bodies were sore from driving their car, they were asked to consider the pioneer pushing handcarts. And if the silence felt eerie, the trekkers were to imagine the barren Wyoming landscape in 1856. The events challenged the first re-enactors and tested their resolves by introducing their senses to trail life.⁹⁵

Yet, the first re-enactors of 1947 were unprepared or perhaps uninterested in replicating the complete sensory world of the pioneers. The 1947 re-enactors merged a modern trek with the experiences of the pioneers. Cannon and Boud had instructed that white tops of Conestoga

⁹⁴ Page Dougherty Delano, "Making Up for War: Sexuality and Citizenship in Wartime Culture" *Feminist Studies*, 26, no. 1 (Spring, 2000): 56.

⁹⁵ Cannon, *Centennial Caravan*, 148.

wagons were screwed on their roofs, and oxen painted on wooden slats attached to their side vehicles. Still, the car motor propelled them quickly through the plains. Cannon mentions that buffalo meat was provided for a few evening meals, and re-enactors were to consider how the pioneers savored the tender cuts. However, most of their meals were twentieth-century staples including hamburgers, turkey sandwiches, and ice cream.⁹⁶

Other times, while the sounds and silences of the trail played a role as they moved throughout the roads, loudspeakers were attached to the top of cars with constant announcements or directions for the drivers. In sum, the modern world wasn't completely abandoned as they celebrated the centennial.⁹⁷ Today, there are a plethora of opinions on how much (or little) modern materials should be allowed on Mormon Trail re-enactments. While hiking shoes with Gore-Tex are always permitted, local leaders often prohibit participants from bringing anything that can be considered "technological" including phones and earbuds.

The 1947 trek incorporated the modern world into their re-enactment, but their most memorable experiences occurred while engaging their senses in the wilderness like the pioneers. When the re-enactors attempted to crest Rocky Ridge, there was not enough clearance for their cars, and their shocks bounced over the trail. Like the Willie company who abandoned their handcarts on the ridge, some re-enactors left their cars as they crested the peak. The weather was considerably hot and the trail steep. Those who climbed with their bodies complained about their parched throats and sore muscles that night. Consequently, these re-enactors experienced an intimate connection with the pioneers that exceeded those who remained in their cars. When the

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

rain poured on the trekkers, and the heat scorched their skins, they reflected on the difficulty of the pioneers. The thirst they experienced at Martin's Cove, the smell of the Wyoming desert, and the constant sounds of the windy environment helped the trekkers reach meaningful emotional states of connection. According to the commemorative book on the re-enactment, those who challenged their bodies appreciated a richer experience.⁹⁸

One inaccurate re-enactment on the first trek included men dressing up as Native Americans yelling and whooping to frighten the re-enactors. As other chapters note, when pioneers rarely encountered Native Americans, it was generally amicable, and the ungrounded fear of the Native Americans was borne out of racist myths. On July 22, Cannon and Boud brought in local ward teens to dress up as Indians and frighten the re-enactors. They were told to raid the re-enactors and "attack" their caravan. While the plans were never executed, this type of villainizing of the Indigenous people would become much more commonplace in modern-day re-enactors.⁹⁹

When the summer festivals were over, Apostle J. Rueben Clark stirred members to be both mentally and physically worthy of their pioneer heritage. At the semiannual General Conference, Clark would deliver one of the most memorable speeches about the pioneers. Clark's title "They of the Last Wagon" used poetic language that parallels Kimball's article on the Sweetwater Rescue. Clark focused on the last wagons that followed behind the original vanguard of 1847. He provided vivid accounts of the physically exhausted pioneers as they pressed on towards the Great Basin. His words struck listeners who were reeling from the vices

⁹⁸ Cannon, *Centennial Caravan*, 151.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

of the modern world. Clark's admonished believers to pay homage to the pioneers in both thought and deed. His message was repeated throughout the twentieth century. At one point, he emphasized the physicality of the trip:

But back in the last wagon, not always could they see the Brethren way out in front, and the blue heaven was often shut out from their sight by heavy, dense clouds of the dust of the earth. Yet day after day, they of the last wagon pressed forward, worn and tired, footsore, sometimes almost disheartened, borne up by their faith that God loved them, that the restored gospel was true, and that the Lord led and directed the Brethren out in front. Sometimes, they in the last wagon glimpsed, for an instant, when faith surged strongest, the glories of a celestial world, but it seemed so far away and the vision so quickly vanished because want and weariness and heartache and sometimes discouragement were always pressing so near.¹⁰⁰

Clark's words did two things for the reader: first, they reassured them that there would be the rewards for the faithful in the end, and second, they also provided a reminder that the journey to God was both a mental and physical exercise. In 1997, as contemporary re-enactments emerged, President Gordon B. Hinkley used Clark's speech to justify why thousands of young Latter-day Saints embody the pioneers on the Mormon Trail.

While the 1947 re-enactment blended modern amenities with the pioneer experience, their most memorable moments came when they engaged their senses like the pioneers. While it is difficult to say how much the centennial re-enactment influenced leaders in the twenty-first century. It is clear one difference between the centennial and sesquicentennial is the urge to restrict modern technology. As the story became more distant and the mythology grew, contemporary Latter-day Saints became convinced to shorten the gap between young believers

¹⁰⁰ Vaughn J. Featherstone, *Purity of Heart* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing, 1982), 86.

and the handcart pioneers of 1856. Leaders consequently read the handcart stories and structured theatrics to help re-enactors to embody the pioneers by mimicking their sensory experiences.

The Boy Scouts and Embodying the Pioneer. During the twentieth century, the Boy Scouts of America and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints shared a mutually beneficial plan to shape young boys into respectable men. Following the success of the 1947 Centennial re-enactment, LDS troop leaders saw value in testing young men with re-enactments. By focusing on the youth, leaders engineered events to test the physical bodies of Mormon scouts. Mormon Trail re-enactments were generally conducted by Mormon BSA troops until the Church ignited trek for all LDS youth during the sesquicentennial of 1997.

Millions of young Mormons dedicated their time by participating in the myriad of activities and rewards the Boy Scouts offered during the 1900s. More than 145,000 earned the rank of Eagle Scout by the year 2000. The LDS Church donated millions of dollars to support the BSA's often lofty ambitious goals, including scout camps, powwows, and jamborees. An important link between the BSA and the LDS Church was the equal admiration for the pioneer spirit. Both organizations objected to modern society and the lack of rugged outdoorsmanship among America's youth. Latter-day Saint leaders discovered within the BSA an organization where young boys were led into the wild with strict discipline that mirrored many pioneer ideals. For the BSA, they found an ally as Mormon boys came prepared and eager to engage with the

strict guidelines. While the relationship has since fractured, it was perhaps one of the most important secular/religious partnership in the century.¹⁰¹

When the Church officially endorsed the BSA, approximately 20,000 young men were involved in the Church's own scout program. By January 1913, a committee, which included Elder Heber J. Grant from the Quorum of 12 Apostles, met with BSA leader Samuel A. Moffat to discuss a potential partnership. The meeting left Grant "favorably impressed,"¹⁰² and two months later, on March 15, the YMMIA approved a resolution to affiliate with the national Boy Scout program. On September 2, 1913, the *Deseret News* reported that Scouting had been officially adopted "to promote discipline and develop character, to instill honor and trustworthiness in the lives of young boys and to inspire them with a sense of duty to parents, country, and religious ideals."¹⁰³ This type of character development paralleled the masculine ideals Victorians celebrated.

With one foot, the BSA emphasized important qualities newly organized corporations desired, including loyalty, punctuality, and discipline, with the other they stressed the prevailing ideas of muscular Christianity, including rigorous physical activities.¹⁰⁴ The first LDS sponsored BSA troop began with an eager outdoorsman named Thomas George Wood who organized a group of fifty youth between the ages of twelve to eighteen in the heart of Salt Lake City. The boys participated in a plethora of rigorous outdoor activities where they tested their bodies and

¹⁰¹ Mike and Judy Kigin, "History Highlights: Prophets and Scouting," *Vanguard International Scouting Association*, March 15, 2018, <https://www.vanguardscouting.org/blog/history-highlights-prophets-scouting/>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.; Mischa Honeck, *Our Frontier Is the World: The Boy Scouts in the Age of American Ascendancy* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press), 70.

strength in concordance with the new direction Church leaders endorsed. Wood embraced a masculine agenda, arguing that manhood is best achieved by doing physicality.¹⁰⁵

From the beginning, Church leaders detected the strong link between BSA values, and the traditional ideals connected to the pioneers. As then President of the Church Heber J. Grant observed:

Scouting is reaching all boys: poor boys as well as those who are more favored. Utah is setting standards for the whole country. Utah is repeating history. Just as she developed the early scouts, the great heroes of pioneer days, so now she is raising up boy scouts, caught by the same spirit of enterprise, by the same spirit of adventure. It is the pioneer spirit, the holy crusade of olden days applied in practical, yet romantic fashion to the youth of this later.¹⁰⁶

The connection between the Mormon pioneers and the BSA strengthened as the scouts played a role in protecting Mormon Trail sites. When a fire erupted along the Mormon Trail in 1912, it was the scouts who grabbed the essential tools needed to smolder the flames. The BSA and LDS communities heralded the boys as heroes. They continued to monitor and maintain parts of the trail throughout the twentieth century.¹⁰⁷ In 1937, Utah held a Jamboree and introduced scouts from across the world to covered wagons. Troops were instructed to sleep in the wagon beds and participate in pioneer like activities. The article noted that, “Along with it all was a couple of real Mormon handcarts to add to the picture.”¹⁰⁸ In all the Mormon Trail became an important connection for the two organizations as they both saw the tradition of the pioneer to be about mental and physical willpower. The BSA became so impressed by the connection

¹⁰⁵ “A Century of Scouting in the Church” *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, October, 2013, <https://www.Churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2013/10/a-century-of-scouting-in-the-Church?lang=eng>.

¹⁰⁶ George J. Fisher, “Scouting in Utah,” *Improvement Era*, 27 (1924): 472.

¹⁰⁷ “Fire on Mormon Trail Extinguished by Scouts,” *Scouting*, 4, no. 10. (September 16, 1916): 4.

¹⁰⁸ “Jamboree” *Scouting*, 25, no. 9, (September 1937): 27.

young Latter-day Saints had with their ancestors, that one advertisement encouraged scouts from anywhere to seek out a “Indian trail or some historical site near you.”¹⁰⁹

As America entered mid-century, the connection between the Boy Scouts and the pioneers became more bodily and sensory as they participated in Mormon pioneer re-enactments. In 1952, troops in Utah decided to re-enact the last thirty-six miles of the route into the Salt Lake Valley. The boys hiked for two days as they forded rivers and maneuvered through passes. They slept, ate, pushed their handcarts, and sang songs like the pioneers.¹¹⁰ In 1974, more than 100 Ogden High School scouts hiked down the top of North Ogden Pass into Liberty, Utah. Not only did they wear handmade pioneer clothing and carry old rifles and muskets, but the group also used covered wagons as well as handcarts to traverse the difficult terrain. They encountered heavy snowfall and treacherous conditions. Splattered with mud, the group unanimously praised the Mormon pioneer’s sacrifice. Steve Belnap, one of the participants, claimed, “Having to perform guard duty at night, eat pioneer food cooked on a fire. and everything else we did help me appreciate the hardships of my pioneer ancestors.”¹¹¹ A few years later, another scout group had so many problems with their wheels on their replicated handcarts, they carried the whole handcart during a storm. When they reached their destination at This is the Place State Park in Salt Lake City, they stood at the monument of Brigham Young, and stated how grateful that their time on the pioneer trail lasted only an afternoon.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ “Pioneer Trail Trek,” *Scouting*, 40, no. 4 (April 1952): 29.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹¹ Laurel G. Cole, “FYI: For Your Information,” *New Era*, June 1974.

¹¹² Ruth Duffen, “We Sang Hymns When Things Got Rough,” *New Era*, October 1978.

By the 1970s and 80s, it was commonplace for Utah scout troops to introduce Mormon Trail re-enactments that tested the senses of young believers. High adventure outings consisted of daring events which the pioneers encountered. This included anything from pushing replicated carts up hills, to eating less food. As the next chapter notes, these re-enactments will grow to become more visceral and sensorial as the Church purchased the land around the Sweetwater area for pageantry. For example, in 1982 an LDS troop outside Washington, D.C gathered 300 young men for a handcart re-enactment. Each group had to construct their own cart and push it through the Chesapeake region. “We wanted participants to learn what it was really like to be a pioneer,”¹¹³ explained Kevin Rees, the youth director of the encampment. A precursor to modern trek, the young men faced the perils of Indian attacks, mudholes, broken wheels and mob raids. Trekkers would sing Come, Come Ye Saints, and when challenging situations arose, a troop leader would say, “Well, what would the pioneers have done?”¹¹⁴

Latter-day Saint scout troops normalized Mormon Trail re-enactments for young believers. Following the success of the 1947 Centennial re-enactments, BSA leaders orchestrated re-enactments to embody the pioneers with events that challenged their bodies with activities that replicate sensory world of the pioneers. As they existed like the pioneers, they claimed to draw closer to them. As they came to appreciate the sacrifices endured by the pioneers.

Conclusion

There are many anecdotes and narratives that help explain why Latter-day Saint teens re-enact the experiences of the handcart pioneers each year. From the first report of the handcart

¹¹³ Richard M. Romney, “Homemade Handcarts and Trails of Skill,” *New Era*, May 1982.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

incident, the Church methodically shaped the story to be advantageous to their religion. As the Church struggled to maintain their image in the nineteenth century, the handcart story became a shining example of true sacrifice and heroism. Later, that myth grew thanks to the writing of Solomon Kimball, and the influential power of Victorian masculinity. Following WWII, LDS believers looked for heroes that possessed the attributes Cold War Americans sought after: perseverance, strength, spirituality, and success. By that time, the handcart emigrants had been designated with those characteristics and more. The 1947 re-enactment paved the way for others to engage in similar experiences to draw closer to the Church and their pioneer ancestors. As the Latter-day Saint Boy Scouts re-enacted the pioneers, Church leaders saw the value in testing all their youth.

The belief which is prevalent in LDS re-enactments today revolves around the idea that human experience flows from bodies and, more specifically, through our senses that feel, express emotion, taste, smell, and see the world. Church leaders quickly looked for ways to discern how the pioneers used their bodies to survive on the trail. They guarded the story closely, emphasizing the heroic aspects and refocusing the narrative to be about the determination to survive when the storms trapped them. It will be later when the Church focuses on the journals of those who were trapped, and the hellish conditions they endured. When they embraced these stories, re-enactments became more inclusive, more intense, and more sensorial.

The following chapters will consider how Mormon Trail re-enactments are best understood the proper context of their dynamic transition from England to the American West. Using sensory history, it becomes clear that as they moved from the urban cities to the frigid Wyoming desert, their decisions were based on a sensory transition. The changing sights, sounds,

smells, tastes, and feelings of the pioneers dictated how they pushed their handcarts on the trail. Re-enactments become more comprehensible when they are contextualized within the pioneer's sensory transition from the urban streets to wilderness travel.

CHAPTER TWO

EMBODYING THE PIONEER

Introduction

On a warm autumn day in Gilbert, Arizona, a group of young Latter-day Saints participated in a theatrical experience that demonstrated the power of sensory re-enactments. The youth were between twelve and sixteen and dressed in either prairie dresses or cotton shirts and suspenders depending on their gender. They spent most of the day pushing homemade handcarts along a path representing the Mormon Trail. The Arizona sun was hot, and the young trekkers had already experienced a wide variety of re-enactments testing their dedication to recreating the experiences of the handcart pioneers. However, what occurred next blurred historical time periods and focused on the persecution that had followed early Mormons. A faux mob with bandana masks surrounded the re-enactors, fired blanks out of guns, and demanded Joseph Smith be turned over. The young trekkers hesitated at first. Then a 16-year-old boy stepped forward and volunteered to receive the abuse in Smith's stead. What came next was bizarre, as the mobsters, attempting to replicate a tar and feathering, dumped a pot of chocolate pudding on the young boy's body followed by feathers. Stunned at first, the young trekkers reacted violently.¹¹⁵

The young trekkers' retaliation was analogous to the actions of volunteers during the Stanford Prison Experiment. In 1971, Stanford professor Philip Zimbardo built a mock jail, and

¹¹⁵ Lawn Griffith, "Gilbert Ward Connects with Ancestors by Re-Enacting Mormon Trek" *East Valley Tribune*, November 12, 2005, http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/get_out/gilbert-ward-connects-with-ancestors-by-re-enacting-mormon-trek/article_18f0a27c-2572-5773-8f97-f454a1b762b0.html. Many stories about trek are available through local newspapers which document Latter-Day-Saints from their respective hometowns.

assigned volunteer college students to be either prisoners or guards. Eventually, they fully embodied their roles and violence seeped into the experience.¹¹⁶ Like the prisoners, the young trekkers “attacked the mob with poles they used to pull their handcarts, with some from the mob hurt, and one received a cut on the side of his head.”¹¹⁷

Were historians to have observed this specific trek event they would have detected the complexity that accompanies theatrical re-enactments. The trek organizers were familiar with some documented accounts about persecution against Mormons in early America. Latter-day Saints tussled with mobs frequently, and Joseph Smith and others were tarred and feathered. The chocolate pudding conjured up for these young trekkers a comparable feeling to the anger nineteenth-century Mormons felt. It is possible to argue that these youth embodied persecuted Mormons for a fleeting moment. However, a scholar familiar with Mormonism would raise some concerns about anachronism. Handcart pioneers never encountered a mob while trekking, and Joseph Smith died 12 years before the handcart expedition. In a more accurate performance, the mobsters would have demanded Brigham Young. This account is evidence that living history can be both provocative and problematic when re-enactors use violence while embodying.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Mormon Trail re-enactments use sensory history to create a meaningful relationship between young Mormons and the past. Mormon Trail

¹¹⁶ The Stanford Psychologist Philip G. Zimbardo experimented in the 1970s on obedience to authority. In the study, volunteers were assigned to be either "guards" or "prisoners" in a mock prison setting by the flip of a coin. The study demonstrated the surprising ease with which ordinary persons can be commanded to act destructively against innocent individuals when given legitimate authority. This continues to claim the attention of psychologists and other social scientists, as well as the public. For more information see: Thomas Blass's *Obedience to Authority: Current Perspectives on the Milgram Paradigm*.

¹¹⁷ Griffith, “Gilbert Ward Connects with Ancestors by Re-Enacting Mormon Trek.”

re-enactments, like all re-enactments, by nature are sensorial. The more authentic trek becomes, the more the sensory experiences become visceral and taxing for the young re-enactors. Between the years 1998 to 2015 trek experienced a sort of “Wild West” era. Before the Church published strict guidelines, grassroots youth leaders implemented a wide array of experiences that often sacrificed safety for authenticity. As young Latter-day Saints tried to embody the pioneers, leaders orchestrated events that focused on manipulating their sensory environment. LDS leaders instructed young re-enactors to wear smothering pioneer clothing, disregard modern amenities, and research nineteenth-century pioneer life. When executed properly, this process allowed LDS children to engage with their culture’s symbol systems intellectually, emotionally, and through embodied experiences.

The first section of this chapter considers how Mormon Trail re-enactors attempt to reach a sublime connection to the pioneers through sensorial mimicry. Performance theorists use the term sublime when re-enactors claim they temporarily separate historical distance. Success hinges on a sensory connection. The environment must be monitored allowing for a re-enactor to become convinced they have suspended time and place. While in a subliminal state, they connect with something bigger than oneself. Often, participants articulate their emotions as a connection to God or the divine. Sensory history can help scholars understand why embodying past people’s senses is necessary for these emotional states.

The second section outlines how trek became an overnight success as multisensory re-enactments became ubiquitous every summer. The 1997 re-enactment ignited interest in trek during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The sesquicentennial set precedents on how to replicate the experience of Latter-day Saint pioneers. Imitating the sights, sounds, smells, and

tastes of the handcart pioneers became normalized. 1997 implemented theatrical performances that strived for authenticity. The re-enactment zoomed in on the handcart pioneers and their rescuers. They became further venerated as the pioneer worth emulating. Trek turned to the sesquicentennial as a model before the Church introduced more specific guidelines.

The final section analyzes how treks isolate the senses to elicit deeper connections with the handcart pioneers. When leaders plan re-enactments, each respective sense is considered by trek organizers. The young participants mimic nineteenth-century clothing styles and use handcarts built to scale. They encounter a soundscape that is monitored, and the food is engineered carefully to match the pioneers' experiences in Wyoming.

The general argument of this chapter is that trek, as a product of living history, validates sensory history's importance as a methodology. There is something about engaging with past people's sensory experiences that energizes curiosity in history. Research and publications need to evolve with the tide of history, which is increasingly about people seeking ways to better understand history by using their bodies.

The Sublime and Sensory Re-enactments

Scholars use the concept of the "sublime" to explain powerful connections people claim to experience during re-enactments. Vanessa Agnew has written extensively on re-enactments and sublimity. She argues that re-enactments emerge as a body-based discourse in which the past is reanimated through physical and psychological experiences. This can, according to Agnew, lead to what Edmund Burke called the sublime. To Burke, the sublime is a state in which someone experiences the overwhelming size of the universe. It can evoke a sense of beauty, terror, and/or awe. Burke regards the sublime as the strongest emotion the mind can experience.

In this case, the emotion comes from connecting to the experiences of the past people and inhabiting the same space. It requires a sense that they are embodying another person's experiences. The senses become the means of the connection.¹¹⁸ The humanities scholar Jonathan Lamb builds on Agnew's research. He postulates that when re-enactments produce an overflow of emotions and sensations the line blurs between the re-enactor and the historical person. At such moments of intensity, a concept called "prosthetic memory" helps us understand how re-enactments create illusions of traveling back in time with individuals obtaining memories of historical events.¹¹⁹

For sublime experiences to occur, the environment must be constructed to create the possibility for what Jill Dolan calls "Performance Utopias." When people carefully construct the environment for re-enactors, participants can experience fleeting yet powerful glimpses of utopia through the sublime. In these contexts, deep empathy surfaces, and can produce a shared subliminal experience. These groups hope for transformation that might convince them to evaluate their privileged conditions. Dolan's theory, which has been largely considered within a theater context, is applicable when applied to religious re-enactors. Accordingly, these utopias create spaces that persuade people to engage in improving personal and cultural relationships.¹²⁰ For young Latter-day Saints, these experiences nurture deep empathy toward the handcart pioneers and their Church.

¹¹⁸ Vanessa Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?" *Criticism*, 46, no. 3 (Summer, 2004): 330.

¹¹⁹ Jonathon Lamb, "Sublime," in *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*, ed. Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, Juliane Tomann (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2019), 210.

¹²⁰ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 455.

The performance scholars Megan Sanborn Jones and Lindsay Livingston have both studied how Latter-day Saints engage in performative mediums. Sanborn Jones examines Mormon pageants and confirms that the places where these performances happen is essential for infusing past narratives with contemporary believers. “These locations,” Sanborn Jones writes, “transforms them into memorials to the dead, an intersection of time and space, that both preserves the past and makes it new again through performance.”¹²¹ Livingston, while analyzing the Hill Cumorah Pageant in New York, builds on Sanborn Jones’ conclusions. She contends that, “both the spectators and performers, through their spatial and embedded experiences at the site, are reminded of the Church’s history and mythology, while at the same time, their future understanding, is affected by their participation in the spatial production of the site and the performance.”¹²²

Building on Sanborn Jones and Livingston, scholars argue that when there is a history of trauma at these places, the performance become even more meaningful and subliminal. Barbara Whitmer insists that victims and descendants of trauma, either by biology or “culture, reenact traumatic events in hopes of healing and righting wrongs. She claims these moments can lead to a suspension of time and place. Similarly, the scholar Lucy Nevitt Magliocco argues theatric re-

¹²¹ Megan Sanborn Jones, *Contemporary Mormon Pageantry: Seeking After the Dead* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 7.

¹²² Lindsay Livingston, “This is the Place: Performance and the Production of Space in Mormon Cultural Memory,” in *Enacting History*, ed., Scott Magelssen and Rhona Justice-Malloy (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 31.

enactments of violence are likely to “sanitize or diminish the suffering, dirt, and squalor that are inseparable from an actual battlefield.”¹²³

Sifting through trek stories, it’s evident that many young Latter-day Saints claim to have reached this sublime experience while re-enacting in sacred spaces. While some trekkers leave the experience feeling manipulated, many describe trek as a profound awakening. There are many stories of young people becoming so convinced by the theatrics that they lose track of time and place. One participant found herself feeling overwhelmed about crossing a river. Then an image came to her mind, “I knew it was the Lord reminding me about that moment [of the pioneers crossing the Sweetwater River], that there were angels,” she recalled that with emotion in her voice. “Just like that experience, I knew the Lord would be by my side and send angels, that I would be able to go through it and be able to achieve everything that I was doing.”¹²⁴ A fifteen-year-old re-enactor named Elizabeth Jeffery recalled “I think about them differently now.

¹²³ Lucy Nevitt Magliocco, *Theatre and Violence* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 42-43. Psychologists have looked at this phenomenon of the sublime in controlled environments. Edwin Holt and Roger Barker offer a theory about the dynamic interaction between participants and re-enactments. They propose a complex integration of a re-enactor and their extended environment, which can develop when they are immersed into the land and story. Holt called this the "recession of the stimulus." In one controlled study in Iowa, Baker and Holt discovered a high degree of correlation between a group's behavior and the broader social setting. These settings occur naturally, have distinct boundaries and, while dependent on the collective actions of a group, are objectively independent of any individual participant. As they observe and participate in a controlled environment, participants become myopically convinced by staged performances which recapture past events. For further reading, see Harry Heft, “Ecological Psychology in Context: James Gibson, Roger Barker, and the Legacy of William James's Radical Empiricism” *John Capps Source*, 38, no. 3 (2002): 470.

¹²⁴ Sydney Walker, “How Handcart Treks in Argentina are Connecting Youth with Their Latter-day Saint Pioneer Legacy,” *The Church News*, October 28, 2021.

Instead of a Sunday School story on a page, I believe I can now feel a little bit of their struggles and their pains and their great joy.”¹²⁵

In 2013, a Church group from Herriman, Utah organized a trek verifying how re-enacting traumatic events can elicit emotional responses. Local Church leaders brought over a dozen teenagers to the wilderness to witness depictions of major events in Church history. Productions included Joseph Smith’s First Vision, the organization of the Church, Smith’s experiences in Liberty Jail, and other pivotal events in Mormon history. A watershed moment occurred when youth were assigned to re-enact Joseph Smith’s martyrdom at Carthage Jail. A seventeen-year-old boy named Quinton Fisher was assigned the role of Joseph Smith. “It really brought everything to life,” Fisher said. “He sacrificed and gave his whole life to the gospel.”¹²⁶ Fisher maintains his experience drew him closer to his faith and to Joseph Smith. It was in the act of embodying that allowed him to reach a sublime experience in which he claimed to have felt similar pains as Joseph Smith.¹²⁷

During the same trek, the youth encountered a rowdy mob that destroyed their replica temple creating a further suspension of time and place. The organizers directed the trekkers to help construct a Nauvoo Temple. They applied stucco to the walls, built stained-glass windows, and placed an angel Moroni on the roof. The completed temple stood over 20 feet high and

¹²⁵ Melissa Merrill, “Blazing Trails of Faith” *Church Magazines*, July 2010.

¹²⁶ Ryan Morgenegg, “Utah Youth Reenact Pioneer Heritage,” *The Church News*, September 18, 2013.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

towered over the re-enactment space. During the next four days, historical characters visited the youth to inspire and help maintain an environment that appeared and felt historical.¹²⁸

On the last day of the conference, the youth braved another violent re-enactment from Mormon history. A man portraying Brigham Young asked the youth to gather at the temple. He told them that because of persecution, they were going to have to leave for the West. During his speech, “armed men” appeared and ransacked the temple. Amber Crane, an 18-year-old young woman captured how this violent moment elevated the youth towards a strong connection with the pioneers:

When the mobs came, my heart sank. In the back of my mind I had an idea of what would happen, but I never thought that it would be as horrible as it was. It was devastating. We had put so much hard work into building our temple, and it was hard to sit there and watch them ruin it. I was angry and I wanted to stop them, but I knew that I couldn't because the pioneers had to sit there and watch just like me. It was one of the worst experiences, but it showed me just how hard the pioneers really had it. It helped us. It was when they bonded with these reenactments it helped them bond in other ways too.¹²⁹

Sensory historians advocate for the type of descriptive history that re-enactors rely on when organizing events. They conduct archival research into how people detail what they saw, heard, tasted, smelled, or touched. The re-enactment story shared at the beginning of this chapter is worth considering in context of sensory history. When these sensory historians write about a tar-and-feathering they do so with rich details. The sight of the viscous black liquid running down a body, the smell of the hot chemical tar, the sound of the victims' screams, and the feel of the hardened tar after it had cooled would be emphasized. Organizers of re-enactments aim for a similar sensory reaction. The image of the body being covered with a thick liquid and the mob's

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹Ibid.

laughter were effective in placing the participants closer to understanding the humiliating and painful experience of being tarred and feathered.

A major difference between re-enactors and professional sensory historians is the risk attached to living history. Re-enactments are burdened with the possibility that some re-enactors will become so engrossed in theatrical reality that they will act in unpredictable ways. These unintended side effects highlight the potential downfall of creating intense bodily connections. The young trekkers, angry over Joseph Smith's mistreatment in Missouri, attempted to rewrite the story of what happened to early Latter-Day Saints. In their emotional state, they became convinced that the mobs intended to harm the trek group. The "mob" leaders quickly switched out of character and asked the youth to stop throwing rocks. The youth, however, had become so affected, they wounded a few of the men. This can happen in the quest for the sublime when re-enactors lose track of time and place. There is something about restoring a full sensory texture of history that captivates human imagination.

Robert Orsi's well-known but controversial ideas surrounding "abundant history" are worth considering here. He calls for historians to be bolder with their research. Orsi argues that Western modernity has too readily dismissed so-called religious experiences. He takes umbrage with those who claim these experiences are inaccessible to researchers. Orsi says these experiences are now "drained of presence" and "remade in conformity with modern liberal notions of what 'religion' is: autonomous, a distinct domain apart from other areas of life, private, in conformity with the causal laws of nature, reasonable, interior."¹³⁰ Orsi asks the

¹³⁰Robert A. Orsi, "Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity," *Historically Speaking*, 9, no. 7 (September/October 2008): 13.

historian to jettison their classical notions of logic and space and time to further understand the “abundant events” that mark the lives of religious subjects. Under Orsi’s theory, researchers need to probe deeper and consider how religious experiences and their presence, existence, and power in space and time are intertwined with physical sensory experiences. In this way, the historian becomes linked with the historical subject as they both acknowledge the spiritual experience as being worthy of scrutiny.¹³¹

Mormon historians like Stephen Taysom have considered Orsi’s theory. While Taysom is fascinated with Orsi’s claims, he finds some conclusions problematic. One of Taysom’s biggest concerns is how Orsi fails to address the narratives which shape these religious experiences. As Taysom puts it: “Because these events have made their way into the historical record, we know that they made it out of the individual’s mind and into the mind of someone else.”¹³² For Taysom, and other critics, individuals who participate in spiritual events have bought into the narrative that the original event generated. Taysom uses the story of Joseph Smith’s Gold Plates as a case study to complicate Orsi’s abundant history. For Taysom, the plates intruded into American culture because of the narrative that surrounds them. It is the narrative that gives them such power.

It’s beneficial to consider Orsi’s theory and Taysom’s objections in the context of sensory history and Mormon Trail re-enactments. Sublime experiences are an intriguing phenomenon. Many scholars do not address the sensory connection that is imperative for this connection. Orsi

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Stephen Taysom, “Abundant Events or Narrative Abundance: Robert Orsi and the Academic Study of Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 45, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 9, 21.

insists that historians have concluded “the gods are not available by touch, taste, sound, or sight.”¹³³ Orsi would benefit by looking closer at the success of re-enactors who create sensory experiences to reach these enlightened moments. It is through sensory connections that many spiritual manifestations become real. The sight of the landscape, the sound of the wind, the taste of the unpalatable food, and the smell of the wildflowers are the gateway to these ineffable experiences. To Taysom’s point, the narrative that shaped the event is the key that unlocks this intimate relationship. However, as this dissertation argues, it is the specific sensory narrative that has been reconstructed to benefit the re-enactor who is trying to reach this spiritual enlightenment.

People who participate in historical re-enactments in highly controlled settings often claim sublime and out-of-body experiences through the senses. For historians, how they use these sources is particularly relevant. Re-enacting sensory experiences is important for people who want to produce intimate affiliations with past people. When re-enactors embody the senses of past people, they do it based on how historical figures reported their experiences in journals, newspaper articles, and letters.

Embodying During the 1997 Sesquicentennial Trek. The grandeur of the 1997 sesquicentennial re-enactment inspired trek to become a popular cultural event for young Mormons. During the sesquicentennial, Latter-day Saints introduced pioneer re-enactments as extravagant commemorations. On July 22, an estimated 50,000 people greeted 61 wagons, nine handcarts, 45 horseback riders, and 380 walkers at This Is the Place State Park near the mouth of

¹³³ Orsi, “Abundant History,” 13.

Emigration Canyon in Salt Lake City. They had traveled from the Mormon Pioneer Cemetery at Winter Quarters near Omaha to Salt Lake City over three months. Nearly 10,000 people participated. Some only trekked for a few hours, while others re-enacted for days or weeks. A select few traveled the entire 93-day journey. The impetus for the reenactment began after three independent companies organized together. A nonprofit company called “Mormon Trail Wagon Train—150 Years, Inc.” was created to handle the legal and financial aspects of the wagon train. The Church did not directly sponsor the trek. They surmised it would be too costly to spend tithing donations for the re-enactment. The Church, however, did provide generous financial contributions while providing public affairs missionaries along the trail.¹³⁴

While engaging in bodily and sensory re-enactments, the 1997 trekkers encountered misfortunes like those of the original pioneers. Re-enactors discovered the dangers of maneuvering cumbersome handcarts through the valley. Larry Stewart sustained a critical head injury loading his 2,800-pound wagon onto a flatbed truck. It slipped and pinned him against a van. Others discovered the toll trail life takes on the body. Kimberly Stewart broke her foot while pulling a handcart and was forced to ride in the wagon. The trekkers encountered torrential rains in Nebraska, rocky trails in Wyoming, and steep mountain roads in Utah. As one trekker recalled, “the blisters, sunburns, and aching muscles were *real*.”¹³⁵ The performance scholar Jody Enders argues that with living history, regardless of the intended consequences of a performative event,

¹³⁴ LaRene Porter Gaunt and Jennifer Shumway Ballard, “Letting the World Know,” *Ensign*, (October 1997): 54.

¹³⁵ Anna Bryner, “From Nebraska to Utah: 1997 Trek Re-enactment Still Impacts Participants,” *The Daily Universe*, (July 21, 2017).

there is a persistent stream of flux, where unpredictability (especially in natural places where performances occur) demonstrates the instability of intention.¹³⁶

Some believers who were not biologically related to the handcart families joined the re-enactment to develop a deeper connection to pioneer ancestry. For example, Walter Okamoto and his family came from Japan to participate in events along the way. “They are my pioneers too,” Okamoto said, “We all benefitted from their faith, courage, and sacrifice. What those pioneers did, they did for all of us.”¹³⁷ Vladimir Sechov arrived in Utah from Ukraine with a handcart assembled and delivered from Kyiv for the centennial.¹³⁸ Apostle Dieter Uchtdorf, a German convert to the Church, did not participate in the 1997 trek. Eleven years later, he justified his spiritual connection to the pioneers. “I love and honor the faith and courage of those early pioneers of the Church,” Uchtdorf stated. “My own ancestors were living an ocean away at the time. None were among those who lived in Nauvoo or Winter Quarters, and none made the journey across the plains. But as a member of the Church, I claim with gratitude and pride this pioneer legacy as my own.”¹³⁹ Uchtdorf opened the floodgates for trek to become a global occurrence. From Mongolia to Argentina, believers constructed handcarts and participated in their own treks with a dose of their cultural practices adapted to the re-enactments.

The sesquicentennial named creating authentic sensory experiences as a primary goal. Church leaders reminded volunteers on the trail to do that which was most meaningful.

