

CHARLES W. MARTIN

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October 15, 1981

Dear Merrill:

We have recently been corresponding about, among other things, the death of Almon W. Babbitt. I have now found a little more information about it. I am enclosing three pages of a translation of a book written in Danish and called VOR TIDS MOHAMED, (Present Day Mohamed) and written by John Ahmanson. It was published in Omaha in 1876. John Ahmanson was a Mormon convert who led a number of Danes from Copenhagen to Liverpool where they joined other English Mormons. They sailed to the United States, finally arriving in Iowa City where they built handcarts. This was in the year 1856. Ahmanson was the Captain of the Scandinavian Hundred in Captain Willie's Handcart Company the got caught in the snows west of Devil's Gate where a number of them perished before being rescued. Ahmanson became very bitter with Mormonism; he left the next spring (1857) but could not bring his personal goods back to the States with him. He later sued Brigham Young and collected from him in the Territorial Court of Nebraska. His book above listed is a blast at Brigham Young and Mormonism in general. However he did write about his experiences overland from Iowa City to Salt Lake City.

The enclosed three pages tell of his meeting with Babbitt. But you will also note he tells of two massacres, the first one of an advance party of Babbitt's people located about one day's travel west of Fort Kearny. He meets Babbitt a couple of day's travel west of Fort Kearny on August 31, 1856. He states Babbitt had with him three people; his driver, a lady and a child. It is a little different story than the other ones about Babbitt. Anyway, I think it helps to tie in the year that it happened.

Sincerely,

Charlie

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March 4, 1982

Merrill J. Mattes
5800 W. Plymouth Drive
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Dear Merrill:

I received your letter of February 2nd.

Enclosed is translation of the John Ahmanson trip across the plains to Salt Lake City. It isn't very long or detailed so doubt if you will want to include it, but anyway, here it is. I hope you can read the first few pages. The fellow that translated it for me used all kinds of scratch paper and these first pages were typed on bright yellow paper & the xerox copies didn't come out very well. The book is printed in old type German. It is called VOR TIDS MUHAMED. It was written by John Ahmanson and printed in Omaha, Neb. in the year 1876.

Had a letter from Greg Franzwa the other day about his maps of the Oregon Trail. I guess he is anxious to make sure that they are correct. I also will help if I can.

Bob Berry and I have sort of a wild idea to head out next August to try to explore the Applegate-Lassen trail from Rabbit Hole Spring up through the Black Rock Desert to High Rock Canyon. Bob has been in touch with Tom Hunt who wrote the book, GHOST TRAILS TO CALIFORNIA and Tom has been sending him detailed maps and giving advice on how to navigate the desert area. Sounds interesting. Don't know if I can argue Mary into this trip or not!

How many pages long is your book going to be? It sure sounds like you have run into a never-ending job!

Best regards,

Charlie

THE TRIP TO UTAH

In a beautiful almost poetic manner appeared in the Mormonism the longing "to go home to Zion." Many of the psalms expressed this in gripping words, and at all opportunities the apostles emphasized the new age with its rich promises. It was natural therefore, that the saints with great impatience looked forward to ^{the} that day, when they could begin the trip to Utah, even though the departure from the homeland for the moment might sit more or less heavily in their heart.

The 23 of April, 1856, one hundred and sixty two Mormons left Copenhagen on the steamship "Rhoda". The author of this little work had been assigned as leader of this little company of immigrants across the North Sea. They arrived in Liverpool on the 30 of April in good shape; there we joined with 608 English and Scotch Mormons who also stood ready to "go home to Zion", and the 4th of May our trip over the Atlantic with the ship "Thronton" began. It is not my intention here to give descriptions of something which is so well known as a sea trip on an immigrant ship is nowadays. We Mormons suffered no more hardships aboard than other immigrants under the same conditions; maybe even less, because an appropriate organization in which the Latter Day Saints steadily had excelled was not missing among us on the ship either. Frederick D. Richards in Liverpool, one of the leading apostles of the new Zion and "president of the European mission" had designated a president and three advisors to keep tab on the Saints on the trip.

An elder, E. J. Willis, was designated president. Milton Atwood, James Clough, and I were advisors. As it happened nothing strange occurred on our long and rather stormy ^{transit} ~~trip~~ unless one might consider six deaths, three births, ~~an~~ ^{and} two marriages.

The 14th of June we arrived in New York, where the apostle John Taylor received us, and under his leadership the trip continued to Iowa City which lies approximately 1300 English miles east of Salt Lake City, counted at that time about 3000 population and was important, as starting point for an important immigration. - The railroads ended here; if you wanted to go further west, the trip had to be continued in some other manner. The common transport method on the western prairies naturally consisted of wagons, to which ~~hu~~ were hitched horses, mules, or oxen; But this year the prophet Brigham Young had made a big invention in this business. Because it involved a big outlay to move the usually poor immigrants over the prairie in the usual manner, he had ^{therefore} decided that the immigrants themselves could pull their wagons.

