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QUIET POWER  
A HISTORY OF JAMES GREY WILLIE

by

Doug R. Stephens

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

History

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

1985

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is difficult to go back into the past and write something that is to be called history. When research and writing his history is based on the life of a man, a life significant then and now, it is especially hard to put meaning to the traces and facts of the past. For this reason the conclusions and personal meanings for James Grey Willie's life will largely be left for the final chapter, with the scope for the book being set in the first chapter. The reader will be subjected to the presentation of the facts, with the historical background and framework, in much the same way the author was in doing the research. Then the conclusions, ramifications and significance of James Grey Willie's life will be largely drawn at the end of the work when the reader will have sufficient knowledge on the subject. In this way it will be hoped that those concerned with the life of James Grey Willie will come to somehow appreciate and understand a life from long ago.

Many thanks to the fine members of the Utah State University Library Special Collections, and also the people of the L.D.S. Church Historian's office, Archives, and Genealogy Library in Salt Lake City. Also special thanks to the Utah History Department, and especially to Dr. Charles Peterson for his many hours of proofreading, editing, and

advice, and without whose efforts this project could not have been possible. Also a gracious thanks to Paul Willie who provided the very generous student grant that funded this work. And to Julie Stephens (my wife) for the countless hours of typing and editing, along with valuable support throughout the completion of the work.

Doug R. Stephens

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## ABSTRACT

Quiet Power,

The Life of James Grey Willie

by

Doug R. Stevens, Master of Science

Utah State University, 1985

Major Professor: Dr. Charles S. Peterson  
Department: History

The purpose of this work has been to provide a working biography on the life of James Grey Willie for the field of history, and also to provide a useful and meaningful volume for the James Willie descendants. The work covers James' life from its beginnings in England in 1814, to his death in Mendon, Utah, in 1895. It covers the surviving traces that exist on his life, with the notable accomplishments of Pastor in the Mormon mission field in England (1853-1856), and Bishop of the Salt Lake City Seventh Ward between 1856 and 1859, with major emphasis on his most famous deed, that of captain of the ill-fated handcart company of 1856.

(245 pages)

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION - LABELED FOR LIFE

On the morning of October 20, 1856, Mormon handcart company Captain James G. Willie found twelve of his company frozen in their tents.<sup>1</sup> Relief from Salt Lake City had been expected as word along the trail brought news of rescue parties for the troubled handcart companies. It was decided that Willie, along with a companion, would strike out by mule in search of the expected relief.<sup>2</sup> One can only imagine the feelings in Willie's mind as he started out from the makeshift camp on the fifth crossing of Wyoming's Sweetwater River. He must have thought back to the beginnings of this long and disastrous adventure. He must have thought too about the decision to push on so late in the year burdened as they were with short supplies and makeshift equipment and handcarts. He must have thought of the decision made in England by Mormon Apostle Franklin D. Richards that put him in charge. Surely he could not help but wonder if he might have done better in some way, thus saving more of his people. Already many lay dead, buried on the plains between where he left his camp, and Iowa City. The handcart experiment on the part of the Mormon Church, of

which he was certainly a key part, had been a costly one in terms of human life. His group of about 440 people had just eaten the last of their rations.<sup>3</sup> The weakness of his people from lack of food made the cold more unbearable. Thus James G. Willie's journey was one of great importance, for if he did not return quickly with supplies, many more souls would join the dead.

Willie and his companion, a man named Joseph Elder, left the fourth handcart company camp among the willows sometime that morning.<sup>4</sup> They pushed west two days under harsh blizzard conditions, praying all the way they would not stray off the main trail. Toward nightfall, on the second day, they found a flag that had been placed on the trail. This flag indicated that the rescue party was camped some distance off the road in a stand of trees. The two men struggled into the rescuers camp at nightfall, half frozen but profoundly concerned about the handcart company back at the fifth Sweetwater crossing.<sup>5</sup>

Captain George D. Grant, and the twenty men of his rescue party, were relieved to make contact with Captain Willie at last. Grant's party had stopped at Willow Creek two days before, unwilling to press on in the storm without a definite destination. Were it not for a special effort of Harvey Cluff in placing the flag, Willie and Elder would surely have been lost and doomed in the storm.<sup>6</sup> Also, many would have died in the handcart company while Grant waited the storm out before continuing



his search.