¹³⁶ Lare N. E. Porter Gaunt and Jennifer Shumway Ballard, “Letting the World Know,” *Ensign*, (October 1997): 57; Jody Enders, *Murder by Accident: Medieval Theater, Modern Media, Critical Intentions* (New South Wales: ReadHowYouWant.com, Limited, 2010), 82.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Michael S. Van Rosen, “Russian handcart reaches New York -- Saints Across Eastern Europe Honor Pioneers,” *Church News*, June 27, 1997.

¹³⁹ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Faith of Our Fathers,” *Church News*, April 12, 2008.

Expectations were set that the 1997 re-enactment would be condensed into a few significant moments. In later treks, “rogue” leaders embraced a more authentic experience for these young re-enactors. During the sesquicentennial trek, however, organizers arranged times to slip in and out of their performative roles. In this way, young Latter-day Saints became like actors exiting the stage after they complete their lines. In one example, some trekkers are given scripted lines when monumental re-enactments take place. Many trek groups will assign a young man to read part of Solomon Kimball’s Sweetwater Rescue story (See Chapter Two).

Andi Pitcher Davis provides a window into how the 1997 re-enactors selectively embodied the experiences of the pioneers with their senses. Davis woke at 5:30am and donned a dress made of eight yards of homespun cotton. She cooked an “authentic” breakfast with a cast iron pan over an open fire. She then slipped out of her role and loaded up camp into a large moving van. When the van was out of sight, she quickly returned to character. Her family, along with hundreds of others, began walking alongside a wagon train in the open terrain. She walked 18 miles that day, singing pioneer songs in her period attire. There was not a perfect science of when and how to break character for young trekkers. While staged performances are much more controlled, these re-enactors are often told to act spontaneously when a leader addresses them.

The 1997 sesquicentennial re-enactment explicitly tried to replicate the sensory world of the pioneers. One isolated group called themselves the “authentic group.” These re-enactors dedicated themselves to sleeping in nineteenth-century tents, eating pioneer food, and speaking and acting like pioneers. Their wagons and handcarts were constructed to scale. They square

danced, ate buffalo meat, performed theatrics, and walked like the pioneers.¹⁴⁰ While thousands participated, the “authentic group” became well-known and more attuned to how replicating the sensory world might lead to a more powerful experience.¹⁴¹

During the sesquicentennial, there were reports of re-enactors achieving sublime experiences. Some spoke of powerful experiences where they felt that the veil between the living and the dead had shattered. A fifteen-year-old girl named Jane became convinced her deceased grandmother was walking beside her to give her advice. Another re-enactor claimed that the spirit moved with the wagon train.¹⁴² Sandy VanLeeuwen reported, “There have also been some great family relationships built, especially those pulling handcarts. They have a family bond between each other because they more than anybody, have suffered a lot of what our pioneers did in their struggles.”¹⁴³

The sesquicentennial celebrations ended with a large spectacle, and a directive to keep the pioneer’s memory close by. On July 24th and 25th, 130,000 people witnessed the Pioneer Sesquicentennial Spectacular at BYU Cougar Stadium. Thousands viewed it over the Church’s satellite system and by tape delay over television. Four water fountains, 130 automated light fixtures, and video scenes displayed on a huge television screen were shown at the stadium. Three thousand balloons, 600 flags, four campfires, four maypoles, 200 confetti cannons, and fireworks augmented the spectacle. The spectacle was, perhaps unbeknownst to the Church, the

¹⁴⁰ Sara Patterson, “Everyone Can Be a Pioneer,” in *Out of Obscurity: Mormonism Since 1945*, ed. Patrick Q. Mason and John G. Turner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 308.

¹⁴¹ Anna Bryner, “From Nebraska to Utah: 1997 Trek Re-enactment Still Impacts Participants,” *The Daily Universe*, July 21, 2017.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ “Trekkers Reflect Trail Experience,” *The Daily Universe*, (July 23, 1997).

commencement of trek becoming a phenomenon.¹⁴⁴ When the festivities were over, President Hinckley asked believers to “pick up the pioneer torch and rekindle it.” He later stated, “Latter-day Saints have looked back at their heritage and at the same time have looked deep into their own souls. I think there has been a recommitment to the faith, courage and virtues which carried those earliest pioneers westward.”¹⁴⁵

Following the sesquicentennial, the Church concentrated on managing the area for re-enactments. On May 16, 2002, in Washington, D.C, an LDS leader named H. David Burton appeared before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources with the intention of purchasing the surrounding area around Martin’s Cove. In the previous year, the Church had negotiated with the Sun Ranch family to purchase the Hub and Spoke portion which made much of the area accessible. A bill was introduced in Congress that would enable the Church to purchase the area and connect it to the existing Mormon Handcart Visitor Center. Some members of the Recreation and Public Lands Subcommittee were hesitant to turn over federal land to a religious organization.

Burton began the presentation by recounting the story of the Willie and Martin companies to soften the hearts of the committee members. “In order to understand why Martin's Cove is such a sacred location to the Latter-day Saint people and to our Church,” Burton stated, “I must tell you the saga of the Martin and Willie Handcart companies of Mormon Pioneers.”¹⁴⁶ Burton recounted positive memories, omitted organizational blunders, and only briefly talked

¹⁴⁴ R. Scott Lloyd, “Sesquicentennial Spectacular,” *Church News*, (August 2, 1997).

¹⁴⁵ Sarah Jane Weaver, “Sesquicentennial was fulfilling experience,” *The Dessert News*, (August 2, 1997).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

about the suffering. He recounted Brigham Young's call for members in the Salt Lake Valley to rescue the victims, who reached the Martin company just in time. While addressing the committee, Burton used emotional language in his retelling of the account: "The individual stories told from journals of the survivors and the roughly 200 who died from their ordeal are at once tragic, touching and triumphant. From that time to this, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have found inspiration from the stories of faith, dedication, sacrifice and suffering of the Willie and Martin Handcart companies in Wyoming."¹⁴⁷

Burton was a successful businessman and was primed for the task to convince the committee to turn over the rights of Martin Cove to the Church. Burton believed that land and resources should be monitored by private corporations. As a former attorney for Kennecott Copper he had witnessed, under the Clean Water Act, the federal government sue the company because of the hazardous substances released into the environment. He explained to the subcommittee how the Church invested its resources to improve facilities to accommodate visitors. The Church had constructed a bridge, parking lots, public restrooms, campgrounds and even handcarts for public use. Burton asserted: "I do not believe any other group, including the BLM, would have devoted the financial and human resources we have to establish Martin's Cove as the significant historical destination it has become."¹⁴⁸ Burton proved to be successful, as the bill — H.R. 4103, "Martin's Cove Land Transfer Act," — was passed out of committee on May 22 for the consideration of the full House.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 209.

¹⁴⁸ Greg Hill, "Church's Interest in Martin's Cove Explained to Congress," *Church News*, May 2002.

Despite the bill passing, disagreements needed to be worked out between Latter-day Saint leaders and the BLM. The LDS Church wanted unfettered access to Martin's Cove, Rocky Ridge, and other monumental sites to operate them on their terms. The BLM had operated the visitors center that was located just outside the presumed location of Martin's Cove since the 1970s. Many locals felt unsettled about turning over complete access to the site to a private religion. Sara Patterson traced this capricious relationship between the LDS Church and the BLM at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Patterson concludes that Latter-day Saints considered themselves the only suitable caretakers for the sacred site. A believer from American Samoa referred to it as a burial site, and that it needed to be managed by the progeny of the pioneers who suffered there. After consistent lobbying and negotiations, in 2001, with most Wyoming residents in opposition, the Church received permission from the BLM to serve as stewards of the Cove and manage the area for 25 years.¹⁴⁹

While the Church spent resources on maintaining the environment, leaders often turned a blind eye or overlooked trek groups that sacrificed responsible land stewardship for spiritual enlightenment. While Patterson provides important details about the recent history of Martin's Cove, it's necessary to focus on why LDS leaders vied for complete access to the land. As treks multiplied, youth leaders orchestrated prolific events leading to an increase in waste and foot traffic in the area. With the Cove securely in the Church's hands, exceptions were made if a trek group needed to overstrain the land for young people to embody the pioneers.

The Church continues to update their procedures and guidelines for trek groups. The Church released a detailed handbook with certain procedures in 2013. The handbook

¹⁴⁹ Patterson, *Pioneers in the Attic*, 123-25.

recommended that a safety and health leader as well as a medical team accompany teenagers when they went on trek. At sites the Church has dedicated for trek (i.e., Martin’s Cove, Rocky Ridge, etc.), there are now multiple medical stations available. The Church’s handbook dedicates five pages to safety and health. Specific guidelines describe handcart care, inclement weather preparations, dehydration prevention and treatment, symptoms of and treatments for common injuries and illnesses, and transportation for medical needs. The Church advises that “leaders should take all necessary precautions to ensure that participants are safe throughout the trek.”¹⁵⁰ In 2020, the Church required to sign an agreement by trek organizers. The guidelines which read like a legal document, include even more specific requirements and restrictions. Many authentic re-enactments are now monitored for safety.¹⁵¹

Listening Like the Pioneers

Trek has been engineered to tap into the multisensory world of the pioneer. The following chapters look at the sensory history of the handcart pioneers and the re-enactments that rely on that history. It is helpful to explain how trek is conceptually a sensory experience. Different strategies implemented by trek organizers revolve around the need to be familiar with the sensory history of the pioneers.

Trek leaders go to extreme measures to supervise the aural world participants encounter. The concept of quietness and reverence is riddled throughout the numerous trek handbooks. A specific section clearly instructs the youth to “stay behind the priesthood leader who is setting

¹⁵⁰ “Handcart Trek Reenactments Guidelines for Leaders,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2015: 17.

¹⁵¹ “Trek Group Guidelines: Wyoming Mormon Trail Sites—2020,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2020.

the pace. The pace is slow so that everyone can keep up. Take your time, walk quietly, use common sense, feel the Spirit.”¹⁵² Within each group, a Pa and Ma (typically a younger married couple) are embedded with the teenagers to stand as examples of reverence. One unofficial website used by future trekkers counseled them: “In your role as Ma & Pa you will help set the tone for the entire trek experience for the youth in your family.”¹⁵³ There is an unspoken admonition among trek participants that loud moments should be few and regulated. Leaders discipline young trekkers caught up in conversations or expressing exuberance that could deviate from the planned activities. Trek leaders instruct the youth to *listen* as the pioneers did and to pay attention to wilderness sounds that would have informed the decisions handcart pioneers made.

It’s critical to note that within LDS culture, quiet and reverence are signs of worthy discipleship. Much of their religious practice is based on an Old Testament verse in the Book of Kings, which members commonly read over the pulpit:

11 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:

12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.¹⁵⁴

Church leaders emphasize the promise that the Lord subsists in quiet tones. Brigham Young reminded the Saints early to “be careful and not turn away from the still small voice”

¹⁵² “Trek Leaders Handbook: Remember the Pioneers For Their Faith, Obedience, Sacrifice, Charity,” *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Goshen Stake*, 2014, accessed on February, 20, 2023, [Mosida Handbook \(Churchofjesuschrist.org\)](https://www.lds.org/handbook), 39.

¹⁵³ “Roles of Pa and Ma,” *Sydney North, Newcastle, Coffs Harbour*, accessed on February 20, 2023, <https://www.ldstrek.com.au/ma-pa-resources>

¹⁵⁴ 1 Kings 19:11-13.

because “it will teach you what to do and where to go.”¹⁵⁵ Apart from the occasional innocent joke, there is an unspoken expectation that congregations will refrain from loud noises, including applause, sudden bursts of praise, or other sounds which could distract from that spiritual experience. LDS Church services reflect a stereotype of nineteenth-century Quakers in terms of the silence surrounding worship.

The portion of the Mormon Trail used for re-enactments is another access point to convene with ancestors and tap into quiet voice of the Holy Spirit. Most religions achieve a feeling of sacredness through both indoor buildings and interactions with natural places. The historian Christopher Sellers argues that “the notions of human identity and belonging are crafted out of ties not just to other human groups but to land or place to a geographically specific nature.”¹⁵⁶ For Latter-day Saints, these ties are cultural, in the sense that experiences with nature are learned, shared, and mythologized, and they are also biological, meaning that humans experience both chemical and physiological responses to specific natural places. These responses hinge on a controlled sound setting.

Latter-day Saints emphasize the sacred, which deserves quiet reverence, from the profane. Emile Durkheim was the leading voice on sacred and profane spaces. He argued that sacred spaces are distinguishable by the quietude bestowed on the area.¹⁵⁷ Mircea Eliade, William Arnal and others built on Durkheim original concept. These scholars now understand the

¹⁵⁵ Brigham Young, and Elden Jay Watson, *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1846-1847* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971), 529.

¹⁵⁶ Christopher Sellers, “Thoreau's Body: Towards an Embodied Environmental History” *Environmental History* 4, no. 4 (1999): 503.

¹⁵⁷ Kevin Lewis O'Neill, “Beyond Broken: Affective Spaces and the Study of American Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 81, no. 4 (December 2013): 1109.

sacred and profane as not necessarily be "natural" or universal, but also the ability to think and act religiously. Sara Patterson has postulated that the Mormon Trail is a "Lineal Temple, a sacred and quiet space, where members could come experience their history and theology under the umbrella of authority."¹⁵⁸ For Latter-day Saints, an apostle's dedication of a place sacralizes everything within that domain. In 1997, before the sesquicentennial re-enactment, President Gordon B. Hinkley pronounced a special blessing on the land sealing it as a sacred space.¹⁵⁹

There are processes of structuring and manipulating the soundscape at sacred spaces. A top priority for leaders is to control the dichotomy between noise and silence and activity and passivity.¹⁶⁰ The corporal experience is vital in allowing a space to remain sacred. Believers consider Latter-day Saint temples to be the most holy of places. Mormon expectations for worship render loud noises inappropriate within them. Once the doors are open, patrons indicate to believers they have entered a sacred space by using soft voices. The silent atmosphere surrounds participants and helps their transition from a profane to a sacred space.

Latter-day Saints have long recognized Martin's Cove as a powerful example of a sacred space. Martin's Cove and Rocky Ridge become an entrance point into the sacred. The rituals are bound by specific rules about silence and sounds. During the rare occasions loud sounds are permitted, like square dancing in the evening, rules of respect still linger for participants. Gordon

¹⁵⁸ Patterson, *Pioneers in the Attic*, 58.

¹⁵⁹Both Durkheim and Eliade argued that the aim of the historian of religions is to understand, and to make understandable to others, religious behavior. By categorizing profane and sacred spaces Durkheim allowed the scholar to better consider how religions interact with spaces in history. For further reading, see Mircea Eliade's, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, and William Arnal, and Russell T. McCutcheon's *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of Religion*.

¹⁶⁰ O'Neill, "Beyond Broken," 1109.

B. Hinkley claimed divine inspiration as he identified the exact location where the Martin company bivouacked. While historians remain skeptical, members have accepted the location with unwavering faith. The handbook clarifies that “a visit to Martin’s Cove is a quiet experience. No handcarts are allowed in the cove.”¹⁶¹ It further informs visitors that “the cove walk is a reverent, quiet walk-through Martin’s Cove, best conducted individually or in smaller groups, if possible. It is an opportunity to ponder what happened at Martin’s Cove and to honor those who lost their lives there.”¹⁶² Darla Isakson recalled, “Some of the young people in my ward said they sometimes felt the need for *silent reverence* when they were in Martin’s Cove where 56 members of the Martin Handcart Company perished from hunger and cold. They felt they were walking on sacred ground.”¹⁶³

For Latter-day Saints, reverent music, which consists of quiet tones and soft voices, is essential for sacred spaces. Members are encouraged to seek uplifting songs. LDS scripture, the Doctrine & Covenants, clearly commands members to include music: “For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.”¹⁶⁴ Inspirational and supervised music is allowed in all sacred spaces for Latter-day Saints. The hymns invite the Holy Spirit and create a feeling of devotion. They unify believers in their praises to the Lord.

Trekkers use specific hymns every summer as they embody the pioneers. *Pioneer children sang as they walked*, *The Handcart Song*, and *Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel*, are a few

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Darla Isakson, “Line Upon Line: All is Well” *Meridian Magazine*, July 20 ,2006.

¹⁶⁴ D&C. 25: 12.

of the songs that are routinely sung. However, *Come, Come Ye Saints* is the mantra for trekkers. Written by William Clayton on April 15, 1846, it is considered the anthem of the Latter-day Saint pioneers. Clayton wrote the hymn while toiling with the first pioneers through the mud. While camped near Locust Creek in Iowa, Clayton received news that his son was born in good health. His lyrics were a rallying cry for Mormons to prepare themselves for the long journey ahead. The first line is poignant as it speaks of the hardships waiting on the trail West.¹⁶⁵

Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor labor fear

But with joy wend your way

Though hard to you this journey may appear

Grace shall be as your day

'Tis better far for us to strive

Our useless cares from us to drive

Do this, and joy your hearts will swell

All is well! All is well!¹⁶⁶

Trekkers are often told to hear the wind through the area and imagine the deafening sounds. Many trekkers note that the Wyoming wind helps them envision their poor ancestors trapped. As will be noted in a later chapter, the Wyoming wind persistently blows. Dust clouds emerge and groups raise their voices when the wind kicks up. It is important to note that it is

¹⁶⁵ Hannah Seariac, "The Pioneer Anthem: The Compelling Story Behind Come, Come, Ye Saints," *The Deseret News*, (May 26, 2022).

¹⁶⁶ Kathryn J. Kappler, *My Own Pioneers 1830-1918: Volume II, Pioneer the West/Defending Zion 1847-1880* (Parker, CO: Outskirts Press, 2015) 351.

impossible to recapture historical experiences, re-enactors who are caught in windy storms come close to comprehending the hardships that come with communicating in Wyoming wind.

Feeling Like the Pioneers

How one uses their body and how one touches and feels (or what I refer to as “body sense”) is an important part of trek. For the re-enactment experience to be successful, re-enactors must test their dedication by engaging in activities designed to challenge their bodies. Grasping a handcart for hours a day, walking on rocky terrain, and sleeping on the cold ground are examples of how this sense is important for re-enactors mimicking a pioneer’s bodily experience. Trekkers often complain of body aches, and leaders use these complaints to compare the magnitude of the suffering. One re-enactor explained: “At the end of day one, having pushed for nine miles, I could feel every muscle in my body hurting. In fact, I even found muscles I didn’t know existed. But I thought about how the pioneers fought and pushed through every aching muscle to travel to where the Lord wanted them to be.”¹⁶⁷

The use of authentic handcarts is central to the trek experience. Re-enactors, who struggle with their handcarts, tap into the spiritual benefits that come from embodying the pioneers. Blisters and splinters are a common complaint from trekkers as the wooden handles hurt their soft hands. The handcart is often used during the other activities being re-enacted. While catching wild turkeys they clean and carry the carcass in the cart. For square dancing at night, the handcarts are arranged to create a dance floor. Handcarts are always close by, integral to the

¹⁶⁷ “A Jubilee Look at The Beginnings and Growth of The Church In Des Moines and Ankeny, Iowa,” May 17, 2021, accessed on December 1, 2023, [amespagroup16 | We Rejoice in Christ](#).

experience. While the Church recommends handcarts be used, many youth leaders have prioritized bodily engagement with the carts as essential for a true embodying experience.

How the Mormon Trail re-enactors bodies interact with the landscape is part of the reciprocal relationship trek organizers intend for. Trekkers comment on the texture of the rocks, the cactus spines that become lodged in their pants, and the feel of the cold water when they wade across the Sweetwater. These intense bodily interactions are a vital part of trek. Sprained ankles and snakebites have occurred on re-enactments and are similar bodily experiences that plagued handcart pioneers. Some injured trekkers are placed in handcarts and carried along the way – an act that mimics how the handcart pioneers handled similar injuries.

Gender influences how people experience trek. As Bonnie Smith argues, the practice of history has always been gendered, and re-enactments are no different. Smith deconstructs how history has been organized and written within the masculine worldview. “No matter what changes from realism to modernism to postmodernism, from claims of truth to claims of explanation masculinity continues to function as it did in the nineteenth century,” Smith argues.¹⁶⁸ While both young men and young women monitor how their bodies respond to the harsh environment, women’s needs are often ignored.

One way that women are overlooked is in their menstrual needs. One girl commented, “They told us we weren't allowed to bring tampons or wear contacts because pioneers didn't have them, so I didn't go. I was disgusted by the fact they were going to inspect our belongings and confiscate forbidden items such as tampons.” Another girl mentioned “Fine, I'll wear glasses, but

¹⁶⁸ Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 239.

tampons?! Seriously?! No man has the right to tell me what period products I'm allowed to use.”¹⁶⁹ There is evidence that nineteenth-century pioneers used strong linen and bog moss to manage their menstrual flow.¹⁷⁰ Re-enactors, however, were given nothing, which is an anachronistic approach to history.

Eurocentric predispositions frame overtly sexist concepts of the Cartesian split of mind and body. This damaging concept postulates that one can control and ignore the body by overcoming it mentally. Emily Martin's *The Woman in the Body* demonstrates the social, cultural, and medical consequences of this type of mindset. According to Martin, women are left in psychological and physiological pain as they are told to “push through the pain.”¹⁷¹ During trek, leaders expect the needs of the body to be overpowered by the mental and spiritual awakenings available while re-enacting. A woman’s needs during menstruation disregarded for a more powerful force.

On a website dedicated to Mormon Trail re-enactors, photos are neatly arranged on the page revealing young Later-day Saints adorned in pioneer clothing pushing replicated handcarts. The pictures are for the newest crop of young Latter-day Saint trekkers. They are to ponder the photos until they can participate in their own handcart experience. The images capture young people in a variety of poses struggling to operate their handcarts in the blistering heat. They offer a fascinating window view into the relationship contemporary re-enactors cultivate with their

¹⁶⁹ Anonymous, “Tell me to hide period products in order to not offend male coworkers? Consider it done.” Reddit, 2020, accessed October 14, 2023. [Tell me to hide period products in order to not offend male coworkers? Consider it done.: r/Malicious Compliance \(reddit.com\)](#)

¹⁷⁰ For further reading See Tracy Row’s Thesis, “Sustainability, Menstrual Products, and Sphagnum Moss: An Investigation.”

¹⁷¹ Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (New York: Beacon Press, 2001), 114.

handmade vehicles. While the pictures may seem pedestrian, when considered closely, there is something noticeable about the relationship between re-enactor and handcart. One picture is specifically striking—showing a young boy leaning wearily against the front of his cart—exhausted and contemplative from the re-enactment. Like the relationship original pioneers had with their handcarts, this young Latter-day Saint, perhaps unknowingly, appeared to have transitioned from merely “pretending” to re-enacting the struggles of overland travel to embodying the pioneer experience as he appeared both physically and mentally exhausted.¹⁷²

Tasting and Smelling Like the Pioneers. Trek leaders do their best to control the consumption of food and the smells that permeate the air during trek. How much re-enactors eat, and drink plays a role in how connected they feel to their ancestors both bodily and spiritually. Many groups limit access to food, and in some instances, force the young teens to chase, kill, and cook their own chickens. While it is more difficult to replicate smell, leaders sometime emphasize the aroma of the flora in the area. At other times, bodily smells remind re-enactors of the deplorable conditions in which pioneers lived.

Re-enactment leaders, despite potential ethical dilemmas, highlight the benefits of withholding food. Robert L. Backman, an emeritus general authority for the Church, justified extreme measures: “We’re trying to get this generation to realize something of our heritage [these are not like fairy tales]”¹⁷³ Withholding food allows re-enactors to feel like the pioneers, as their calorie intake becomes severely low. A common dinner staple during trek is the bowl of chicken

¹⁷² “Prepare for Pioneer Trek 2022” *South Weber Stake News* [Prepare for Pioneer Trek 2022 – South Weber Stake News](#)

¹⁷³ Scott Taylor, Participants Know Popular Treks Are a Far Cry from the Handcart Pioneers’ Sufferings,” *Deseret News*, (July 26, 2010).

broth. Out of the hundreds of trek stories evaluated, a small bowl of soup was the most common meal. This is generally in line with the historical narrative. While soup was common on the trail, it was usually made with marrow from bones and dugout moss. Most trekkers retire to bed hungry, which leads them to appreciate warm meals at home.

Trekkers are told to indulge in the smells of the surrounding environment. During the summer months, an abundance of resilient vegetation assists in the embodying process. Leaders point out smells of the wilderness. This is another causal link between the pioneer and re-enactor. Sagebrush dominated the region in 1856 and still does today. The smell of wheatgrass and invasive cheatgrass blankets the land. The crimson paintbrush and yellow evening primrose emit fragrances that inform the brain of natural smells. Along the Sweetwater River, the flora changes from homogenous desert plants to riparian zones and wet meadows. In this area willows and choke cherries straddle the banks. Each of these releases pollen in the areas which invades the re-enactors' olfactory senses. Research supports the claim that flora can significantly improve someone's mood.

While taste and smell may seem like afterthoughts trek groups must regulate how food tastes and how their world smells. While many young trekkers return upset at their lack of access to cleanliness, others feel that something is inspiring about living like the pioneers. Regardless of the outcome, these two senses usually play a significant role in how the treks are organized.

Seeing Like the Pioneers

A commonly held belief by trek organizers is that historical re-creation generates visually stimulating moments from the past. Using one's vision to promote connection is important. If the clothing is period appropriate, the environment regulated, and the modern technology mitigated,

people's eyes can trick their minds into believing they are in a different time. The leaders are instructed to keep their motorized vehicles parked away from the Cove. The parking lot is hidden from the trail, and the porta-potties are earth colored. Some trek groups recommend shoes with neutral colors. Trek organizers suggest cast iron to cook, and anything which could transport the re-enactors back into the twenty-first century are discouraged.

Controlling the visual world allows young trekkers to connect to the pioneer experience. How much do the little details matter to embody the sublime? Some groups have used only tin plates and cups. One group refused to use flashlights and thus provided lanterns to use at night. However, most trek groups rely on a variety of modern technologies while focusing on obscuring the more conspicuous visuals. It is impossible to quantify the formula to the sublime based on authenticity. However, there is something about keeping modern visuals minimal which helps these young trekkers engage in history. During one re-enactment a young woman remarked, "Our "trek specialist" put her foot down on electronic devices."¹⁷⁴

Conclusion

It is important to place trek in a larger historical context of other types of realistic dramatic history. National Geographic and the Smithsonian have reported on an increase in a specific type of living history called "quests." During these sponsored events humans use their imagination and adventuresome spirit to reach more intimate connections with history. There is an underlying message of hope in these quests: if we can understand how mankind lived in the past, perhaps we can also imagine how we are going to move into the future. Imaginative realism

¹⁷⁴Jonathan Green, "Don't Hate Me Just Because My Trek Was Awesome," *Times & Seasons*, January 9, 2014.

has gone to new heights. In extreme re-enactments, which include risking one's life to experience a historical moment, some sign wavers that exonerate liability for those who want to truly immerse themselves in history and gamble with their lives.¹⁷⁵

Many participate in the benefits of living history unintentionally. Freedman Tilden's book is the Bible for national parks service. It remains required readings among National Parks. He long ago identified the success of national parks is contingent on relatability, provocation, artistic value, and contextualization. Tilden argues that one way to avoid a sterile environment at national parks is to use "sensory based interpretive techniques or programs."¹⁷⁶ A weekend warrior is not seeking subliminal experiences like organized re-enactors. There still are potentially powerful connections available when human senses are introduced to protected natural and historic sites. Tilden gets you into the emotional and imaginative state by showing you the wonder and awe of natural places. The inspiration can be unscripted. The natural places can tell you history. Wilderness is a space to go to temporarily remove yourself to get distance and perspective.

Oregon Trail re-enactors, like Mormon Trail re-enactors, employ many different techniques to connect to overland travelers, but with a commercial slant. A handful of private companies provide "a real" experience that mimics those of Oregon Trail pioneers. One company offers a three-day adventure with plenty of opportunities to embody the overlanders. They claim to offer a channel for intellectual curiosity, family fun, camping out, and an opportunity to play-

¹⁷⁵ Jay Anderson, "Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums," *American Quarterly*, 344, no. 3 (1982): 305.

¹⁷⁶ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 18, 20.

act. However, this comes with a cost. These living history festivals are also markets where there is much buying and selling of food, crafts, and expensive souvenir replicas. The movement is part revival, revitalization movement, ethnohistorical secular ritual, and nostalgic.¹⁷⁷

Perhaps the most well-known example of a group using re-enactment to connect with the divine is the Catholic celebration of Magdarama in Kapampangan, Northern Philippines. Locals embody Jesus Christ's suffering and death by recreating the crucifixion. Thousands line the street to be part of the re-enactment. The objective is to heighten the senses by challenging the body to reach this a more intimate connection with God. They participate in sensory experiences like the re-enactors but at a more intense level. The person embodying Christ drinks wine before the torture. The re-enactor carries a wooden cross, crawls on rough pavement, and participates in self-flagellation while the audience scream profanities and throw garbage. Eventually the participant is hoisted up on the cross and remains there for hours. The Magdarama petition divine assistance with God. Most participants' loved ones (wife, child, or parent) are experiencing serious illnesses. When they reach a specific enlightened state of being many devotees experience miracles. Following the re-enactment, devotees feel connected to Jesus in an intimate way. While Mormon Trail re-enactors have yet to embody something as intense as the crucifixion, they still seek for a similar experience and connection with their loved ones.¹⁷⁸

In 2015, 340 Mormon youth built a 27-foot replica of the Nauvoo Temple, sang, and rejoiced, and then sat quietly as a "mob" destroyed the temple the following morning. The youth

¹⁷⁷Anderson, "Living History," 305.

¹⁷⁸Anril Pineda Tiatco and Amihan Bonifacio-Ramolet, "Cutud's Ritual of Nailing on the Cross: Performance of Pain and Suffering," *Asian Theatre Journal*, 25, no. 1 (Spring, 2008): 60.

held a celebratory dinner around 145 white flags symbolizing the number of temples in operation. The next morning, “mobs” came into the campsite at 4:55 a.m. and forced the company to uproot and march off on an eight-mile handcart hike, while their temple lay in ruins behind them. As the youth peered back, they were experiencing an embodied connection through their senses. Their eyes teared up as the mob demolish the temple; their ears were troubled by the yells and chants of the mob; their feet and hands ached as they pushed their handcarts up the hill; and their mouths were dry as the smell of the morning desert invaded their olfactory senses. These young people recalled being both sad but also spiritually uplifted by participating. Their experience was beyond pretending or acting.¹⁷⁹

Mormon Trail re-enactments and sensory history provides important insights often overlooked by scholars studying trek. The relationship between their senses and the environment sheds light on how young Latter-day Saints immerse themselves in Mormon Trail re-enactments. The trek organizers replicate the sights, sounds, touches, smells, and tastes of the pioneer world. They pressure participants to seek an interpersonal connection with the pioneers.

¹⁷⁹ “Mormon Youth Build and Destroy Nauvoo Temple Replica,” *This Week in Mormons*, June 16, 2015.

CHAPTER THREE

SEEING LIKE THE PIONEERS

Introduction

On a frigid October morning in 1856, Patience Loader, weak and exhausted from lack of food, and shivering from the freezing conditions, pulled herself out of a thin bed roll and prepared to push her handcart across Wyoming. As she stepped into the chilled air, Patience's eyes were drawn to the sights of her fellow Latter-day Saints struggling to cope with the winter conditions. In her periphery, she saw two young boys, one eleven years old, and the other no more than four or five, in a dire situation. "The Eldest was crawling along on his hands and knees," writes Loader, "his poor feet were so frozen, the blood running from them in the snow as the poor thing was making his way to the sick wagon." Loader further observed that "the other poor dear child crying by his brother side his poor little arms and hands all scabs with chilblains and scarcely anything on to cover his body."¹⁸⁰ Loader also noted seeing a young woman eighteen years old, freezing with a "big wound in her back her sufferings was so great." And next to her was "another poor girl eleven years whose feet was frozen and black... further up the leg the flesh and bone were rotting away...boath [her feet] had to be amputated above the ankle."¹⁸¹ Everywhere Patience looked, emigrants were caught in a desperate struggle of life and death.

Patience Loader's journal entry sheds light into the visual world of the handcart pioneers. In a matter of months, these emigrants had transitioned from polluted English cities to the frozen

¹⁸⁰ Loader, *The Autobiography of Patience Loader Rozsa Archer*, 80.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

American wilderness. The new sights in America overwhelmed the British converts. The distinct flora and fauna, the appearances of the American Indian, and the desert-like geography, were some of the reported differences. Eventually, the pioneers longed for the sights of white civilization. Instead, what Loader saw was unimaginable. Panicked people bivouacking with makeshift tents in snow that blanketed the land. The horrific sights of those days haunted Loader's memory for years. In her autobiography, she recalled that "my feet and hands was covered with chilblains which I have the marks today to remind me of my first Winter passed away from my good old home."¹⁸² Historians have pieced together the traumatic days in October based on the visual stories shared by handcart pioneers.

Much of this chapter focuses on the changing sights and visual memories of the Willie and Martin handcart companies as they traveled to Utah. It is beneficial to consider their visual transition from urban England to the American West. The Industrial Revolution produced technologies that frustrated workers. Factory workers were overwhelmed by cumbersome machinery with multiple moving parts. Furthermore, workers became slaves to the clock. Pocket watches were invented to deliver the approximate time. When they reached America, they were introduced to a new visual environment. The distinct landscape and cold weather shaped many of their decisions. When the snow came, it buried their carts, covered the ground, and concealed landmarks. Previously unobscured horizons disappeared leaving the bewildered Saints wandering with little sense of direction. Their visual perceptions were strained, and they were forced to rely on other senses to navigate their world.

¹⁸² Ibid., 27.

Sight is important to sensory historians. There are dangers, however, in emphasizing it too strongly. According to Peter Hoffer and other sensory historians, Eurocentric people credulously trust written texts and visual technologies for much of our information. Marshall McLuhan argues that vision emerged as the sense without peer during the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution as it became the sole "authenticator of truth."¹⁸³ The visual accounts left by the Willie and Martin handcart pioneers are valuable sources. For modern societies, the eyes are often linked to human knowledge. Visual perceptions foster a sense of confidence, and our eyes are an exquisitely evolved biological instrument for turning light into the brain's language of electrical signals. Visual observations foster confidence in what humans perceive. Lights and shadows form the outlines, and we recognize spatial properties based on shape and size. The seen reality for many has become *the* more reliable reality.¹⁸⁴

The pioneers interpreted visual information through their previous experiences in Great Britain. Seeing involves internal biological functions and subjective external inferences. Eyes are not merely a physical organ recording exact reality; they are means of perception, in which the possessor is conditioned by their past visual experiences. The handcart emigrants frequently struggled to understand the American desert in context of their previous visual experiences in England. It's been said that history always addresses the gaze, and while other chapters will

¹⁸³ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1962), 13. As a media scholar, McLuhan's argument is convincing, but he lacks context on the other senses as he establishes why the visual has become the primary sense in modern society.

¹⁸⁴ Peter Charles Hoffer, *Sensory Worlds in Early America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 3. Hoffer's book tackles a large period of time in context of sensory history. Initially published in 2003, Hoffer implored historians to examine the fundamentals of lived experience and how people perceive the world through the five senses.

challenge that assumption, it's helpful to follow the pioneers as they transitioned from the Industrial world of England to the American wilderness.

As a final note, it's important to highlight that religious people, like nineteenth-century-Mormons, place credence into their "spiritual" eye. The fundamental features of sensory perception are universal, including the physiological structure of the eye. However, the handcart pioneers were prone to spiritual visions, and often trusted these experiences when they were desperate. Some handcart pioneers noted spiritual manifestations that appeared as *real* as any other experience. Deceased loved ones appeared assisting family members. Others claimed strange visitors appearing with food. One famous anecdote involves a pie that was left in the road for a pioneer who had given up. Spiritual visions were just as germane as other visual experiences for these weary trekkers.¹⁸⁵

Before analyzing this visual transition of the handcart pioneers, this chapter opens with examples on how Mormon Trail re-enactments imitate the visual world of the emigrants. Re-enactors claim when modern sights are hidden, a deeper connection develops. Trek leaders' structure visual environments so the re-enactor can better reach sublimity. In this state, as they embody the pioneer, they claim personal connections to these emigrants where time and place can become suspended. This is perhaps the origin moment for young re-enactors. When they step off the chartered busses at Martin's Cove, the natural environment must be conspicuous.

¹⁸⁵ The term spiritual eye has been used for centuries to make sense of the social construction of the sacred. In line with Emille Durheim's the sacred and profane, there has been a need for religious communities to differentiate heavenly visions compared to earthly visions. For further readings on spiritual eyes, see Georgia Frank's *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*, David Morgan's *the Embodied Eye*, and Robert Orsi's, *History and Presence*.