At our arrival in Iowa City we found many Mormons busily employed in the manufacture of a kind of two-wheeled cart (hand cart), which weighed about sixty pounds, and each of these carts was designed for five people, each with 17 pounds baggage, which consisted of the necessary clothing and cooking apparatus. The more affluent immigrants of course preferred travelling in the regular manner and of course did so; but F. D. Richards had asked me to ^{accompany} ~~take~~ the poor Danes with the hand-cart train, as I was the only one of them, who had any ability in English. - After I had arranged to have my wife ride on the customary wagon train, to which some of the Danish immigrants had joined, I yielded also to this his wish, though it was obvious, that this trip would be extremely difficult.

The hand-cart train, which consisted of about 500 people, broke camp at Iowa City the 16th of July, 1856, with 23 tents, 94 hand-carts and 5 big provision wagons. H. D. Willie took over the leadership and divided us in 5 sections. Each section had a big wagon with three pairs of oxen pulling, which carried the provisions and the tents.

The provision was designed for a daily ration for each man of one pound wheat flour, two and a Half ounce pork, two ounces sugar, two ounces dried apples, one-fourth ounce coffee, plus a little tea, soda and soap.

The 5th division consisted of 93 Scandinavians, for whom I was chosen
assigned as leader; but the honor with this post was small, and
 advantages even less; because it led to this, that I myself had to
 drive the wagon with the three pair of oxen, none of the others seemed
 able to that and it is by the way also a difficult job, because you
 have no reins to steer the animals with, but only a long whip and
 certain stereotyped expressions in the ox language. In the middle
of August we reached Florence, a little city, lying on the west side
of the Missouri River, at that time the boundary line between the
"Red man" and the "pale faces" territory. Here I met Elder van Gott
 together with several high-standing missionaries who were on the trip
 home to Salt Lake City from their different missions in Europe and
 Asia.

We received here a number of slaughter cattle, which were to furnish
us with meat for the rest of the trip--to be butchered as we needed
 them.

As we still had 1000 miles left many who knew the climatic conditions
 of the country thought that we should stay the winter in Florence,
 but the prophet H. C. Kimball's oldest son then rode into the middle
 of the camp and gave a speech, wherein he sharply corrected these
people of little faith, plus promising to "shove all that snow in his
 mouth which we would get to see on the trip to the valley!" Thus
 of course such every hesitation had to disappear. Captain Willie
 also said that he would continue the trip until receiving orders from
 Brigham Young to halt.

Travelling continued. The 29th of August we reached Fort Kearney and visited the Omaha Indians chief who was encamped there with his tribe. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ The savages offered us courteously the peace pipe and gave us, in return for some gifts to their chief, a good deal of dried buffalo meat. We were told here, that a little company belonging to Secretary Babbit * had been murdered by a band of Cheyenne Indians. We reached that place the following day and found the burned out wagons, plus the bodies of two men and a child. On the 31st we were overtaken by Secretary Babbit, who was coming home from a visit in Washington, he now had only his driver and a lady with a little child with him. He said, that except for these Cheyennes he was personally acquainted with every Indian tribe between the Missouri River and Utah.

He had travelled this way several times, once all alone, and believed now that he would be perfectly sure to get through in spite of the accident which overtaken those men, that had carried his baggage. After a short rest with us he continued again at a gallop trading his sturdy light-footed mules and his own experience.

We continued forward on Nebraska's immense prairies, which stretches from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains- about 500 miles. The road parallels nearly all the time the Platte River, which runs from west to east in a valley, which in some places is 10 or 15 miles wide. The land seems fruitful, has mainly a rich grass growth, but on account of yearly prairie fires, which draws over the plain, you find neither trees nor bushes, except here and there, where a little river with its twisting has been able to block the Fire-King's fury.

President Fillmore had already in 1851 acknowledged Utah as a territory of the Union and appointed Brigham Young governor with Babbit as secretary. By the way Babbit had resigned from the Mormonism.

