

CHAPTER 5

SNOWBOUND AT

RED BUTTES



Mother, the snow

has come.



D N OCTOBER 18, THE RESCUERS CAMPED AT THE HEAD OF THE SWEETWATER, WITH STILL NO SIGN OF THE WILLIE OR MARTIN COMPANIES.

More than one hundred miles east, the Hunt Wagon Company passed the Martin Company. The Hunt Company clerk wrote, "It was enough to draw forth one's sympathy for them, seeing the aged and women and children pulling their handcarts, many of them showing haggard countenances."²⁰

Facing the companies was the last crossing of the North Platte. The river was wide, the current strong, the water frigid. A well-made bridge reached across the river, but the toll was prohibitive for the pioneers.

James Bleak recorded of the Martin Company experience: "October 19: We crossed the Platte, very trying in consequence of its width and the cold weather." Josiah Rogerson observed, "The crossing of the North Platte was fraught with more fatalities than any other incident of the entire journey. . . . Blocks of mushy snow and ice had to be dodged. . . . Some of the men carried some of the women on their backs or in their arms, but others of the women tied up their skirts and waded through like the heroines they were."

"When we were in the middle of the river I saw a poor man carrying his child on his back," Patience Loader recalled. "He fell down in the water. I never knew if he was drowned or not. I felt sorry that we could not help him, but we had all we could do to save ourselves from drowning." Her mother had carried dry socks in the pockets of her skirts to exchange for those soaked in the crossings. But this time, the Saints needed more than dry socks: "We had to travel in our wet

**Mother,
has com**



-David Mink-

STOPPED AT RED BUTTES

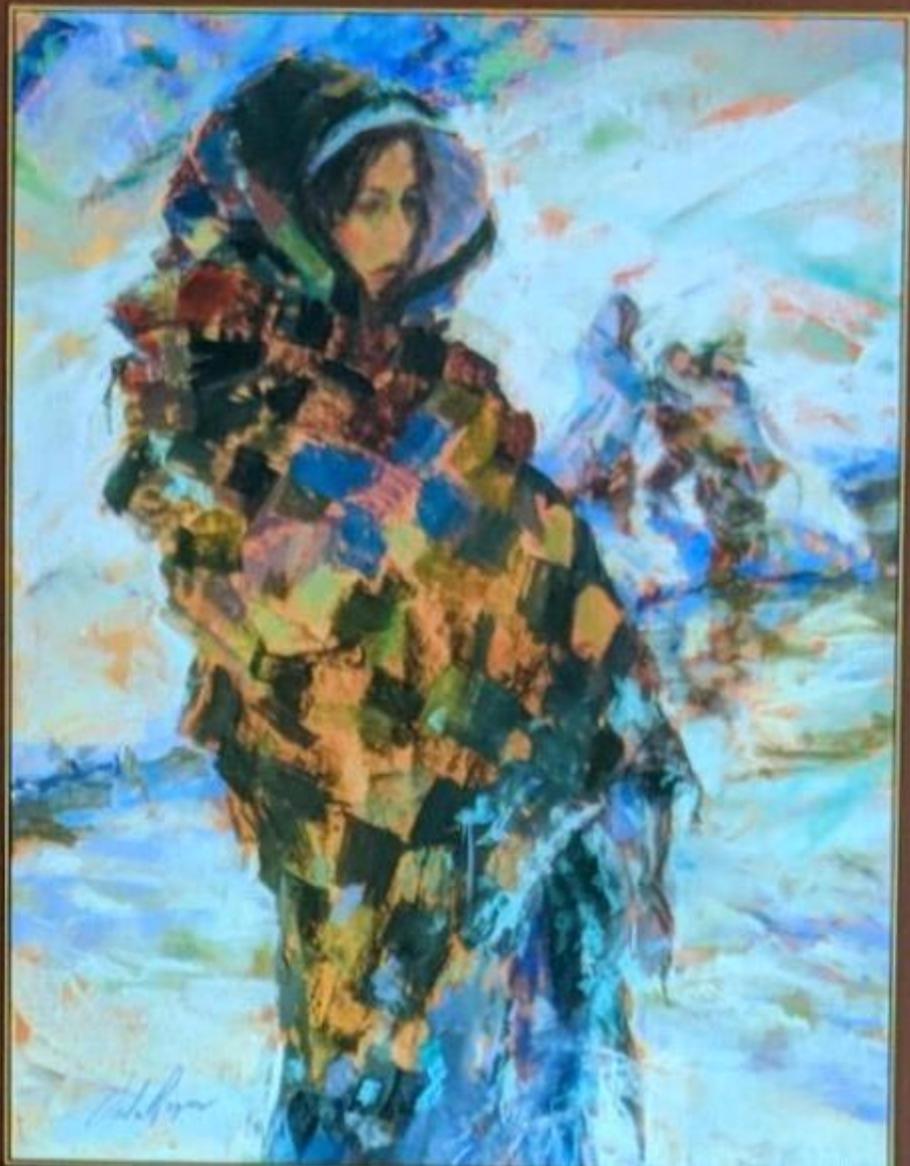
BY DAVID MEIKLE

The Martin Company had barely crossed the North Platte when snow, hail, and sleet began to fall, halting their journey beneath the lofty escarpments of the Red Buttes. The setting served as a backdrop to some of the most severe suffering on the trail. The wind blew incessantly, temperatures hovered near zero, and the snow continued to fall. Here, the advance rescue riders from the Valley found the Martin Company.