Re-enacting the Visual World of the Pioneers

When Mormon Trail re-enactors arrive at Martin’s Cove, they are asked to peer forward at land formations and a well-preserved trail. From the parking lot, Devil’s Gate, the Rattlesnake Range, and the Sweetwater River are visible. Trek leaders often employ guides to accompany the groups. The guides vary in their expertise. In some cases, they were previous park rangers, and have a thorough understanding of the landmarks and the handcart story. Other times, they are ward “historians” who volunteer, and are limited in their knowledge. Either way, trek groups pause often while guides point out significant landmarks. They are told to envision their ancestors struggling to push their handcarts or wade across the river. While the climate is usually dramatically different than what the emigrants encountered, trekkers are asked to gaze forward and imagine a frozen river, or a snow-covered ground.

The young trekkers are instructed to dress so re-enactors look the part. They are encouraged to wear modern hiking boots or sturdy sneakers. Hats, shirts, and pants, however, should resemble the handcart pioneer’s attire. Anything that conspicuously distracts from the re-enactment is discouraged. The Church handbook provides specific instructions about attire: “Ideally, young women’s blouses should be lightweight and long-sleeved, and their skirts should reach the midcalf, with bloomers or shorts underneath to prevent chafing.”¹⁸⁶ For the men, they recommend “lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and comfortable, loose-fitting pants.”¹⁸⁷ At the bottom of the page an italicized passage is noteworthy here. “The wearing of white clothing to represent deceased persons or angels from the other side of the veil”¹⁸⁸ the handbook states, “is

¹⁸⁶ *Handcart Trek Reenactments: Guidelines for Leaders* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015): 16.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

not to be included as part of treks.”¹⁸⁹ This visual admonition demonstrates how important sight is to trek organizers.

The landscape is supervised to prevent modern objects from distracting the trekkers. Leaders strategize concealing the modern world. Martin’s Cove and Rocky Ridge are monitored environments. It’s important in these moments to keep the surrounding landscape pristine. A priority is to use period appropriate clothing, ensure replicated handcarts are authentic, and keep motorized vehicles out of sight. Some groups employ extreme measures to prevent modern gadgets. Styrofoam plates, modern toothbrushes, and even toilet paper have been banned by leaders who are dedicated to completely replicating Wyoming in 1856. Anything that could visually disconnect the re-enactor from embodying the pioneer is forbidden.

The use of baby dolls is a clear example of how re-enactments are visually stimulating. Baby dolls are handed out at the beginning of some treks. Each “family” is given a doll and are required to care for the “infant.” While all participate, young women are to embody a pioneer mother with a young child. A popular, yet difficult, re-enactment is to direct young women to bury their babies on the side of the trail. Many young women become emotionally distraught during this event. Young trekkers retell their experiences of having a baby entrusted to them only to leave it behind. While baby dolls evoke a powerful sense of touch, the plastic components can distract from the re-enactment. Therefore, the dolls are wrapped in blankets. It is, furthermore, the sight of the baby doll “sleeping” in the handcart or covered with dirt after it had “passed,” that causes provocative emotional responses.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

The re-enactors must be convinced to embody parents of a baby doll. One group was entrusted with a seven-pound bag of beans to care for. The group named it Charles Martin Herbert, after a small child who originally crossed with the Willie handcart company. The “baby” was given to the group already in a diaper, and when the youth neglected to check it, a leader scolded them. The leader then revealed the baby's bottom, and tiny chocolate logs that had melted in the diaper.¹⁹⁰

Occasionally the difficulty of losing a child during re-enactments becomes traumatizing. In one instance, each family of a trek group was given a baby doll. They nurtured it, played with it, and took turns rocking it to sleep. The trek family developed an attachment to the infant doll over time. However, like other treks, there was a bigger lesson the organizers planned “One family leading the group had to bury the doll,” an anonymous trekker reported, “but couldn't stand around and mourn. The “mother” was dramatically pulled away from the grave, screaming. The rest of us had to solemnly walk on by it in silence.”¹⁹¹ Another trek family, after given a doll, “made jokes about it needing a diaper change etc.”¹⁹² Later, each member held the baby and were told to treat it as a family member. At one point, the “parents” announced that the baby was sick. The trekker then recounted that, “our ‘mom’ had her back to us, holding the baby and sobbing. She turned around and told us the baby stopped breathing. It was super quiet. Then the boys in

¹⁹⁰ Mark Saal, “Baby Charlie Brings Large Handcart Family Together,” *The Standard Examiner*, March 18, 2014.

¹⁹¹ Mormon Melon, “Burying dolls on trek? Anyone here ever do that? Creepy.” *Reddit*, 2016, accessed on July 20, 2023, https://www.reddit.com/r/exmormon/comments/4q4xad/burying_dolls_on_trek_anyone_here_ever_do_that/.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

the group took out a shovel and we buried this doll in silence.”¹⁹³ Later the trekker recalled everyone sobbing from the “doll experience.”

These stories demonstrate the sublime experience re-enactment leaders hope for. When young trekkers embody the trauma of losing a child it induces a connection which is only possible if the re-enactor develops a deep spiritual connection with the pioneers. The reaction by the young woman validates how one can temporarily separate the distance between the living and the dead and suspend place and time.

It is common for leaders to invite guest speakers dressed as historical heroes to motivate the youth. It's important in these instances that the re-enactor look the part. Trek groups have heard speeches from the likes of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and Ephraim Hanks. One group was harassed by "Governor Lilburn Boggs" (the infamous Missouri governor who signed the extermination order against the Mormons). His rowdy band of mobsters attempted to drive the youth from their borders with rousing anger.¹⁹⁴ Some groups use historical characters from LDS scriptures. Moses and Paul from the Bible, and Alma and Samuel the Lamanite from the Book of Mormon have known to visit different treks. Pony Express “riders” dressed in period clothing frequently galloped up describing mail routes that connected Mormon settlements to the east. Trek families simulate growing sick with smallpox, being injured, or being snakebit. Some trek groups make a game out of it. One youth claimed that “they give you cards when you pull the

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Rose Palmer, “Pioneers Trek to Mile High Ranch,” *The Redlands Daily Facts*, July 2, 2006; Deborah Sullivan, “Mormon Trek Long Lesson in Resilience,” *L.A. Times*, June 29, 2003.

carts telling you if your pioneer person died or not.”¹⁹⁵ If they died, they were loaded in the cart for the rest of the day.

Another common visual event on trek is to have leaders dress up as indigenous tribes and interact, in often threatening ways, towards the re-enactors. This re-enactment of inverted colonialism places the Indians as the oppressors against the peaceful white settlers. Most interactions with Indigenous tribes were positive on the trail. Native Americans often aided the struggling pioneers. Philip Deloria offers a clue as to why whites historically dressed up as Native Americans. “The practice of playing Indian—the temporary, deliberate, structured, staged, embodied, and costume performances of ideologies attached to Indianness offers conceptual ways to understand the desire of gone natives.”¹⁹⁶

Leaders capitalized on the image of nineteenth-century American Indians to elicit responses from young Latter-day Saints. Certain trek leaders advocated that it was important for young re-enactors to encounter a “real” Indian. Sometimes leaders dress in full ritual garb, stand on a distant hill, and intimidate the trekkers. One young man documented that “they had a woman dress up like a Lakota woman and beg for food.”¹⁹⁷ In another instance, a company encountered “Indians” acting friendly. “It was a treat to get smoked salmon from the Native Americans,” said one trekker.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ “What Trek Really Is,” *Reddit*, accessed on December 11, 2023, [What the Trek really is : r/exmormon \(reddit.com\)](https://www.reddit.com/r/exmormon/).

¹⁹⁶ Philip J. Deloria Jr. *Playing Indian* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998), xiv.

¹⁹⁷ “Did anyone go on Trek?” *Reddit*, [Did anyone go on Trek? : r/exmormon \(reddit.com\)](https://www.reddit.com/r/exmormon/).

¹⁹⁸ Madalyn McRae, “Foreign pioneer treks teach youths gratitude, perseverance,” *The Daily Universe*, July 14, 2017.

Occasionally, Indigenous Latter-day Saints, and other people of color, participate in trek. There are few recorded examples of Native Americans commenting on their experience at trek, but there have been groups Northern Arizona who have traveled to Martin's Cove. It would be a surreal experience for Indigenous members to watch whites dress up as Indian Americans to try and evoke emotional responses. In 2024, The Tongan South Stake in Salt Lake City will venture to Martin's Cove for trek. The website reminds members that, "While our Polynesian ancestors did not walk the plains of Wyoming pulling handcarts like the latter-day saint pioneers, they are rightly pioneers in the gospel of Jesus Christ."¹⁹⁹ In their guidelines, they are to dress like nineteenth century white settlers and embody a white settler. The website notes it's important for them to appear as pioneers.

For trek organizers theatrical performances elicit important visual connections with the pioneers. Trekkers have been harassed, arrested, and attacked so they can embody the pioneers. It's thought-provoking to read about these accounts, but it's more poignant when someone witnesses them. YouTube has become an archive for trek groups to compile their experiences. Past participants are encouraged to go back and contemplate their trek experience. In one video, a video camera recorded leaders re-enacting mobsters. They shook and rattled tents, shot guns in the air, and threatened the young re-enactors with violence. They were told to pack camp and leave. The video revealed frightened faces as trekkers became surrounded by intimidating men in bandanas.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ "South Salt Lake Tongan Stake 2024," accessed on December 30, 2024, [Tongan South Stake Trek 2024 \(tongansouthtrek.com\)](https://www.tongansouthtrek.com).

²⁰⁰ 2012TonyL, "Tucson West Stake 2012 Pioneer Trek: Complete, Part 1 of 2," July 28, 2012, re-enactment summary, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyJIwPFItqA&t=742s>.

Making sense of why Mormon re-enactors capture the visual world of the handcart pioneers is tricky, but sensory historians can help. It is possible to mimic aspects of their appearances, and to identify landmarks pioneers isolated in journals about the nineteenth century. Still, there is something mysterious and unknowable about the visual world trekkers try to imitate. Sensory historians have researched how visuals shape decisions in history. However, historians like Joan Saab addresses the combination of seeing, memory, and imagination to connect the present to the past. Building off Diderot, Saab claims that there is something powerful about first visualizing and then imagining that allows people to feel connected to historical figures. The re-enactors who stand at Independence Rock, Devil's Gate, Martin's Cove, and Rocky Ridge are told to see and then imagine the suffering pioneers. They claim sublime experiences partly because of visual imitation.²⁰¹

It's helpful to look at how a visual history of the handcart pioneers provides new insights for scholars and provocative information for all readers. Academics can see the benefits of sensory history by examining the Mormon emigrants' transition from England to the American West. For the average reader, when senses like sight are isolated, the story becomes more engaging as one follows the handcart pioneers on their arduous journey through their eyes.

Seeing the Old World. During the 1870s, Arnold Toynbee, a British labor historian dedicated to the plight of the worker, traveled the English countryside addressing industrialization. Toynbee, a young man with a prominent face and deep penetrating eyes lectured to workers across England about the spectacle of industry. "Villages became towns and

²⁰¹ A. Joan Saab, *Objects of Vision: Making Sense of What We See* (State College: Penn State University Press, 2021), 17.

towns became cities.” Toynbee proclaimed, “The gigantic factories are what we see around us at the present time.”²⁰² Circuiting Northern England, Toynbee commanded the pulpit with impressive oration skills, longing for “the great landmarks, the mountain ranges, the river channels, the inlets and estuaries.” He lamented the “crowded cities with the canopies of smoke.”²⁰³ Toynbee’s thoughts echoed the sentiments of many whose world grew horizontally and vertically with cottage homes and factories that billowed smoke clouds into the air. Urban decay accosted the eyes of the British as rapid industrialization appeared. In 1888, Wyman’s famous *Commercial Encyclopedia*, declared, “It is impossible for the mind to grasp readily the rate of progress which had been made in the industrial and commercial world, during the last two centuries and a half... Inventions and discoveries have followed each other in such quick succession, that is well nigh impossible even for those most immediately concerned, to keep abreast of the advance made of each art and craft.”²⁰⁴

England embraced an optimistic belief of human supremacy over nature with machinery as the *modus operandi* for success. In an atmosphere of progress, machines existed to improve the condition of human masters. Michele Chevalier, who studied the fast-growing railroad system, foresaw the machine as extending man's creative abilities. He once stated, “There is

²⁰² Arnold Toynbee, and Benjamin Jowett, *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England: Popular Addresses, Notes and Other Fragments* (London: Rivingtons Publishing, 1887), 190.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁰⁴ Wyman and sons, *Wyman's Commercial Encyclopedia of Leading Manufacturers of Great Britain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1888), 7.

nothing in the physical order of things of which our race has a better right to boast, than of the mechanical inventions.”²⁰⁵

New productivity and technological schemas emerged with the factory. Previous social fabrics formed in agricultural communities were now upended and shattered. Women were marginalized further as their wages were reduced. People of color were also mistreated in urban environments as evolutionary theory and industrial management combined to reconfigure the story of Africans, Asians, and others into one of underdevelopment, decline, and inefficiency.²⁰⁶

Industrialization overwhelmed the visual acuity of workers. Pulleys and wheels moving at a rapid rate frustrated workers familiar with agricultural machines. With giant levers, the British relied on machines as humans were relegated to monitors and caretakers. Karl Marx foresaw the confusion that overwhelmed the industrialized workers. In his proliferation of essays, he predicted that workers would classify machines as formidable competitors. As this competition intensified, thought Marx, the notion that there was something “*human* about the machines” would anger the working class. These machines not only produced *for* humans, but they were also the product *of* human expertise.²⁰⁷ Many pushed back at the sudden upheaval

²⁰⁵ Michele Chevalier, *Society, Manners and Politics in the United States: Being a Series of Letters on North America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1839), 134.

²⁰⁶ Paul R.D. Lawrie, *The African American Worker in the Progressive Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 20. While there are many monographs about British Imperialism, more attention to the complex racist views needs more attention. For a general overview which mentions thins in some detail, see A.G. Hopkins and P.J. Cain’s *British Imperialism: 1688-2000*.

²⁰⁷ Fabio Grigenti, *Existence and Machine: The German Philosophy in the Age of Machines 1870-1960* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 17. Examining the development of machine intelligence through the Marxist concepts of alienation reveals a tension between certain workers and the reality of capitalistic development. It further ignited Marx’s crusade to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

caused by these factories. In 1829, the writer Thomas Carlyle explained, “Our old modes of exertion are all discredited and thrown aside. On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one.”²⁰⁸

Industrialization altered how the British understood time. Before the Industrial Revolution, people tracked sunlight hours through archaic means. Some placed sticks in the ground. The changing lengths of their shadows allowed people to tell time based on the position of the sun. Others used sundials, a more sophisticated version of stick time, that influenced the ringing of Church bells to call parishioners to worship, funerals, or occasional celebrations. Indoor candles and hourglasses, like egg timers, used burnout times to track the passage of time. As businesses moved into urban spaces, however, time concerned city organizers who needed a more consistent and universally accepted way to manage daylight hours. Industrialization compelled inventors to reevaluate the importance of mass-producing clocks that could be used to tell time and control workers.²⁰⁹

The Industrial Revolution changed timekeeping in two essential ways. First, it changed how people perceived the passage of time. People organized their lives on the new social world factories had created. Second, and equally important, it revolutionized the production of clocks and watches. Factory owners prioritized and coordinated the production and distribution of raw

²⁰⁸ Maxine Berg, *The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy 1815-1848* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 12.

²⁰⁹ Alun C. Davies, “The Industrial Revolution and Time” *The Open University*, August 30, 2019, accessed July 12, 2023, <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history-science-technology-medicine/the-industrial-revolution-and-time>. Time studies has become an important contribution to historical research. Scholars have recognized how quickly, and jolting industrialization altered people’s lives as the concept of time changed. See Vanessa Ogle’s, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870-1950*.

materials. Unlike farming, which required humans to be a reliant on the natural environment, factories attempted to separate humans from the natural world. Raw materials and finished products were often at the whim of canal companies, mail coaches and later railways. Factories demanded considerable time management. “Knockers-up” would arrive early and wake up workers by tapping on their windows. For railway passengers, agreed timetables were essential, as was a standard time. The days of sundials faded as the market for timepieces increased. workers began to acquire cheap, bulky (turnip-sized) pocket watches.²¹⁰

The important link between sunlight and work vanished for factory workers. Rural communities dawdled for hours in the sun, basking in the fresh air and clear sights across the horizon. Their working hours were contingent on sunlight. Urban residents, however, labored before sunup and persisted after sundown. The nineteenth-century British physician Robley Dungleson, an ardent supporter of sunlight, observed that the urban worker was a “pale, deformed being,” while the young farmer was a “ruddy native of country situations.”²¹¹ As medical professionals realized the benefits of Vitamin D, pressure mounted on employers to provide more leisure time for workers to get outside in the sun. Theobald Palm, a scientist who later published an influential paper on rickets, concluded that sunlight was key to the health of societies.

When residents wandered outside, the overcast and gloomy climate combined with the soot in the air stifled people’s surroundings. As early as 1843, committees failed to control the amount of smoke in London. Dr. D.B. Reid claimed to have trapped “200,000 visible portions of

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Daniel Freund, *American Sunshine: Diseases of Darkness and the Quest for Natural Light* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 13.

soot” using a giant canvas veil that he hung up at the House of Parliament.”²¹² Despite the attempts of the middle classes to control pollution, demand for industrial products triumphed over health concerns. Britain’s factories produced soot, smoke, and fog at an unbearable rate. One British wife complained that when she opened her window, her home was enveloped in soot. The pollutant defaced buildings, sculptures, and clothes as it darkened the skies. As one politician put it, “Smoke was the everlasting source of thickness, darkness, and filth of the London atmosphere.”²¹³

Mormon converts, who were disproportionately poor, witnessed the overwhelming problems of factory life. In Liverpool, residents spent their lives surrounded by the struggles of industrialization. Missionaries found success in poor neighborhoods and managed to convert residents swallowed by the dark streets and living in dilapidated shanties. Yet, their humble conditions allowed Mormon missionaries to represent an American religion that was clean and void of the urban decay.

The *Millennial Star*, a periodical for British converts, described the unruly sights of the Old World. Its prospectus, also reprinted in the first number of *the Star*, announced that the magazine “will stand aloof from the common political and commercial news of the day. Its columns will be devoted to the spread of the fulness of the gospel.”²¹⁴ *The Star* found success

²¹² Lee Jackson, *Dirty Old London: The Victorian Fight Against Filth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 226.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 228.

²¹⁴ Parley P. Pratt, “Wesleyan Methodists Verses Mormons,” *Millennial Star*, 15, (June 1853): 77. The Latter-day Saints’ *Millennial Star* was the longest continuously published periodical of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and was printed in England from 1840 until 1970. While it was a British publication, it often reprinted correspondences and sermons from Salt Lake City. Young and other leaders used it specifically to address British Saints, and more relevant to this dissertation, handcart pioneers before they departed in 1856.

among the urban populations of Northern England. LDS apostle Parley Pratt, who served as editor-in-chief, included pieces on industrialization in Great Britain. Authors pointed out the unpleasing sights of factory life. *The Star* jaded the Latter-day Saints against the promises of newly industrialized Europe. One article appeared on March 26, 1853, condemning the nations of Europe for “building up monster cities.” While the “majority are cooped up in the filthy dens of pestiferous courts and alleys.”²¹⁵ In a later publication, Pratt reminded the Saints why migration to Zion should be a priority. “The Saints are looking forward to the approaching season for emigration with a degree of anxiety.” Pratt explained. “A sprit seems to be brooding over the nations of the Eastern Hemisphere, and the Saints are desirous of escaping the evil by flight.”²¹⁶

The *Millennial Star* served the British Saints in two valuable ways. First, it linked together the British and American believers. Second, it became a propaganda machine, disparaging the Old World’s industrialization while idealistically describing the American landscape as a tranquil alternative to dirty England. Pratt’s editorial page regularly introduced the British Saints to new settlements emerging in the Great Basin and the communal spirit thriving in the desert. Many pages were dedicated to the need for Saints to join the faithful in Utah. “I recommend you think for a few minutes of any one company of Saints who have left England for Zion,” C.W. Wandell, a prominent LDS Leader wrote. “Follow them in your mind across the Atlantic. They have had some little inconveniences to put up with, but they had the satisfaction that they were in the way of their duty—they were going to Zion, as the Lord commanded.”²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Parley P. Pratt, “Emigration,” *Millennial Star*, 15, (June 1853): 697.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 697.

Occasionally, the prophet urged the British Saints to leave England. On November 26, 1853, Pratt included a letter from Young reminding the British to cultivate a “great desire to emigrate to head quarters, where alone they can get the experience in many things they cannot get in England, and where they can be free from the bonds, and oppression, and misery in which they are now enslaved.”²¹⁸ While Church leaders held influence over the British Saints, Brigham Young was in an entirely different class. As the mouthpiece of God, he demanded obedience.

The Saints in Utah differed from British believers in appearance. Many of the British Saints found it difficult to meet the Church’s standards of cleanliness. Brigham Young fervently taught that “cleanliness is next to godliness” and that how one looks signifies their inner spirituality. Young reminded returning missionaries to come home with clean shirts: “Those who have white shirts know it for themselves; and those who have got spotted shirts, will come to me and say, ‘is my shirt clean?’ ‘Do you think I have come clean and pure?’ My answer is YOU HAVE NOT, but your eye has been as a fool’s eye.”²¹⁹ In another letter, apostle Heber C. Kimball instructed the Saints in the principle of both temporal and spiritual cleanliness. He taught the Saints they should be “purifying our habitations, and then extending our operation to our cities, our lands, and every thing which comes within our jurisdiction.”²²⁰ Kimball’s message affected the psyche of British Saints, whose wardrobes consisted of a few rags.

In the Spring of 1856, British converts eagerly awaited their turn to travel to Utah. In preparation for the new handcart plan to commence, George Grant wrote a letter to apostle

²¹⁸ Parley P. Pratt, “Emigration,” *Millennial Star*, 15, (November 26th, 1853): 777.

²¹⁹ Brigham Young, “Minutes of the General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *Millennial Star*, 16, (January 28, 1854): 51.

²²⁰ *Ibid* 744.

Franklin Richards in January detailing the growth of converts and the collection of tithes which had increased in Liverpool. According to Grant, 239 new Saints had joined in the previous year, and £1500 pounds had been procured for future emigration. The newly organized Perpetual Emigration Fund covered the rest of the cost of emigration. It provided financial assistance to individuals and families who wanted to emigrate to Zion. It functioned as a loan program. included the cost of a transatlantic journey, train ride, and supplies for the remaining trek.²²¹

There is evidence that new converts needed to prove their loyalty before they could emigrate to Utah.²²² The First Presidency, which consisted of Brigham Young and his two counselors, reminded the British Saints, “Slacken not your hands...and prove yourselves by embracing every opportunity to be useful, and magnify your callings.”²²³ The warning came with a disclaimer. New converts should understand the expectations of complete obedience in Utah. Thomas Ord, a leader of the Leicester branch, was told to finish his Church calling before he was “ready to emigrate to America.”²²⁴ In another instance, Chesterton John Gillman, eager to emigrate following his wife’s death, left his adult son behind because he was not yet “released from his calling.”²²⁵ Many Saints felt pressure to be prepared both temporally and spiritually before leaving for Zion.

²²¹ George D. Grant, “Home Correspondence” *the Millennial Star*, 16, (November 25, 1854): 745.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Brigham Young, “Tenth General Epistle,” *Millennial Star*, 16, no. 2, (January 14, 1854): 18.

²²⁴ Samuel Openshaw, *Tell my Story Too*, ed. Eleanor Grant Ord, (Salt Lake City: Tell My Story Too Press, 2009), 281.

²²⁵ Chesterton Gillman, *Tell My Story Too*, 34.

Despite the conflict brewing in America, leaders presented Zion as a splendid sight. 1856 was a turbulent year as political and economic concerns plagued the United States. Anti-abolitionists burned down Lawrence, Kansas, and the grandiloquent John Brown massacred pro-slavery vigilantes by the Potawatomi River. The nation held its breath as both Nebraska and Kansas descended into anarchy. Even the Capital wasn't immune from the division. That same year, Preston Brooks of South Carolina pummeled Charles Sumner with a cane in the hall of the United States Senate after the latter gave a scathing antislavery speech.

British Saints were taught that Utah was a haven from the tumultuous events haunting the United States and even the world. Mormon leaders believed America had brought the scourge upon themselves. The *Millennial Star* republished a letter from Joseph Smith titled "State of Society in America." The British Saints were introduced to the wrathful prophecies Smith had pronounced against the United States while in Nauvoo.²²⁶ Later publications reminded the Saints that Isaiah's prophecies were being fulfilled: "*The mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.*"²²⁷ British emigrants were unfamiliar with large mountains. Their countryside consisted of rolling green fields and stone roads. For those pioneers who pushed handcarts to the American West, the sight of the towering mountains didn't disappoint.

Some British converts hoped for a physical transformation, in which they took on the same corporeal characteristics of an American Latter-day Saint. By physically placing

²²⁶ Parley P. Pratt "State of Society in America," *Millennial Star*, 18, no. 28 (July 1856): 438-39.

²²⁷ Isa. 2:2.

themselves in Utah, emigrants had imagined a communalist society where all things were held in common. Their bodies and spirits would progress and improve together in this and the next.

Unlike many Christians, Latter-day Saints believe in eternal growth for those who adhere to LDS principles and ordinances. According to early Church leaders, this progression would not end. To Mormons, God the Father and Jesus Christ were identical in appearance and possessed the characteristics of a perfected being.²²⁸ Early on, Joseph Smith rejected the traditional Christian view of ex nihilo creation, teaching instead that “The Spirit of Man is not a created being; it existed from Eternity and will exist to eternity. Anything created cannot be eternal.”²²⁹ An LDS apostle named Orson Hyde, a contemporary of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, took it one step further. He surmised that “God, our heavenly Father, was perhaps once a child, and mortal like we ourselves, and rose step by step in the scale of progress, in the school of advancement.”²³⁰ Another apostle Parley Pratt argued that human characteristics change because of progression. As the historian Benjamin Park noted, “The very germs of these Godlike attributes, being engendered in man, the offspring of Deity, he reasoned, cultivating, improving, developing, and advancing by means of a series of progressive changes, to arrive at the fountain Head, the standard, the climax of Divine Humanity. Thus, when man’s body is redeemed and exalted, his affections and affinities are perfected with him.”²³¹ While these doctrines were in

²²⁸ James B. Allen and John Welch, “The Appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in 1820,” in *Exploring the First Vision*, ed. Samuel Alonzo Dodge and Steven C. Harper (Provo Ut: Religious Studies Center, 2012), 47.

²²⁹ Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: Volume 1, The Attributes of God* (New York Greg Kofford books, 2001), 77.

²³⁰ Howard H. Barron, *Orson Hyde: Missionary, Apostle, Colonizer* (Kaysville, UT: Horizon Publishing, 1977), 254.

²³¹ Benjamin Park, “Parley Pratt and the Cultivation of Human Affections,” *Juvenile Instructor Blog*, July 9, 2009, accessed October 21, 2023.

their infancy in 1856, missionaries sold Mormonism and America as a place that could transform the bodies and souls of the Saints when they emigrated.

Seeing the New World

For six weeks, the ships that carried the handcart pioneers rattled and rolled on the Atlantic Ocean. The nineteenth-century transportation revolution on the North Atlantic relied on improved efficiency in sea travel. Winds, however, dramatically affected sea travel. Ships traveling west had to journey five hundred miles farther than eastbound ships, causing travelers bound for the New World to remain months in crowded conditions. Furthermore, the capitalist market structured the experiences of social classes. The introduction of comfort amenities on passenger ships improved conditions for the wealthy, while the steerage area remained unventilated and crowded. Latter-day Saint converts traveled in steerage with very little access to fresh water or air. For those who did wander up on deck, the British Saints witnessed a new environment as their eyes observed the splendor of the open waters. “Sea-sailing is very pleasant at times.” John Jacques of the Martin Company wrote in 1856, “I could sit for hours on the forecastle, and watch our noble vessel dashing through the briny waves and lashing them into an innumerable variety of fantastic forms of spray and foam.”²³²

The ocean introduced the emigrants to the cruelty of the open sea. Lightning storms which danced on the water and monstrous waves captivated and frightened Mormon travelers. A terrifying occurrence was the loss of children overboard. One mother woke from a nightmare that their young child had fallen off the ship. Surely enough, the next day the young boy, leaning

²³² David H. Pratt and Paul F. Smart, *Life on Board an Mormon Emigrant Ship* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Publishing, 1980).

over the bullworks, fell into the “foaming ocean.”²³³ Handcart pioneers Bodil and Niels Mortenson witnessed a young boy named Thomas Pedersen fall from the top to the bottom deck and die four days later. They wrapped him in canvas and the American flag, and then deposited him in the ocean.²³⁴ Just outside of Liverpool, John Grimmett, a seven-year-old boy, became entangled with some ropes and was jerked overboard.²³⁵ Despite the frantic search, the young boy was never seen again. With their eyes, these British Saints witnessed how easily one can be lost at sea.

According to official Church records, between the years 1846 and 1869, approximately 670 Latter-day Saint immigrants died while crossing the ocean. Some died from sickness, but many died by falling overboard. The raging waters, like the snow in Wyoming, became an obstacle when people became lost. When someone fell off the ship, the frigid Atlantic waters combined with the consistent swells warranted almost certain death. As it will be noted later, many who wandered too far from their camps while on the Mormon Trail became similarly lost in an ocean of prairie and mountains just as menacing as the Atlantic.²³⁶

Both ships that carried the Mormon converts docked at eastern cities before departing by train to Iowa. The sights of New York and Boston mirrored Liverpool and London. Factory smoke obscured skies, and the large population crowded the streets as they moved towards the train. At least one emigrant noted that America didn't feel very different than Liverpool. As the trains rolled west, the views revealed the vast American prairies which intrigued their eyes.

²³³ R. Ballantyne, “Foreign Correspondence,” *Millennial Star*, 17, (1855): 301.

²³⁴ Bodil Malene Mortensen, *Tell My Story Too*, 77.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

²³⁶ Fred E. Woods, “Seagoing Saints,” *Ensign Magazine*, 31, no. 9 (September 2001).

In 1936, a memorial was erected in Coralville, Iowa which was modeled after Torleif Knaphus bronze sculpture on Temple Square in Salt Lake City. It was erected to highlight the territory which served as the jumping-off point in the Mormon pioneer's push West. The marker, a large granite boulder with a bronze plaque honoring the handcart pioneers, stands today at St. Morrison Park north of Clear Creek. British converts gathered there to await their departure for the Great Basin. The statue's stunning qualities and impressive details conjure up strong emotions for those who contemplate the challenges the British Saints faced. In all, five handcart companies of approximately 1,900 people total traveled from Iowa City to Salt Lake City in 1856.²³⁷

Many pioneers commented on how the American Midwest looked different from English cities. There were few factories billowing smoke clouds, and the streets were open and clean. John Southwell of the Martin Company wrote about the open country along the train tracks, which were "studded with fine orchards, bearing fine apples and all kinds of fruit."²³⁸ In Iowa City, Heber McBride remembered the warm days and fresh sunshine, and how "swimming was the order of the day with all the small boys in camp."²³⁹ Yet, the Midwest also introduced the handcart pioneers to the sights and sounds of the summer rains which drenched the Saints as they scurried to their campsite. 18-year-old Elizabeth White described the incident in her journal:

When we completed our journey to Iowa City, we were informed that we would have to walk four miles to our camping ground. All felt delighted to have the privilege of a pleasant walk. We all started, about five hundred of us, with our

²³⁷ Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Pioneer Mother Monuments: Constructing Cultural Memory* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 248; Dean L. May, *Utah: A People's History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 75.

²³⁸ Joseph Smith Barlow, *Tell My Story Too*, 164.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

bedding. We had not gone far before it began to thunder and lightning, and the rain poured. The roads became very muddy and slippery.²⁴⁰

The precocious fifteen-year-old George Cunningham described that night with powerful metaphors: “I think that it is written somewhere that the devil is prince and power of the air. If so, he must have been in an awful rage.”²⁴¹ The British emigrants were no strangers to the rain, but the southerly moisture from the Gulf of Mexico produced durations of intense showers that drenched the residents and travelers of the area. When the rains came, it came in buckets, often flooding tents and soaking supplies. The Midwest rain, however, came less frequently than the continuous showers of England. Most days the Saints basked in the cloudless skies of Iowa.

The clear skies in the Midwest influenced the Willie and Martin companies to push on to Utah in 1856. Most Latter-day Saints are familiar with the name Levi Savage. He is known for opposing the leaders who foolheartedly drove the already tired emigrants forward. Certain journal accounts highlight how the emigrants, unaccustomed to frontier life, ignored Savage’s admonition to remain in Florence. Savage disagreed with James Willie, stating he was “much opposed to taking women & children through destitute of clothing when we all know that we are bound to be caught in the snow and severe colde weather long before we reach the valey.”²⁴² Savage had been across the trail, and had encountered Western storms, but the company largely ignored him. As the August heat baked the Saints, they longed for the cloud cover which commonly blanketed the skies over England. Many found it incomprehensible that they would suffer from cold in a matter of weeks. As they moved from Iowa City to Florence, Nebraska,

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 245.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 245.

²⁴² Howard A. Christy, *Weather, Disaster, and Responsibility: An Essay on the Willie and Martin Handcart Story*” *BYU Quarterly*, 37, no. 1 (1997): 20.

more than one journal entry described the weather as “excessively hot.” One death was recorded in conjunction with the scorching temperatures.

Thus, as the Willie Company staggered into Florence on August 11th, they had a fateful decision on their hands to either stay in the Midwest or push on West. The company shared their doubts about traveling so late in the year. Many were already worn down and suffering with symptoms of malnourishment. The leaders acted quickly and gathered the company on August 13th. With rousing speeches, the leaders assured emigrants the Lord would preserve them if they pushed on. Captain James Willie trivialized risk and reminded the British Saints of their covenants. The son of famous apostle Heber Kimball, William Kimball, guaranteed he would “eat all the snow that fell on us between Florence and Salt Lake City.”²⁴³ Willie and his lieutenant Millen Atwood implored the emigrants to trust God and they would be protected. Levi Savage’s advice to winter in Florence was ignored by those who encouraged British Saints to prioritize reaching Zion. As the emigrants weighed their options, they were unaware of the frigid conditions in the Intermountain West. British winters were nothing to scoff at, and many of the emigrants experienced cold feet and uncomfortable conditions. However, the Western Wyoming storms were a different experience. The snow drifts that trapped the emigrants appeared as large white towers obscuring their views. In the end, roughly 100 emigrants decided to remain in Florence, but most reluctantly squinted at the blazing sun, and peered forward at the dry grasses,

²⁴³ Will Bagley, “One Long Funeral March”: A Revisionist’s View of the Mormon Handcart Disasters” *Journal of Mormon History*, 35, no. 1 (2009): 80.

unaware that with each step west, the elevation increased, and the air would soon chill their bones.²⁴⁴

Past the Great Plains, the concept of time and place shifted for the Saints. Factory life created a world where the bells, whistles, and ticking clocks organized urban life. Little seemed to change day to day in Industrial England. At first, company leaders attempted to reproduce that world. Buglers informed the emigrants when it was time to rise, and the setting sun was an indication to assemble camp. Yet, as the situation became dire, time management became less important. As they formed wagon trains, it was clear that some moved quickly while others lolled behind. The two companies were staggered for miles, with some stumbling into camp as late as 2 am. Control further disintegrated as leaders rode back and searched for stragglers.

Large numbers only hindered organization. The Willie company, numbering five hundreds, was by far the largest LDS group to attempt overland travel. Once in Wyoming, things unraveled quickly as the companies were either too exhausted or uninterested in following what seemed to be insignificant rules about 6am roll call and lights out at 9pm. Some couldn't find the strength to pitch a tent in the dead of night. They would plop themselves down in their carts, or on the cold ground with a bedroll. As will be noted later, the concept of time became entirely irrelevant as they became further trapped by storms.²⁴⁵

While the weary pioneers kept their gaze forward as they walked the trail, occasionally majestic geological formations caught their eye. A common entry in pioneer journals compared the impressive landmarks to European architecture and ruins. The granite and sandstone towers

²⁴⁴ David Roberts, *Devil's Gate: Brigham Young and the Great Handcart Tragedy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 208-09.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 302.

that protruded out of the ground served as waypoints in their slow march West. Today, it's difficult to imagine the current travel time of the handcart companies, which at best was 15 miles per day.²⁴⁶ Independence Rock, Devil's Gate, and the Needles were important landmarks marking progress for the pioneers. Some believed these physical landmarks resembled Old World buildings. At Scott's Bluff in Western Nebraska, the pioneers became enamored with the 800 ft. landmass which was visible for miles around. Frederick Perry noted that the Bluff resembled "ruined palaces, castellated towers, temples and monuments."²⁴⁷ Another traveler referred to it as "the ruins of some ancient vast city, complete with domes, towers, temples, minarets, amphitheaters, frowning parapets, and even "a royal bath."²⁴⁸ The sights were foreign to the emigrants and made it difficult for them to reconcile nature creating such intricate designs without a human architect.