Our trip went fairly well until the 3rd of September, but that day an unlucky happening occurred which later caused us much trouble and the death of many people. It was already evening when we made camp and the darkness was increased yet more by a terrible storm, which ~~continued~~ ^{raged} all night. Shortly before the weather broke, many of us heard a strange noise, which sounded like the noise of a rapidly passing wagons; but none such showed up, we thought that it came from a ^{herd} flock of buffaloes passing by and settled down to rest. Next morning however we discovered that 22 oxen the majority of our ~~pulling stock~~ draft animals had disappeared and even their tracks had been erased by the rain. It happens often on these ^{extensive} ~~wide~~ plains ^{where} ~~that~~ the animals seem to get some of their original wildness back, that oxen, mules and horses when they get scared, suddenly take off like crazy. If you can follow them immediately on a good horse until they are tired out it is sometimes possible to drive them back; but it is impossible to stop them sooner. Such an animal run is called a "stampede." We never saw the oxen again, although we spent three days hunting for them. There were now only twelve oxen left besides the slaughter cattle consisting of cows and young stock. We tried now without much results, to use these as draft animals. - The end result was that part of our provisions had to be loaded on the hand-carts and thus we continued the trip; but it was slow, very slow progress.

Early ~~er~~ on the morning of the 18th of September, before my night watch yet was ended, I saw a rider approaching our camp. I took him at first to be an Indian but closer scrutiny showed him to be dressed in a military cloak, and altogether he looked like an American soldier. He told of having travelled from Fort Laramie in company with two families who had left Utah* in order to return to the States.

**

The two families names were Margetts and Coudy They were apostates on the road to England, and there is suspicion that "Bill Hickman" and two other Mormons had been sent out to murder them.

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While he had gone out on the previous morning to shoot a buffalo the

Indians had murdered all the others. ~~xxxx~~ On his return he found the wagons all aflame and the bodies of his companions, five adults and an infant child. Since then he had full of fright continued his trip on the prairie about 70 miles without stopping until he reached us. Secretary ^{Babbit} with his 3 companions had likewise been murdered by "Cheyenne Indians". On Sunday the 18th of October the first snow fell. But the same day we met three wagons loaded with provisions which had been sent out from Salt Lake City. Our pitiful condition had become known there because some Mormon dignitaries in coaches had passed us on the road and had informed Brigham Young. Joseph ^{A.} Young (Brigham's oldest son) with whom I had become acquainted in Denmark, was the leader of this aid-train. The provision however was not meant for us, but for two immigrant trains still further back. However, we were comforted with the information that on the following day we would meet 14 wagons with provisions, which was intended for us. It was welcome information, Young was paid with repeated hurrahs, hurrahs, until he left us. This evening we made camp by a little river called "Sweetwater" and divided happily that little bit of provision we had left and which consisted of just a little bit of bread which we had bought in Laramie. Rations had already for a long time been reduced to the point of only 6 ounces of flour a day; coffee ^{and tea} had long since been used up. We beleived now to have survived the worst; but to hunger and over-work should now be added cold and nakedness! When we made camp in the evening by the little river the ~~sun~~ warmth of the sun had melted the snow and we went to sleep with good hopes for the future; but the following morning we awoke with a different feeling. The snow fell during the night a foot deep and the area around Sweetwater which under no condition seemed encouraging seemed now twice as desolate and hopeless: the last provisions ^{had been passed out} ~~were divided~~ AND THE ANIMALS, WHERE SHOULD THEY FIND FOOD?

Three days dragged along, but no wagons came; we then sent out two men to see if they could possibly have passed us and missed us. Finally they aid-train came on the evening of the 21st of October led by the so-called Snow-Prophet George Kimball. He was hardly as brave now as in Florence, but the necessary ~~impudence~~ audacity in the body of the son of the Mormon prophet was not lacking. Captain Willie was dismissed immediately and Kimball took over the leadership of the immigrant train. The supply of provisions and clothing were divided, but they were sadly lacking in the bitter winter which now came on.

Captain Kimball had now decided to make forced marches. He had the whole plan how this should be done in his head and he was the man capable of getting it done. We broke camp on the 23rd of October from Sweetwater in the following order: children at the head, oldsters and sick who still ambulant ^{were} marched away under leadership of a certain infamous ~~renowned~~ bricklayer apprentice from Copenhagen by the name of Christensen *. ~~Following~~ ^{After these} ~~Following~~ came these two-wheeled hell machines ^{devised} ~~invented~~ by Brigham Young drawn by worn out men and women. The wagons closed up this sad parade. This travel order however did not last long, for many were soon behind with the hand-carts, they were unable to keep up with the order set by Kimball. There was a Dane by the name of Niels Andersen who during nearly the whole trip was shown to be one of the strongest and bravest of the whole train. He had often set his 14-year old daughter on the cart when she was tired and he still ~~dr~~ went on as fast as anybody else. But lately he had been attacked by dysentery which now had begun to take its toll on the others. Today he ~~was~~ had failed to the extent that he

He came from the western states on a mission from Utah and had joined us in Florence. Later he was accused of having murdered a deaf mute boy while he was engaged as a postman in Salt Lake City. He admitted the murder, but was acquitted. The court could not even determine the cause of the murder.