PATIENCE LOADER

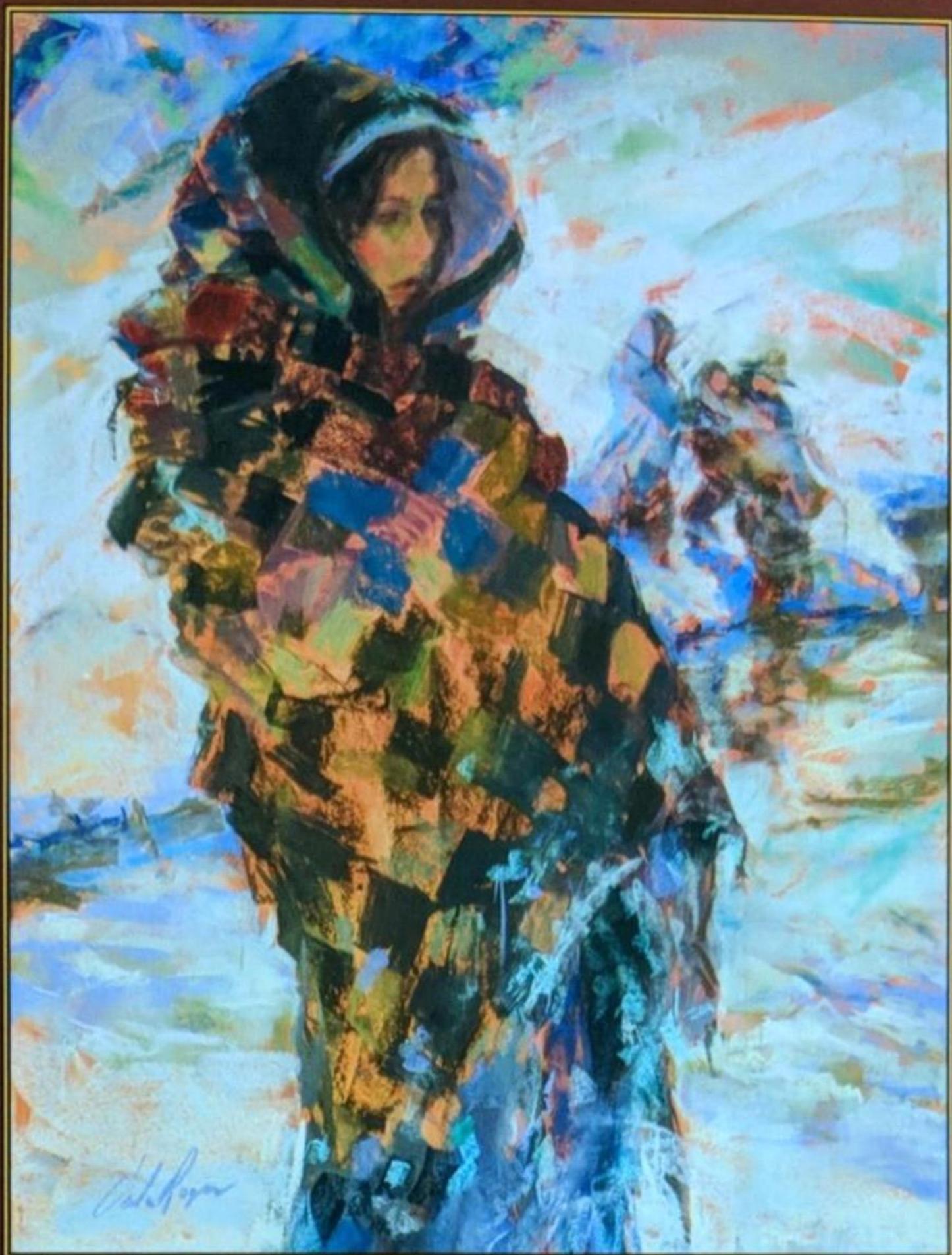
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Sir Henry Lambert, a
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chase a wagon and team.



