

Handcart Pioneers



Soon after the first Mormon pioneers reached Utah in 1847, the church encouraged its converts in Europe to [emigrate](#) to Utah. As most of them were poor and funds were wanting, a system was designed by church leaders to have their followers make the final leg of the trek on foot, pulling handcarts, in order to save money.

Coming from Europe, they would first travel by train to Iowa City and then join a caravan to make the 1,300 mile arduous journey. It was not without significant loss of life.

Fortunately for my daughter-in-law's 4th great grandmother, Kirsten Eskilsson, who emigrated from Denmark after the death of her husband with many of her young children in tow, she was able to join the Robert F. Nelsen Wagon Company which consisted of 56 wagons and some 380 people, mostly from Scandinavia. While travelling by wagon was far easier than pulling a handcart, they still had their share of tragedy.

Someone tried to yoke up a wild cow who bellowed, frightening other teams and causing them to bolt. One man was killed and several others injured during that incident. They also faced a prairie fire and a buffalo stampede. The going was slow and it was uncertain whether their provisions would last the trip. A team travelled from Salt Lake City to meet them and replenish their supplies. When they finally arrived at their planned destination, there had been six deaths, three births and they

had lost 24 head of cattle. The journey took 2 1/2 months.

As they rode into camp, they were led by a two wheeled cart pulled by a white ox bedecked with garlands of wildflowers. On the sides of the cart was written, "Hail Columbia, This Beats the Hand Carts."

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