The significance of emigrants comparing New World geology to Old World architecture should not be trivialized. Historian Susan Matt has documented how overland travelers attempted to re-establish a sense of place by affixing old names to new locales. While their eyes were fixed on the horizon, their minds were often on the homes they left behind.²⁴⁹ The New World, as splendid as it first appeared, eventually felt empty. The Saints yearned for the industrial world which had seemed so inescapable previously. They longed to see crowds, markets, and the bustling world they gladly departed. George Harrison of the Martin Company captured this

²⁴⁶ Jana Bommersbach, "Handcart Pioneers," *True West Magazine*, Nov 6, 2015.

²⁴⁷ Laura Allred Hurtado, Bryon C. Andreasen, *Saints at Devil's Gate: Landscapes Along the Mormon Trail* (Salt Lake City, Church Historians Press, 2016), 58.

²⁴⁸ "Scott's Bluff National Monument," *National Parks Service*, December 9, 2000, accessed on September 12, 2023, [NPS Historical Handbook: Scotts Bluff \(npshistory.com\)](https://www.nps.gov/history/handbook/scotts-bluff).

²⁴⁹ Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8.

homesickness while chatting with his companions: “Off in the distance we heard a sweet toned cow bell making music at twilight which reminded us of the vesper bells of Bonny England. “It makes us a little homesick for old England.”²⁵⁰

The desert skies affected how the emigrants saw their path forward. During the day, the autumn sun revealed a splendor of shapes and colors. The spaciousness overwhelmed them as panoramic views allowed the emigrants to gauge the massive continent. It revealed the lonely nature of America. Nebraska’s population hovered around 30,000 with most residing east of Iowa City. Occasional homesteads appeared, but once they arrived in Western Nebraska, the sights of white settlements were rare. When the sun swung low in the evening sky, it irritated their eyes as they faced West, affecting their vision. When the sun settled behind the horizon, the British converts witnessed the sights of the cloudless but chilly October nights in the American West. Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson of the Martin Company poetically described the night sky as “the vault of Heaven for a roof, and the stars for companions.”²⁵¹ Samuel Openshaw noted that it seemed the land met the “sky on all sides.”²⁵² Certainly, the plethora of stars conjured up feelings of both loneliness and appreciation for the open country contrasted against cloudy England.

The pioneers were just as startled by their positive interactions with Native Americans as they were by the nonhuman world. The first section of the Mormon Trail bisected two major Native American tribes—the Cheyenne to the north and the Pawnee to the south. Handcart pioneers spotted indigenous people miles away, and they appeared, to the emigrants, blurry and menacing. Most encounters with Native Americans were simple business transactions. The

²⁵⁰ George Harrison, *Tell My Story Too*, 213.

²⁵¹ Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson, *Tell My Story Too*, 226.

²⁵² Samuel Openshaw, *Tell My Story Too*, 279.

emigrants exchanged clothing, tobacco, and rifles for food. Handcart pioneers revealed that American Indians were instrumental in aiding their journey. George Cunningham recalled that he and his family were invited to camp one night with a large group of Omaha Indians at Wood River, Nebraska. He observed that “we did so and they were very friendly.”²⁵³ Peter Madsen recorded that “Brothers Willie, Atwood, Savage, and Ahmanson presented the chief of the Omaha tribe with presents and paid their respects. They received from him dried buffalo meat.”²⁵⁴ Four-year-old Sarah Oakey remembered, “Sometimes in the evenings the Indians brought buffalo meat into camp to trade for salt and clothing which was a welcome change.”²⁵⁵

Despite Native Americans assisting emigrants, they rarely escaped the reputation as savages. Accounts reveal Indians helping the handcart companies with stranded wagons, rescuing drowning emigrants, and even rounding up lost cattle. Still, emigrants were alarmed by the sight of their darker skin and colorful clothing. White Americans portrayed them as hedonistic and unnatural. Mette Mortensen wrote that “many times we were very frightened at the sight of Indians.”²⁵⁶ Robert Reeder became convinced without evidence that the Indians had driven away their cattle. Benjamin Madley, while researching the annihilation of the American Indians during the Gold Rush, concluded that most overland encounters with Indians were amicable. “By the mid-nineteenth century,” Madley writes, “authors and journalists convinced thousands of emigrants to fear Indian attacks.”²⁵⁷ On one occasion, emigrants were impressed

²⁵³ George Cunningham, *Tell My Story Too*, 23.

²⁵⁴ Peter Madsen, *Tell My Story Too*, 70.

²⁵⁵ Rhoda Rebecca Oakey, *Tell My Story Too*, 93.

²⁵⁶ Mette Mortenson, *Tell My Story Too*, 81.

²⁵⁷ Benjamin J. Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 78.

when Captain Willie avoided conflict with a Native American group by explaining their ties to Brigham Young.

LDS leaders had long established Native Americans as central to the Book of Mormon and instrumental in ushering in God's Kingdom. Yet, these poor British converts were often unaware of the nuanced relationship between Latter-Day Saints and American Indians. LDS leaders had long established Native Americans as instrumental in ushering in the Second Coming in the Last days. Yet, there had been conflict between Latter-Day Saints and American Indians. Mormon converts generally were taught the prejudices common in nineteenth century America which dismissed the Indian as untrustworthy and uncivilized.²⁵⁸

The Visual World of the Suffering Pioneers

As pioneers inched closer to the Continental Divide in Wyoming, oncoming storms obscured their visual world. Wyoming provided little geographic variety for the eye sore emigrants. Rolling hills mirrored each other, and the vegetation remained grey, dull, and unchanging. Cold wind kicked up dust, and the land became rockier underneath their blistered feet. As they moved towards the Rattlesnake Range in mid-October, the British Saints saw white flurries fill the sky. Innocuous at first, a hard wind blew the flurries which stung their eyes. The pioneers prayed the storm would ease up as they pressed on. However, on October 19, the snow and wind produced whiteout conditions. The next day, both companies discovered 18 inches of snow on the ground and sub-zero temperatures. Some had abandoned their clothing and bedding to lighten the load, and they used anything to insulate their bodies. Leaders mistakenly tried to outrun the storms and reach the higher elevations. However, snow hampered their decision

²⁵⁸ Robert Reeder, *Tell My Story Too*, 111; Madley, *An American Genocide*, 78.

making as it had with the Donner Party. The snow stuck to the ground causing treadless wheels to slide under the slippery and muddy conditions.²⁵⁹

Historians delegate an area called Devil's Gate as an important landmark for Latter-day Saints. David Roberts, whose popular monograph retells the Willie and Martin disaster, used the name of this landmark as his title to highlight the landmark's significance. The emigrants were often impressed when they spotted the narrow cleft of beautiful granite, which was 30 feet wide at the base but nearly 300 feet wide at its top. Like a towering castle, it watched over the prairies to the east and served as a gateway to the jagged and large peaks in the west. The smooth-flowing Sweetwater River cut through the large rock towards the Wind River Range. For both companies, Devil's Gate was an appropriate name in October 1856. As they moved towards South Pass, it seemed as if the Devil had abandoned fire for snow. The pioneers became blinded by the blizzard which halted their progress.²⁶⁰

Edward Martin, the strong but unyielding leader of the handcart company, made a fateful decision to cross the icy Sweetwater River and retreat to a more protected area. A spirit of egalitarianism arose as the strong helped the weak wade across the Sweetwater. Martin led his company into one of the coves within the Rattlesnake Range. Perhaps two miles off the trail, the company nestled themselves in the rocks praying for the storm to pass. As the emigrants pitched their tents, however, the wind continued to howl, and snow buried their carts as the temperatures plummeted.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Roberts, *Devil's Gate*, 354.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 354.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Martin, together with two or three others, set out from the camp at Devil's Gate for help. The snowstorm blinded their vision. They soon wandered for several hours, until they made a fire with their last match. From the cove, the emigrants spotted Martin's fire less than half a mile away. Others attempted to search for shelter only to meet a similar fate as Martin. The company's visual world had become less reliable, and their eyes became less effective.²⁶²

Meanwhile, 85 miles west, the Willie Company encountered similar winter squalls at Rocky Ridge. At 7000 feet above sea level, Rocky Ridge is considered the most arduous section. The trail over Rocky Ridge is approximately two miles long and ascends over 700 feet in elevation. Large boulders of granite dot the ridge making it difficult to travel with a wagon or cart. People found themselves pushing handcarts uphill through blinding snow. One emigrant described the "steep hills and rocky ridges [which] nearly shook the wagons to pieces and we passed several ravines where the snow still lay several feet in depth."²⁶³ On October 22, the Willie company took 27 hours to travel 15 miles from the base of Rocky Ridge to Rock Creek. The peak of Rocky Ridge typically provides a panoramic view of the large and desolate Wyoming territory. On a clear day, the Willie Company would have seen the faint outline of the Rattlesnake Rocks where the Martin Company sheltered. One hundred miles to the Northwest, the Wind River Range appear like giant towers soaring to the heavens. However, as the Willie Company traversed higher, dark clouds and blinding snow obscured all views.²⁶⁴

²⁶² "Edward Martin Grandfather of Mae Martin Felt," *Felt Family Online*, accessed on July 12, 2023, [Edward Martin Story | Felt Family Online](#).

²⁶³ "Rocky Ridge," *WYO History*, January 2017, <https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/rocky-ridge#:~:text=%E2%80%9CAbout%2010%20we%20left%20the,lav%20several%20feet%20in%20depth>.

²⁶⁴ James E. Faust, "A Priceless Heritage," *Ensign*, 32, no. 7, July 2002.

Jesse Taylor, a ten-year-old boy in the Martin Company, provided a vivid account of the suffering emigrants. On the morning of October 20, Taylor peered outside his tent with several inches of snow on the ground and counted 15 of his fellow travelers buried in one grave. While Jesse and his family huddled “in a little cove called Martin’s Hollow,”²⁶⁵ A young man named George Padley came to Jesse’s mother begging for food. To Jesse, the man looked emaciated, and his deathly appearance haunted him. Within a few hours, Jesse’s mother became incapacitated. He reportedly watched his mother’s flesh fall off her toes and the side of her left foot. He looked on in horror as her protruding bones were removed with scissors.²⁶⁶

As they suffered in Wyoming, their physical characteristics, including skin color, facial shape, and temperaments were less discernable as they became shells of their former selves. Before departing, the handcart pioneers each had distinct appearances. However, malnourishment and hypothermic conditions eroded their visual individuality. Emile Durkheim reminds us, that as individuals leave their homes their memories and bodies are displaced. While there was something liberating in being ungrounded from their previous home, their identities were partly constructed by the inflexible realities of being born at a specific time, in a specific place, and into a specific social relation. On the trail, however, their identity salience became erratic, and their individuality mattered less on account of situational changes. Ephraim Hanks, one of the rescuers, noticed this change as people moved the sick in and out of wagons. He claimed he could “judge how long they would be before they would probably die, a certain lantern jawed, famine-stricken appearance would be seen in their faces which the more plainly

²⁶⁵ Jesse Soar Taylor, *Tell My Story Too*, 308-09.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

defined was an index of their nearer death.”²⁶⁷ Imminent morbidity affects humans differently, yet some physical characteristics of the dying are shared. When blood circulation declines, loss of pigmentation occurs leading to a grey like epidermis. The emigrants became paler and greyer, and their skin started to mottle as they remained in their tents. Some emigrants recalled struggling to discern their own family members as some became similar looking in appearance.

As the companies prayed for rescue, time became more insignificant to the starving pioneers. Hours bled into each other, and as the blizzards obscured the skies and the sun, time seemed to stand still. Journal entries mention frustration as normal tasks took hours. With little energy left and lagging cognitive abilities, re-setting the tents in the dark, gathering firewood, and even attempting to light a match could take all day. One account claimed that the men were so weak that it took them two hours to clear the places for their tents.²⁶⁸

To compound things, the emigrants were strung out for miles with six to eight hours passing between the first and final handcart arriving at camp. Johan Ahmanson recalled that the Willie Company “came to the campsite where the earlier arrivals had already kindled a fire and set up their tents. By midnight the last wagon came in. Since several of the handcarts were still missing, however, some of the wagons were sent off to help them. It was 4:30 a.m. when the last handcart returned.” By the time all the emigrants were accounted for, the morning sun revealed that fourteen emigrants had frozen to death in the night.²⁶⁹

When the rescuers spotted the camps, many wept at what they saw. The emigrants appeared unable to communicate, and they lost their sense of direction as the weakest piled into

²⁶⁷ Ephraim Hanks, *Tell My Story Too*, 458.

²⁶⁸ Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson, *Tell My Story Too*, 226.

²⁶⁹ Niels Andersen. *Tell My Story Too*, 3.

the wagons. While America's splendor had captivated the emigrants, they longed for the sights of factories, dockyards, and old England again after they became trapped in the Wyoming storms and watched as their fellow Saints died.²⁷⁰

Conclusion. Modern-day re-enactors try to manipulate the visual world to be authentic, but there are still sights that disrupt the re-enactment and remind them that they inhabit a different time than the original pioneers. However, re-enactors try to ensure that there are enough visual replicas of the past, including clothing, natural landmarks, and food, to allow participants to believe they inhabit a past world and can see like a nineteenth-century pioneer.

The vivid accounts of the Willie and Martin handcart tragedy provide a clearer picture of what happened during October of 1856. Handcart participants injected their visual memories within the larger domain of embodied memory. The emigrants saw spaces in both Industrial England and the American West obscured by environmental factors. There is value, however, in taking their stories at face value. When participants such as Levi Savage note the people in a constant state of suffering, historians must give credit to the traumatic memory born out of the visuals imprinted on their minds.

Yet for historians, sight by itself pose a host of methodological problems. Questions about how the other senses inform vision can modify what we think we know about how the world is perceived with eyes. Later chapters will retell this handcart story and how its participants transitioned from Industrial England to the American West foregrounding different

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

senses. Human senses do not work isolated from each other and work together to make up the full human experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

FEELING LIKE THE PIONEER

Introduction

On a brisk morning in September 1856, Patience Loader used quilts to make a bed in her handcart for her father who was too sick to walk. Her family pushed the handcart but struggled to propel it forward with the extra weight. Loader recorded that “we 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 we got to the top of the hill about one o'clock.”²⁷¹ As the family rested at the top, they were exhausted, and their bodies were worn down. “the sun was scorching hott so bad for my dear dieng father on the top a hill,” Loader writes, “not the least shade for him we had to stay there all day.”²⁷² Loader’s precarious situation provides a window view into how these emigrants bodies, tormented by the hostile environment, struggled as they pushed their handcarts towards Utah.

This chapter argues there is value in exploring the handcart pioneer’s body sense (how they touched and felt) as they transitioned from England to the American West. Re-enactors replicate how the Willie and Martin handcart companies described their bodily relationships with both material possessions and the environment. Trekkers use replicated handcarts and interact with the Wyoming environment where the companies were stranded. The handcart became a major part of the pioneer’s identity as they navigated the American landscape.

²⁷¹ Loader, *Autobiography of Patience Loader*, 70-71.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

The first section focuses on how British converts from cities developed into overland travelers co-evolved with their vehicles. Northern England employed Britain's poorest to work in the dingy factories. The Industrial Revolution shaped the handcart pioneers' previous relationships with machines and trapped them into piece-mill work. Brigham Young's call for converts to gather to the Great Basin hastened the converts departure as they had been promised Zion is an American paradise. Once in the American West and on the overland trails, these emigrants reinvigorated the protestant work ethic that celebrates sweat and toil in the open landscape. As the emigrants departed from Iowa City with their handcarts, they learned to operate the handcarts on the trail until they became entangled with the vehicles as co-evolved "tool-beings."²⁷³

The next section considers how the handcart pioneers' confidence deteriorated as their vehicles did not glide across the plains as promised. As the trail became steeper and more arduous, the handcart became a necessary burden that couldn't be abandoned. In Wyoming, the pioneers used their handcarts to survive while trapped in thick snow until the carts became useless. British Saints then tried to unentangle themselves from the vehicles which had become

²⁷³ Don Ihde, *Instrumental Realism: The Interface Between Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Technology* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1991), 30. For further reading, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty's, *The Structure of Behavior*. Ponty's claims have caused scholars to evaluate further how the philosophy of technology helps shed light on humans and their tools. Ponty makes it clear that human beings can not only extend the specialty of their lived bodies with the aid of artifacts but perceive with them as well. Ultimately, the blind man does not feel the stick so much as the objects in the way through the stick. While still controversial in philosophical circles, Ponty and Heidegger's phenomenological claims offer some important insights into the danger of separating humans from their tools due to modern misconceptions. For further readings, consider Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Bateson asks "Where does the blind man's self-begin? At the tip of the stick? At the handle of the stick? Or at some point halfway up the stick?"

an extension of their personage. Handcarts, which had been essential previously, were now useless as leaders abandoned them in Wyoming.

The final section considers the important relationship between the pioneer's bodies and the environment. The emigrants encountered a variety of different natural textures with their hands and feet. They positioned their bodies based on the soft grasses, prickly cacti, and sharp rocks. Blisters developed on their feet as they became worn down by the unstable ground and rocky terrain. In Wyoming, the pioneers were forced to adapt their bodies to survive in the Wyoming prairies. With numb limbs, the pioneer's fine motor skills disappeared, and they failed to accomplish simple tasks from buttoning their shirts to pitching a tent. Their bodies at the beginning were immersed in the American prairies which were full of life. By the end of their journey, their bodies were surrounded with snow and ice which impeded how they felt the world.

Before analyzing the handcart pioneers' bodily journey, this chapter looks at how re-enactors attempt to create relationships with the pioneers through replicated handcart. Young trekkers immerse themselves in the pioneer world by cultivating a human/machine relationship with their replicated handcarts. At the same time, young re-enactors immerse themselves in the Wyoming landscape. The trekkers feel the rough terrain under their feet and their bodies encounter local flora and geological formations. Re-enactors strive for the sublime as they mimic how the pioneers touched and felt the environment.

Re-enacting the Pioneers Body Sense

Once the young re-enactors arrive at Martin's Cove, they are encouraged to explore the environment while the leaders prepare the re-enactments. The young teens gravitate towards Devil's Gate a mile or so from the visitor's center. The landmark is isolated against a backdrop of

the vibrant Wyoming environment. The young people often take off their shoes and wade in the cool Sweetwater River which cuts through the rock. Others move closer and run their hands on the rough granite wall. In the summer months, the young people notice the insects that hover around the standing water, and some collect insects. One young person recalled, “We hiked to the river, where it comes through the 100-meter-deep gorge, waded into the cool water, and marveled at its beauty and magnificence. I watched as a snake swam by in the crystal-clear water, the frogs hopped in, and swallows dipped and dove.”²⁷⁴ When they wander back to the visitor center, their bodies have already started the important process of feeling like the pioneers.

A vital part of the re-enactment process is to have young participants integrate with their vehicles—handcart and body—in a similar way as the original pioneer. While some handcarts are outsourced to companies to manufacture, others employ carpenters from their local congregations. Some re-enactors are eager to use their bodies to move the handcarts are unloaded off trailers. One re-enactor wrote that at first it was a novel experience to push the cart, and “Along the way they enjoyed getting a little wet as they crossed several small streams and had a little rain shower cross their path.”²⁷⁵ Like the pioneers, however, the task of maneuvering handcarts is taxing. One trek leader made mental notes about games and activities she could engage in with teens while they walked. However, “the cramming was totally unnecessary.” She recalled, “because hiking the trail with a handcart was exhausting! It was often so challenging,

²⁷⁴ Kevin, “Martin’s Cove and Devil’s Gate,” *Adventure Patches*, February 22, 2021, accessed on December 4th, 2023, [Martin’s Cove and Devil’s Gate - Adventure Patches](#).

²⁷⁵ “Malad Stake Trek 2022,” *Malad Stake Trek 2022*, August 11, 2022, accessed on December 10, 2023, <https://www.idahoenterprise.com/2022/08/12/408535/malad-stake-trek-2022>.

that I was perpetually out of breath and unable to carry on a conversation, let alone sing a song.”²⁷⁶ Another youth mentioned being “human brakes” while moving their handcarts.²⁷⁷

A good example of the intimate bond created between the handcart and the re-enactor occurs during the Woman’s Pull. The Woman’s Pull was originally tied to the Mormon Battalion. Before the Saints left for Utah, 500 Mormon men volunteered to travel to California to fight in the Mexican War. Consequently, many women were left to walk the trail by themselves. However, the Church quickly shut that narrative down. Historians and critics stressed that handcarts were not used until nearly a decade after the War. The Woman’s Pull is now a dedicated memorial to women who were forced to push their carts alone after their husbands and fathers had died.

During the Woman’s Pull, young women are instructed to have their hands on the handcart while pushing up a steep hill. In the LDS Church handbook, it insists that “pulling handcarts helps the youth discover their own strengths and the strengths of others. It can also help them increase their faith in and dependence on the Lord.”²⁷⁸ While adults generally walk alongside the handcart, the young girls during the Woman’s Pull are instructed to have some bodily connection to their handcart. Some girls push at the front, while others help along the side, or push at the back. On more than one occasion, young trekkers are scolded for not being close enough to the handcart as they girls push through difficult parts.

²⁷⁶ “Pioneer Trek Travelogue,” *Design Mom*, August 2, 2018, accessed on December 10, 2023, [Pioneer Trek | Travel | Design Mom - the blog](#).

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ *Handcart Trek Reenactments Guidelines for Leaders* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Publishing, 2015), 13.

To appropriately understand the embodied re-enactment these young women are experiencing, the handcarts they are attached to must be central to the story. During the Woman's Pull, the young men are instructed to stand to the side of the trail and wait, hats on their hearts, as groups of young women push their handcarts up a steep hill (often at the site of Rocky Ridge, where the pioneers struggled themselves). Because amateur carpenters construct many of the handcarts, the young women are put in potentially precarious scenarios. One participant noted that she could not let go of the wobbly handcart, lest it seriously injure one of the girls in the group. Another noticed that as the handcart moved up the steep incline, she felt a desperate need to keep pushing.²⁷⁹ The girls are reminded that if their bodies become disconnected from the handcart, serious injury is certain. There is to be no separation between the girls and the carts. Given the number of participants, it is often impossible for all the girls to be involved. Many are told to simply place their hand anywhere on the handcart.

Young women claim they reach sublime experiences during the Woman's Pull when it seems like they are transcending their circumstances and becoming a part of the past. Like the pioneers of 1856, one wrong stumble could lead to serious injury or even death if the cart unexpectedly fails. It is, however, during these circumstances the young trekkers seem to move from pretending to believing that they can physically embody the experiences of the pioneer. As one girl explained, "We had to pull a handcart over a particular hill, and all of a sudden it wasn't a game anymore. The atmosphere changed. We became serious."²⁸⁰ Many framed their new connections with the past in familial terms. Another participant claimed, "My ancestor's hand

²⁷⁹ John C. "Learning the Wrong Lessons," *By Common Consent*, June 10, 2008.

²⁸⁰ Shaun Stahl, "Handcart Trek More Than Teen Make-believe Game," *Church News*, July 8, 2000.

was on my back as I pushed.”²⁸¹ Ann Ardos, an adviser at trek, said she felt “the Spirit during this women’s pull and knew the Lord was helping them up the hill”²⁸² Another leader remembered, “When we reenacted this by having the women pull some of the hand carts up a steep hill, the fortitude I saw in them was incredible, they prepared themselves mentally and spiritually by meeting together beforehand and then those women gave it everything they had.”²⁸³ Many recollect that they suddenly lose a sense of place and time as they focus on pushing. One young girl recalled this specifically: “I felt united with the young women I was put into a family with. And off to the side we’re the young men. It was probably the best feeling. At the moment I never felt so cared and loved for by my peers because I could see how much they wanted to help. It was all very emotional.”

While the Woman’s Pull appears to be about the relationship young women forge with their handcarts, young men are also essential to the re-enactment. A major part of trek is the gender roles, which are emphasized in their respective groups. Not only are young people divided into families with a ‘Pa’ and ‘Ma,’ girls and boys are given specific tasks to perform that correspond to their gender. Leaders instruct boys to stand up straight with a silent and solemn masculinity during the Woman’s Pull. They are not allowed to help their friends and sisters no matter how difficult the task appears for them. One young man remembered watching the girls push the handcarts. His leaders “encouraged [them] to sit back and think about what our mothers

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Sarah Harris, First-ever Micronesian pioneer trek presents missionary opportunity for Pohnpeian youth,” *Church News*, August 8, 2017.

²⁸³ Robert Stevens, “Handcart Trek Gives Participants Appreciation for Pioneer Trials” *Sanpete Messenger* [Handcart trek gives participants appreciation for pioneer trials | Sanpete Messenger](#).

have done for us.”²⁸⁴ It was an odd suggestion. The girls’ physical exertion became an opportunity for the young men to reflect on the labor that women performed daily, even though few of their mothers engaged in physical work that was as intense as what they were experiencing. Other leaders focused on the boys’ interior state. A group from Kansas directed the young men: “This is to be a spiritual and reverent event. There should be no cheering or teasing. It will be done in silence and with the men removing their hats as the women come up the trail.”²⁸⁵ In another instance, young men, desperately wanting to help the girls, were told to stand by and “pray for them.”²⁸⁶ Even the young women felt sympathy for the young men. This may seem odd in a twenty first century, but Latter-day Saints instruct women to be nurturers and caregivers to the men. One young girl explained that she was “touched by the way the men were lined up on the hill. I couldn’t look at them.”²⁸⁷ Another young woman, recalled her experience with the Woman’s Pull: “People change on the trail,” she continued. “I noticed in the testimony meeting that the young men no longer called them girls, but women.”²⁸⁸

A paradox exists for young women on trek. The Woman’s Pull on the surface appears to be a memorialization for the pioneer woman who pushed her cart in forbidding terrain. Nevertheless, the white, middle class values Latter-day Saints embraced at the turn of the twentieth century remained embedded in their cultural norms nearly a century later. From outside

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ “Ma & Pa Pioneer Trek Handbook,” *Boise Idaho East Stake*, August 4, 2016, accessed on July 29, 2023, <http://www.salinatrek.org/pdf/ma-and-pa-handbook.pdf>.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Todd McMahon, “Teens Re-enact Trek Taken by Mormon Pioneers” *Green Bay Press Gazette*, July 3, 2014.

²⁸⁸ Shaun Stahl, “Handcart trek more than teen make-believe game,” *Church News*, July 8, 2000.

perspectives, the LDS Church has been too fixed on outdated beliefs about gender.

Contemporary believers are often criticized for the strict gender roles that govern much of the Church. As trek unfolds every summer, the idea of vigorous manhood is at the heart of many of the reenactments. One young woman, when reminiscing about trek, proclaimed, “I hate it. Every young man focuses on how they are strong, and girls are weak. It reinforces the church doctrine that men should be the ones in charge because of their sex.”²⁸⁹

No two treks are the same, as hundreds of groups are allowed to organize according to the promptings of the spirit (and the handbook), but the Woman’s Pull remains a consistent event for Mormon Trail re-enactors. While sifting through trek journals and news articles, the Woman’s Pull is usually mentioned. This seems to be linked to the potent and intense experience the event produces. Young re-enactors seemed more emotional, and contemplative while participating in the event. As these young women struggle up the hill with their male peers silently observing them, all parties appear to be connecting to the handcart pioneer on a transcendent level. There is, however, an underlying reality: patriarchy still holds the power. One girl lamented that a male leader, following the event, reminded her “Now you understand why it’s important to have men in your life.”²⁹⁰ Young men are frequently instructed to never let a woman struggle with physical work again. In all, there is a feeling among many re-enactors that the Woman’s Pull may be more

²⁸⁹ Smith, Hank, "The “Women’s Pull Needs to Go” March 10, 2018, 9:09 pm. <https://twitter.com/hankrsmith/status/972685968401510401?lang=en>. Smith is a BYU professor who is active on social media. Many of his posts elicit comments from Latter-day Saints about their experiences. Smith claims that because the Woman’s Pull is not based on history. It is sensational and when youth get older, they resent being emotionally manipulated. Gimmicks aren’t effective because the Holy Ghost doesn’t need our help.

²⁹⁰ Angela C. “The Woman’s Pull, *By Common Consent*, June 9, 2015, accessed on March 15 2022, [The Women’s Pull – By Common Consent, a Mormon Blog](#).

for men than women. As re-enactors engage their bodies in the different events, they rely on the journal accounts of the emigrants.

To better understand re-enactors' relationship with their handcarts, it's helpful to look at how emigrants in 1856 created a relationship with their carts. In a span of a few months, the emigrants moved their bodies from the streets of Liverpool to the open sea and then to the American Midwest. From there, they pushed cumbersome handcarts through the desert until they were trapped in blizzards. Believers have interpreted their experience as a refining experience. The pioneers emerged out of the refiner's fire towards a glorious deliverance when they were rescued. It was, to Latter-day Saints, a noble and lasting rebirth.

Feeling the Old World. In 1856, the same year the handcart pioneers struggled on the Mormon Trail, British factory workers were expected to cultivate a relationship between their bodies and machines. The Industrial Revolution placed humans as part of, not outside the machines they operated. They were instructed to perform tasks within the larger production processes of factories. Industrialization linked hands and eyes to machines until they became one colossal body with interchangeable parts. Designers hoped to create a seamless process from conception to execution. Long before people feared machines replacing humans, there was a hope for a co-partnership between the two.

Industrialists imagined a future where humans became part of the organism of industry. The famous business theorist Anrew Ure echoed these sentiments when he wrote: "A factory I conceive to be, in the strictest sense, involves the idea of vast automation, composed of various mechanical and intellectual organs acting in uninterrupted concert for the production of a

common object.”²⁹¹ For Ure and nineteenth-century industrialists, they envisioned workers perfected by scientific instruction and united with their machines.

Despite the optimism of factory owners, there was a steep learning curve for workers who transitioned from simple farm tools to fast moving, mechanized technologies. The incredible sensitivity and precision needed from workers led to frustration as they struggled to keep up with the demands of production. Indeed, human hands had to adapt to automated, repetitive gestures. Outside factors sometimes kept workers from performing with the consistency that factory owners expected.²⁹²

The historian Thomas Andrews’s concept “workscape” is helpful here. Andrews argues that workscales are not static environments but a “constellation of unruly and ever-unfolding relationships for laborers, with “land...air and water, bodies and organisms.”²⁹³ I suggest here that the factories English workers encountered are best understood as “workscales” with environmental elements that sometimes impeded the mechanical success that managers hoped to achieve. This concept reveals two important things: first, historians should consider laborers within their larger environment and their relationships to machines. Second, factory owners often became frustrated when they were unable to fully control the relationships between humans and machines in the workscales they had created.

²⁹¹ Andrew Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures: Or, An Exposition of the Scientific, Moral, and Commercial Economy of the Factory System of Great Britain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1835), 13.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America’s Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 125. Andrews argues that the “workscape” of the Colorado mining fields played a crucial role in fomenting solidarity among miners and exacerbating tensions between capital and labor. An argument that follows is the eventual tension between industrial workers and owners leading to the rise of labor strikes in England during the 1800s.

Most British Saints were employed in industrial occupations that required a bodily relationship with machines. Furnace mills and textile factories employed many converts and expected them to learn the specifics of machinery. Andrew Smith's experience working in a paisley factory influenced him to join the Willie company. The production of paisley was labor intensive and involved the tedious stitching of hems and fringes. Weavers mimicked artisans from Southern India where paisley originated. For the production and dyeing of cloth, a worker needed to perfect their muscle memory and develop agile fingers. Smith's physically demanding schedule wore him down. His body were exploited for the development of England.²⁹⁴ Many converts shared his experience.

Converts commented on the brutal conditions in England's factories, particularly in nail factories. By the early 1800's, nail production was increasingly automated, but bodies were still needed for proper care and operation. Flat metal strips of around two feet in length and slightly wider than the nail length was aligned on the machine in perfect symmetry. The worker had to stand close and operate the first lever with accuracy, as it cut a triangular strip of metal giving the desired width of the nail. Both the second and third levers expected similar precision as the worker held the nail in place while the third lever formed the head. In these situations, metal often cut, burned, and maimed nail workers as it flew off the machine at lightning speeds. Serious injury was common, and at least one handcart pioneer was injured prior to their journey.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Andrew Smith, *Tell My Story Too*, 125.

²⁹⁵ Marie Wilhelmina Catherine Krause, *Tell My Story Too*, 348; "The history of NAIL MAKING," *Glasgow Steel Nail*, accessed on October 13, 2023, <http://www.glasgowsteelnail.com/nailmaking.htm>.

As the missionaries informed the converts about financial opportunities to emigrate, many were relieved to walk away from their machines. Conversion to Mormonism and subsequent immigration offered British converts relief from England's industrializing cities. When British converts boarded the ships, they had already cultivated and abandoned a body-machine relationship. However, they cultivate another relationship with their handcars. Some converts spoke of the freedom they felt as they watched the large factories disappear into the horizon.

Feeling Handcars

White settlers regularly used animals to travel across the overland trail. Oxen, horses, and mules were all used to decrease the danger of the journey to the Western United States. Camels have even accompanied some travelers. The handcart pioneer emerged at a time when most societies looked for ways to lessen their loads by either animals or machinery.

Overland travelers soon discovered that the West's unforgiving environments tested their bodies. The road to the West has never been easy. With elevations as high as 7,000 feet and deserts stretching for miles, the scarcity of water and food left even the savviest pioneer concerned on the trail. Pioneer journals described the turmoil that occurred in those years before the railroad tore across the land. As Lavina Porter put it "I would throw myself down on the unfriendly desert and give way like a child to sobs and tears."²⁹⁶ Traveling on the overland trails propelled the pioneer towards steeper passes, colder climates, and arid conditions. What waited for the pioneer and their pack animals were the menacing Sierras or the steep Wasatch Range.

²⁹⁶ Keith Heyer Meldahl, *Hard Road West: History and Geology Along the Gold Rush* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 16.

Few emigrants understood that as they traversed towards the setting sun, their experience would be as much about going “upward” as going “westward.”

While modernist accounts of the overland trails rarely consider the autonomy of pack animals, they often dictated how and where wagon trains traveled. Historians such as Virginia Anderson document how humans are shaped in unexpected ways by the activities of animals. “Despite their status as domesticated creatures,” Anderson argues “The animals were never wholly under human control. Sometimes they acted in ways their owners neither predicted or desired.”²⁹⁷ Thus, steep routes which could easily be traversed with human feet became impassable as large animals needed more room and space. The need for food and water became the concern for emigrants who needed to find prairies for their animals to feed and water holes which were clean.

Often travelers deemed physical coercion of animals necessary to accomplish the harsh workload of pulling wagons weighing thousands of pounds. Emigrants expected animals to operate like machinery with little regard to the creature’s needs. Harriet Loughary in 1864, noted the animal cruelty she witnessed by a wagon company. As water and grass became sparse, the tired animals were “(sic) goaded and whiped (sic) on until night and then only a few green weeds and no wood.”²⁹⁸ Louisa Cook, while walking through Nebraska in 1862, noted a train of six wagons with animals covered with welts and shrinking from the men.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.

²⁹⁸ Robert L. Munkres, *Saleratus & Sagebrush: People and Places on the Road West*, (Zanesville, OH: New Concord Press, 2003), 323.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Trail historians have noted that in places where the path was barren, emigrants provided little water to the weakened animals. Many livestock weakened in the 40-mile desert, a dry and craggy place between the Humboldt and Truckee rivers. Mark Twain, while traveling the California Trail in 1861, observed, “From one extremity of this desert to the other, the road was white with the bones of oxen and horses.”³⁰⁰ Trekkers pushed their animals as far as possible, and then left them in the desert.