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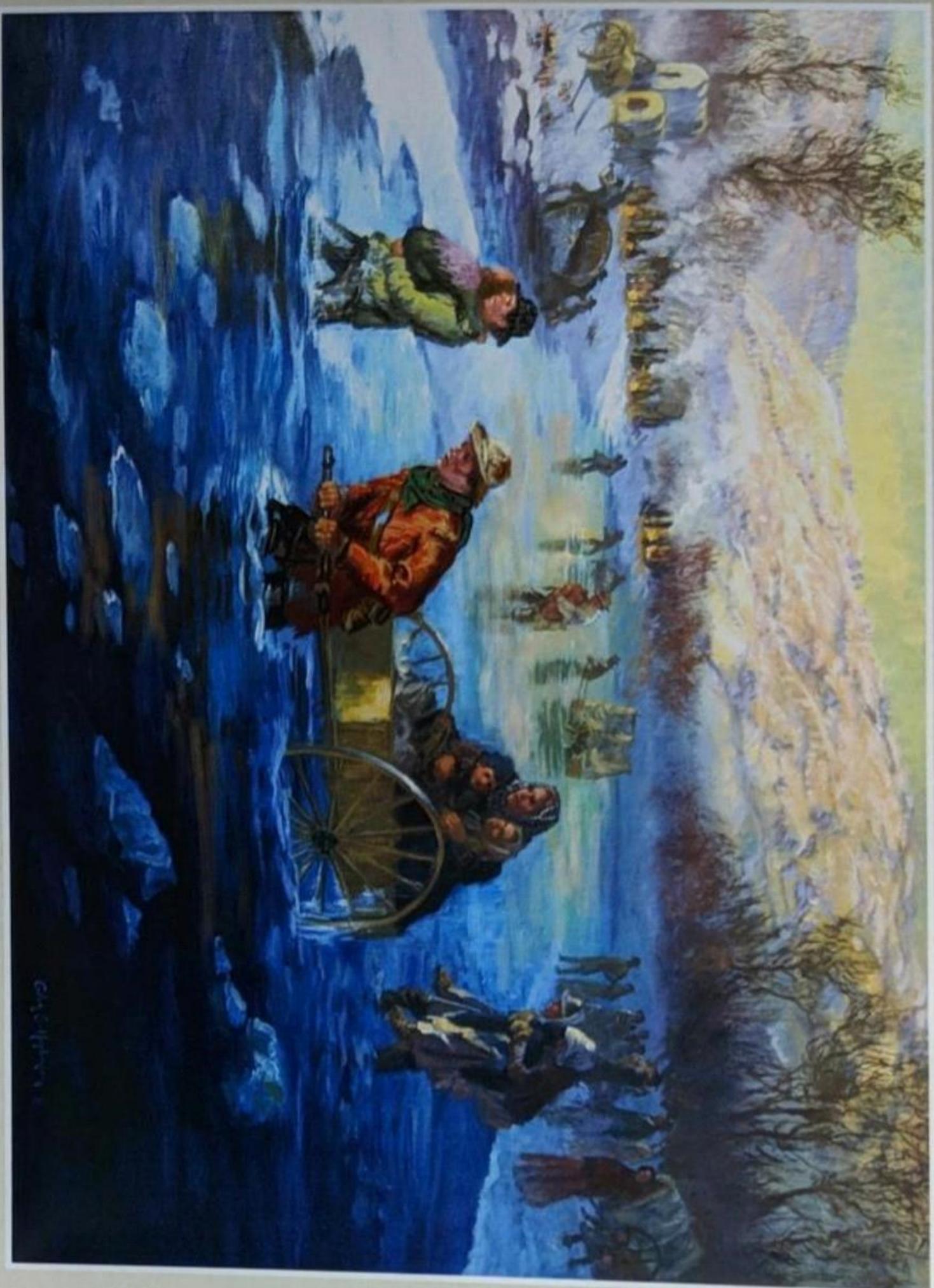


RIVER CROSSING BY JULIE ROGERS

*To lighten their load, they heaped up piles of clothing and bedding, and burned them. "Those precious quilts and coats would have been greatly appreciated a few days later," one emigrant noted when it was too late. "Instead of caching the goods or just leaving it by the wayside, they destroyed it so it was impossible to go back and get it when it was sorely needed a few miles further on."*¹

Patience Loader was the daughter of James and Amy Loader. For thirty-five years her father served as a gardener for Sir Henry Lambert, a wealthy landowner at Aston Rowant, Oxfordshire, England. When the Loaders joined the Church, he was dismissed from his position. Patience, her parents, four sisters, and two brothers and their wives immigrated to America in February 1856 to make a new start. James's skills as a gardener were soon put to work.

The Loaders rented rooms in New York and intended to stay there until they had sufficient means to purchase a wagon and team. But his son-in-law Jaques, still back in England, questioned Loader's loyalty to the faith and wrote a scathing admonition that the family should "be ready to go with us, with cheerful hearts, trusting God, and not in your own strength." Jaques concluded, "All will be well—you will rejoice in the Lord more than ever before." Under pressure, Loader relented. He and his family would go to the Salt Lake valley. He announced, "I will pull the handcart if I die on the road." He did both.



The crossing of the North Platte was fraught with more fatalities than any other incident of the entire journey.



clothes until we got to camp. Our clothing was nearly frozen on us," Loader continued. "That night the

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ground was frozen so hard we were unable to drive any tent pins in and the tent was wet. . . . We stretched [the tent] open and got under it until morning."

That night Josiah Rogerson reached his hand out to the side of the tent and, feeling it heavy and weighted with snow, said, "Mother, the snow has come." He later recalled, "What a chill seemed to fill the whole tent as I whispered those five words."

Winter in all its unmerciful fury was upon the emigrants—and upon the rescuers. Harvey Cluff recorded that Captain Grant was determined to make camp and wait out the snow in a sheltered cove three miles from the trail.

Much farther east, Barnard White, Hunt Company, observed of those in the handcart companies he had passed: "The snow, increasing in depth daily . . . [deeply affected] the emigrants. They appeared to be like a lot of worn-out cattle and had no feeling for anything except to eat and die. God forbid that I should ever witness such scenes again." That last crossing of the Platte caused them to bury many more.