had been placed in Christensen's group and his wife had to pull their cart alone. She had naturally dropped back and I therefore helped her till we reached the camp place. Then it went fairly well but we could not catch up with the train. About noon time we caught up with her husband, who toddled along the road and seemed as helpless as a child; he broke out in heart rending complaints when he saw us. His wife comforted him as well as she could and gave him food, which he ate hungrily. We stopped to wait for some other carts which were yet further behind us and to try to get him up for a ride. Finally Savage arrived captain of the wagons with an ox wagon; but he refused to take Andersen because the wagon as he said was already over-filled. After a serious exchange of words with me, and after convincing himself, by certain less-gentle experiments that the man was not able to walk finally permitted him in the wagon. This forced march day also ended; but not till two hours ^{after} it became dark, ~~did we catch up with~~ ~~one of the~~ in company with one of the Utah wagons ~~did we reach~~ which we had caught up with did we reach the camp place, where the first arrivals already had made fire and set up the tents. The last ox wagon arrived about midnight; but as several hand-carts still were missing some wagons were sent out to help them and it was 4:30 in the morning before the last ones were in camp.

Next morning the 24th of October 14 immigrants were found frozen to death in our camp, Niels Andersen among them. Two died later in the day. They were all buried in a large square grave, which on account of the cold had to be chopped out of the ground with axes. These were the first-fruits of ~~the Snow-Prophet's~~ George Kimball, the Snow-Prophet's forced march. The ill feeling towards him was common; I myself was simple enough to threaten him that I would prefer charges against him

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to Brigham Young! O thou~~s~~ believeing simpleton! The prophet laughed right in my face. It was now no longer necessary for him to wear his sanctimonious mask. Through the sheepskin of Mormonism the wolf claws ~~were~~ began to stick out. - Though travelling continued at a slower pace from now on nearly everyone of our natural campgrounds became marked by a fresh grave. God knows, how many of us had survived had not Brigham Young from Salt Lake City where our sad conditions ~~were~~ ^{was} well-known sent the one aid-train after the other to help us. When we reached Fort Bridger (120 miles from Salt Lake City) we no longer needed to use these two-wheeled people destroyers and every one who needed ~~it~~ ^{it} could ride. The 8th of December with the crossing of "Big Mountain" we looked ~~down~~ ^{down} for the first time into the ~~valleys~~ ^{valleys} where the Lord's folks had set up quarters, and where the prophecies which awaited them would be fulfilled. Many forgot the past ordeals at this sudden view and the following day, a Sunday, we all broke up; under expectant conversation we drove quickly down through the 12-mile long and narrow "Immigration Canyon," to the big Salt Lake Valley, where we from 7 miles distance could see the capitol of Mormonism and Brigham Young, Salt Lake City. At this distance the city with its light grey adobe houses looked like an immense tent camp and the Salt Lake Valley which is about 30 miles wide from east to west looked like a basin or a dried out lake with its giant mountain masses reaching up all around.

Though vegetation ~~new~~ was dead and the eye saw nothing but an empty treeless valley surrounded by naked red mountains the impression of the whole was very pleasant. The climate was still mild and pleasant down there and the giant cliffs or mountain masses which on all sides reached into the sky gave the place an imposing almost romantic ~~look~~ appearance.

Our train reached the city after noon. While we made halt- right outside Brigham Young's palace- many people and the bishops of the city came from the nearby Tabernacle. The Prophet himself did not honor us with his presence; he was probably ashamed to look at our terrible worn out condition, the result of his own short-sighted and miserable plan, but he had ordered his bishop to be ready at our arrival to see to our quartering in the different districts in the city; I was immediately ~~surrounded~~ surrounded by some old friends from Denmark who for quite some time had lived in Utah. They took me home with them with great friendliness after my travel companions whom I now for the main part saw for the last time had been ~~quartered~~ housed. This Year's last immigrant train, namely "Martin's Hand-Cart Company" and "The Independent Wagon Company" containing my wife arrived in Salt Lake City the 17th of December in ^{an} ~~a~~ if possible still worse condition than ours had been. The Wagon Company lost nearly all its draft animals and as a result had to leave the goods and the wagon on the road. Part of this they left in Laramie but the greater part in Fort Bridger and at the Devil's Gate. This was one of the worst winters that man had known. The snow lay a foot deep in the valleys and two to three feet in the mountains. I had been very anxious about my wife and my little son and had sought ⁱⁿ every manner possible to be sent out with an aid-train to meet them but in vain; I was successful only in getting a buffalo hide, a little coffee, sugar, etc sent with the wagons to bring them in. She received the buffalo hide but not the other. On the 17th of December I went by myself to meet them and reached them at the foot of "little Mountain". Who could describe my happiness to find both my dear ones in good health! Forgotten were the difficulties of travel and the long separation and happily we rode into Zion.