Mormons found pride in using their bodies and moving away from animal power. One pioneer boasted “We had the advantage over the oxen drivers, they had to hitch up their cattle, while we just had to hitch up ourselves.” Another pioneer commented that people inquired where their wagons were? The general reply was it was a matter of pride “drawing our handcarts.”³⁰¹ One pioneer summed up the mindset of handcarts: “Times change and what we look at now as hardship was then taken as a matter of course.”³⁰² Brigham Young saw the handcart experiment as the first step to self-sufficiency. In a statement to the Saints in Scandinavia he predicted, “The time will come when the Saints would be willing to go to Zion with a bundle on their backs and be proud to have that privilege.”³⁰³

Company leaders sometimes treated handcart pioneers like pack animals pulling wagons. Whenever animals were sick or feeble, leaders used aggressive means to push them forward. Occasionally, handcart emigrants were treated similarly. Ann Rowley witnessed James Willie

³⁰⁰ Medhal, *Hard Road West*, 228.

³⁰¹ Lydia D. Alder, “The First Handcart Company” *Improvement Era*, 10, (1909): 721.

³⁰² Frederick Hansen “The Great Handcart Train from Iowa City to Salt Lake City,” *Journal of History* Vol 9, no 1 (January 1916): 414.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 411.

whip a man who was suffering from the cold.³⁰⁴ John Griffiths, ailing from rheumatoid arthritis, attempted to hold onto a cart to aid him as he walked. When the teamster noted this, he “slashed his long whip around and struck father [Griffiths] on the legs and he fell to the ground.”³⁰⁵

Edmund Ellsworth pushed the handcart Saints over steep passes with few stops and little sleep. Weaker trekkers were shuffled to the back of the line. Pioneers were pushed and cajoled to move along as they fell behind. Leaders referred to the stragglers as “useless cattle” and “worthless swine.” Jewell Rowley noticed Captain Willie stand over a man prone on the trail. He whipped him until he started moving. Nicholus Teeples recalled punishments occurring whenever there were rivers that needed to be crossed, mountains to be climbed, and roads to be cleared. “The leaders had to take a whip to them,” Teeples wrote “and lash them back to consciousness.”³⁰⁶

This lack of empathy demonstrates the consequences when humans become united to a technology typically connected to animals. Unlike other teamsters who could focus their irritation on their animals for the difficulties on the trail, the handcart pioneers were burdened with the responsibility when things went wrong. The previously mentioned Edmund Ellsworth claimed that when handcarts broke down, the handlers were to blame not the carts. Irritated company captains spent hours driving the emigrants forward. Still, many became incapable of pushing their large vehicles up the mountain passes.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Roberts, *Devil's Gate*, 267.

³⁰⁵ David L. Clark “Violence and Disruptive Behavior on the Difficult Trail to Utah, 1847-1868” *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 53, no. 4. (2014): 95-96.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ Roberts, *Devil's Gate*, 145.

Mormons, like other Western cultures embraced a world that became, as Colin Renfrow explains, “more substantive, more material.”³⁰⁸ By the mid-nineteenth century it became evident that material objects constrained humanity. Humans became, to steal the word from Ian Hodder, “entangled” with their material inventions. This co-dependency allowed the Latter-day Saints to bring some of their materials to the Great Basin. However, these technologies also created an unstable reality when leaders overestimated their technological advancements. White settlers looked for efficient but cheap ways to reshape, restructure, and remake technologies as they migrated across the country. The cultural needs of the pioneers stimulated a drive to seek new types of transportation which was in line with the speed over comfort.³⁰⁹

To understand the co-dependent relationship between pioneers and their vehicles, it’s necessary to evaluate how they constructed their handcarts. In 1856, as Brigham Young confidently led his people, he developed handcarts a method for overland transportation. How or why Brigham Young selected handcarts is not entirely clear. He may have been influenced after observing 49ers pushing wheelbarrows to California. Despite the disasters that occurred with the Martin and Willie Handcart companies, Young considered the handcart plan a success as early as 1857. Ten companies made the long journey across the trail from 1856 to 1860.³¹⁰

Handcarts were both a machine with certain functions and an expression of a social world. Given the open build of a handcart, there was no hiding possessions, or more importantly,

³⁰⁸ Ian Hodder, *Where Are We Heading? The Evolution of Humans and Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 8.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

³¹⁰ LeRoy Reuben Hafen and Ann Woodbury Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion: The Story of a Unique Western Migration, 1856-1860: with Contemporary Journals, Accounts, Reports, and Rosters of Members of the Ten Handcart Companies* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 11.

food. In fact, many families in other vanguards with covered wagons saw a wide discrepancy of material supplies as some possessed a luxury of goods. Handcarts had no tops, and each cart was designed to hold 85 pounds of supplies. These vehicles were exposed and free for public viewing. As they travelled together, they also starved together and, in some cases, died together.³¹¹

Handcarts were designed to be efficient, lightweight, and reliable. Generally, six or seven feet long and the width of a wide track wagon, the two wheels had axles consisting of a single pole of wood. More luxurious carts had wheels hooped with thin iron tires, but most carts were constructed with simple hickory. With three or four binding cross bars from the back part to the front of the cart, there was then two or three feet of space from the latter bar to the front bar for the lead man, woman or boy of the team."³¹² Once the frame was constructed, the handcart was one's lifeline on the trail. Carrying flour, bedding, extra clothing, cooking utensils, and a tent, handcarts were simple vehicles weighing 60-85 pounds. On average, five people were assigned to one cart; each person was limited to 17 pounds and loaded carts generally weighed less than 200 pounds.³¹³

A closer look at wood used to build of the handcarts clarifies why many pioneers broke down on the trail. An expert carpenter would have flagged the green wood used for the handcarts. Young may not have realized that the moisture content of lumber was critical.

³¹¹David E. Nye, *Technology Matters: Questions to Live With* (Boston: MIT University Press, 2007), 47. Nye points to how all technologies create social worlds. He tackles central questions about our relationship to technology with wide-ranging historical examples from many societies.

³¹²Hafen, and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 53.

³¹³Moulton, *The Mormon Handcart Migration "Tounge Nor Pen Can Never Tell the Sorrow,"* 109.

Moisture in wood moves to the surface by simultaneous diffusion of vapor and bound water. Diffusion is a slow process. As wood dries and shrinks, stresses build up and then escape through the development of warping. The importance of this dimensional change in wood cannot be overemphasized. Lumber dries because moisture in wood moves from zones of high to low concentrations. Thus, wood dries on the surface first. Moisture from inside the board then moves toward the surface and eventually evaporates. As the moisture content of wood drops below 30 percent, the wood begins to shrink. Depending on the size of the wood, there can also be splitting, surface checking, cupping, bowing, and twisting.³¹⁴

Pioneers repaired handcarts regularly on the trail.³¹⁵ With little experience in building vehicles to withstand the arduous journey to Utah, the emigrants soon discovered that the environment tore apart the wood, spokes, and frames. One pioneer explained that the construction was so poor that “some required new axles, and the whole of them having a piece of iron screwed on to prevent the wheel from wearing away the wood.”³¹⁶ Another pioneer observed that over time the wooden axles and boxes quickly wore out due to the constant strain of the extra weight. Some wrapped their axles with leather from bootlegs, while others sacrificed tin-plates, kettles, or buckets from their mess outfits. Archer Walters wrote about the seemingly daily stops to restore broken carts. In his memoir, he explained, “Our carts, when we started, were in an awful fix. They moaned and growled, screeched and squealed, so that a person could

³¹⁴ Daniel L. Cassens, “Drying Small Quantities of Hardwood Lumber--Understanding the Effects of Moisture on Wood” <https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/FNR/FNR-37.html>.

³¹⁵ Doug R. Stephens, “Quiet Power: A History of James Grey Willie” Master’s Thesis, Utah State University, 1985), 129; Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 99-100.

³¹⁶ Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 94

hear them for miles.”³¹⁷ In his writing, the handcart takes on the persona of a human who is injured and incapable of the arduous journey.

Industrious families quickly learned that teamwork was the most effective way to propel the handcarts forward. Often called “spike teams,” three people operated the cart, with two on the outside and one on the inside. Each person was assigned specific responsibilities, including pulling back when going downhill and pushing in unison when traversing up steep inclines. The learning curve for emigrants operating the handcart was steep. One pioneer explained that holding the cart back was extremely difficult because there were no brakes. Similarly, Frederick Hansen, recalled, “Pulling was new work to all, also the holding back as the carts had no brakes.”³¹⁸ Frustrations mounted quickly as they encountered overwhelming geography. When the Willie and Martin Companies reached deep snow, some carts required five to six individuals to push their handcarts through deep drifts. They became even more unwieldy when Latter-day Saints placed emaciated trekkers in the cart. As the pioneers struggled forward, these emigrants were expected to quickly learn the process of a new technology. Unlike factory work, however, there were no instruction booklets, supervisors, or seasoned workers to guide them. They were forced to learn as they pushed.

Feeling the New World

How does one capture the relationship pioneers’ body sense had with their handcarts? As mentioned above, understanding the complex unification of humans and tools can be tricky. There are benefits from recognizing the material connection between pioneers and their

³¹⁷ Roberts, *Devil’s Gate*, 143.

³¹⁸ Frederick Hansen, “The Great Handcart Train From Iowa City to Salt Lake City,” *Journal of History*, 9 (October 1916): 411.

handcarts. The scholar Don Ihde has called the relationship between humans and technology “mediated perception,” (I---Technology---World). Ihde argues that when someone looks through a spyglass, they see objects they otherwise wouldn’t have noticed. Thus, their visual access to reality is strengthened and altered, and the more they rely on the spyglass, the more their world becomes determined by the tool. Whether or not the spyglass becomes a common aid depends on the overall relationship the human creates with the technology. Similarly, the pioneer perceives the environment differently with a handcart than if there were no mediated technology. Thus, hills looked steeper and more arduous, roads seemed muddier, and their journey more daunting as their handcart became part of the embodied experience of moving West.³¹⁹

A difficulty when dealing with humans and their tools is the terminology we use. A person’s experience of a tool is based on familiarity. For example, it would be unreasonable to call a hammer ‘clumsy’ without considering the human who wields the tool. Some pioneers found pushing their handcarts unproblematic given their strength and endurance. Others, however, struggled. As John Chislett noticed, “The young and strong went along gaily with their carts, but the old people and little children were to be seen straggling a long distance in the rear.”³²⁰

A subtle reciprocity existed between pioneer’s body sense and handcart. Over time, blisters turned into callouses as trekkers grasped their carts for hours on end. As the pioneer exerted his and her bodies in new ways, forearm, leg, and back muscles continuously contracted, tore down, and built up stronger. Scientific evidence has shown that people strengthened muscles much more rapidly—eight times faster—than the rest of the body. And in amazing ways, many

³¹⁹ Don Ihde, “The Technological Lifeworld” in *American Philosophy of Technology: The Empirical Turn*, ed., Hans Achterhuis (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 2001), 125-128.

³²⁰ Levi Savage, *Tell My Story Too*, 34.

pioneers forgot, albeit only momentarily, that they were pushing large vehicles across inhospitable environments.³²¹ Journal accounts reveal an interesting pattern. While emigrants were in Iowa, it is common to read accounts such as “we pushed the handcart forward,” and “I stumbled with the handcart.” However, while they moved into in Nebraska and Wyoming, the emigrants altered their wording. It was more common for an emigrant to say, “We moved forward,” or “We pushed over the mountain.”³²² While this may seem trivial, sensory historians pay attention to these type of changes in the archives. The handcart became part of their personage as the weeks went by on the trail.

As large groups pushed handcarts across Nebraska, some created a positive relationship with their handcarts. In 1860, Anna Marie Stucki recalled that after being on the trail for some time they found it more “comfortable moving the handcarts than standing still in the drizzle.”³²³ George Cunningham explained that the companies found some rhythm as they pushed through, and then were forced to impatiently wait for “heavily loaded supply wagons and their ox team.”³²⁴ Even the Willie Company covered 270 miles across Iowa in just over three weeks, arriving at Florence, Nebraska on August 11th – far faster than any wagon train.³²⁵

³²¹ Dan Vergano, “Humans Evolved Weak Muscles to Feed Brain's Growth, Study Suggests” *National Geographic*, May 28, 2014.

³²² James Willie’s journal is a good example here. He uses different language the further West they go in describing how people pushed their carts forward.

³²³ David Kenison, “The Stucki Family, Swiss Converts,” *The Wayback Machine*, June 14, 1997, accessed on October 1, 2023, [The Stucki Family, Swiss Converts \(archive.org\)](#).

³²⁴ David Kenison, “George Cunningham and the Willie Handcart Company,” *The Wayback Machine*, 1998, accessed on October 1, 2023, [George Cunningham and the Willie Handcart Company \(archive.org\)](#).

³²⁵ Roberts, *Devil’s Gate*, 13.

At times, the pioneers reveled in the novelty of frontier life as they pushed their carts. The countenance of former factory workers improved as they walked in the fresh air. Industrialized factories expected workers to labor within a confined space with little movement. As the emigrants found their footing on the plains, many seemed to delight in the journey. Sarah Moulton explained that “I never had my health so well in my life before I walked 300 miles and pulled the handcart all the way and we walked sometimes 17 & 20 miles a day.”³²⁶ The official journal for the Willie Company recorded “All are well and in first rate spirit.”³²⁷ While complaints about the endless trail and unwieldy carts were constant, there was something invigorating about the open air and blue skies. As the historian Daniel Freund explains in his book on the history of sunshine in America, “people accepted the benefits of fresh air and sunlight to overall health as scientific truth in the 19th century.”³²⁸

Once across the plains, the burden of pushing a vehicle became too costly for the weary pioneers. Levi Savage observed people abandoning their carts as they passed through the bluffs. “The ascent was sand,” Savage wrote. “It caused very hard pulling.”³²⁹ Furthermore, the wind stirred up the dust making it nearly impossible to pass. More than one handcart was left behind in the deep ruts. “Some places the wheels were up to the boxes,” One emigrant explained, “and I was so weak from thirst and hunger and being exhausted with the pain of the boils that I was obliged to lie down several times and many others had to do the same.”³³⁰ James Jensen wrote

³²⁶ Roberts, *Devil's Gate*, 209.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ Daniel Freund, *American Sunshine: Diseases of Darkness and the Quest for Natural Light* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 16.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

³³⁰ Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012), 109.

that pushing their handcarts through the deep sands and steep hills was “almost impossible to imagine.”³³¹

Wyoming’s terrain determined how the pioneer’s traveled with their handcarts. Wyoming consists of 97,818 square miles, in which a third of the state is comprised of the Rocky Mountains. As pioneers crossed over into the Territory, the windswept plains quickly transitioned to desolate basins. The landscape became gradually more difficult to push the carts uphill. Sarah Crossley wrote that land was “covered with green grass and dotted with wild flowers. It seemed so easy to us then, but as soon as the grass turned brown, and the flowers disappeared then the plains rose up into the Great Rocky Mountains.”³³² The handcarts struggled as the trail became muddy and uneven. The leg of the trail in Wyoming presents deep ruts caused by heavy snow fall and muddy conditions. While the Gurnsey ruts, which are four inches deep in some spots, are a well-known tourist destination, many sections of the trail revealed cavernous ruts intermittently. While cresting over sand hills, the companies encountered “gouged deep ruts,” which caused the handcart wheels to sink. On September 30th at Willow Springs, William Binder documented that “many of our company travelled barefooted through the mud and slush.”³³³ Before the major snowstorm, they were already struggling to move their handcarts.

The handcarts became as burdensome as a broken leg or a serious illness. Harvey Cluff noted this problem, “Now again the blizzard set in with increased fury” Cluff recalled, “over four hundred miles of country lay between the emigrants where winter falls to a depth that stops all

³³¹ Glen Rawson and Dennis Lyman, *Journal of the Handcart Pioneers: 1856-1860* (Sandy UT: History of the Saints, 2017), 68.

³³² Sarah Crossley, *Tell My Story Too*, 194.

³³³ Roberts, *Devil’s Gate*, 14; William Lawrence Spicer Binder, *Tell My Story Too*, 172.

travel by teams.”³³⁴ John Smith Young and his group, trailing behind the company, pushed their handcarts through the night only to lose the road and stumble into a sandy embankment. Their handcart flipped over, and they remained there, helpless, until rescue parties discovered them in the morning.³³⁵

These accounts beg the question: What happens when this relationship between human and technology disintegrates? As the philosopher Graham Harmon observed, “When objects fail us, we experience a negation of their accessible contours and become aware that the object exceeds all that we grasp of it.”³³⁶ In other words, there is disconnection that occurs for the human who is detached from the technology previously used. No longer confined by the machine they adjust to a new normal. For the handcart pioneers, this breakdown happened at unfortunate moments, when the handcart remained a necessity for survival.

In some instances, handcarts acted as a refuge from erratic weather found in the high desert. Both young and old hid under and in their handcarts when the weather turned. In Iowa and Nebraska, with the summer sun bearing down on them, pioneers plopped them on their side or under the handcarts to use as shade. When the Willie Company encountered their first Wyoming storm, they piled into their handcarts covering their bodies with damp wool blankets to keep warm. While wading in the knee-deep Platte, many lost their footing and fell into the frigid muddy water. As they crossed the other side, most lacked the expertise to build a fire in wet

³³⁴ Rawson and Lyman, *Journal of the Handcart Pioneers*, 176.

³³⁵ John Smith Young, *Journal of the Handcart Pioneers*, 92.

³³⁶ Danielle Sands, *Animal Writing: Storytelling, Selfhood and the limits of Empathy* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2019), 105.

environments with sodden timber. Some families buried themselves under layers of clothing to keep warm.³³⁷

There was no option for the Martin and Willie Companies but to abandon their carts in the deep snow by the Rattlesnake Mountains. This presented new problems for the pioneers: as burdensome as the carts were, they held their food and supplies. At a council on November 3, handcart leaders decided to ditch their carts at Martin's Cove. They were, however, unsure how to carry the necessary resources. Some historians note this as a key moment for the handcart pioneers. Once the handcarts were abandoned, their final hope was that a rescue party had been sent out from Salt Lake City. While the emigrants were distraught at abandoning their supplies and their low chances of survival, one pioneer noted that it was "relieving not to have to push the handcart anymore."³³⁸

The written account occasionally failed to describe the relationship pioneers formed with their handcarts, but other sources help. While contemporary Latter-day Saints have employed many artists over the decades to capture this embodied relationship of handcart and pioneer, no artist succeeded more than Minerva Teichert. In her painting, titled "Handcart Pioneer," the central figure in the painting is a young mother. She holds her handcart with one hand, while triumphantly raising her other arm in the air while cresting a mountain pass. Her husband and young son have their backs toward the painting, looking towards what lay ahead. The determined woman's intense stare is ambiguous. Her face reveals both a sense of achievement, and concern for what lays ahead. In this painting, which has elements of Impressionism, the handcart appears

³³⁷Ibid., 128.

³³⁸Roberts, *Devil's Gate*, 243

entangled with their bodies, demonstrating the intricate relationship the pioneers developed with their handcarts.

Feeling the Environment. The fusing of bodies with landscapes is important as Nancy Langston postulates that “the landscape of exposure begins in our own bodies and connects us across generations, across species, and across ecosystems.”³³⁹ She later argues that these elements are “dynamic, and all interrelate, acting within themselves and upon each other.”³⁴⁰ For the handcart pioneers, their bodies were reacting to the Wyoming environment as they felt the world. They developed a dynamic relationship with the environments where they suffered. Linda Nash’s research is helpful here. She analyzed the connection farmers have with their land to understand how these relationships take shape. In her analysis, bodies respond and conform to the demands of the landscape. The bodies of the handcart pioneers adapted to the environment, including the rocks under their feet, the hard desert on which they slept, and the prickly bushes that scraped their hands even as they adapted to the demands of their handcarts.³⁴¹

Martin’s Cove became a sacred site for their descendants partly based on the connection that the handcart pioneers developed with the land. Christopher Sellers claims that “notions of human identity and belonging are crafted out of ties not just to other human groups but to land or place-to a geographically specific nature.”³⁴² These ties are cultural, in the sense that people

³³⁹ Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), XIII, 185.

³⁴⁰ Jody A. Roberts and Nancy Langston, “Toxic Bodies/Toxic Environments: An Interdisciplinary Forum” *Environmental History*, 13, no. 4 (2008): 631.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² Christopher Sellers, “Thoreau’s Body: Towards an Embodied Environmental History,” *Environmental History*, 4, no. 4 (1999): 503.

learn, share, and mythologize their experiences with nature. They are also biological, meaning that humans experience both chemical and physiological responses to specific natural places. The pioneers failed to realize that their progeny would sacralize the physical spaces where they suffered.

As the Wyoming weather turned frigid, the pioneers became incapacitated as they huddled together. Being cold for long periods of time can have dramatic effects. Loss of feeling moves from hands and feet to arms and legs. By the end of October, many handcart pioneers were unable to function. Maria Normington walked until her feet were so frozen and sore that she crawled along on her hands and knees. Langley Bailey, after finding refuge at Martin's Cove, wrote about his father's attempt to reinforce the shelter and gather any type of firewood. However, after becoming "very benumbed,"³⁴³ he passed later that evening. Another pioneer described the water as "so cold that it sent pains right to the bone and the muscles cramped. We could hardly keep from falling as we trudged along."³⁴⁴ Others attempted to induce circulation by jogging in place to keep the blood moving throughout the body.

Before numbness dulls the sense of touch, research reveals how pain heightens the sense of feeling. Pain serves as a warning system to protect humans from potential harm. When the pioneer encountered persistent pain, the peripheral nervous system increased sensitivity to receptors causing the sense of feeling and touch to increase. Thus, after months on the trail their feet became more linked with the landscape they treaded upon. Emily Hill remembered her sister's feet aching with every footstep, until she "broke down and was unable to walk" She later

³⁴³ Langley Bailey, *Tell My Story Too*, 162.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

confessed asking herself (footsore and weary with the first week of walking and working) “if it was possible for me, faith or no faith, to walk twelve hundred miles further.”³⁴⁵ Eliza Morton, worn down from the journey, and “half-starved, footsore and heartsick,” would sit down as her feet became too painful to walk on.³⁴⁶

Research confirms that while the hands and feet are the most sensitive parts of the body, they are also the first to lose these sensations when temperatures plummet and blood is needed to warm more crucial organs. When their feet became too numb and their hands too cold to start a fire, many pioneers became incapacitated in the Wyoming snow. Their bodily entanglement with the land led to the pioneer adapting the sense of touch for survival purposes. Being able to employ cold fingers to start a fire or find strength to properly set up a tent was the difference between life and death as the pioneers became weakened by the elements.³⁴⁷

As the pioneers lost their abilities to touch and feel, their body sense became less connected to the physical world. Many elderly struggled to understand the world in which they found themselves. They were unable to build fires, stake tents, and cook foods. They became dependent on the needs of others whose own situations were dire. Donald Grayson’s important sociological study of the Willie company sheds light on the elderly and mortality rates. According to Grayson, 100% of men between the ages of 61 to 69 died in the Willie Company. This is followed by 54% of those between the ages of 51 to 59 perishing.³⁴⁸ According to John Linford, “The elderly women could hardly be persuaded to cross the cold streams, claiming they

³⁴⁵ Emily Hill, *Tell My Story Too*, 41.

³⁴⁶ Eliza Morton, *Tell My Story Too*, 155.

³⁴⁷ “Tactile Sensitivity,” *Science World*, 2023.

³⁴⁸ Donald K. Grayson, “Human Mortality in a Natural Disaster: The Willie Handcart Company,” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 52, no. 2 (Summer, 1996): 194.

would rather die.”³⁴⁹ One observer in the Martin Company described the exhaustion of many older people. “Tired and weary as they were,” they wrote, “some of the old would lie down on their hard beds and be almost instantly in the land of dreams.”³⁵⁰ Patience Loader’s father, fifty-seven-year-old James, became almost useless as his body became crippled by the weather.

On August 17, 2011, Jason Wright became a rescuer for a trek group that was dangerously trapped in scorching temperatures. In a remote area of Virginia, A leader radioed for assistance as the young re-enactors suffered from bodily injuries and heat stroke. As the support group arrived, they encountered a young trekker whose foot had been trapped under a handcart. It was swollen and he couldn’t walk. “We rushed up the trail to find the company stalled atop a mountain,” Wright remembers, “exposed in the sun with little shade available and in desperate need of help.”³⁵¹ Wright recalls navigating his way through thick weeds to locate his daughter and her trek family: “They were lying on the ground under their cart and tarp to escape the unforgiving sun.”³⁵² Meanwhile, a young man vomited three times on the side of the trail, while another trekker was found unconscious.

These young trekkers experienced how nature can torment bodies in hostile environments. Wright describes the physical cost of pushing a modern body to reenact a nineteenth century pioneer. The example of the young trekkers using their handcarts to shield themselves from the elements is noteworthy. Like the pioneers in 1856, the cart became a temporary haven from the elements. Nevertheless, the re-enactors, like the emigrants, were

³⁴⁹ John Linford, *Tell My Story Too*, 65.

³⁵⁰ Roberts, *Devil’s Gate*, 13, 40.

³⁵¹ Jason F. Wright, “Winchester Virginia Stake Survives Unprecedented Handcart Trek,” *Jason F. Wright*, July 24, 2012

³⁵² *Ibid.*

unable to push their handcarts up the hill any further. While the re-enactors were caught in 100 degree weather and the pioneers encountered below freezing blizzards, both experienced how the environment dictates how people move their bodies.

Wright points out the reward that follows from pushing one's body to extreme measures. "They weren't actors reading lines or following a director's instructions. Wright concludes, "They were playing themselves in the greatest test most of them had ever faced."³⁵³ Wright documents that everyone in the group felt their bodies fail them. Yet, Wright sees the benefit in the suffering: "I believe they will remember that the trail each day is often much more difficult than we expect. The rocks are bigger and the slopes so much steeper. Children perish before parents, jobs disappear, homes are taken in foreclosure and evil men murder the innocent and faithful. But with the love and support of a family, we can one day walk the final hill toward our celestial home."³⁵⁴

Conclusion

This chapter contends that touch played a significant role in how the handcart pioneers transitioned from Industrial England to the Mormon Trail. Factory work had initially shaped their bodies, but as they became overland travelers, their bodies co-evolved with their vehicles. These British believers at first saw themselves as being free of a large, industrialized machinery. They became entangled with their machines once again. Their clunky vehicles often inhibited their ability to navigate the landscape. Eventually, the handcart pioneer's dispositions and behaviors were shaped by the technologies bound to them. Their bodily interaction with the American

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

wilderness dictated many of their experiences trapped in Wyoming. As the sense of touch became an important part of their story, the idea of *feeling* took on a new meaning as their bodies became numb and ineffective.

While the visual and auditory systems inform our brain about the external world at a distance, body sense appraises brains about the physical environment. Just like vision and audition, bodily sense is complex. Within the somatosensory system, the brain forms percepts about pressure, pain, temperature, rough and smooth textures, and what is referred to proprioception, which is awareness of one's limbs and if they are static or dynamically engaged. While society still defaults to the pedestrian term touch to talk about bodily sense, it is important to tease out how this sense is more than just hand on object.

In the twentieth century, modernists posited a fundamental division between nature and technology. Historians argue, however, that this is largely an “illusory boundary.” As this boundary dissolves, two important concepts are revealed: first, humans have radically altered the Earth by standing deeply inside nature, harnessing the natural world to create consequential technologies, such as mines, electricity, and transportation. Second, and perhaps more relevant to this chapter, is the reality that humans employ technologies to decrease their workload and increase efficiency. As they become more reliant on these inventions, humans become part of that technology, developing together into what scholars have identified as biotechnology.³⁵⁵

It may seem odd to look at history in a framework that presents humans as almost cyborgs – an amalgamation of human and technology. Indeed, modern humans have historically

³⁵⁵ Biotechnology uses living cells to develop or manipulate products for specific purposes. A good example of this is the bionic eye, which was invented in 2013, and provides increased vision for visually impaired people.

separated themselves from both machine and beast – prioritizing their independence over all other things. However, the key to understanding “envirotech” history is to look outside of a science fiction paradigm and consider how people foster relationships with the material world. Envirotech historians are careful to examine how humans have employed and co-evolved with their technologies through their written accounts. Thus, one of the keys of this chapter is how the pioneer learned not only to push their handcars, but to repair them, sleep in them, appreciate them, and even despise them as they become inescapably intertwined with them. In sum, the handcart pioneer is distinguishable from other white migrants because of their intimate relationship with technology as they struggled while traversing the steep terrain and snowy ranges.

As a final story to solidify the significance of the sense of touch. William Spicer’s detailed account of the emigrants who waded across the river evokes the sense of touch as a necessary part of the handcart story:

The rude river welcomed them with what the pioneers referred to as “ice cakes” - chunks of ice hidden under the surface of the water, with snow on them above the surface. Many of the pioneers had their legs cut by these ice cakes as they struggled across the river. Some were swept downstream and rescued only with great difficulty. The weather was pitiless as the first winter storm beat down upon them at this crossing. Already weak from shortened rations, this new exposure and exertion brought death to some. It would be another nine days before the express team of riders sent out from the advance rescue party would find these stranded Saints.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ William Spicer, *Tell My Story Too*, 396.

CHAPTER FIVE

LISTENING LIKE THE PIONEERS

Introduction

On a cold autumn morning in Wyoming, Patience Loader stood quietly over her father's body lying in a shallow grave along the Mormon Trail. With the weather worsening, the men in her company burrowed their shovels quickly into the rocky western soil and filled the grave. Loader wrote about the death of her father. As she transcribed her thoughts, she noted a particular sound that haunted her: "The earth thrown in upon his poor body, oh that sounded so hard," Loader wrote, "I will never forget the sound of that dirt being shoveled onto my poor father's body."³⁵⁷ Loader's journal entry conjures up an important question: Why did this sound become central to the memory of her father's burial? Sensory historians have long held that a multisensory approach to archival research can shed light on historical moments, and Loader's journal entry is an indication; a sort of *le signe* to historians that historical soundscapes should garner further attention.

This chapter explores the aural world of the handcart pioneers as they moved from Great Britain into the isolated Wyoming desert environment. These emigrants encountered a vastly different world with strange and alien-like sounds that transformed their experiences. This includes not only the natural sounds that were common on the trail, but also the absence of human and mechanical noises the pioneers were accustomed to in industrialized England. This chapter argues that certain sounds and silences inform our understanding of and beliefs about a

³⁵⁷ Roberts, *Devil's Gate*, 52.

particular group in a place and time. The changing sounds these pioneers encountered disrupted their aural world as they moved from a world full of industrial noise to the natural sounds and silences of the American wilderness. Along the trail, the sounds of strange animals, capricious weather, survival, and death became an important part of their experience.

As the emigrants transitioned into a state of survival, the sounds that engulfed them further amplified the surroundings and dictated their decisions. This chapter examines how their ears became a primary sense for functioning as the harsh blizzard environment obscured their vision. Imperative to this type of historical analysis is an important question: Why has vision triumphed over hearing in historical accounts? Many pioneers, long after their eyes failed them, listened to find their camps, and when assistance eventually arrived, it was the shouts and screams of the rescuers that shattered the isolation. The emigrant's previous experience living in industrial England, where factory noises drowned out other sounds, impeded their communication skills in a variety of ways. How they communicated in the howling wind, combined with their heightened fear of strange animals affected how they experienced the overland trails. As they were trapped, harrowing cries and long silences played a role in how they endured the frigid Wyoming desert.

Latter-day Saints theology has at its core a paradox between sound and ritual practices. Although Latter-day Saints spoke in tongues in the nineteenth century and still believe in aural revelation, their worship emphasizes silence. Latter-day Saints make a clear distinction between publicly accessible, religious services and private ceremonies, which are often exclusive and redolent in symbolic meaning. In public worship activities, believers monitor talking, laughter, and music to ensure they stay within the bounds of reverence. As believers move inward toward

the private and symbolic realm, the Church spends resources on training to ensure their most sacred places are quiet and reverent. As one moves from the outer edges of LDS culture toward the more powerfully ritualistic inner sanctum of the church, public openness and accessibility become rare. While the handcart pioneers did not traverse sacred spaces, many tried to follow the doctrinal norms to keep their composure so that they could hear God through His still small voice.³⁵⁸

Mormon Trail re-enactments are dedicated to mimicking the sounds pioneers encountered in Wyoming. Like the previous chapters, this first section opens with an investigation on how leaders monitor sounds and silences to heighten the re-enactment experience. The Sweetwater Rescue story, covered in chapter one, is a good example of how the sounds are monitored during trek. When young people tune into the aural world of Wyoming, they claim to experience a closer connection with the pioneers and become further dedicated to the church. Trek leaders expect quiet while trekking around Martin's Cove. This allows them to indulge in the splendors of the Wyoming wind which is ever blowing. When treks take place in other places, leaders highlight the sounds of nature that parallel those the handcart emigrants would have heard.

Re-enacting the Sounds of the Pioneers

During the three-to-four-day experience, trekkers are instructed to embody the aural world of the pioneer. While trek organizers can't control the sounds of the environment, they can monitor the noises of human interference. Each youth group is directed to keep themselves composed while performing re-enactments. Loud laughter and physical displays that lead to

³⁵⁸Warrick N. Kear, "The LDS Sound World and Global Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 34, no. ¾ (Fall, 2001): 86.

yelling are to be avoided. One adult leader explained that “Stripping out all of the noise of the world gave a singular purpose. . . . It didn't matter if it rained, hailed, was muddy or if our pit roast dinner didn't cook properly. Everyone knew that we were experiencing something unique and wonderful.”³⁵⁹

The re-enactment of Solomon Kimball’s version of the Sweetwater River rescue demonstrates the importance of sound on trek. During this sacred re-enactment, young men roll up their pants, take off their shoes, and carry young women across the river. The young trekkers are instructed to keep their voices low and listen to the slow-moving water as they contemplate the difficult task. Stories are shared on either bank or quiet music plays from a covered speaker while the young men carry the young women. Trekkers are encouraged to think about the sounds of sorrow that accompanied the handcart pioneers. One trek leader played the recorded voices of people crying while the young trekkers moved across the river.³⁶⁰

When the sounds are monitored during the Sweetwater re-enactment, the youth achieve a closer connection with the handcart pioneers. “It was beautiful. Revenant. Respectful. Real.” Teresa Hislop wrote in her blog. “Every woman and girl, regardless of size or girth, was treated as a lady, carried safely across, and set gently on the opposite shore. It was truly beautiful.”³⁶¹ Another young man experienced a powerful experience while participating in a Sweetwater re-enactment. “While we waited, our stake president told us the story of the Sweetwater rescue.”

³⁵⁹ “Pioneer Trek Re-enacted by Mormon Youth in Canada,” *The Church Newsroom*, July 24, 2013, accessed on December 10, 2023, [Pioneer Trek Re-enacted by Mormon Youth in Canada \(churchofjesuschrist.org\)](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org).

³⁶⁰ *Itineraries for Treks at Mormon Handcart Historic Site* 2018 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Publishing, 2018),15.

³⁶¹ Teresa Hislop, “2018 Trek,” *Life Stories You Can Tell*, June 24, 2018, accessed on December 1, 2023, [Pioneer Trek 2018 - Life Is the Stories You Can Tell](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org).

The young men recalled, “As I stood listening to the story, I felt the love and sacrifice of those boys, and the Spirit swelled in my heart. I felt a desire to be like those great young men and help rescue all those needing spiritual help in our day, including my own family.”³⁶² Three young boys from Lethbridge Canada, Randy Bullock, Drew Walters, and Brett Barfuss embodied the rescuers and felt the spirit of the three rescuers beside them.³⁶³

During the Woman’s Pull (mentioned earlier), the sounds and silences of the environment are monitored carefully. The young trekkers are to keep themselves poised and controlled as the young men stand aside while women push handcarts up a steep hill. Both trek groups are instructed to look around and imagine the blowing wind and suffering emigrants. One group witnessed young men quietly singing Come, Come Ye Saints, a popular LDS pioneer hymn from the sidelines. Accordingly, there wasn’t “a dry eye among the men.”³⁶⁴ Another group of young men were told to “stop cheering” so the still small voice could be heard.³⁶⁵

Trek commonly includes pony express riders delivering pre-written letters from loved ones to be read in isolation. “Every kid got a letter from home,” One leader explained, “and they were given quiet time to read their letters and reflect. Kids were touched.”³⁶⁶ Another youth group received a special delivery from the Pony Express Mail Service. Each youth received a handwritten letter from their mother and father. They were instructed to go into a silent place not

³⁶² Kersten Campbell, “What Is Mighty Prayer?” *The New Era*, December 2011.

³⁶³ “The Real McCoy,” *The New Era*, October 1996.