Grant's men broke camp before dawn and traveled twenty-five miles to the Sweetwater camp. There they found the group among the sagebrush near the river bottom, sixteen miles from where Willie had left them.<sup>7</sup>

What the rescuers saw was not a pleasant sight. Men, women, and children were gaunt and sick with hunger. The cold had turned frozen limbs "black as they literally rotted."<sup>8</sup> The group had received some relief from an advanced express team from Captain Grant's group. A single light wagon had arrived at noon on the day Willie left the Sweetwater Camp. It left a pitifully small amount of supplies, and then moved quickly on to locate the Martin Company which was expected to be in worse condition. With this added spark the group pushed on sixteen miles, despite their desperate condition. The little help the express team offered was consumed in the sixteen miles.<sup>9</sup> Thus they were no better off, and probably worse than when Willie left. Yet they were nearer Salt Lake City and real relief.

How thankful they must have been to see the rescue party. It was small, with limited supplies, but it was enough to lift the spirits of the sufferers.<sup>10</sup> The rescue mission was in no way complete. Little could be offered to the 440 of Willie's company. Many were too far gone with sickness and hunger and would die before they reached Salt Lake City. Yet October 25, the group found the

strength to move on.<sup>11</sup>

For the Willie and Martin companies, the handcart experience was, of course, a tragic event. For the West generally it became a symbol and a tradition. For James G. Willie it brought doubt, strength, and elements of grief that would last a lifetime. The Mormon dream of gathering to "Zion" in the Rocky Mountains had taken its toll in human life in the past nine years since first the pioneers arrived. But no event would symbolize tragedy and suffering as did the experience of the Willie and Martin handcart companies of the 1856 migration.

This single event thrust the name of James Grey Willie into Mormon fame. Putting aside the names of Brigham Young and a handful of other pioneering greats, the name of James Grey Willie is as well known as any frontier Mormon, recognized alike by historian, lay member of the church, and those even remotely interested in Western history. This simple quiet man was to be known for the rest of his life as "the Willie of handcart fame." All of his other accomplishments would pale by comparison to this one event. Taken by itself, the Willie handcart experience would make this man worthy of historical study, but Willie's life was much more than that.

He is a man worth seeing in his full character. To that end an attempt will be made in the pages that follow to explore all periods and aspects of his life. Not only will the handcart episode come in for consideration but

the events of his early life in England, the quest that led him to America and the turns that resulted in his joining the Mormon church. With knowledge of the developmental forces that molded him it will be easier to understand who this man of "handcart fame" was. From this perspective his subsequent experiences in Salt Lake City and the long decades in the anonymity of Cache Valley's Mendon will be considered. Throughout, an effort will be made to understand the personal side of the man. Because his descendants are interested, a great deal of attention will be given to bringing "Grandfather Willie" into living perspective. With only glimpses and sketches surviving through the past century, the challenge of these pages will be to gain a sense of the real man.

Footnotes

1 Rebecca Cornwall and Leonard J. Arrington, Rescue of the 1856 Handcart Companies (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1981), pp. 12, 13; William Woodward, "Company Clerk Record of Captain James G. Willie Handcart Company," (privately published), October 21, 1856.

2 Cornwall and Arrington, p. 13; Woodward, Oct. 20, 1856.

3 Cornwall and Arrington, p. 12.

4 Woodward, Oct. 20, 1856.

5 Cornwall and Arrington, p. 13.

6 Ibid., p. 13.

7 Ibid., p. 13.

8 Ibid., p. 13.

9 Woodward, Oct. 21, 1856.

10 Cornwall and Arrington, p. 14.

11 Woodward, Oct. 25, 1856.

CHAPTER II  
HIS BEGINNINGS

James G. Willie was born on November 1, 1814, in the town of Murrell Green in the country of Hampshire, England.<sup>1</sup> Only the basic details are known about his younger life in England. Background information concerning Willie's hometown and area, along with the basic social history will be used in this section to provide groundwork for understanding his later experiences.