Drifts of snow covered the plants and grasses, which were much-needed feed for the cattle. "Our cattle were drooping for want of food," White recalled, whose family's team included four

BARNARD WHITE



oxen, two cows and a good wagon. "And from this time on we had to cut down trees for them to browse upon, and still they died off fast." By Devil's Gate his family would have lost three of their oxen and one cow. Sagebrush dug out from the snow was their only firewood.

More men died than women on the trail. Insufficient rations often favored toward wives or children took their toll. Wrote Elizabeth Jackson: "I listened to hear my husband breathe—he lay so still. I put my hand on his body, when to my horror I discovered that my worst fears were confirmed. . . . He was cold and stiff—rigid in the arms of death.

"They did not remove my husband's clothing," Jackson continued. "He had but little. They wrapped him in a blanket and placed him in a pile with thirteen others who had died, and then covered him up with snow. The ground was frozen so hard that they could not dig a grave."

The wagon trains were not as desperate for food or supplies, yet they could barely roll through the snowdrifts—their wagons bogged down, their animals exhausted. John Bond, a twelve-year-old in the Hodgett Wagon Train with his family, later recorded, "Day after day passes and still no tidings of help coming from westward. The bugle is sounded again . . . to call all the Saints together for prayers to ask the infinite Father to bring food, medicines, and other things necessary for the sick and needy." Bond had seen a woman cooking a pot of dumplings before evening prayer and then watched her hide them. He did not go to prayer. "I stood back and looked for the dumplings, found them, and being so hungry I could not resist the temptation, sat down and ate them all." Some died, Bond later wrote, "lying side by side with hands entwined. In other cases they were found as if they had just offered a fervent prayer and their spirit had taken flight while in the act." Some, he continued, were "sitting by the fire; some were singing hymns or eating crusts of bread." Captain Martin would position himself at the graves, shotgun in hand, shooting at crows and buzzards hanging above the wagon trains in the air.

Ahead on the trail, at a crossing of the Sweetwater, the Willie Company faced the same harsh, winter blizzard and a succession of deaths. Death took the old and the young, and the cold prepared the rest of the company for a similar fate. "Even when you wrapped up in a blanket, your teeth chattered," eighteen-year-old Sarah James recalled. Many children chewed on rawhide stripped from the wheels of the carts; their shoes had holes in the bottom and were ripped at the seams, but these children were still better off than those who had to wrap their feet in rags or canvas.

LOUISA ROWLEY BY GLEN HAWKINS

Louisa Rowley, great-great-great-grandmother of artist Glen Hawkins, crossed the plains with her mother Ann and her seven siblings in the Willie Handcart Company. "It hurt me to see my children go hungry," Ann Rowley wrote. "There came a time when there seemed to be no food at all." After "asking God's help," she remembered two hard sea biscuits in her trunk. "Surely, that was not enough to feed eight people, but five loaves and two fishes were not enough to feed 5,000 people either," she mused. She put the biscuits in a dutch oven and covered them with water, "asked God's blessing," and put the pan on the coals. "When I took off the lid a little later," she said, "I found the pan filled with food."





REMYZAN BENTH JACOBSON



Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson, Martin Company, later wrote of the death of her husband on about the twenty-fifth of October: "I will not describe my feeling . . . but I believe the Recording Angel has inscribed it in the archives above, and that my sufferings for the gospel's sake will be sanctified unto me for my good." Such was her continued reliance upon the Almighty long after winter storms had beat most of the life out of her and her children.

Elizabeth was born August 5, 1826, at Macclesfield, Cheshire, England, the oldest daughter of the eleven children of Edward Horrocks and Alice Houghton. At age seven, she went to work in a silk factory and spent her Sundays with her family as they attended services of the Wesleyan Methodists.

Missionaries converted her and her family in 1841, and she married Aaron Jackson seven years later. In 1856 the family boarded the *Horizon* with their three children: Martha Ann, Mary, and Aaron.

Of the night when her husband died, she later wrote, "It was a bitter freezing night and the elements had sealed up his mortal frame. . . . I could not sleep. I could only watch, wait, and pray for dawn." The ground was frozen so hard that they could not dig a grave. He was left in a covering of snow "to sleep in peace until the trump of the Lord shall sound."



WHEN DAYLIGHT CAME BY ROBERT T. BARRETT

Elizabeth married William R. Kingsford a year after reaching the Valley. They made their home in Ogden, Utah, where she died on October 17, 1908.

That same day, Sunday, October 19, Captain Grant and his party were hunkered down in the storm, unknowingly twenty-five miles west of the Willie Company. The express riders Wheelock, Young, and two others rode into the Willie camp with the news—a supply train was on its way. Sarah remembered the moment. “We huddled in our covers, close to each other for warmth. It was snowing and we were so tired. Suddenly we heard a shout, and through the swirling snow we saw men, wagons, and mules coming toward us. Slowly we realized that help had come.”

The sight before Young and fellow rescuers “would stir the feelings of the hardest heart,” wrote Dan Jones. Children and infants were wailing from hunger. Parents were emaciated and listless. Many were near death; others sat stony-faced, their limbs frozen black and rotting.

“More welcome messengers never came from the courts of glory than these two young men were to us,” Chislett recorded. But all they could offer was hope that help was coming, that rescuers would bring food, clothing, and wagons. They then mounted up to ride east in search of the other companies.