³⁶⁴ Angela C. “The Woman’s Pull,” *By Common Consent*, June 9, 2015.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Marlene Meyer and Patricia Auxier, “Local youth re-enact Mormon handcart journey Handcarts in Alaska,” *The Frontiersman*, June 15, 2013.

far from the trail where they could read and listen for the Holy Ghost which speaks when the volume is low.³⁶⁷

For a moment in 2007, one trek group from Alaska came close to encountering a similar aural world as the handcart pioneers. The deafening sound of howling wind frightened the young trekkers who challenged the Alaskan wilderness. The local re-enactment combined 10 cities and small communities on the Kenai Peninsula, 150 miles south of Anchorage. Things went as planned until the third day. The group awoke to a terrible storm with wind blowing more than 50 miles per hour. Pegs pulled loose, tents collapsed, the rain pounded down, and dark clouds covered the entire sky. As the wind pounded them, the trek leaders shouted to communicate like the handcart leaders. After deliberation, they knelt in prayer and asked the Lord to calm the storm. One young trekker explained, “Minutes later we saw a break in the sky, and we started to see blue and then the sun just came out of the clouds.”³⁶⁸ When interviewed after the event, the participating youth reported having sublime experiences with the handcart pioneer. Lyssa DaVanney recalled that “The trek was such an awakening experience for me.” Another young woman reported that “The wind stopped, and you could see the clouds parting and the sun coming out. It was like seeing Moses parting the Red Sea, except this time God parted the clouds for us.”

These young Latter-day Saints see sound as a way to tap into their ancestors’ experiences. In some instances, trekkers research the sensory world of one of their past relatives. They profess becoming emotionally connected to the pioneers. They maintain that in some instances they hear

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

the voice of their ancestor urging them to keep pushing the handcart. As they try to embody past worlds through hearing, they inhabit and understand the pioneer to represent them on a deeper level. More than this, they're also hearing the isolation where the pioneer once stood.³⁶⁹

For the pioneers in 1856, the new sounds and silences they encountered while transitioning out of England shaped many of their decisions. At Martin's Cove, their ears were assaulted with the cold Wyoming environment. Earlier, however, they reveled in the quiet that persisted on the Plains. When they finally reached Salt Lake City, they were enthralled to hear the noise of white civilization again. These sounds rejuvenated their confidence which was lost in the Wyoming desert.

The Sounds of the Old World. During the mid-nineteenth century, a British Mormon named James Mellor documented the congested and noisy world of Northern England. Before he departed with the Martin Handcart company, Mellor spent his younger years in dreary factories, irritated about industrial capitalism, and regularly moving jobs as a transient worker. In a detailed journal, Mellor describes his occupations with notes on not only the grueling and unsanitary working conditions but also the terrible noises which accompanied factory life. As a young man, he endured an awful accident. He became entangled with a textile machine nicknamed the "Devil." According to Mellor, "The machine malfunctioned at such speed it flew all to pieces, even to the hare shaft and the spikes caught me in many parts of my body."³⁷⁰

³⁶⁹ Sarah Agnew, *Embodied Performance: Mutuality, Embrace, and the Letter to Rome* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 49.

³⁷⁰ Edna J. Gregerson, "James Mellor: English Convert and Handcart Pioneer - A Biography" (Master's Thesis, Utah State University, 1961), 11.

However, it wasn't just the physical pain Mellor mentioned. In his journal he wrote that as the machine exploded, it created such a loud noise it startled the city block. In another instance, while later working for the railroad as a tunnel digger, Mellor explained how the old and tired chains supporting the digging mechanisms moaned and creaked day after day, worrying the workers, until they snapped on the hoist burying him in dirt and rock. Certain he was dead, the other workers unburied Mellor who jumped out like a "Jack in the box."³⁷¹

Mellor's account reflects a reality of the industrial materials surrounding Industrial England and the constant sounds that permeated the cities daily. The historian Karin Bijsterveld has noted that as industrialism spread, factory sounds ran together. In her article on the emergence of industrial soundscapes, she cleverly refers to this phenomenon as "the diabolical symphony of the Mechanical Age." While the cacophony was generally noted to be persistent on the dockyards and in the center square, sounds of all kinds of frequencies and from every direction encircled the residents in a cloud of dissonant noise. Industrial cities in the nineteenth century not only witnessed the profusion of sounds from the constant hum of the factory but also the arrival of other "urban noises" including crowds, moving objects, clanging bells, and deafening whistles.³⁷² The author Thomas Carlyle, sensitive to loud sounds, wrote angrily about the soundscape he encountered in Liverpool: "All summer I have been more or less annoyed with noises, even accidental ones, which gets free access thro' my windows....henceforth I hope

³⁷¹Ibid., 19.

³⁷² Karin Bijsterveld, "The Diabolical Symphony of the Mechanical Age: Technology and Symbolism of Sound in European and North American Noise Abatement Campaigns, 1900-40," *Social Studies of Science* 31, no. 1 (2001): 37.

to be independent of all men and dogs, and street noises.”³⁷³ English officials attempted to implement quiet hours, but as factories swallowed the inner cities, residents found it difficult to escape the constant movement and noise.

Poorer residents were enveloped with amplified and often unbearable sounds. The need for unskilled labor grew exponentially and spurred a dramatic shift in the population of cities like London, Glasgow, Manchester, and Liverpool. Unlike affluent residents, the working class kept their housing close to the factories. The convenience of walking allowed workers to avoid the need for transportation, and factory managers often rang loud bells when work was to commence. Once on the factory floor, many of these citizens encountered machines which frightened their sensibilities. One worker explained that she felt intimidated by the “great groaning joints and whizzing fans.”³⁷⁴ Even outside the factory walls, the poorer working class were encumbered with the noises of the inner city. Henry Mayhew’s sociological study on nineteenth-century urban life observed that cities were in constant motion with the “tumult of a thousand different cries of the eager dealers, all shouting at the top of their voices, at on and the same time is almost bewildering.”³⁷⁵ Indeed, Mayhew’s book is riddled with examples of the never-ending noises in London.

Visitors were disturbed by the cacophony in Northern England as capitalism gentrified sleepy towns into chaotic urban centers. An American rural tourist commented that as one travels

³⁷³ John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2003), 43.

³⁷⁴ Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2008), 78.

³⁷⁵ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour & London Poor* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

through the area, they “see and hear many strange and horrid things.”³⁷⁶ He later noted that “poverty, sickness, crime, and wretchedness echoed in one ear.”³⁷⁷ These new rhythms and aberrational noises were most deafening as one walked closer to the city center. Travelers noted the racket of roaring machines and the incessant slamming of hammers. One unbearable sound came from the boilers, which were often compared to “gunshots,” “hurricanes” and “thunderous hissing.”³⁷⁸ Indeed, boilers became synonymous with hearing impairment. The same source that referred to boilers as “hurricanes” commented that the noises were so loud that their “ears seemed to be bleeding.” Officials and medical professionals used the term “Boilermaker’s Disease” as a catchall phrase to industrial hearing loss.³⁷⁹

As Great Britain attempted to cope with the arrival of industrialization, Mormon missionaries appeared in the country with a modern, Americentric Christianity detached from the crowded industrial towns in England. Great Britain was ripe for Latter-day Saints and their message about a restored gospel. By the 1840s, cities from Ireland to England had witnessed the migration of laborers into dingy factories. These workers had been uprooted and deceived by the supposed luxuries of urban life. The increase of Mormon converts was truly dramatic from 8,245 members in the United Kingdom and Ireland in 1842 to 24,199 Latter-day Saints by the end of

³⁷⁶ Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 16.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1984), 120-121.

³⁷⁹ Julia Grella O'Connell, *Sound, Sin, and Conversion in Victorian England*, (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor and Francis Press, 2018), 12.

1851.³⁸⁰ Joseph Smith instructed missionaries bound for Europe that America or New Jerusalem would be “a land of peace, a city of refuge, a place of safety.”³⁸¹ England became a temporary base of operations after Joseph Smith’s martyrdom. It remained a dependable geographical zone where proselytizing was successful and disconnected from the troubles brewing for American Latter-day Saints.³⁸²

As James Mellor struggled to find a suitable life for his family in England, he longed for the quiet found among the Latter-day Saints in America. Following his conversion, he often commented to his family that the class system was not so rigorous in America. Mellor longed for the peace that was available across the sea. Regardless of his work ethic, Mellor could not escape the poverty that followed him. While in Leicester, he was arrested and confined to debtor’s prison for six weeks “for no crime only being poor and out of work.”³⁸³ During the final five years Mellor remained in Liverpool. He witnessed the birth of three more children in a world that had embraced urban society. As the factories continued to produce more smoke in the air, loud and infuriating noises haunted him. He longed for a quiet spaces American Mormons described.

Many British converts were relatively poor and resided in loud cities. J.B. Meynell, an American Mormon missionary spoke of the challenges and successes he experienced while proselytizing in the industrial towns of Northern England. His journal was replete with stories of

³⁸⁰ Joni Kesler, “Tracing Early English LDS Convert Ancestry in England,” *Family Search*, accessed January 17, 2023, https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/img_auth.php/0/09/Tracing_Early_English_LDS_Convert_Ancestry_in_England_J_Kesler_Sep_2017_JMR.pdf.

³⁸¹ William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1957), 24.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁸³ Gregerson, “James Mellor: English Convert and Handcart Pioneer - A Biography,” 19.

impressive orations and spiritual witnesses. It was also fraught, however, with dirges for the poverty he witnessed. He grew frustrated over the crowded cities. Meynell was especially disturbed by what he observed in the towns of Worcester and Herefordshire, commenting on the local factory and landowners' unfair treatment of tenant farmers. "To these despotic rulers, whose influence amounts to law", Meynell wrote, "the poor rustic who labors for \$1.75 a week to maintain a family of four to six children."³⁸⁴ Meynell noted that the factory towns of Northern England were loud and vulgar. He became troubled by the pressure industrialization placed on the local population. "Yes, upon the miserable poor," Meynell observes "God has looked down in mercy, and they have the gospel preached to them."³⁸⁵ Meynell, however, became even more bothered by the cacophonous soundscapes in nineteenth century England.

These poor converts became fixated by the rumors of America's untapped land and resources. As one historian put it, democracy, rich natural resources, and American enterprise offered all ethnicities, both rich and poor a chance to escape the failures which had upended the Old World.³⁸⁶ Driving this promise was the possibility of land ownership. William Mulder's groundbreaking work on the immigration of Scandinavian Mormons parallel many of the tactics used by Mormon missionaries to entice converts all over Europe. He noted that several letters written by American Saints to European converts included sweeping claims about the amount of free land available: "We have all the deeds to the ground." The land cries out to be used."³⁸⁷ For

³⁸⁴ J.B. Meyenell, *A Few Incidents of Travel in England Connected with the Immutable Principles of Truth, Called the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: J. Gooch Publishing, 1845), 11.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁸⁶ Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1990), 3.

³⁸⁷ Mulder, *Homeward to Zion*, 84.

those new converts working in the factories, these promises would have seemed like a golden opportunity.

Yet, one of those promises sold wasn't just the splendid visual world of America, but the quieter and less industrialized land of opportunity. Since America's conception, people saw the New World as a pillar separate from the "sinful land" of Europe. Michele Perrot observed there was a surge in Europe with people desiring private spaces, America was ideal for basking in personal areas that are secret and quiet.³⁸⁸ As Europeans looked for serenity, the promise of America transcended politics and bled over into people's social lives. The British saw America as a place with no king, and where one could evade the inescapable noise of England., George Washington, following the American Revolution predicted the solitude available would attract thousands of Europeans "to retire from the noise and bustle of The Old World to enjoy tranquility and serenity."³⁸⁹ Europeans felt entitled to this opportunity, not as foreigners, but as heirs to America which had been purified by their ancestors. This, as one scholar put it, "homemaking myth" offered a space to re-invent themselves and clean their ears from the loud sounds of the Old World.³⁹⁰

The longing for quiet spaces grew out of enclosure in early modern England. Enclosure had transformed common spaces into private property. Fences and new laws prevented common English folk from enjoying their customary rights. It also destroyed their ability to retreat to a

³⁸⁸ Alain Corbin, *A History of Silence: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 6.

³⁸⁹ Maldwyn Allen Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 54.

³⁹⁰ Orm Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2000), 9.

piece of land if the burden of factory life became too overwhelming. In one study, it was determined that in one Northern English town, 66% of land was consolidated and sold to three people. As a result, two detrimental consequences appeared: first, more workers displaced from their land vied for factory jobs, which decreased pay, and second, access to land was increasingly inaccessible to the British laboring classes.³⁹¹

The writer François-René de Chateaubriand captured the tranquility and solitude of the American landscape with his writings. During the nineteenth century, Chateaubriand played a role in shaping European ideas about America. While most in Northern England certainly wouldn't have heard his name, historians suggest that his influence transcended his French home and spread throughout Europe. His writings were riddled with descriptions of America's lavish country sides rich in natural wonder. The myth of America as an untapped world of tranquility was rekindled as a post-Puritan promise. Chateaubriand 's prose emphasized a society that was unreachable now for workers in Northern England. "Buried in profoundness peace," Chateaubriand gracefully writes, "those places gilded by the last fires of daylight, animated by the whistling of cardinals, the cooing of blue wood pigeons, and the song of mockingbirds."³⁹²

A goal for Mormon missionaries was not only to convert locals to Mormonism but also to a romanticized idea of America. Despite Mormonism's popularity in Great Britain and Northern Europe, scholars from Harold Bloom to Jon Butler have argued that Mormonism embraced the splendor of America as much as any Second Great Awakening religion. The impetus for

³⁹¹ Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz Publishing, 1964), 217-18.

³⁹² François-René de Chateaubriand, *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave: 1768-1800* (New York: New York Review Books, 2008), 282.

Mormonism's success hinged on the idea of American exceptionalism, which the nineteenth century re-emphasized. Joseph Smith centered America as important to Jesus Christ's mission. The Book of Mormon claimed Jesus visited the New World after his resurrection, and Smith asserted that the Garden of Eden was in Jackson County, Missouri. Smith claimed that Jesus' millennial rule would emanate from there, not Jerusalem. This further impressed European converts that America has always been the central location for God's people.³⁹³

While it is surprising converts would embrace pushing handcarts across rugged terrain, the desire for tranquility in Zion trumped all other concerns for British converts. John Watkins, a convert who later joined the Martin Handcart expedition, longed for the solitude and peace the Mormon missionaries had promised him. After his father died and his mother disowned him, Watkins settled in the Rainham region outside London. Here, like so many Mormon converts, Watkins became obsessed with the promise of Zion. "Lo and behold," Watkins wrote, "the spirit of gathering as foretold by Isaiah hundreds of years ago, rested upon me so strong that I prayed to the Lord fervently to open up the way for me to go, under any conditions, for I was willing to pass through anything to gather with the Church."³⁹⁴ Another convert, William Harrison, who also joined the Martin Company, became so desperate to join the Saints in the West, appealed to President Brigham Young to help his family to move West. "We are all in the Church," Harrison writes. "I have been in thirteen years, my wife has been in fourteen. We greatly long for the day to come when we shall have the Privilege of Beholding the faces of our Brethren and sisters in

³⁹³ Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Chu Hartley Publishing, 1992). Bloom identifies Mormonism as *the American religion*. He bases this partly on Smith's doctrinal ideas that place America central to the creation, resurrection, and return of Christ.

³⁹⁴ Nerda Watkins Reese, *John Watkins, Margaret Ackhurst Watkins, Harriet Steel Watkins, and Mary Ann Sawyer Watkins* (Self-published, 1981), 3.

the Vallies [sic] of Ephraim and where we shall not be ground down by the Iron hand of Oppression.”³⁹⁵ Harrison echoed the thoughts of many English caught in the industrial cities of the North, lamenting: “Dear President, things are in a bad state here. Trade is at a very low ebb and the People seem to grow worse every day. Well might the Savior Say, ‘Except those days were cut short in Righteousness there should no flesh be saved.’ He says the Valley is a first rate place for those that desire to do right. His trade is a Carpenter. He says he has got Employment and doing very well.”³⁹⁶

The Sounds of the New World.

Life aboard emigrant ships were noisy. The *Horizon* and *Thornton* were at full capacity as they departed from Liverpool in May 1856. Emigrants often complained about the tight living quarters. They wrote in their journals about the new sounds permeating the ears of the passengers. Once the ships sailed on open water past the channel, the powerful soundscape of the ocean captivated and terrified these British landlubbers. John Jaques, a passenger on the *Horizon*, noted the constant commotion from the vomiting because of sea sickness. Passengers succumbed to sounds and movements of people vomiting. One Mormon emigrant named Andrew Smith grew tired as the “Ship rolled, and boxes rattled.”³⁹⁷ He provided a useful account on how the sounds disturbed the emigrants on the sea:

It began to blow very hard and continued to increase until it blew a complete gale and continued on till Monday morning about five o’clock when afterward it cleared

³⁹⁵ George Harrison, “Pioneer Members of the Martin Handcart Companies,” accessed on January 12, 2023, http://www.tellmystorytoo.com/member_pdfs/george-harrison_1078_362.pdf

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ “Saints by Sea,” accessed on January 22, 2023, <https://Saintsbysea.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/535>; Candy Moulton, *The Mormon Handcart Migration* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 23, 29.

up a fine day with not so much wind as would blow out a candle. ... During the gale the water stove in the glap window that was in the hatchway and came down where we were in the lower deck in torrents until it went over our shoes and with the rocking of the ship it would carry with it pots, pans, kettles, and waterpots with great furry, but was moving about such as heavy chests, trunks, boxes, etc., which we had to lash up tight or have our legs broken.³⁹⁸

The open sea gave Mormon emigrants a taste of the silence they would encounter on the Mormon Trail. The popular American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne captured the solitude people experienced when they reached open water: “The Ocean has its silent caves, Deep, quiet, and alone; Though there be fury on the waves, beneath them there is none.”³⁹⁹ During the twilight hours, many Mormon emigrants found solace on the open deck, basking in the vastness that stretched on for miles. Marry Powell admitted that she grew to love the ocean, writing, “Each afternoon I watched the sun sink like a ball of fire beneath the waves.”⁴⁰⁰ Emma Collings, reflecting on her experience, mentioned to her husband about the capricious and lonely nature of the ocean, stating, “Well, I have seen the mighty deep in its anger, with our ship nearly on her bends, and I have seen it, as now, under a cloudless sky with scarcely a ripple on its surface, yet I know not which to admire most. I feel most powerfully the force of those words ‘The Mighty God’ which Handel so beautifully expressed in one of his chronicles.”⁴⁰¹

While most Mormons in Northern England had seen the Channel from the docks, most had never traveled on open water. The experience introduced the Saints to mysterious sea animals including whales, dolphins, and sharks, as well as strange sounds from the waves and

³⁹⁸ Andrew Smith, *Tell My Story Too*, 125.

³⁹⁹ George Parsons Lathrop, *A Study of Hawthorne* (London: The British Library, 1876), 122.

⁴⁰⁰ Candy Moulton, *The Mormon Handcart Migration*, 29.

⁴⁰¹ Emma Collings, Pioneer Members of the Martin Handcart Companies,” accessed on January 12, 2023, [richard-collings_993_538.pdf \(tellmystorytoo.com\)](https://www.tellmystorytoo.com/richard-collings_993_538.pdf).

tides on the open ocean. To many, the excitement of the sea not only conjured up feelings of wonder and awe, but also confusion and discomfort. As the Saints moved further west away from England, they became wanderers entranced by new sights and sounds.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the eastern United States was rapidly industrializing. British Saints notice that eastern America mirrored those of their home country. Boston and New York, where many emigrant ships docked, were metropolises. The populations of both cities had grown tremendously since 1850, with most people crowded in a thousand-acre peninsula. As immigrants funneled into Boston, the population by 1855 reached over 150,000. A government report revealed that Boston experienced many of the issues plaguing Great Britain. As new factories and businesses popped up, residents found their homes demolished as tenements became commonplace. Factories with billowing smoke blackened the air, and those same never-ending sounds the Saints escaped in England discouraged newly arrived British Saints and their hopes for American serenity. Most journals contained very little about eastern cities. Their fleeting entries were placeholders until they could describe the American West and Zion.⁴⁰²

Mormon emigrants who entered Eastern Iowa were awe-struck by the preponderance of deciduous trees that rattled from the constant wind. Oak, hickory, maple, basswood, ash, walnut, elm, and cottonwood blanketed the land and created soothing sounds which delighted the ears of the emigrants. Still, only about 18% of Iowa, 6.7 of the state's 36 million acres had some form of tree cover in the 1850s. The rest, as the pioneers soon discovered, lay coated by the thick roots of

⁴⁰² William A. Newman, and Wilfred E. Holton, *Boston's Back Bay: The Story of America's Greatest Nineteenth-century Landfill Project* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2006), 43-44.

prairie grasses that loved both the sun's scorching heat and the fires that roared like a locomotive across the grasslands. Their density thwarted any trees trying to invade. A demographic map from 1850 would show a land almost empty of white settlers west of Missouri with few exceptions in the Great Salt Lake and along the California coastline. Once the train departed Boston and New York the landscape became more agricultural and spacious. While the patterns of populated areas compared to rural vacuity were common in England, the roads and tracks through the countryside seemed protected with endless trees compared to England.⁴⁰³

After arriving in the Midwest, the ears of the handcart pioneers were introduced to the unusual sounds of rural America. James Bleak (pronounced Blake) of the Martin Company, wrote to his family that: “This is certainly a most beautiful country.” He further commented, “If you know anyone who thinks of coming to America, tell them to come to the western states and not to stay in the Eastern cities.”⁴⁰⁴ Samuel Openshaw echoed Bleak’s sentiments proclaiming: “How many thousands of people are there in England who have scarce room to breathe and not enough to eat. Yet, all this good land lying dormant, except for the prairie grass to grow and decay, which if men would spread themselves and obey the commandment of God to replenish the earth, instead of thronging together in cities and towns and causing the air to be tainted with stinks and giving rise to disease, what a blessing.”⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Cornelia E. Mutel, “The Historic Role of Iowa's Trees” in *Famous & Historic Trees of Iowa*, ed., by William A. Farris (Des Moines: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 1997), 5.

⁴⁰⁴ James Bleak, “Pioneer Members of the Martin Handcart Companies,” accessed on January 12, 2023, [james-godson-bleak_940_480.pdf \(tellmystorytoo.com\)](https://www.tellmystorytoo.com/member_pdfs/james-godson-bleak_940_480.pdf).

⁴⁰⁵ Samuel Openshaw, “Pioneer Members of the Martin Handcart Companies,” accessed on January 12, 2023 https://www.tellmystorytoo.com/member_pdfs/samuel-openshaw_1284_596.pdf.

Yet, the silence that loomed over the pioneers conjured up feeling of both excitement and bewilderment as they waited anxiously in Iowa for the handcarts to be finished. While many kept themselves isolated from the locals in Iowa City and Florence, some wandered into the towns to secure goods. Younger emigrants who were curious and inexperienced, often found themselves harassed by locals suspicious of Mormons. To these adolescent pioneers, they were amazed at the wild natures and rough language of the frontiersmen.

The Sounds of Suffering on the Trail

Some pioneers found that the absence of familiar sounds disturbing and isolating. The endless longing for the sounds of civilization, or what the historian Mark Smith calls “the acoustic islands of safety,” cut deep into the psyche of British Saints traveling by handcart.⁴⁰⁶ While awe and appreciation for the natural sounds on the trail regularly occurred, the novelty quickly wore off as their feet became sore. As the Martin and Willie Companies crossed the Nebraska line and past Fort Bridger, they reached one of the most isolated places in the contiguous United States. In between the vast networks of the East and economically rich Western coast, Wyoming is a vast territory stretching for hundreds of miles. Although Wyoming was home to several indigenous communities and ranchers, white settlers saw it as empty. Compared to the crowded shores of Great Britain, it seemed like a vacuous region void of civilization.⁴⁰⁷

The pioneers learned to associate the sounds of industrialization with safety and progress. In the vast spaces of Wyoming, they were disconnected from large groups and feared the natural

⁴⁰⁶ Peter A. Coates, “The Strange Stillness of the Past: Toward an Environmental History of Sound and Noise,” *Environmental History*, 10, no. 4 (October 2005), 637.

⁴⁰⁷ Roberts, *Devil’s Gate*, 114.

world they once believed they could tame. This fear generated nineteenth-century ideas about progress. As business moguls bumptiously dismissed the natural world, an erroneous belief surfaced that industrialism created a society controllable by levers and pulleys. The inaugural years of the nineteenth century produced a false certainty that ingenuity and material manipulation civilized societies could harness the natural world. Historians now acknowledge the power of nature and its ability to control, shape, and even overwhelm technology. Donald Worster described technology as “a product of human culture as conditioned by the nonhuman environment.”⁴⁰⁸ Nature has repudiated the modern misconception that humans can tame the landscape.

In Wyoming, the power of nature was apparent through the sounds of animals. Pioneers noted the animal were heard throughout the prairies including rattlesnakes, galloping antelopes, and insects, which buzzed and hovered around them. Journals frequently noted encounters with the large and lumbering bison. The mere sight of the roaming buffalo caused panic in the companies. While in herds, the sound of their hooves replicated hundreds of banging drums. Emma James of the Willie company observed that one evening a “large herd of buffalo came thundering toward us. It sounds like thunder at first, then the big black animals came straight to our carts.”⁴⁰⁹ James Gardner, another traveler in the Willie company, also described the sound of stampeding buffalo to thunder in the distance, noting “a great thundering herd of buffalo came right through the camp. It looked as though they were doomed to destruction.”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁸ Donald Worster, “Transformations of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History,” *The Journal of American History*, 76, no. 4 (March 1990): 1089.

⁴⁰⁹ Rawlson and Lyman, *Journal of Handcart Pioneers, 1856-1860*, 54.

⁴¹⁰ James Gardner, “Pioneer Members of the Martin Handcart Companies,” accessed on January 16, 2023, https://www.tellmystorytoo.com/member_pdfs/james-gardner_1648_872.pdf.

The most frightening animal the pioneer encountered was the grey wolf. Having successfully scavenged behind nomadic tribes for millennia, wolves readily trailed the overland emigrants. Wolves were known for scavenging for food, gaining the sobriquet "shark of the plains." Emigrants learned to bury their dead in deep holes, placing heavy planks over the coffins. They hauled large stones to fill the graves to prevent wolves from disinterring corpses. While in daylight a wolf's subterfuge skills were unmatched, darkness revealed a choir of desperate howls. At nightfall both companies set up guards around the wagon trains. Travelers often wrote about the sounds of wolves. Frances Carrington, although not connected with the handcart companies, claimed she went sleepless at night due to the "frightening" and "hideous" howling of wolves outside the fort. Handcart pioneers had similar experiences. John Young Smith explained, "We travail all night with the wolves howling around us, our pistols in our right hand."⁴¹¹ Josiah Rogerson of the Martin Company documented that as it turned dark "the sharp bark and yelping of Platte wolves was the only sound that came to our ears."⁴¹²

Perhaps most pressing to the emigrants was the assurance that progress and industrialism eliminated the threat of Native Americans. Fear of the yells, chants, and taunts which accompanied the uncivilized preoccupied the emigrant's mind. Stories of the screeching savage during the twilight hours, and tales of interactions with Native Americans were commonly told around fire pits. Emigrants huddled close to their wagons when warned of war chants that came from the prairie Indians. William Rowley, a handcart leader, recalled a Sioux Indian warrior with 500 strong demanding flour and bacon. Rowley claimed in the evening the emigrants were

⁴¹¹ Rawlson and Lyman, *Journal of Handcart Pioneers, 1856-1860*, 92.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 120.

awaken with the “most hideous noises and that some had buckskin suits covered with bells. They sang and jumped and knocked down one of their tents.”⁴¹³

Regardless of this story’s accuracy, reassuring noises of white progress assuaged the fears of many who saw the unsettled wilderness as dangerous. Each push westward was a victory for white America. As the former pioneer John Watson recalled in 1891, “The print of the moccasin is followed by the tread of the engineer and the attendants, and the light trail of red man is effaced by the road of iron.”⁴¹⁴ It was commonly believed that the “wild savage of the Plains,” with obscene noises looked to rapaciously plunder the handcarts. The historian Michael Tate dispels the myth of the protagonist white settler and the antagonist Indian. “False rumors of constant Indian threats and periodic massacres of wagon trains abounded at midcentury,” Tate explains “always obscuring the larger relationship that was based upon mutually beneficial trade, cooperation and friendship.”⁴¹⁵

As the pioneers pushed further from their homes, they longed for the sounds of industrialism in the Old World. What had disturbed their ears in England, now became the sounds of progress, and were favored over the sporadic and uncomfortable noises of the unconquered Indian. “Everywhere the sound of the axe” Hezekiah Niles proclaimed, “is opening the forest to the sun, and claiming for agriculture the range of the buffalo.”⁴¹⁶ Many pioneers,

⁴¹³ Rawlson and Lyman, *Journal of Handcart Pioneers, 1856-1860*, 50.

⁴¹⁴ Tyrone Power, *Impressions of America: During the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835 · Volume I* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1836), 56.

⁴¹⁵ Michael L. Tate, *Indians and Emigrants: Encounters on the Overland Trails* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 144-45.

⁴¹⁶ Mark Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, 118.

who were tired of the ceasing hammers in Liverpool, would have welcomed the mechanical sounds as they were trapped in the snowy ranges.

These handcart companies felt a communal solitude which reduced their assurance of a safe journey. While there is a difference between solitude and loneliness, the emigrants experienced both. Phillip Koch insists that loneliness is possible irrespective of location – a deserted island or a packed stadium. Solitude, however, is contingent on physical separation. The pioneers felt solitude both literally and symbolically. Koch uses Thoreau’s time on the pond to demonstrate the power of both loneliness and solitude, contending that what made Thoreau’s experience more poignant was the psychological understanding that he was isolated. While Koch is primarily concerned with the benefits that come from solitude, there’s a certain anxiety that emerges when people do not choose their isolation in remote places and are forced to acknowledge their vulnerability of being alone. The emigrants encountered such solitude while also enduring the howling wind.⁴¹⁷

In Western Wyoming, the windy environment has been historically a sense of irritation for most overland travelers. Early settlers used the term “howling wilderness” as common parlance to describe the unsettled regions of America. The extensive journals of Lewis and Clark reveal discomfort with the wind that blew incessantly. Later, fur trappers and Midwest settlers wrote about the wind stirring up dust and rain with a fervor not felt in the Eastern states. Alain Corbin has argued that the capricious nature of wind has haunted humans for centuries. He notes

⁴¹⁷ Phillip J. Koch, “Solitude” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 4, no. 3 (1990): 185.

that “the tempest, the thunderstorm and the hurricane all entered literature as signs of the basic instability of the human condition.”⁴¹⁸

Many pioneer journals were riddled with entries about windy prairies, which stung people’s faces and impaired their hearing. Samuel Openshaw commented that as the Saints moved into Wyoming they were “seeing the storms increasing upon us in the midst of an inclement and howling desert.”⁴¹⁹ In August, Peter Madsen of the Willie Company also spoke of “strong hurricane winds,”⁴²⁰ which terrified the emigrants as they walked. In another instance, one Irish convert wrote that the dust from the wind was so thick that “we could not see each other 1 yard distance.”⁴²¹

As the pioneers crossed the continental divide, they discovered the intensity of the Wyoming wind across the desert. The region has a semi-arid and continental climate, making it drier than the East with dramatic temperature swings. Wind speeds in Wyoming often reach 20 mph, which is caused by jet streams, mountain positions, height, altitude, and the oscillation of wind from the highest to the lowest points. The combination of the Great Divide and the latitude of Wyoming creates the perfect scenario for wind.⁴²² October 1856 was exceptionally windy and cold. As Howard Christy noted in his study of the handcart tragedy, both companies experienced

⁴¹⁸ Alain Corbin, *A History of Wind* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 46.

⁴¹⁹ Samuel Openshaw, *Tell My Story Too*, 280.

⁴²⁰ Peter Madsen, *Tell My Story Too*, 70.

⁴²¹ Roberts, *Devil’s Gate*, 145.

⁴²² Taiwo Victor, “Discover the 10 Windiest states in the US,” accessed on Feb 2, 2023, [Discover the 10 Windiest States in the US - AZ Animals \(a-z-animals.com\)](https://www.a-z-animals.com/discover/10-windiest-states-in-the-us/)

temperatures as low as eleven degrees below zero in late October and early November.

Furthermore, the windchill was sometimes as low as seventy degrees below zero.⁴²³

When the handcart companies passed through Devil's Gate, they heard the persistent blowing wind encircle the area. The high desert landscape from Devil's Gate to South Pass evoked a sense of spaciousness for the pioneers. "It seems something marvelous & mysterious," Hannah Tapfield King wrote. "Our cavalcade should pass along breaking the eternal silence of these wild places."⁴²⁴ The wind created constant humming and whistling noises as the jet streams funnel through the Rattlesnake Range kicking up dust devils. Betsy Goodwin wrote that the wind "kept blowing harder until it became fierce."⁴²⁵ One military company traveling in the region complained of the alkali dust which kicked up for miles. As the wind blew through sagebrush, it exuded a sweet and somewhat metallic scent. "The wind blows almost continually," Kathleen Sun, owner of the Sun Ranch near Devil's Gate once commented.⁴²⁶ During the summer months, the sun and the wind burned the light-skinned Europeans. The colder months sent chills with the icy breeze for those who dared cross during the spring and autumn months.

The wind at Devil's Gate tormented the emigrants with constant whistling and howling. By late October, the area around the Sweetwater River witnessed blinding snow. The blizzard pounded the weary trekkers as they slowly tried to cross Rattle Snake Mountains. The wind became so raucous, that leaders struggled to communicate orders. It was as loud as any industrial

⁴²³ Howard A. Christy, *Weather, Disaster, and Responsibility: An Essay on the Willie and Martin Handcart Story* *BYU Quarterly*, 37, no. 1 (1997): 18.

⁴²⁴ Laura Allred Hurtado and Byron C. Andreasen, *Saints at Devil's Gate: Landscapes Along the Mormon Trail* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2016), 84.

⁴²⁵ Rawlson and Lyman, *Journal of Handcart Pioneers, 1856-1860*, 56.

⁴²⁶ Tom Rea, *Devil's Gate Owing the Land, Owing the Story* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 14.

noise that the Saints had encountered in the British Isles. The pioneers recorded that the wind penetrated their clothing, chilling their bodies, and stinging their faces. “The day we crossed the Rocky Ridge,” John Chislett wrote on October 23rd. “It was snowing a little the wind hard from the north-west - and blowing so keenly that it almost pierced us through.”⁴²⁷ Chislett describes the company wrapping themselves in blankets, quilts, or whatever else they could get, to keep from freezing.⁴²⁸ On November 6th the wind was so terrible, according to one account, that it blew down every tent within Martin’s Cove. Eight-year-old Jane Griffiths remembered, “In the morning we would find their starved and frozen bodies right by the side of us, not knowing when they died until daylight revealed the ghastly sight to us.”⁴²⁹

Of all the sounds noted, the cries of the suffering affected them deeply. Wails often cut through the howling blizzard, as hundreds were trapped in the snow. John Chislett’s poignant journal recorded that all suffered from the cold as night ascended on the emigrants. In the mornings pioneers crawled out of their tents “benumbed and showing an utter lack of that vitality so necessary for our success.”⁴³⁰ One graphic moment came when eight-year-old Sarah Moulton, crossing Rocky Ridge, was dragged up the hill by an old lady who was determined to get her to the top quickly. Young Moulton later recalled that “My left hand being exposed to the cold. I cried with the cold and wanted to go back to my father and mother.”⁴³¹ When she warmed her hands by the fire the flesh fell off her bones, and she screamed in agony.

⁴²⁷ John Chislett, “Story and Diaries of the Willie Handcart Company Part 1 of 2,” accessed on Feb 3, 2023, [dist.pdf \(familysearch.org\)](#).

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Lynne Watkins Jorgensen “The Martin Handcart Disaster: The London Participants” *Journal of Mormon History*, 21, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 191.

⁴³⁰ Roberts, *Devil’s Gate*, 209.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 209.

The frequency and volume particularly affected the pioneers. Thirteen-year-old Heber McBride noted that “Nearly all the children would cry themselves to sleep every night.”⁴³² John Jaques observed that there was considerable crying of the women and children and perhaps a few of the men, whom the wagons could not accommodate with a ride.”⁴³³ Many emigrants wrote of the horrifying experience of waking up next to their deceased spouses. One woman, a Mrs. Jackson, woke to find her dead husband. “Her face was suffused in tears, and in between her burst of grief and wails of sorrow, she would wring her hands and tear her hair.”⁴³⁴ In the background, her children accompanied the cries with screams of “Father!”

