

THE MARTIN HANDCART COMPANY CROSSES THE NORTH PLATTE

By ELIZABETH JACKSON
Martin Handcart Company
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"Some of the men carried some of the women on their back or in their arms, but others of the women tied up their skirts and waded through, like the heroines that they were, and as they had gone through many other rivers and creeks. My husband (Aaron Jackson) attempted to ford the stream. He had only gone a short distance when he reached a sandbar in the river, on which he sank down through weakness and exhaustion. My sister, Mary Horrocks Leavitt, waded through the water to his assistance. She raised him up to his feet. Shortly afterward, a man came along on horseback and conveyed him to the other side. My sister then helped me to pull my cart with my three children and other matters on it. We had scarcely crossed the river when we were visited with a tremendous storm of snow, hail, sand, and fierce winds. . . .

"About nine o'clock I retired. Bedding had become very scarce so I did not disrobe. I slept until, as it appeared to me, about midnight. I was extremely cold. The weather was bitter. I listened to hear if my husband breathed, he lay so still. I could not hear him. I became alarmed. I put my hand on his body, when to my horror I discovered that my worst fears were confirmed. My husband was dead. I called for help to the other inmates of the tent. They could render me no aid; and there was no alternative but to remain alone by the side of the corpse till morning. Oh, how the dreary hours drew their tedious length along. When daylight came, some of the male part of the company prepared the body for burial. And oh, such a burial and funeral service. They did not remove his clothing—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. He was left there to sleep in peace until the trumpet of God shall sound, and the dead in Christ shall awake and come forth in the morning of the first resurrection. We shall then again unite our hearts and lives, and eternity will furnish us with life forever more.

"I will not attempt to describe my feelings at finding myself thus left a widow with three children, under such excruciating circumstances. I cannot do it. But I believe the Recording Angel has inscribed in the archives above, and that my suffering for the Gospel's sake will be sanctified unto me for my good"

(Elizabeth Jackson, as quoted in LeRoy and Ann Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* [1960], 109–12).