Encouraged by the promise of rescue, the Willie Company moved out again. Chislett wrote: “We pursued our journey with renewed hope after untold toil and fatigue, doubling teams frequently, going back to fetch up the straggling carts, and encouraging those who had dropped by the way to a little more exertion in view of our soon-to-be-improved condition. We finally, late at night, got all to camp—the wind howling frightfully and the snow eddying around us in fitful gusts.” They made camp among the willows, built fires, paid their “usual devotions to the Deity, and retired to rest with hopes of coming aid.”

“Being surrounded by snow,” Chislett added, “out of provisions, many of our people sick, and our cattle dying, it was decided that we should remain in our present camp until the supply train reached us.”

The next morning, the snow stood one-foot deep. “The pitiless storm and the extra march of the previous day had been too much for their wasted energies,” Chislett observed of those who died in the night. “We buried . . . five people in one grave, wrapped only in the clothing and bedding in which they died. We had no materials with which to make coffins, and even if we had we could not have spared time to make them, for it required all the efforts of the healthy few who had remained to perform the ordinary camp duties and look after the sick.”

At this point, Captain Willie dared not wait for rescue. Accompanied by twenty-one-year-old Joseph Elder, he left the camp to find the rescue party and the promised aid. Meanwhile, the rescuers had pushed themselves and their animals to their limits; Robert T. Burton, who had



SEARCHING BY LEE UDALL BENNION

Lone rescue rider Ephraim Hanks described when he first found the emigrants: "My heart almost melted within me. I rose up in my saddle and tried to speak cheering and comforting words to them. I told them also that they should all have the privilege to ride into Salt Lake City, as more teams were coming."^w

TRIAL OF HOPE—CAPTAIN
WILLIE AND JOSEPH B. ELDER

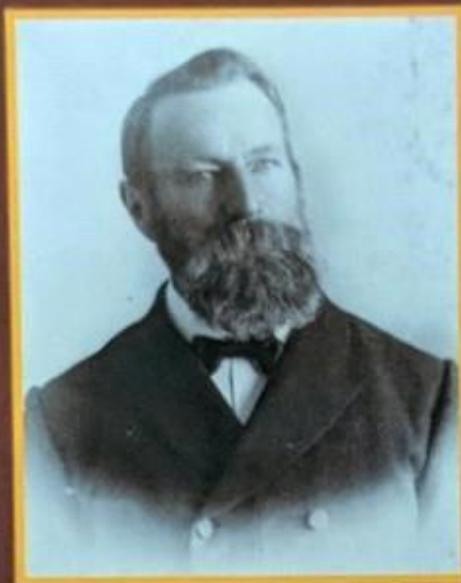
BY AL ROUNDS (Right) When the promised relief party did not arrive, Captain James Willie and Joseph B. Elder set out in the swirling snow to find their rescuers. On October 20, the two, nearly frozen, stumbled into the rescue camp with grim news that the Willie Company would soon perish without assistance. The rescue wagons moved out immediately.



HARVEY CLUFF

Harvey Cluff, age twenty, attended the October general conference of 1856 “having walked from Provo to Salt Lake.” President Brigham Young called for the people “to aid the late handcart companies . . . as the winter season was fast hastening on.” Wrote Cluff some years later, “The response was most remarkable.” Being in Salt Lake “and of an ambitious turn-of-mind, I volunteer[ed] to go.” His brother Moses “was on the plains returning from a mission to England.”

The rescuers with their “twenty odd wagons drawn by four animals . . . each, and each loaded with vegetables, meat, flour, groceries, [and] clothing” found the Willie Company in critical condition. “Think of it,” wrote Cluff, “400 miles from any possible



HARVEY CLUFF

supply of provisions. You no longer wonder at the joy manifested by that perishing people when they saw salvation pull into their camp.” Cluff described how “the bones and crumbs” from the meals of the rescuers were “thrown out on the snow” only to be gathered up and gnawed on by the survivors “as long as they [offered] any substance.”

Cluff stayed with the rescue party bringing the Martin Company into the Valley. “How inadequate is language to depict, or pen to write, the soul-stirring pleasure, and gratitude to the all-wise Creator for our safe arrival home. It was near the close of December of the year 1856 when I arrived at my home in Provo City.”

Cluff died in 1916.



HARVEY CLUFF BY JAMES C. CHRISTENSEN

Not far from camp, rescuer Harvey Cluff had posted a sign in the snow to direct the advance team of rescuers back to the main body of the relief party if they returned. Instead, the sign pointed the way to Captain Willie and Joseph B. Elder, who were out looking for the promised help of the rescuers. Immediately, though in a blinding snowstorm, the rescuers set out with Willie and Elder to reach the Willie Company. "Oh, what a sight to see," Cluff exclaimed at the sight of the handcart company. "Aged men, women, children, and young maidens plodding along through the snow several inches deep, with icicles dangling to their skirts and pants as they walked along pushing and pulling their handcarts, the wheels of which were burdened with snow."

ROBERT T. BURTON



CA. 1890s

seen rigorous action with Indian marauders, who had been caught in summer with no water, and in winter with no tents or coats, later said of the campaign to find the emigrants, "This was the hardest trip of my life."

