

Martin Co. Meeting - Bessemer Bend/Red Buttes Camp - Oct. 27, 1856

Louisa Mellor (Martin Handcart Company)

At last the Company gave up and decided they could go no further. We all gathered around and held a meeting, praying God to help us, as we knew it was Him alone who could deliver us from death. We were happy and willing to die for a just cause.

(Louisa Mellor account)

Peter McBride (Martin Handcart Company)

We camped at the Sweetwater [Platte] River. A meeting was held. It was decided that we could go no further, the snow so deep and no food. We were doomed to starvation. They gave me a bone of an ox that had died. I cut off the skin and put the bone in the fire to roast. And when it was done some big boys came and ran away with it. Then I took the skin and boiled it, drank the soup, and ate the skin, and it was a good supper. The next day we had nothing to eat but some bark from trees. . . . That day we got word that some teams were coming to meet us from the Valley. . . . No one but a person having gone through what we had suffered can imagine what a happy moment it was for this 'belated handcart company.' Men, women, and children knelt down and thanked the Almighty God for our delivery from certain death. It put new life into all the Saints.

(Peter McBride account)

Elizabeth Sermon (Martin Handcart Company)

The weather was getting colder, food was getting less and storms more frequent. The animals drawing the wagons were getting weaker. . . . We traveled on until a heavy snow storm overtook us and further progress could not be made. . . . The Captain called us all together and stated that we must lay our bodies down, and "were we willing to do so for the Gospel's sake?" Many a poor, starved man shouted with their remaining strength, "Aye", but mothers could not say that, so were quiet. Food would have suited us better, for we did not think altogether about religion, but my faith was still in my Father in Heaven.

(From letter to Elizabeth's children dated March 16, 1892)

Eliza Morton (Martin Handcart Company)

Worn out with the wearisome journey, half-starved, footsore and heartsick, Eliza Morton told in after years how she often sat on a bank as a stop was made along the dreary journey, surrounded by deep and glistening snow, and thought of the home she had forsaken. Eliza also related how when the weather was below zero, she carried water from a river for camp purposes when the handles of the buckets would freeze to her hands. So desperate was their situation when almost without food, snowbound in the Black Hill [Red Buttes], their Captain, Edward Martin, stood before them as they sat huddled about the embers of a dying campfire and asked whether if it should be the will of the Lord that they may perish there, they were willing to submit to his will. Each man and woman raised his or her hand as a signal of their submission. Characteristic of her faith, Eliza Morton remarked, 'I held up my hand but I didn't believe we were going to die.' None of those imbued with the true spirit of the pioneers, and supported by a mightier power than man's, could have sung the songs of Zion as did those staunch emigrants as they gathered about the campfire.

(From account written by Eliza Morton Anderson's daughter, Harriet Yardley, and Harriet's children.)

Timeline and significance of these quotes:

- Oct. 16, 1856 Weather has started to get cold. Feed for the cattle is scarce. Flour rations reduced from 1 lb. to 12 oz. per day for adults, from 8 oz. to 6 oz. for children.
- Oct. 17, 1856 Near Deer Creek. Baggage reduced from 17 lbs. to 10 lbs. for adults and to 5 lbs. for children. Discarded and burned items included clothing, bed linens and blankets.
- Oct. 19, 1856 Martin Company crossed the N. Platte River for the last time at the "Upper Crossing". The Church had operated a ferry at that site a few years previously, but it was no longer in use. (Ft. Casper was not built at this site until 1865.) There was a toll bridge that they had passed about 5 miles before, but the toll was too high for them to afford it. It was known as "Richard's Bridge" and was located by a small trading post sometimes known as "Ft. Bridge".

As the Martin Co. crossed this wide and swift river, the first winter storm descended, adding to the misery of the "ice cakes" already floating down the river and cutting their legs. Many were swept off their feet and downstream. Many were the heroics of that day, as members of the Hodgett and Hunt Wagon Companies as well as the Martin Company helped to carry others across.

The storm and the river crossing took its toll on the people and the animals. They made little progress over the next few days. (This was the beginning of what some call the "9-day camp.")

- Oct. 20, 1856 Moved only 3 ½ miles through 1 foot of snow. Rations reduced again.
- Oct. 21-22 More snow. Unable to move. (Rescue wagons arrive at Willie Camp near Sixth Crossing of Sweetwater. Of the 14 relief wagons, 10 are sent on to find and rescue the three rear companies. (Sometimes referred to as "The Willie Sacrifice".)
- Oct. 23, 1856 Move 5 - 6 miles to "Red Buttes" camp at Bessemer Bend of the N. Platte River. More snow. (Willie Company is ascending Rocky Ridge in a blizzard.)
- Oct. 24, 1856 Unable to move. More snow. (Burial of 13 in common grave at Rock Creek - Willie Co.)
- Oct. 25, 1856 Unable to move. Rations reduced again.
- Oct. 26, 1856 Unable to move.
- Oct. 27, 1856 Unable to move. Only 1 day of meager rations left. Captain Martin calls meeting.
- Oct. 28, 1856 Express riders Joseph A. Young, Abel Garr and Dan Jones find the Martin Co. (See their stories in the rescuers section of the book *Tell My Story, Too*.)
-

- 3 Nephi 1:9 Compare - Tells of the impending death of the believers in 1 day if their promised sign of their "rescuer" did not appear.
- 3 Nephi 1:13 Compare to Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson's account of her recently deceased husband appearing to her on Oct. 27, 1856, and telling her to "cheer up," that "deliverance [was] at hand". Grace Wignall bio., tells of similar angelic messenger on Oct. 27. See also Jane Bitton bio. indicating she thought death was imminent. She had gone down to the river to wash and put on clean clothing so she could "die clean." (See these in Martin Company section of *Tell My Story, Too*)