Silence that accompanied death became as intolerable as screams. Heavy breathing often followed moans before morbidity takes hold. Elizabeth Jackson woke up to find her husband dead. When no one heard her scream for help, she lay next to his body, traumatized in silence. Martha Ann awoke one morning to find her dear friend frozen stiff beside her. The experience of sleeping next to the corpse in silence haunted her through her life.⁴³⁵ Levi Savage spoke of the “quiet testament of despair in his journal on October 20.”⁴³⁶

Scientists have observed that fine motor functions shut down during the final stages of death. People who are in the throes of starvation look apathetic, lethargic — almost mechanical in their slow-motion reactions. Humans in this state find themselves passing in between consciousness, occasionally aware of their pitiful state without the ability to react. One of the

⁴³² Ibid., 339.

⁴³³ Ibid, 348.

⁴³⁴ Rawlson and Lyman, *Journal of Handcart Pioneers, 1856-1860*, 107.

⁴³⁵ Martha Anglesea, “Pioneer Members of the Martin Handcart Companies,” accessed on January 16, 2023, [martha-anglesea-\(or-anglesey\) 877 856.pdf \(tellmystorytoo.com\)](https://www.tellmystorytoo.com/martha-anglesea-(or-anglesey)-877-856.pdf).

⁴³⁶ Roberts, *Devil’s Gate*, 293.

first senses lost is the ability to speak. Vocal cords become swollen, and the physicality needed to make coherent phrases is challenging. For pioneers shivering in the night, their desire to reach out for help would have been impeded by their inability to communicate.

When modern-day treks occur, there are times to reflect on the suffering saint's auditory transition. Many leaders read journal excerpts and note the sounds that accompanied the suffering Saints. They frequently ask participants to close their eyes, keep quiet, and listen to the natural silences in Wyoming. These moments are important for organizers planning for subliminal experiences. Re-enactment directors remind the youth to stay focused as they tap into the handcart pioneer's world. They commonly pater follow up the silent reflection with a quiet hymn to conjure up spiritual connections.

Sacred songs, as noted in Chapter Two, are encouraged on trek. While young re-enactors are occasionally directed when to sing, at other times they do it extemporaneously. The Church encourages music to accompany trek as they move their bodies throughout the sacred spaces. The handbook notes that "the sacred hymns of the Church add spirituality to a handcart trek."⁴³⁷ Trek leaders include inspirational music to enrich trek.

In 1856, handcart emigrants sang the "songs of Zion" to bolster their weary spirits. Charles Sansom, one of the rescuers, was impressed with the strength of pioneers. He recorded that, "Their songs would ascend every night around their campfires."⁴³⁸ Millen Atwood noted that "the brethren and sisters enlivened the journey by singing the songs of Zion."⁴³⁹ When the night air chilled the pioneers, songs would be heard from different tents. Susannah Stone

⁴³⁷ *Handcart Trek Reenactments Guidelines for Leaders*, 13.

⁴³⁸ Charles Sansom, *Tell My Story Too*, 493.

⁴³⁹ Millen Atwood, *Tell My Story Too*, 4.

remembered that “I often think of the songs we sang to encourage us on our toilsome journey. It was hard to endure, but the Lord gave us strength and courage.”⁴⁴⁰

Trekkers have determined that one way to monitor the soundscape is through music. One group at Martin’s Cove isolated a quarter of the participants to represent those who died in the companies. They instructed them to sit “in the meadow as ‘angels’ as everyone sang the last verse of Come, Come Ye Saints.”⁴⁴¹ The trekkers spoke of the powerful connections they felt with the pioneers while singing. Another group encouraged a variety of ways to let music become an integral part of trek. They recommended volunteers form a Trek Choir, organize square dancing with live bands, perform at morning or evening devotional songs or during rest stops, and write “family Songs” based upon experiences of the trek.⁴⁴²

Conclusion. Walt Whitman wrote that people would never understand the “actual Soldier of 1862–’65, North and South, with all his ways.”⁴⁴³ The sounds and silences that consumed the handcart pioneer are similarly inaccessible. The blowing blizzard, the cries of the suffering, and the feeling of solitude in the Wyoming desert are impossible to relive. The industrial world of Great Britain had desensitized the ears of British Mormons, who were more likely to hear a factory hum over a bird chirp. The constant mechanical noise drowned out the natural elements

⁴⁴⁰ Susannah Stone, *Tell My Story Too*, 132.

⁴⁴¹ “400 Re-enact Trek of 2 Sets of Pioneer Immigrants,” *Colorado Community Media*, July 17, 2003.

⁴⁴² Jenny Phillips, “Trek Activities: Making it Memorable!” Jennyphillips.com, 2015, accessed on January 3, 2023, [Microsoft Word - Trek Activities.docx \(wordpress.com\)](#)

⁴⁴³ Walt Whitman, *The Complete Prose Works of Walt Whitman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1902), 141.

British citizens two generations prior had encountered daily. British converts saw the United States as a place where they could recapture the serenity available in rural spaces.

The sounds and silences of the American West dictated many of the companies' decisions. In the end, British emigrants longed for the comforting sounds of human companionship. Entrapped by snow and wind, the handcart pioneer became a perfect example on how essential sound is when studying history. The other senses failed the pioneer, leaving their ears and voices as the most heightened sense. Samuel Dobson, when he heard fiddle strings, bolstered his disposition. At other times, the sounds of the environment affected their well-being, like Eli Tracey who wrote that "we would spread down our blanket and cover ourselves...no sound but the howl of the big mountain wolf which would make the night hideous."⁴⁴⁴ As the pioneers closed their eyes at night, many checked to make sure their loved ones were still alive and breathing. The surest way to accomplish this was to listen for the signs of life.

⁴⁴⁴ Eli Tracey, *Tell My Story Too*, 505.

CHAPTER SIX

SMELLING AND TASTING LIKE THE PIONEERS

Introduction

While storms trapped the Martin company in Wyoming, Patience Loader awoke to a young man named William Whittaker eating the flesh off his fingers. Exhaustion and malnourishment had shut down Whittaker's brain function. In his diminished state, he had become convinced that his own flesh was edible. In the morning, Loader and others in the tent found William's lifeless body and the company quickly buried him in the rocky ground at Willow Springs. Many people have imagined and reimagined Whittaker's last moments. Indeed, one historian claimed that once Whittaker finished eating his own fingers, he began gnawing on Patience's hand. This source, however, is unsubstantiated. We know little about William Whittaker. He doesn't appear on the muster roll for the Martin Company despite his brother listed as a member of the expedition. William Whittaker appears in the handcart story only once, when young Patience Loader wrote about his dreadful condition.⁴⁴⁵

In the context of sensory history, this source conjures up an important question how smell and taste influenced the pioneer's transition from England to Wyoming? In typical circumstances, it is difficult to envision a human consuming their own flesh. Whittaker, in his deluded and malnourished state, convinced himself his fingers tasted and smelled edible and

⁴⁴⁵ Petree, *The Autobiography of Patience Loader Rozsa Archer*, 79; Stanley B. Kimball and Violet T. Kimball, *Village on Wheels: A Social History of the Gathering to Zion* (Sandy, UT Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 231.

could nourish him. As gruesome as this story is, it demonstrates the power starvation has over reason in dire situations. Humans have many safeguards to protect themselves, and smell and taste are two senses that warn the brain when danger looms. At times, however, the need for sustenance takes priority over the evolutionary protections.

This chapter argues that by considering the tastes and smells of the Willie and Martin handcart pioneers, new insights about how their tragedy in 1856 are revealed. As the companies became trapped, these two senses often dictated where they camped, and how they survived. Their bodies were failing, and they spent many hours seeking foods that could provide nutrition. Scholars rarely pay to how smells and tastes contribute to restructuring the past. The field of taste history has mainly focused on consumption rather than production, despite its growing popularity. Nonetheless, these two things determine not only what people eat, but also where and how much (or how little) they consume. Likewise, some historians consider smell when strong fragrances or stench obviously drive the narrative. In normal circumstances, however, conventional scholars overlook smells and scents in the archives.

The smells and tastes the handcart pioneers experienced evoked important emotional responses as they transitioned from Industrial England to the American West. British cities had become plagued by the smells of urban poverty and industrial production. Food in Liverpool was heavily processed and unappetizing. In contrast, the scents and tastes they encountered as they traveled to Zion were novel. The handcart pioneers became immersed in the dynamic American landscape. In the prairies, the smells of nature bolstered their dispositions as they found the trail full of life. The tastes of the New World, contrasted against industrial England, delighted the taste buds of the pioneers as their brains released dopamine. They devoured lean buffalo meat,

ate the wild nuts, and drank from the freshwater along the trail. Their introduction to Iowa wheat and the vibrant and juicy berries they picked along the side of the road encouraged them on their journey. The tragedy that befell the two companies was shaped by the changing smells and tastes the pioneers experienced. As the snow blanketed the living flora and scattered the fauna, pioneer journal entries became less poetic and descriptive of the fresh scents and novel tastes. They became preoccupied with the empty smells and lack of sustenance leading to starvation.

Ultimately, the absence of nutritious foods led some pioneers to consume materials that their tastebuds and bodies would otherwise reject. In their malnourished state, the pioneers ate leather, insects, and even dirt as they struggled to stay alive. The putrid smell of the dying and dead shattered their pride and lingered with them long after the ordeal. The smell of those succumbing to death shook pioneer companies' confidence. These two senses often dictated the decisions they made. When the air smelled of sulfur and alkaline, they moved campsites and avoided water. When pioneers were in the throes of starvation, their survival hinged on when the leather they boiled softened enough to allow them to choke it down.

The senses are essential to understanding social cues and hierarchical decisions along the Mormon Trail. The homogenous and processed food of urban Liverpool drastically differed from the fresh but sparse foods in the American West. While their diets as members of the British working classes were less than adequate by today's standards, most had never come close to experiencing the hunger that zapped their energy in Wyoming. When the pioneers' situation became precarious, life and death for the pioneer came down to whether something smelled or tasted agreeable enough to consume.

It is important to understand that things smelled and tasted different in the nineteenth century. Food, beverages, and even water had a distinct scent and taste that is impossible for twenty-first-century humans to comprehend. In the nineteenth century, it was common for people to consider smells that are deemed intolerable, rotten, and rancid today as not only acceptable but normal to consume. The smell of buffalo chips (bison dung) and the taste of rattlesnake would have different flavors given the differently evolved taste buds of contemporary people. As young re-enactors mimic the tastes and smells on the of the handcart emigrant, their senses are refined and are different from humans in the nineteenth century. However, once the pioneers reached a point where their food boxes were empty, the taste of leaves and dirt was as foreign to their taste buds and olfactory senses as they would be to us living today. While no trek group has reported eating dirt, many have consumed few calories, and feel the hunger pains like the emigrants recorded.

This chapter begins with how re-enactors replicate the sensory history of how the pioneer's smelled and tasted. Like the other senses, trek organizers study how and what the pioneers ate and smelled on the trail. While they can't reproduce the experience, they can reintroduce hunger, thirst, pleasing smells, and putrid stench. Taste and smell create vivid memories, and when the trekkers are in the sublime, these two senses help blur the lines between handcart pioneer and re-enactor.

Re-enacting Taste and Smell

Limiting food is a common strategy on trek. Fasting is a common practice among Mormons, who spend one Sunday a month fasting to heighten their senses. Unsurprisingly, this strategy is implemented on trek. "They are not going to go hungry," Dennis Emory stated after

leading a trek expedition, “but they’re not going to be real happy when they open up their lunch sack (today) and find a potato in there.”⁴⁴⁶ One local newspaper reported, “food was meager: a clementine, a stick of beef jerky, and a couple of saltine crackers for lunch,,” even though the children had worn out their bodies during the day.⁴⁴⁷ One participant recalled that the youth were warned about the lack of food, and many began calling the event the “starvation trek.” According to one group, a small bowl of chicken broth was all they were given after a hard day of pushing. In the interviews conducted, it seems that many young men and women looked back at the experience with nostalgic memories.

Leaders hoped to create visceral, spiritual experiences by restricting food. One trekker recalled, “Our trail boss (Val Esplin) had a short meeting with the mas and pas where he told us that the point of the first day was to wear the kids down so they would be more receptive to the Spirit. Well, he did manage to wear us down.”⁴⁴⁸ Several participants claimed depriving food led to spiritual renewal. One trekker recounted: “When we finally reached Zion, I had this new energy and joy that I just wanted to run around.”⁴⁴⁹ Another young man insisted, “You can’t be on that Trail very long without the spirit touching you.”⁴⁵⁰ One participant interviewed claimed a stake president said he would break the youth like one breaks a horse.⁴⁵¹ This would help them have a spiritual experience. True to his words, the trek was excruciating with the leaders even

⁴⁴⁶ Harold Pierce, “Pioneer Trek Re-creates Mormon Hardships,” *Santa Maria Times*, July 17, 2005.

⁴⁴⁷ Mary B. Johnston, “Mormon Trek Tests Strength and Courage on Jericho Trail,” *The Berkeley Independent*, February 10, 2020.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

going as far as to withhold water and food. It was reported that the youth testimony meeting was tear-filled. Both boys and girls claimed they had created a deep connection with their ancestors through their physical exhaustion and pain.

Trek leaders maintain that the smells of the Wyoming wilderness allow them to connect with their ancestors. One trekker commented that “the smell of hearty sagebrush” at Martin’s Cove was exhilarating.⁴⁵² The smell of living things bolstered their confidence just as it had bolstered the spirits of the Mormon pioneers in 1856. Margaret Clark wrote that she recognized the “slightly dusty odor” of “prairie grasses.” She also heard “the constant little chirp” of a meadowlark “in the distance.”⁴⁵³ One group handed out a packing list that recommended deodorant, but discouraged, “lotions, aftershave, hairspray, gel, makeup or perfumes.”⁴⁵⁴ The smells that accompany natural places are important. One group said it was meaningful to be in the same spot as their pioneer ancestors.⁴⁵⁵

To replicate the environment, keeping the space clear of any modern smells becomes a priority for some leaders, even if it leads to disagreeable odors. One young trekker complained on a forum that “Our "dad" suspected someone smuggled in deodorant and threatened to leave us in the middle of nowhere if no one confessed.”⁴⁵⁶ The same youth mentioned that showers were forbidden, and “we were supposed to pretend we were married to complete strangers and wash

⁴⁵² “Living the Bucket Life, Or Why We Reenact a Pioneer Trek,” Feb, 2017, <https://segullah.org/genre/essay/living-the-bucket-life-or-why-we-reenact-a-pioneer-trek/>, accessed on October 25, 2023.

⁴⁵³ Steve Orton, “The Mormon Trek of 1997,” *Meridian Magazine*, May 21, 2007.

⁴⁵⁴ “Packing List,” 2019, accessed on December 14, 2023, [2019 Stake Trek - Packing List \(google.com\)](#).

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ “Did anyone go on Trek?” *Reddit*, [Did anyone go on Trek? : r/exmormon \(reddit.com\)](#).

their hair and junk.”⁴⁵⁷ Another participant had a similar complaint reliving the lack of food and the smell because there was “no deodorant, or toothpaste.”⁴⁵⁸ In another instance, one young man became sick with diarrhea and was not given enough toilet paper. According to a young woman in her group he had to “cut strips from his clothes. Originally, he started with linings and the like. But by the end of the trip, he was down to some pretty short shorts.”⁴⁵⁹ One group dealt with only one tent and commented on the stench of people who were confined in the space. “We were laughing so hard at the “wet dog” smell and look of all of us. We had no choice but to touch each other in such close quarters, even though we all felt extremely gross from the days adventures, not topped with soggy wet-ness.”⁴⁶⁰ Another youth in the tent commented, “It’s definitely been a little smelly but I think when you’re all smelly and gross together no one really cares.”⁴⁶¹

In their malnourished state, some trekkers report spiritual witnesses, and ineffable experiences. Daryn Steed had a powerful vision he was not expecting about a young pioneer girl. “She was a small girl, and she popped in my head out of nowhere.” Steed recounted, “She was wearing no shoes, and her skin was blistered from the sun. For a moment, it seemed like she might talk to me—perhaps tell me that things weren’t so bad. At least I had good hiking boots, and my family was safe at home. But then she was gone as quickly as she had appeared.”⁴⁶²

Reflecting back on the encounter, He wondered if that girl was simply a “figment of my

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Kristen Duke, “Mormon Pioneer Handcart Trek: Day 2,” *Capturing Joy*, accessed on June 14, 2023, [Mormon Pioneer Handcart Trek: Day 2 - Capturing Joy with Kristen Duke \(kristendukephotography.com\)](https://www.kristendukephotography.com).

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Daryn Steed, “Signpost Members Recount Their Trek Experiences,” *Signpost*, July 18, 2018.

dehydrated and exhausted imagination. Maybe everyone sees ghosts while they walk in old pioneer clothes.⁴⁶³

As these re-enactment leaders prepare their events protecting the smells and tastes become a priority. As the multisensory re-enactments occur, replicating these two senses of the pioneers is as important as much as sight, touch, and sound. While interviewing a former trekker, who asked to remain anonymous, they began to tear up recounting their experience. “I was so hungry,” they said. “There was little food, but when I laid in my tent, I became overwhelmed with a deep connection with the handcart pioneers. I knew what they had felt, well sort of.”

The Smells of the Old World. In the summer of 1850, British residents woke to the sights and smells of sewage slopping on the banks of the Thames River. London’s population had topped two million and was continuing to grow. As thousands of gallons of waste poured into the river, many locals covered their faces with handkerchiefs. Others boarded up their windows to keep the stench from invading their living spaces. For eight years, the local government frantically failed to divert the polluted water as cesspools continuously overflowed. The summer months produced a stench that caused residents to avoid the river. Families futilely attempted to quarantine their families from the smells. One local journal claimed that if one were to wander too close to the riverbanks they would be “struck down with the stench and all kinds of fatal diseases.”⁴⁶⁴ Citizens were disgusted with the slow-moving legislative action of parliament.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Stephen Halliday, and Adam Hart-Davis, *The Great Stink of London: Sir Joseph Bazalgette and the Cleansing of the Victorian Metropolis* (Cheltenham, UK: The History Press, 2007), 3-6.

Local agitators demanded change. In 1858 the stench intensified and became unbearable. The Great Stench of 1858 served as an example of how Industrialization and overpopulation changed Great Britain during the nineteenth century. Smells invaded urban areas---desensitizing people's noses and contaminating the air. The demands of industrialization wreaked havoc on the infrastructure of towns originally laid out as cottage villages. In Northern England, waste of humans and factories produced vile stench and smells. People complained of clogged sinuses and watered their eyes. Urban centers in Victorian England produced an unpleasant cocktail of stale fruit, vegetables, rotten eggs, foul tobacco, soot, smoke, and dust, which abused noses on busy street corners. To exacerbate things, city trash removal companies were reserved for affluent citizens.⁴⁶⁵

Like most problems with industrialization, the poor received the burden of the blame. The nauseating smells of inner-city life or what Henry Mayhew called the "steam of stench," plagued the working class as their living quarters shrunk to accommodate the large factories. Residents of Industrial England found their homes and neighborhoods constantly surrounded with lingering smells of both human and material waste. The new sensitivity to body odor, as one historian observed, resulted from the upper classes benefiting from mechanized water systems. Bathing became a way for aristocratic families to segregate themselves from the poorer populace. The wealthy strategically and ostentatiously showcased cleanliness over the smelly lower classes.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁵ Lee Jackson, *Dirty Old London: The Victorian Fight Against Filth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 120-21.

⁴⁶⁶ Brian Ladd, *The Streets of Europe: The Sights, Sounds, and Smells That Shaped Its Great Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 153.

However, it was not only the living that produced the stench of urban England but also the odor of decay and death. As graveyards multiplied, many people kept their distance from shallow cemeteries which exposed nauseating smells of the dead. Within the city limits of London, one report recorded 47,000 deaths in 1837. According to a well-known doctor named John Hogg, most of the deceased were quickly and haphazardly interred in small Churchyards. One graveyard, Spa Fields, garnered a reputation of operating well over capacity with dead bodies being chopped up and incinerated to make place for the newly deceased. One woman attested she saw “gravediggers throw up parts of a human body and then chop it up with their shovels.”⁴⁶⁷ While it is unclear how often gravediggers were reckless, many of the dead were reportedly disregarded based on their status as homeless. As demand increased for burial spaces, graveyard supervisors, according to one historian studying death in Victorian England, commonly neglected graves. There was little to no upkeep following the internment.⁴⁶⁸

The high death rate in the 1830s prompted officials to improve the smells and conditions in the cities. Under The New Poor Law of 1834, a newly formed government program created hundreds of workhouses to provide jobs and lodging for the most desperate. Originally touted as a system of relief, the workhouses were underfunded and understaffed. Commissioners, however, spent more time weeding out freeloaders and scroungers than aiding the needy. According to the nineteenth-century reformer Edwin Chadwick, the job of the commissioners was to purge the deceivers by ensuring that “only those who truly *needed* relief would choose to

⁴⁶⁷ Lee Jackson, *Dirty Old London*, 120-21.

⁴⁶⁸ Carl Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: The Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1995), 90; Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 181-82.

enter the grim, forbidding Union.”⁴⁶⁹ The workhouses were horrifying places. One man testified in 1845 that: "I have seen the men gnaw at the bones, they broke the pig chop bones to pick the fat and gristle out... The men were very glad to get hold of them they were so hungry.”⁴⁷⁰ However, it wasn't just the lack of food available. Many people described horrible stench in the suffocating rooms. The author Samuel Hayes Elliot asserted, “It smells of wounds undressed and festered; of hair uncombed for long; of scurvy fever left unwashed upon the surface; and a visitation oft of death air.”⁴⁷¹ An investigative journalist in the 1840s, concluded, “The smell [is]so truly overpowering that I thought I should have been compelled for my own preservation to have immediately retire.”⁴⁷²

The New Poor Law was designed to protect the wealthy from the poor and to concentrate miasmas in certain areas of the city. The outbreak of cholera in nineteenth-century London worried urban residents as deaths multiplied. Vexed medical professionals drew parallels with water-borne diseases and determined that bad air, arising from decayed organic matter or miasmata, was the problem. Miasma theory had been widely accepted in the eighteenth century and still had support during the mid-1850s. Proponents stressed eradicating disease through cleansing and scouring. One prominent supporter named Dr. William Farr proposed that the miasma theory was the cause of cholera. He became convinced that that soil at low elevations

⁴⁶⁹ Jackson, *Dirty Old London*, 70.

⁴⁷⁰ Charlotte Newman, “To Punish or Protect: The New Poor Law and the English Workhouse,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 18, no. 1 (March 2014):123.

⁴⁷¹ Samuel Hayes Elliot, *New England Chattels: Or Life in the Northern Poor house* (New York: H. Dayton, 1858), 377. While Elliot's book is preoccupied with New England, he mentions how the Old World instituted the same policies that were driving the poor laws in new England as well.

⁴⁷² Jackson, *Dirty Old London*, 181.

was the source. The banks of the Thames, he proposed, contained organic matter that produced miasma. While medical professionals challenged the legitimacy of miasma, most residents believed bad smells caused disease.⁴⁷³

For working-class Mormon converts, the smells of urban decay accelerated their exodus to the New World. During the 1840s, Latter-day Saint apostles established an effective missionary system. British mission's leaders oversaw the emigration of more than 55,000 British Saints. James Bleak noted in his journal that "Liverpool is the dirtiest place I ever saw."⁴⁷⁴ Later, while in America, he commented on the pristine air of America contrasted against the dirty skies of England. Another handcart emigrant, Sarah Ann Brett Wright, encountered the deplorable conditions of inner-city smells when she was forced into a Working house, or "Poor house." Her husband had abandoned the family, and her opportunity for employment was limited. Her meager income at a local factory led to her eviction and placement in one of the many Poor Houses in London. Sarah and her three children recalled the deplorable conditions as they resided in a small room full of foul odors.⁴⁷⁵

Mormon missionaries often commented on the smells infesting the cities. Some of the first missionaries in the United Kingdom despised industrialization. Joseph Fielding and Theodore Turley were bothered by the factories in Manchester. Fielding recorded, "I was much affected to see the slavery that is there endured, the dust, the bad smell of oil etc., the deafening

⁴⁷³ "Competing Theories of Cholera," *UCLA Department of Epidemiology*, Accessed on April 8, 2023, <https://www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/snow/choleratheories.html#:~:text=MIASMA%20THEORY,susceptibles%20in%20diseases%20considered%20contagious.>

⁴⁷⁴ James Godson Bleak Jr., *Tell My Story*, 178.

⁴⁷⁵ Sarah Ann Wright, *Tell My Story Too*, 335

noise and the confinement.”⁴⁷⁶ Brigham Young, who spent years as a missionary in England, concluded that the “Masters i.e., factory owners care little for their manufacturers, have reduced the workers way to almost the lowest extremity.”⁴⁷⁷ J.B. Meynell observed that “I have heard speak of poverty by some individual in America a few years since, but it is a word without meaning when applied to individuals here.”⁴⁷⁸ Missionary journals mention the crowded and stuffy conditions and the lack of fresh air.

Soot from the factories produced confusing and uncomfortable odors which fermented the air. The handcart emigrant George Harrison recalled industrial life in Liverpool and commonly used chemicals. “My father was a glass blower, and I remember how hard he had to work in the old factory not far from our humble home, making glasses, bottles, and other ware. I can see him yet as he would dip his blower into her hot liquid glass and then with puffed cheeks blow bubbles, and with the help of different molds, shape the bubbles into tumblers, goblets, and flasks. He would come home very tired at night.”⁴⁷⁹ Bronchitis and other respiratory diseases impeded many urban spaces. Micro-chemicals entered through noses and damaged lungs and throats. While Elizabeth Green was in Liverpool, she helped care for a friend afflicted with tuberculosis and contracted the disease. Like many with the sickness, lack of fresh air intensified the symptoms and often led to mortality.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁶Donald Q. Cannon, and Lyndon W. Cook, *Essays in Mormon History: A New Light Breaks Forth* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 219.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁴⁷⁸ Meynell, *A Few Incidents of Travel in England*, 8.

⁴⁷⁹ George Harrison, *Tell My Story Too*, 212.

⁴⁸⁰ Elizabeth Green, *Tell My Story Too*, 206.

The Tastes of the Old World

Taste influenced life in nineteenth-century England. Historians have noted that industrialization not only changed the eating habits of urban workers but also the access to foods. England restructured urban diets in the 1800s around what historian Chris Otter has called the “nutrition transition.” The result was a trifecta of a meat, wheat, and sugar diet. City residents witnessed their food becoming homogenized as processed food allowed larger quantities to be delivered to the masses. During the nineteenth century, vegetables were nearly absent on the dinner plates of poor English laborers. Save for the occasional head of cabbage and Irish potato, the working class saw their diets reduced to chewy cuts of beef, stale hard bread, and sugary drinks and desserts.⁴⁸¹

Great Britain during the nineteenth century articulated food along lines of class, race, and gender. Poorer residents were given little access to fresh fruits resulting in scurvy and Vitamin C deficiency. Zooming in, historians have noted that British women consumed smaller portions and less protein than men. These women split their servings in half for their working husbands. This led to malnutrition for many urban women. Intersecting with both class and gender was the racism that the British Empire had promoted. Immigrant food was disregarded and equated with primitive and unrefined palates. As late as the twentieth century Winston Churchill claimed, “Yellow men, brown men, and black men, had not yet learned to demand and purchase a diet superior to rice.”⁴⁸² Thus, the nutrition transition widened the gulf between the classes as food parity remained sparse in the deep corners of English cities.

⁴⁸¹Chris Otter, *Diet for a Large Planet: Industrial Britain, Food Systems, and World Ecology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), 12.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 14.

The intensity of factory labor disrupted how British residents prepared and ate their food. The six-day work week made it difficult to prepare healthy meals. In the factory town of Birmingham, women and girls accounted for 40 percent of those employed in the button-making trades in 1841. As the growing division of labor and the market reinforced each other, buying habits shifted towards processed foods and beverages that could be consumed far from the fields. British diets were drastically restructured, and purchasing and consuming habits became more about convenience over nourishment. Many industrialized countries today still structure food consumption this way. Industrialized England sparked the ubiquity of dishes such as fish and chips and Yorkshire Pudding.⁴⁸³

American missionaries complained about the lack of nutritious food and encouraged Mormon converts to quickly abandon their meager things to seek refuge in the New World. Apostle Heber C. Kimball, noted that, “Yes many of them have not to eat. Times are so hard they can’t quit work. Therefore, they have to go hungry.”⁴⁸⁴ Another apostle Wilford Woodruff objected to the high tax burden on the working class: “And what is left but starvation. Leaving out of account all seasonings such as peppers, spices, etc., which by taxation is four times the value it is in the United States.”⁴⁸⁵ Woodruff’s account highlights not only the lack of food but the blandness of their diets. The American missionaries found the tasteless, soggy foods irritating.

⁴⁸³ Maxine Berg, “Women's Consumption and the Industrial Classes of Eighteenth-Century England” *Journal of Social History*, 30, no. 2 (Winter, 1996): 416.

⁴⁸⁴ V. Ben Bloxham, James R. Moss, Larry C. Porter, *Truth Will Prevail: The Rise of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the British Isles, 1837-1987* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Press, 1987), 54.

⁴⁸⁵ James B. Allen, *Trials of Discipleship: The Story of William Clayton, a Mormon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 15.

British emigrants noted food shortage as a factor in how hastily they departed for the Great Basin. By the midcentury, England witnessed periods of food shortages. The capitalist machine prompted aristocrats to hoard food and turn a blind eye to hunger in the cities. “My noble mother stood by my father without a murmur in this hour of trial,” handcart emigrant John Linford wrote, “It was a dark outlook for a husband and father as financial ruin and starvation stared him in the face.”⁴⁸⁶ Thomas and Sarah Moulton described the difficult task of saving for their emigration. According to her son’s journal, Sarah “turned her desire into resolution and determination and saved money for the next 15 years in a hidden fruit jar, and during the last year before their departure, the family lived chiefly on barley flour in order to save more money.”⁴⁸⁷ While post-Civil War America witnessed the largest migration during the century, the 1850s had its share of displaced Europeans arrive on American shores.

When the numbers are evaluated, it’s clear the converts were looking for ways to escape the poverty in England. Studies show that between 1850 and 1870, deaths attributable to starvation and malnutrition accounted for around 1.5% of reported causes of death in urban conditions. While that number may seem low, the study also concluded that malnutrition undoubtedly contributed to other causes of morbidity and mortality, such as increased vulnerability to infection. In another study, it was determined that illness, brutality, accidents, and the effects of intemperance were the most common causes of ill-health and death. This is amply borne out by the public health records of the time, which clearly promote the role of disease and accidents as the main causes of mortality. Statistically, the majority of those who

⁴⁸⁶ John Linford, *Tell My Story Too*, 63.

⁴⁸⁷ James Heber Moulton, *Tell My Story Too*, 85.

joined the handcart companies were the English poor. They likely suffered from many of these afflictions.⁴⁸⁸

Smelling and Tasting the New World

By the 1850s, Mormon emigrants became a common sight on passenger ships as the Perpetual Emigration Fund boosted funds for the poor converts. Between 1836 and 1853, 710 sailing vessels carried 203,510 emigrants from Great Britain to the United States. The capricious weather confined passengers for 40 to 90 days on the chilly North Atlantic. Below deck, ships were crowded (each passenger having about two square feet of space) with many reporting deplorable conditions. Many shirked at the ever-present lice and rats. Passengers had little food and ventilation. While numbers vary, historians agree that 10-20% of those who left Europe perished at sea. Transatlantic immigrants faced few legal barriers, but their long-term volume grew in line with, not faster than, the development of the U.S. economy. America's willingness to open its borders to weary Britons influenced thousands to find passage across the ocean. While ships were usually loaded with Irish Catholics escaping persistent famines, Mormons were a common sight.⁴⁸⁹

The *Horizon* and *Thornton* were typical schooners with cramped spaces and inadequate air holes. Mormon emigrants ignored British law which restricted a ship's load to three adults for every five ton of ship. Many of the spaces were so crammed that supplies and luggage invaded

⁴⁸⁸ Paul Clayton and Judith Rowbotham, "An unsuitable and degraded diet? Part One: Public Health Lessons from the Mid-Victorian Working Class Diet" *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1, no. 6 (June 2008): 284.

⁴⁸⁹ Raymond L. Cohn, "Mortality on Immigrant Voyages to New York, 1836-1853" *The Journal of Economic History*, 44, no. 2, (June 1984): 292; "Leaving Europe: A New Life in America Departure and Arrival," Accessed on March 15, 2023, <https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/leaving-europe/departure-and-arrival>.

the living spaces of the passengers. For beds, people were crowded into compartments of wooden slats measuring six square feet. In the hull, two passengers shared a three-foot-wide compartment. Joseph Greaves noted that his bunkmate grumbled that he was forced to duck to avoid hitting his head on the short joists. A young girl recapped the dangers of the tight quarters. She recalled a horrible incident when a man with boiling soup in a milk can lifted it over her head only to be bumped spilling it on the girl's back.⁴⁹⁰

The congested spaces produced an unbearable stench that overwhelmed passengers. Immigrants were ordered to air out their bedding twice a week and clean their quarters daily. As the voyage lingered, however, many failed to bother themselves with cleanliness. William Clayton noted that such "sickness, vomiting groaning and bad smells I never witnessed before...almost suffocated us for want of air."⁴⁹¹ To combat the odors, lime, vinegar, and even smoke were used to mask the stench. Furthermore, toileting facilities were inadequate. Many ships consisted of two primitive toilets, one on each side of the ship. With over 400 passengers, there was always a wait. Because the between-deck reeked, many refused to use the facilities and thus created their own toilet system with buckets they disposed of overboard. The jolting sea destabilized items not tied down, causing the waste buckets to spill on the floors adding to the already despicable stench. One account has a first mate purifying the air in the between-deck

⁴⁹⁰ David H. Pratt and Paul F. Smart, *Life on Board an Mormon Emigrant Ship* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Publishing, 1980), 5; Mary Barton, *Tell My Story Too*, 166.

⁴⁹¹ Pratt and Smart, *Life on Board an Mormon Emigrant Ship*, 7.

with a red-hot iron that he had dipped into a pail of tar. The smoke and steam from the bubbling tar helped deaden the worst stench.⁴⁹²

Pioneer John William Southwell's journal provides insight into the smells at sea. In describing the *Horizon*, Southwell noted that the vessel had three decks that the Saints occupied. The officers allowed families near the cooking galley where a head cook issued meals. Southwell recorded that people complained about the stench of sea life. He documented one lady's irritation who grumbled, "This is a hard way to serve the Lord, for is not cleanliness a part of godliness? John, I want to go back home."⁴⁹³ Southwell also found sea life unbearable, commenting that "the water we had to drink would stink so that we could hardly use it for 2 or 3 days then it would be good again."⁴⁹⁴

Many pioneers described the disappointing food at sea. Salt beef, pork, vegetables, and sea biscuits were common on dinner plates. The cook generally included some kind of pudding as a side dish. Herbert Walker McBride wrote that his provisions were sea biscuits, salt pork, and beef with peas, rice, tea, sugar, and dried fruit sometimes. Elizabeth Steward reported that "each passenger was allowed so much rations which consisted of hard sailor's biscuits made of very coarse flour, so hard we could scarcely break them, salt pork and beef, rice and split peas."⁴⁹⁵

Aboard the *Thornton*, a young girl named Sarah received a sea biscuit as her only birthday

⁴⁹² Børge Solem, "Sanitary Conditions on Board - Health and Sickness on Emigrant Ships" *Norway Heritage*, Accessed on April 26, 2023, [Sanitary conditions on board - health and sickness on emigrant ships \(norwayheritage.com\)](https://www.norwayheritage.com/sanitary-conditions-on-board-health-and-sickness-on-emigrant-ships).