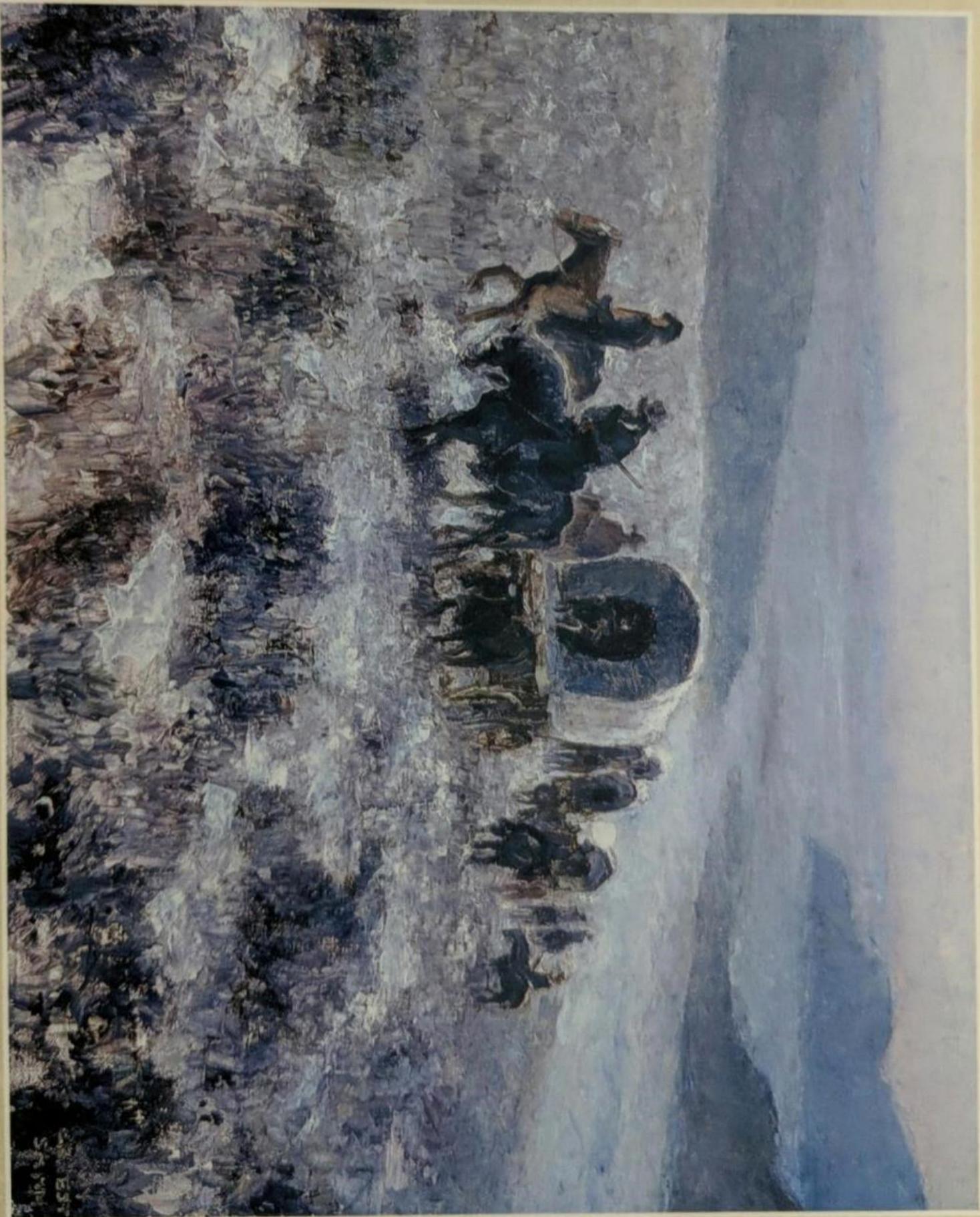
They watched for the express riders and news of the condition and locations of the handcart companies. Rescuer Harvey Cluff volunteered to take a signboard and place it at a conspicuous place at the main road so the returning express riders would not miss the camp. But the sign ending up pointing the way to Willie and his associate. "I had only been back to camp a short time when two men rode up from Willie's Company," Cluff reported. "The signboard had done the work of salvation."

RESCUE WAGONS

BY GARY E. SMITH

Toward the end of October, Church officials reported on the progress of the rescue: "We have now some 200 teams out to meet them, and some were only prepared with seven days' forage for animals. It will be necessary for more teams to go to their relief with grain and hay to sustain the animals already sent out, or they will die."

When the rescue teams reached camp, the cries of starving children and the gaunt looks on the faces of parents stunned the valley boys. John Chislett noted, "Such a shaking of hands, such words of welcome, and such invocation of God's blessings have seldom been witnessed."



“Death was not long confined in its ravages to the old and infirm,” John Chislett, Willie Company, attested. Men were “worn down by hunger, scarcity of clothing and bedding, and too much labor in helping their families. . . . Many a father pulled his cart, with his little children on it, until the day preceding his death. . . . I have seen some pull their carts in the morning, give out during the day, and die before next morning.”¹⁰⁰ Artist Steven Lee Adams knows firsthand the pain of losing a child; his oldest was killed in an automobile accident not long ago. Adams writes of his art, “I was looking to capture a feeling we will all share at some time or another. Hopefully we will be able to soldier on like the amazing people who settled the land we call home.”

Captain Willie reported his company utterly destitute and starving. He reported that the express had arrived at their camp east of Rocky Ridge. They had bolstered their hopes and then gone on to locate the other companies still in the rear. The next morning,

October 21, the rescuers hitched up their teams and rode out. The deep snow slowed their progress; it was sunset before they reached the handcart company.

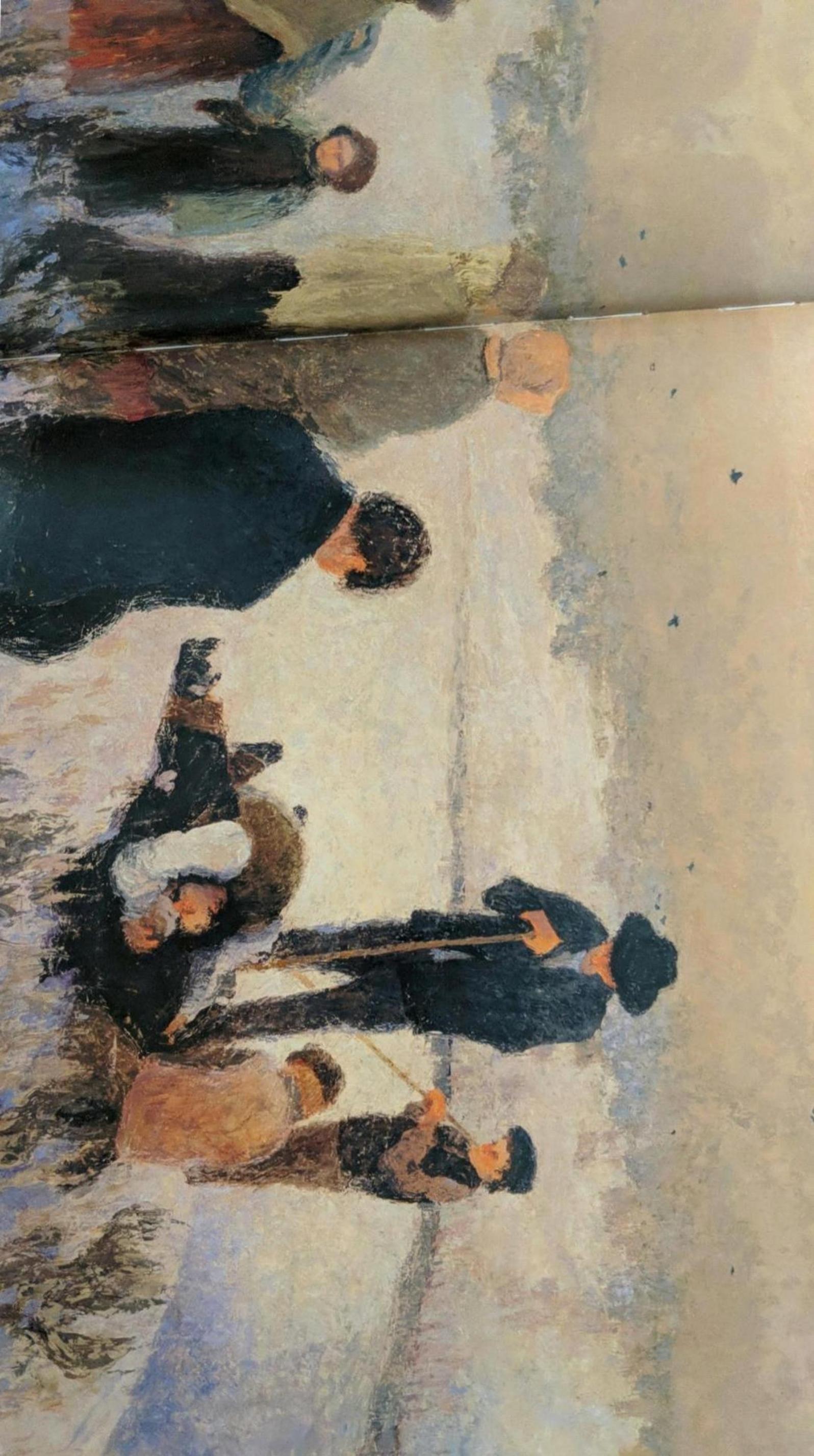
“On an eminence immediately west of our camp, several covered wagons, each drawn by four horses, were seen coming towards us,” Chislett said. “The news ran through the camp like wildfire, and all who were able to leave their beds turned out en masse to see them.”

Cluff, as a rescuer, recalled that “when the people of the camp sighted us approaching, they set up such a shout as to echo through the hills. . . . This was certainly the most timely arrival of a relief party recorded in history.”

Jones also surveyed the scene when he arrived. “They were in a poor place, the storm having caught them where fuel was scarce. They were out of provisions and really freezing and starving to death.” The young rescuers mounted mules, and with axes in hand, dragged wood for fires from the surrounding hills. Even with the food and assistance, “many poor, faithful people had gone too far—had passed beyond the power to recruit. Our help came too late for some and many died after our arrival,” Jones lamented.