⁴⁹³ Helen Free VanderBeek, *George Allen Wadsworth--Pilley to Panaca* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 26.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ Barnard White, *Barnard White: Volume 1* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1967), 187.

present. “There was one cook stove for each deck,” Sarah wrote “and our family was allowed to use it for an hour each week. The ship’s diet was largely bean biscuit soaked overnight.”⁴⁹⁶ One passenger remembered sometimes they had fresh fish to eat because the captain traded some nails to fishermen in exchange for seafood.⁴⁹⁷

Most emigrants saw portions diminish the further they drifted out to sea. Some ships lacked variety with rice being the only item available. Occasionally, Church leaders supplemented rations, but the portions were meager. Robert Reeder remembered that after six weeks he fell ill and could not stomach the food, The usual diet of sea biscuits, salt pork and beef, also brown sugar and vinegar became unappetizing to him. “I got very feeble living principally on sugar and vinegar for three weeks,” Redder confessed.⁴⁹⁸ Convert Michael Jensen confessed in an interview that “many nights while on the sailing vessel, they were obliged to sleep in wet bedding, and live on half rations a part of the time.”⁴⁹⁹

The tastes and smells of England were linked to the emigrant’s culture and provided a semblance of identity for the pioneers. Industrialization provided two features that attracted people to cities: uniformity and reliability. Mass-produced foods rarely deviated in taste and smell, and offered the British converts a psychological comfort. As their diets and familiar smells shifted, their confidence faltered. The more the smells and tastes changed, the pioneers felt unsure about the changes once they became Americans.

⁴⁹⁶ John Oborn, *Tell My Story Too*, 95.

⁴⁹⁷ Thomas Porritt Jr., *Tell My Story Too*, 291.

⁴⁹⁸ Robert Reeder, *Tell My Story Too*, 111.

⁴⁹⁹ Interview with Michael Jensen, Handcart Pioneer, *Saints by the Sea*, accessed on April 30, 2023, [Interview with Michael Jensen, Handcart Pioneer | Saints by Sea \(byu.edu\)](#).

The emigrants encountered tastes and smells on America's eastern shores that paralleled English harbor towns. Melanie Kiechel's work on the smells of urban America reveals that sanitary social movements in England were present in America as well. Residents in Charleston, Boston, and Philadelphia filed petitions in the nineteenth century seeking relief from the stench in the populated streets. When ships anchored in Boston and New York, strong smells emitted by urban and industrial decay, and assaulted the senses of new arrivals. A particular stench familiar to the emigrants was "Dock smell," which was a concoction of smelly fish, rancid oil, and human sweat. Additionally, the tastes of industrial America included processed beef and sugary desserts.⁵⁰⁰

The golden fields of wheat impressed and delighted the emigrants as they arrived in the Midwest. Spring wheat, a specific breed of the *Triticum* genus had emerged as the staple crop in the region. Compared to winter wheat, which is used for pasta and bread in milder climates, spring wheat is durable during the harsh Iowan winters. By 1856, spring wheat emerged as the money crop for Iowans. Joseph Dart and Robert Dunbar's invention of the grain elevator in 1842 improved efficiency. This effective and secure system of grain storage and handling met the needs of farmers and merchants. As the emigrants walked through the fields, waiting for the handcarts to be built, they were impressed with the sweet smell and the taste of wheat. Camp cooks quickly capitalized on the ubiquity of the grain. One of the camp butchers, Thomas

⁵⁰⁰ Melanie A. Kiechle, *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 6,14. Kiechle's work is instrumental in showing how deeply connected smells became as motivating factors in the sanitary laws which increase by the late nineteenth century.

Moulton sent his children into the fields to “glean wild wheat to add to their food supplies.”⁵⁰¹ Others purchased extra wheat from local farmers who overcharged the grain to the desperate pioneers.

As the handcart companies pushed their carts through Iowa and Nebraska, they were immersed in the pleasant smells of the American wilderness. Therapeutic horticulturalists have recorded both psychological and physiological benefits from clean wilderness air and the aroma of wild flora. Fresh smelling scents play a role in determining the emotional responses people experience in nature. As scents travel through the nose to the limbic system endorphins pulsate through the body. These weary pioneers were unknowingly receiving positive chemical reactions as seasonally the area was a piebald garden of sunflowers, daisies, gayfeather, and butterfly milkweed. In an earlier expedition, William Clayton observed that “I have noticed a variety of shrubs, plants and flowers all new to me today, many of which have a pleasant smell and in some places the air appears impregnated with the rich odors arising from them.”⁵⁰²

The vibrant smells along the trail kept the emigrants confident in their ability to complete the journey. Samuel Openshaw encapsulated how many felt about the Midwest: ““It would truly be an amusing and interesting scene if the people of the old country could have a bird’s eye view of us when in camp...where the air is not tainted with the smoke of cities or factories.”⁵⁰³ The

⁵⁰¹ Adam Slez, *The Making of the Populist Movement: State, Market, and Party on the Western Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 85; Thomas Moulton, *Tell My Story Too*, 85.

⁵⁰² William Clayton, *William Clayton's Journal: A Daily Record of the Journey of the Original Company of "Mormon" Pioneers from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing, 1927), 173. While Clayton didn’t join the handcart expedition, his journal provides important details about the flora and fauna on the Mormon Trail.

⁵⁰³ Samuel Openshaw, *Tell My Story Too*, 279; Thomas Moulton, *Tell My Story Too*, 85.

smells bolstered their dispositions as their tired bodies pushed the carts westward. Sarah Moulton of the Martin Company commented that the plains comprised abundant wavy grasses, flowers, and wild fruit which covered the land. The pioneer children frequently picked wild daisies and other flowers to smell while walking.

The Mormon Trail revealed an ecosystem full of life and improved the physical and mental health of the weary travelers. Both captains of the companies were pleased with the Saint's disposition. They observed butterflies, bees, and other lively bugs surrounding the diverse foliage. John Chislett remembered "There were always flowers and pretty rocks to pick. This land was so different from the one in England that it kept us interested."⁵⁰⁴ Had it been a warmer autumn, the pioneers would have indulged in the pleasant smells of the Wyoming flora. These smells would have bolstered their mental well-being as they turned their carts towards Utah.⁵⁰⁵

In August, edible berries and nuts still dotted the landscape, leading to easy pickings. Mette Mortensen, traveling with the Willie Company, recorded that she concocted a juice blend with the berries gathered along the trail. She also collecting herbs to use in teas, soups, and stews, even parching a small amount of grain that Captain Willie gave her to create a warm barley drink.⁵⁰⁶ James Bleak also noted the relief of wild berries. "While the weather was fine,"

⁵⁰⁴ Roberts, *Devil's Gate*, 209.

⁵⁰⁵ Phoebe R. Bentley, Jessica C. Fisher, Martin Dallimer, Robert D. Fish, Gail E. Austen, Katherine N. Irvine, and Zoe G. Davies, "Nature, Smells, and Human Wellbeing" *Ambio*. 52, no. 1, (July 2022): 10. Others have researched this dynamic relationship between smells and nature. Scientists now concern themselves with questions about the holistic nature of our sense of smell and are investigating the role of odors in interpersonal relations. For further reading, see Gerard Brand's, *Discovering Odors*.

⁵⁰⁶ Mette Mortensen, *Tell my Story Too*, 82.

Bleak wrote to his in-laws, “we had an abundance of excellent plums and grapes which grow wild in the woods - also cherries and gooseberries small, but of a nice flavor.”⁵⁰⁷ These luxuries went a long way in improving the mental health of these emigrants whose initial diets were sorely restricted. However, they rarely preserved the berries. Had the emigrants foreseen the snowstorms, they would have considered storing up the flora available on the eastern leg of the trail.

The rations provided for the companies were less than adequate given the distance to the Salt Lake Valley. Some emigrants were already in need of replenishment following the sea journey. They were restricted to 17lbs of supplies which calculates to a pound of wheat a day. Younger emigrants were given $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pound. While it is odd the companies ventured into the unknown with little reserves, reassuring voices from God’s anointed reminded the companies that the Children of Israel blindly wandered in the wilderness. Yet, leaders provided a more practical answer which assuaged emigrant fears about walking into the unknown: resupply lines would refuel them in Wyoming. Hungry is a word that appears in journals consistently from Iowa to Utah. Despite four wagons with ox teams loaded with supplies. Rations were depleted as the emigrants demanded more calories the further, they ventured. One pioneer recorded: “Besides that we had one wagon with four mules loaded with bacon and groceries for the trip and one saddle pony belonging to an elder returning home which was used for hunting campgrounds, and the rest were handcarts, about 120.”⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁷ James Bleak, *Tell my Story Too*, 180.

⁵⁰⁸ Robert Redder, *Tell My Story Too*, 111.

The Mormon emigrants, like other overland travelers, bargained for food with the Indigenous tribes. Since the arrival of white settlers, friendly tribes had learned to trade food for supplies as wagon trains rolled West. From Columbus and the Taino to Jamestown and the Powhatans, Europeans have benefited from forging relationships with tribes familiar with the edible plants and wild game. The nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic change in these interactions as the overland trails opened the West to a variety of white settlers. They bargained with the Omaha, Ottawa, and Pawnee for food.⁵⁰⁹

The most important negotiating chip Native Americans offered the emigrants was the buffalo meat. The American bison has become one representation of the American West. The relationship between these large animals and humans precedes the Spanish's first mention of their existence in the 16th century. Plains Indians, as their respective creation stories suggest, have had a long-standing relationship with these animals. European explorers noted how giant herds congregated on the plains as they moved with the changing weather. By 1800, 30 million buffalo still dotted the Western prairies. In a study of plant/animal co-evolution, bison droppings benefited the soil and created a thick grazing lawn. Consequently, the buffalo were able to feed off the highly nutritious grasses. For Great Plains tribes, the buffalo provided practical sources of food, skins, and tools. They found ways to repurpose a slain buffalo, often using tendons, bones, and different organs for a variety of needs. White travelers who saw the Native Americans' careful approach to butchering were often impressed but saw their method as a laborious waste of time.

⁵⁰⁹ John D. Unruh, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-60* (Urbana, University of Illinois, 1993), 167.

For all their imposing qualities, bison were important to how the handcart pioneers survived on the trail. Emigrants stored-up meat and company hunters killed the occasional buffalo. When the meat was cooked on the fire, the emigrants were rejuvenated as the lean cuts of meat satiated their empty stomachs and provided protein to help rebuild muscle. Mary Ann Hafen explained that after a couple bison were killed “each family was given a piece of meat to take along.”⁵¹⁰ While the family attempted to preserve the meat, Hafen’s brother John used a little pocketknife to “cut off a piece or two each half day.”⁵¹¹

Miraculous stories shared by contemporary Latter-day Saints include lone buffaloes wandering into camp and providing substance for the weary pioneers. Rescuer Ephraim Hanks found a buffalo close to his camp. After shooting it and cutting strips of meat, he was able to provide meat to the suffering Saints. One man presumed dead was given some meat which revived him.⁵¹² Ole Madsen killed a buffalo which wandered close to camp that helped feed his family and others in the Willie Handcart Company.⁵¹³ Buffalo meat saved many whose handcarts were empty of food.

As British Saints indulged in the smells and tastes of America, their identities as Europeans quickly disappeared. Pioneers acclimatized to different temperatures and the humidity present on the trail. Their digestive system and taste buds also adapted to different tastes and strange smells. As the pioneers encountered the New World, their brains assessed foods and smells to determine if there were intolerances, allergies, or toxins present. Their bodies did not

⁵¹⁰ Mary Ann Hafen, *Tell my Story Too*, 67

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

⁵¹³ Elizabeth Georgiana Quilley Read, *Tell My Story Too*, 294.

immediately accept new tastes and smells. This biological imperative explains the “waiting period of acquisition.” Pioneers learned to accept food based on its emotional acceptability (the food makes one feel good), situational acceptability (the food is experienced in a situation that feels enjoyable or safe) and physiological acceptability (the food did not cause digestive upset or an allergic reaction). Over time, buffalo meat, Iowa wheat, and American honey became not only palatable but desirable over time.⁵¹⁴

The Smells and Tastes of Suffering. While looking at the multisensory history of the handcart companies, it’s imperative to consider how pioneers consumed what would normally be regarded as inedible. Taste is a primal sense that combines with smell and taste to form flavors that allow humans to identify and recognize food. If familiar, people anticipate the consequences of ingesting the food. If novel, other sensory cues from sight, touch, and particularly smell predict what will happen if they eat the food. If the outcome is positive, taste will signal pleasure and reward, and if negative, the body will reject the source. However, biologists have also postulated that humans have an adaptive taste system that can modify its sensitivities with internal state in times of high nutritional need. Foods humans normally avoid such as bitter, bland, and even rotten become more palatable when their energy is dangerously low. Signals in the brain restructure palatability to allow for the digestion of substances that can provide energy. In other words, humans bypass the other senses which serve as warnings, allowing their throats

⁵¹⁴ Alex Brown, “How and Why Your Tastebuds Change Over Time,” in *Class Pass*, accessed June 2, 2023, <https://classpass.com/blog/how-and-why-your-tastebuds-change-over-time/>.

to choke down anything potentially substantive. In their state of survival, Pioneers found that rotten meat, leather, and twigs became less offensive to their palates.⁵¹⁵

Before the emigrants consumed unimaginable things, the first sign of serious trouble arose two months following their departure. When the Willie Company arrived at Ft. Laramie, Wyoming on October 1st, the weary trekkers only acquired four hundred pounds of “hard bread” or about a pound of crackers per traveler. The Saints knew they were playing a dangerous game with sorely limited supplies. As the company moved past the last known shelter until Ft. Bridger, they bravely walked West toward the colder climate of Wyoming with their stomachs empty.⁵¹⁶

As the companies moved into Devil’s Gate, the food supplies were diminished. With over 900 people trapped, company leaders quickly switched their strategy from pushing forward to assisting the weakest Saints. One of the pressing concerns was how to assist the feeble when they had little or no food to provide energy for themselves. Research has shown that in survival scenarios, mortality rates tend to be higher among men as they often exert more energy in their attempts to provide food and shelter for women and children. Donald Grayson’s study on the mortality rate of the Willie Company concluded that 20 women died compared to 48 men. The companies expected pioneers to demonstrate a communal spirit of duty and support. Journal accounts reveal that many were burdened with not only providing for their own families but for others as well. According to one source, James Laird of the Willie Company felt torn over whether he should care for his wife and three children or bury the bodies that had died in the previous night.

⁵¹⁵ Paul A.S. Breslin, “An Evolutionary Perspective on Food Review and Human Taste” *Current Biology*, 23, (May 2013): 410, 416.

⁵¹⁶ David Roberts, *Devil’s Gate*, 176.

One morning the captain said, “Brother Laird, we have more to lay away this morning.” James had never refused before, but by this time, he was very weak and replied, “I am afraid to use the shovel this morning.” James was given a handful of corn and told, “Eat this [and] do come and help.” James looked at his starving family with whom he had often shared his rations. Mary encouraged him, saying, “Eat that corn, James, to save your strength. I can never make the trip [without you] with the baby nursing.” Remembering how the baby’s mouth after nursing would often be streaked with blood, James walked over to Mary and put the corn in her lap, picked up his shovel and went to fulfill his assignment. He testified that strength was then given to him that remained the rest of the journey.⁵¹⁷

As the pioneers huddled in their tents, the cold weather triggered the beginning stages of bodily and mental deterioration. The calorie intake for the companies had been dramatically cut below what was needed for someone to survive in normal conditions. One study concluded that 4,000 to 5,000 calories are needed to preserve strength during colder weather. Yet, emigrants in the Willie and Martin companies were eating as little as 200 calories a day, and in some instances nothing as many participated in intermittent fasting. The harder they pushed through the heavy snow, the more their bodies exerted the little bit of energy that remained. For the weakest, their livers had already started to break down body fat and protein in a process known as ketosis. During ketosis, their metabolisms slowed down, and their bodies exuded a sour odor which some pioneers recognized as an early sign of death. As their bodies mined muscle and organs, chiefly the kidneys and liver, the simplest of tasks became arduous and time-consuming. Their bodies also shut down many metabolically intense functions. The digestive system becomes irregular, resulting in cramps and diarrhea.⁵¹⁸

As food disappeared, people sought nutrients by boiling animal byproducts into edible substances. Leather became a food source for the starving Saints. By the nineteenth century,

⁵¹⁷ James Laird, *Tell My Story Too*, 59.

⁵¹⁸ Peter J. H. Jones, and Ian K. K. Lee, “Macronutrient Requirements for Work in Cold Environments,” *National Library of Medicine*, (1996): 11.

leather was created through a process called “vegetable tanning.” Repeated soakings of the rawhide in solutions made from the bark of trees mixed with natural and other ingredients generated an acidic chemical reaction. While technically edible, it was extremely difficult on the digestive system and was best made palatable when broken down into a gum-like substance through a long, arduous process. Some consumed the leather from their clothing. Samuel Smith cut the high tops off his shoes and boiled them for soup.⁵¹⁹ Others used the bindings off handcart wheels, which were made with rawhides and cut into strips and used on the rims. George Cunningham confessed, “We used to boil the bones and drink the soup and eat what little meat there was. We greedily devoured the hides also. I myself had took a piece of hide when I could get it, scorched off hair, roasted it a little on the coals, cut it into little pieces so that I could swallow and bolted it down my throat for supper and thought it was most delicious.”⁵²⁰ Mary Hurren from the Willie Company remembered her father finding a piece of rawhide about a foot square and cutting it into small strips boiling it: “We were very thankful to receive them, and chewed them as we would gum until we secured what nourishment there was in it.”⁵²¹

The rawhide and leather disappeared over time, leaving the starving companies to consume anything from boiled willow leaves to bones and glue. A young boy in the Willie Company remembered, “We resorted to eating anything that could be chewed; even bark and leaves of trees.”⁵²² Maria Jackson Normington’s story highlights the extraordinary loss some endured. After losing three children in England, she buried three more as the family succumbed

⁵¹⁹Samuel Jackson, *Tell My Story Too*, 227.

⁵²⁰George Cunningham, *Tell My Story Too*, 23-24.

⁵²¹Mary Hurren, *Tell My Story Too*, 47.

⁵²²John Oborn, *Tell My Story Too*, 96.

to starvation and hypothermia. In her children's final hours, she gave her meager rations to her children, while she ate dirt to satisfy her own hunger pains.⁵²³ Another member of the Willie Company explained that after attempting to consume roots and bark, they cooked cactus or "prickly pears," by placing them in the fire with the buffalo chips to burn off the stickers. "We would," Jensen explained, "peel the skin off and cut them into little pieces and boil them with the roots, hides, or whatever we had, and plenty of water thickened with a little flour. It made a mush or soup."⁵²⁴ Members of both companies stripped the bark of trees and ate nails. While some in the companies acted in unimaginable ways, there were no reports of cannibalism by either group as many simply starved.⁵²⁵

Smells also played an important role in alerting the Saints to the proximity of death. Body systems, one by one, began to shut down. Their metabolism changed so that breath, skin, and fluids gave off a distinctive odor that signaled the end was near. One study concluded that a distinct odor alone could warn healthy individuals of the sickly and dying.⁵²⁶ John Jaques of the Martin Company noted the atrocious smells "because so many had dysentery."⁵²⁷ Perhaps some of the more haunting smells came from the limbs of those which had begun to decay after the frostbite had reached a point of no return. A young girl's feet turned black and produced an awful stench, which influenced the doctors to cut off her legs.⁵²⁸

⁵²³ Maria Jackson Normington, *Tell my Story Too*, 274.

⁵²⁴ Michael Jensen, *Tell my Story Too*, 53.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Wray Herbert, "Are you okay? You smell like cytokines" in *APS, Association For Psychological Science*, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/were-only-human/are-you-okay-you-smell-like-cytokines.html>.

⁵²⁷ Stanley B. Kimball and Violet T. Kimball, *Village on Wheels*, 130.

⁵²⁸ Roberts, *Devil's Gate*, 312.

The smell-scape of the camps let many with an uneasy feeling as they tried to care for their loved ones during their final moments of life. The historian Evan Kutzler postulates that odors become another element of captivity and further dampens their sense of optimism.⁵²⁹ Many pioneers were captive by their own smelly bodies, forced to wallow in their own filth, and too weak to clean themselves. John Chislett observed the Willie company encroaching further towards the depths of starvation. “Before we renewed our journey,” he wrote, “the camp became so offensive and filthy words would fail to describe its condition and even common decency forbids the attempt...It was enough to make the heaven’s weep.”⁵³⁰

On October 24th, James Willie recorded that 13 people had died in the night and needed to be interred. The morning air was cold, the ground was hard, and so one large grave was shallowly dug for all 13 bodies. While Captain Willie or Levi Savage, an assiduous journal keeper, recorded nothing about the smells of those who had died, it is reasonable to infer that the number of dead would have troubled not only the eyes of the those still living but the noses as well. While the cold assuredly masked the smells of quickly decaying bodies, there still would have been the unpleasant scent of death in the air.

In 2016, Lauren Kutschke arrived at Martin’s Cove and embodied the tastes and smell of the handcart pioneers. Her gear was inspected, and the young re-enactors were told to dispose of stashed-away food or deodorant. Kutschke and her small group assembled their handcarts and

⁵²⁹ Evan Kutzler, *Living by Inches: The Smells, Sounds, Tastes, and Feeling of Captivity in Civil War Prisons* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 60. Kutzler’s work has been instrumental in my research as his research touches on similar significances in context of sensory history.

⁵³⁰ John Chislett, “Story and Diaries of the Willie Handcart Company Part 1 of 2,” accessed on Feb 3, 2023, [dist.pdf \(familysearch.org\)](https://familysearch.org).

pushed throughout the day. “We had plenty of water all day long, and when you drank it, the handcart got just a little bit lighter.” Kutschke recalled, “But there was no food given, and we were not allowed to bring our own food. So we were hot, tired, and hungry.”⁵³¹ At 11pm, Kutschke was given a meager bowl of hot soup with bread and slept. In the morning, there were no toilets, so the young trekkers used the woods. In the evening, after another grueling day of pushing handcarts, Kutschke arrived in camp and was told to catch a chicken and kill it. “This was done by chopping off their head.” She wrote, “Thereafter, we had to pluck it, gut it, and clean it. Of course, we cooked it and ate it too.” Kutschke recalled mixed emotions during it all.

Kutschke’s experience was nothing like the emigrants whose diets consisted of dirt and hides. Indeed, an emigrant would have reveled in an opportunity to eat a chicken. However, there is something interesting about meeting the pioneer’s experience part way. The hunger pains that Kutschke felt allowed her to consider what it means to feel fatigue and hunger while in the Wyoming desert. While in her condition Kutschke admitted a closer bond to the pioneers: “For a few days, we were pioneers. We became close as friends and realized just how good we have it.”⁵³²

Conclusion

Smells and tastes are pivotal in understanding how the handcart pioneers transitioned from England to the American prairies and finally to the Wyoming highlands. At times, these two senses united the companies, empowering them as one as they communed in the smells and

⁵³¹ Lauren Kutschke, “I Survived My Chicken-Killing Pioneer Trek,” *LDS Daily*, July 26, 2016.

⁵³² *Ibid.*

tastes of the New World. Yet, at other times these two senses tested their very sensibilities. Their taste buds and olfactory sense played a role in how they understood and engaged with both their immediate environments and wider corporal and spiritual worlds. The pioneers were taught and instructed that cleanliness is close to Godliness. The multi-sensory experience for handcart pioneers was one of unclean smells and tastes. The rancid smells and tastes they encountered affected their spirits as they were trapped in one of the most inhospitable places in the United States.

In the final days before the rescue party arrived, over 200 men women and children succumbed to the storms and died. However, their experience was much more than visual. Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson explains how smell and taste played a role in her final moments with her husband, who “tried to eat but failed.” She sorrowfully wrote, “He had not the strength to swallow.”⁵³³ According to Elizabeth’s journal she struggled to provide any relief or aid to her ailing husband. While she covered her husband with blankets, she spoke of the bitter air that permeated the tent. “I put him to bed, Jackson continued, “and he seemed to rest easy and fall asleep. About 9’oclock I retired.”⁵³⁴ When she awoke, her husband was dead.

⁵³³ Ibid., 231.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

EPILOGUE

On June 20th, the line between re-enacting and reality became blurred. Meaghan Blair, a 29-year-old wife and mother of two children, tragically passed away while participating in trek. She walked in 95-degree weather for seven hours while wearing smothering pioneer clothing. She embodied what pioneer life was like on the overland trail in the nineteenth-century. She had complained about a headache and had drunk little water. She fainted while the re-enactors moved their bodies through the hot sun. After her death, several questions emerged about trek. Some inquired why she continued when she was suffering severely. Others probed more indignantly, asking why Mormon leaders would ask their members to suffer in the scorching heat.⁵³⁵

In 2018, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sent out a statement:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is growing across the earth. As this occurs, local Church leaders and members are encouraged to focus on gospel learning in their homes and to participate in Sabbath worship and the Church's supporting programs for children, youth, individuals and families. The goal of every activity in the Church should be to increase faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and to share His gospel message throughout the world. Local celebrations of culture and history may be appropriate. Larger productions, such as pageants, are discouraged. As it relates to existing pageants, conversations with local Church and community leaders are underway to appropriately end, modify or continue these productions.⁵³⁶

True to their word, by 2019 the Church shut down two of their largest theatrical productions, the Hill Cumorah Pageant, and the Manti Pageant. The decision produced positive and negative responses. In the comment section of the *Deseret News*, Norman Wright lamented the end of pageantry: "I met many people who are now members of the Church of Jesus Christ of

⁵³⁵ Tad Walch, "Mormon Youth Leader Dies on Trek Outing in Oklahoma," *Deseret News*, June 21, 2016.

⁵³⁶ Tad Walch, "Church finalizes pageant decision: 4 to end, 3 to continue," *Deseret News*, Dec 5, 2018.

Latter-day Saints who indicated that their conversion started at the Hill Cumorah Pageant. Both of my children cited their participation in the Pageant as a foundational block of their testimonies and decisions to serve missions.”⁵³⁷ Others saw the decision as a sign of progress. One member asserted “The Church decision to discontinue the folklore pageantry and focus on home true education makes good sense.”⁵³⁸ Believers were torn by the policy decision. Some saw the benefits of pageantry, while others claimed they overdramatized sacred events.

This led many to wonder what would become of trek. It was one thing to end pageants, and something different to discontinue a youth movement that became a global phenomenon. Trek’s still take place every summer, but with more oversight. It’s evident that the further the Church moves away from the 1997 sesquicentennial; the less intense re-enactments are. The days of unfettered autonomy which produced the trek stories in previous chapters is gone. The Church has reigned in the more anachronistic and unsafe activities previously unmonitored. Two years ago, while meeting with a Church employee who asked to remain anonymous, I asked him, “Is the Church worried about re-enactments that are potentially dangerous?” Without hesitation, he replied, “Very worried.” Consequently, the Church has become more explicit with its guidelines, and the supervisors at Martin’s Cove are trained to keep a close on trek groups.

Despite the changes, trek is more popular and global than ever. In an interesting study of syncretism, many cultures interject their own norms as they re-enact the handcart experience. One of the more curious treks occurred in Mongolia in 2012. Just like other trek groups they wore pioneer clothing, made homemade handcarts, sung pioneer songs, and even re-enacted the

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

Sweetwater River crossing. However, they cooked a goat's head for one of their meals. They encountered camels, yaks, and goats as they walked in the Mongolian high desert. In Coomera Australia, 120 youth participated in their first-ever pioneer trek. While the trek was like any other, they still adopted some of their own cultural norms, including food and clothing to the re-enactment.⁵³⁹

Global treks demonstrate the power of cultural fusing. Ethnographers and anthropologists describe cultural blending to be like a braided stream with different channels flowing into one another, then splitting again. Humans have always interacted, and their ideas, innovations, goods, and cultural practices, not to mention genes, have constantly flowed from one community to another. For the trekkers in Mongolia and Australia, the re-enactors learn to take ownership of the handcart pioneers' experiences. They imagine their own rivers as the Sweetwater, their hills as Rocky Ridge, and their canyons as Martin's Cove. When the sensory experiences of the handcart pioneer are studied, and there is a combination of natural places, handcarts, and bodies, embodying is possible.

Within Mormon history, this manuscript hopes to place the handcart pioneers into a larger conversation about Latter-day Saint theology on bodily progression in this life. Historian Benjamin Park's article "Salvation through a Tabernacle," validates how the body and senses must go through a "refining fire" for salvation. When apostle Parley P. Pratt addressed the importance of bodies, he profoundly declared, "What kind of salvation then do we need? I reply, we need salvation from death and the grave, as well as from our sins...a salvation not only of our

⁵³⁹ Marianne Holman Prescott, "Modern-day Mongolian pioneers re-enact trek," *The Church News*, July 2012; Rachel Sterzer Gibson, "Youth in Queensland, Australia, Participate in Pioneer Trek Reenactment," *The Church News*, December 15, 2022.

spirits, but of our body and parts, of our flesh and bones, of our hands, and feet and head, with every organ, limb and joint.”⁵⁴⁰ Pratt’s view that the body is a vehicle to salvation aligns with Joseph Smith’s teachings. Smith preached about what foods and drinks to consume, when to retire to bed, and how to prepare one’s body for sanctification. He claimed that it was “the design of God before the foundation of the world...that we should take tabernacles that through faithfulness we should overcome.”⁵⁴¹ Pratt continued to express the need for bodily progression in this life: “The very germs of these Godlike attributes, being engendered in man, the offspring of Deity,” he reasoned, “only need cultivating, improving, developing, and advancing by means of a series of progressive changes, in order to arrive at the fountain ‘Head,’ the standard, the climax of Divine Humanity.”⁵⁴² Pratt uses Christ’s resurrection to maintain “Here was an end of mysticism; here was a material salvation; here was flesh and bones, immortal, and celestial, prepared for eternal bloom in the mansions of glory; and this demonstrated by the sense of seeing, feeling, and hearing.”⁵⁴³

When Brigham Young received a second anointing, or a consecration to ensure his salvation, Heber C. Kimball blessed Young’s individual organs and senses: “I anoint thy eyes that they may see and perceive . . . and that thy sight may never fail thee: and I anoint thy ears that they may be quick to hear and communicate to thy understanding . . . and I anoint thy nose that thou may scent, and relish the fragrance of good things of the earth: and I anoint thy mouth

⁵⁴⁰ Benjamin E. Park, “Salvation through a Tabernacle: Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt, and Early Mormon Theologies of Embodiment,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 43, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 2.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.* 25

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.* 18.

that thou mayest be enabled to speak the great things of God.”⁵⁴⁴ Young’s senses became a key component to his journey to Godhood.

Testing one’s body to reach godliness is steeped in Latter-day Saint doctrine. In 1918, the Apostle Orson F. Whitney wrote, “Is not this God’s purpose in causing his children to suffer? He wants them to become more like himself.”⁵⁴⁵ James E. Faust declared that “The blessings of eternity will surely come to those who endure refining, as the Lord Himself taught: “He only is saved who endureth unto the end.”⁵⁴⁶

This dissertation maintains that the handcart pioneer’s journey became the quintessential example of the type of bodily transition that is necessary to refine one’s body for salvation. This is confirmed by this manual used to instruct young Latter-day Saints how the handcart pioneers became *the* example of bodily sacrifice for sanctification. In the section, “The Handcart Pioneers,” there is an excerpt from the journal of Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson. Her details are illuminating about the physical strength handcart pioneers used to prove their loyalty to God: “I believe the Recording Angel has inscribed in the archives above,” Jackson wrote, “and that my sufferings for the Gospel’s sake will be sanctified unto me for my good”⁵⁴⁷ The manual then asks the reader to ponder, “What do you think the phrase sanctified unto me for my good means?”⁵⁴⁸ The authors answer the question in parentheses: “(Her suffering would be made sacred and holy for her benefit).”⁵⁴⁹ Here, the Church reveals two important ideas: first, physical suffering is

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid. 26.

⁵⁴⁵ James E. Faust, “Refined in our Trials,” *Ensign*, 36, no. 2 (February 2006).

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ “Handcart Pioneers, 1856–1860,” *Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Seminary Teacher Manual*, 150, (2013).

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

inevitable and essential for sanctification. “If we suffer patiently for the gospel’s sake,” LDS scripture teaches, “it can sanctify us for good.”⁵⁵⁰ Second, the handcart pioneers, and those who rescued them, became the pinnacle example of physical sacrifice and courage.

President Gordon B. Hinkley validated this while addressing the pioneer’s struggle in context of contemporary trials.

I am grateful that today none of our people are stranded on the Wyoming highlands. But I know that all about us there are many who are in need of help and who are deserving of rescue. Our mission in life, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, must be a mission of saving. There are the homeless, the hungry, the destitute. Their condition is obvious... We have done much. We can do more to help those who live on the edge of survival. It is not with those on the high plains of Wyoming that we need be concerned today. It is with many immediately around us, in our families, in our wards and stakes, in our neighborhoods and communities.⁵⁵¹

From a broader perspective, what I’ve written here attempts to re-enforce the legitimacy of sensory history by focusing on the merits of living history. Tony Horwitz’s book *Confederates in the Attic* was less about the battlefields, gravesites, and museums, and more about the people he encountered at these places where they imitate their ancestors. In such moments, the Civil War re-enactor cultivates powerful connections with dead soldiers. Their sensory experiences on these battlegrounds reveals how the War became more meaningful. This becomes clearer when one looks at these significant landmarks like Gettysburg. Mark Fiege explains in his monumental book *the Republic of Nature*, “Gettysburg still was a place in which to make an ‘imaginative entry into the past.’ The landscape had changed, to be sure, but it still could evoke powerful

⁵⁵⁰ 1 Peter 3:15.

⁵⁵¹ Gordon B. Hinkley, “Our Mission of Saving,” *Ensign*, November 1991, 59.

feelings...for brief electric moments, the barrier that separates present and past, living, and dead, could seem to disappear.”⁵⁵²

Environmental historians are dedicated to convincing other scholars the value in studying what Paul Sutter calls the “interweaving of the natural and the cultural in complex ways.”⁵⁵³ As sensory historians, we are historians of the body, and as Michelle Murphy reminds us “bodies can concretely be many things at once.”⁵⁵⁴ While there are many ways to examine how environmental forces connect and combine with human actions to produce complex historical phenomena, an important framework worth considering is how humans make sense of their existence through their sensory experiences. For religious groups, there is meaning associated with the excitation of neuromotor function that flows from cultures. Scholars have long studied this link of physiological conditions when transcendence is connected to religious traditions. As the neuroscientist Andrew Newberg explains, “When you contemplate God long enough something surprising happens in the brain. Neural functions begin to change. Different circuits become activated, while others become deactivated.”⁵⁵⁵ When Latter-day Saints claim spiritual experiences re-enacting the pioneer trek, their brains are experiencing the multisensory environment which shapes their connection.

⁵⁵² Mark Fiege, *Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 227.

⁵⁵³ Paul Sutter, “The World with Us: The State of American Environmental History,” *The Journal of American History* 100, no. 1 (2013): 97.

⁵⁵⁴ Michelle Murphy, “And All was Light?—Science and Environmental History” in *Oxford Handbook of Environmental History* ed. Andrew C. Isenberg, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 241.

⁵⁵⁵ Andrew B. Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2010), 3.

This project encourages historians to consider how people connect to history through their sensory experiences in more subtle ways. Every year, millions of people travel to sites deemed either sacred or culturally significant. While most are not attempting to embody the people who existed in these locations, they are still experiencing these places through multiple senses. When tourists visit Stalingrad in snowy conditions and their bodies and senses are exposed to a similar environment the Russian soldiers encountered in 1942, are they more attuned to history than if they visited the site in the summer? If someone fasts for three days before visiting Yeravda Jail where Mahatma Gandhi began his hunger strike, does the visitor create sublime connections with Ghandhi as their body is craving food?

This dissertation claims that to explain these types of experiences, two things must be considered. What do the sources say about the sensory experiences the Russian soldiers had at Stalingrad, or how Gandhi felt while on his hunger strikes? And do people have heightened sensorial experiences when they try to replicate that experience today?

In 2018, I interviewed the artist Adam Bateman, a somewhat local celebrity in Salt Lake City, who had made a name for himself by walking the entire Mormon Trail. We sat across from each other in a dingy diner as he recalled the 1,300 miles he travelled. He talked about the landmarks, and the bodily aches and pains that intensified as the days turned into weeks. At one point, with tears in his eyes, he recalled one poignant experience walking through Wyoming. “I became completely lost within myself.” Lightening was in the sky and the rain began to slowly fall on me. I felt truly alone, but also, in a weird way, I also felt connected through my body to the pioneers who walked the same ground and saw the same sights. It was indescribable.” Before

we parted ways, he looked into my eyes and encouraged me to not only see but participate in a re-enactment.

As I walked back to my vehicle, my mind was swirling with curiosity. I became gripped by his story, and it left me wanting to understand what Bateman and thousands of others experience as they try and connect to their pioneer ancestors through their bodies. I called my parents to confirm that my relative, Edward Bunker, was chosen to lead one of the first companies from Iowa City to Salt Lake City. That next day, I called Gene Sessions and asked if he wanted to take a drive with me to Martin's Cove.

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