Chislett was named the regular commissary to the camp. “The [men from the Valley] turned over to me flour, potatoes, onions, and a limited supply of warm clothing, besides quilts, blankets, buffalo robes, [and] woolen socks,” he noted. “That evening, for the first time in quite a period, the songs of Zion were to be heard in the camp.” The next day, the camp rolled on.

Our help came
too late for some.

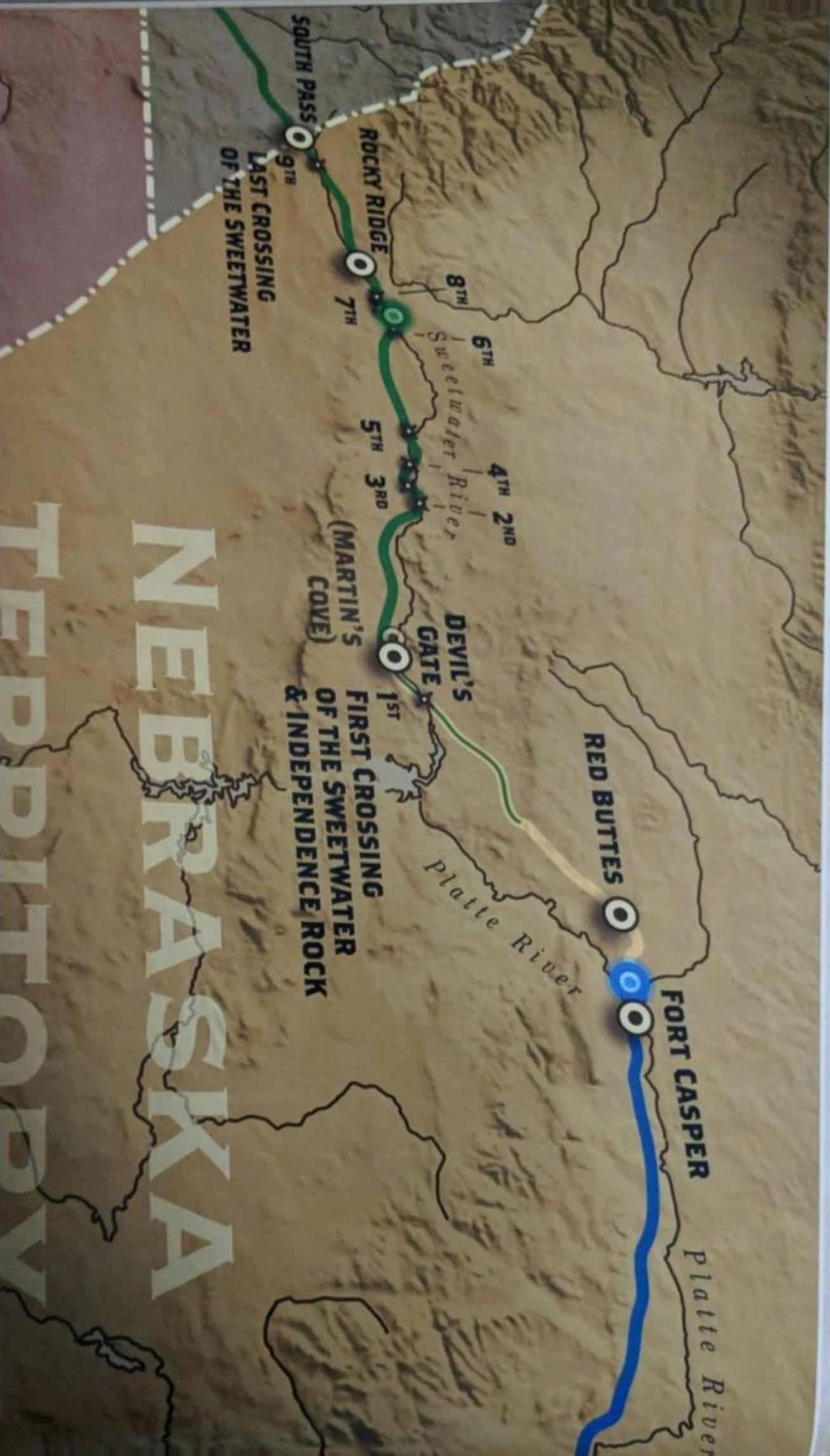


A LAST FAREWELL BY STEVEN LEE ADAMS

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OCTOBER 1858
JOURNEY
BY HANDCART



FIRST CROSSING
OF THE SWEETWATER
& INDEPENDENCE ROCK

(MARTIN'S
COVE)

LAST CROSSING
OF THE SWEETWATER

■ HESLETTERS WITH WILLIE CO. Oct. 25—continue journey west
HESLETTERS SEARCHING FOR MARTIN CO. Oct. 26—waiting at Devil's Gate for word
■ MARTIN CO. Oct. 21 through 28—snowed
in at Red Buttes; deaths continue

■ RESCUERS WITH WILLIE CO. Oct. 25—continue journey west

RESCUEERS SEARCHING FOR MARTIN CO. Oct. 26—waiting at Devil's Gate for word from express riders as to location of Martin Co.; Oct 28—express riders find Martin Co.

■ MARTIN CO. Oct. 21 through 28—snowed
in at Red Buttes; deaths continue