Murrell Green was a small "tything" or town in the "parish" and "hundred" of Odiham, in the country of Southampton, or Hampshire as it is called today.<sup>2</sup> The counties of England are similar to the United States' state divisions and "hundreds" are similar to our counties. A "parish" is another subdivision of the "hundred".

Hampshire county is located on the southern end of Britain. It is roughly sixty miles southwest of London, in the center of the southern coast. The hundred of Odiham is situated in its northeast corner, placing it about thirty miles from the southern coast of England. The parish that Murrell Green is located in has the same name of Odiham, perhaps because the parish is more than twice the size of any of the other ten parishes within the

hundred of Odiham.<sup>3</sup> Murrell Green town is also referred to as a tything. These terms of division are still used in England.

Little needs to be written here of Murrell Green. From the Victoria History of the Counties of England, published by the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London, comes the following:

The manor of MURRELL was ancient demesne of the Crown. In 1170 Arthur de Morhala was fined a mark at Hampshire Great Pleas, which had not been paid in 1175. In 1202-3 Gunilda, wife of Arthur, granted to Gunilda de Broc a croft of land in Murrell called Northcroft for her life, and in 1218-19 Stephen de Morhala and his wife Emma, and Edith sister of Emma, released to William Bulloc all of the claim in a virgate of land at Murrell. Peter son of Arthur acquired land in Murrell in 1227-8 from John de Everleigh. The manor of Murrell had been acquired before the middle of the 13th century by Adam de Bendeng, and it apparently from this time followed the same descent as the manor of Polling, to which it became annexed before the end of the 16th century. The district called Murrell Green is 1 2/4 miles north of the town, and now belongs to Sir Henry P. St. John-Mildmay, bart.<sup>4</sup>

James' father may well have been a farm laborer, working for one of these large land owners in Murrell Green.

At the time of James' birth, England was at war with Napoleon's France. Also the "War of 1812" with the United States was being waged. The disparate struggle with Napoleonic France had a devastating impact on the social history of England. As G.M. Trevelyan explains in Illustrated English Social History, the twenty years of this war came

at a critical moment in our social development, the long war was a grave misfortune. With its violent disturbances of economic life, and its mood of 'anti-Jacobin' reaction against all proposals for reform and all sympathy with the claims and sufferings of the poor--the war formed the worst possible environment for the industrial and social changes then in rapid progress...

When Waterloo was fought, rural England was still in its unspoiled beauty, and most English towns were either handsome or picturesque. The factory regions were a small part of the whole, but unluckily they were the model for the future. A new type of urban community was permitted to grow up which it was fatally easy to imitate on an ever increasing scale, until in another hundred years the great majority of Englishmen were dwellers in mean streets.<sup>5</sup>

The dramatic changes of these years of war no doubt had an effect upon the Willie family. The progress of social change was slowed, and worse yet the working man's economy was drastically effected.

Early in young Willie's life, the family moved to the city of Taunton.<sup>6</sup> There Willie was christened on June 15, 1821, in the St. Mary Magdelene Church.<sup>7</sup> It was also at Taunton that he was educated and spent his boyhood years.<sup>8</sup>

Taunton is a city within the hundred of Taunton, in the county of Somerset which is located in south-eastern England, on the southern shores of the British Channel. The city of Taunton is a borough and market-town, and the head of a "union", or a main center within the hundred of Taunton. It is 144 miles slightly south of due west of London, and approximately forty miles southwest of Bristol.<sup>9</sup> Samuel Lewis provides an excellent

description of the town of Taunton in the Topographical Dictionary of England:

The town is situated in a central part of the singularly beautiful and luxuriant vale of Taunton-Dean, and is upwards of a mile in length: the principal streets, which terminated in the market-place, are spacious, well paved, and lighted with gas by a company established in 1821: the houses, mostly built of brick, are generally commodious and handsome, and well supplied with excellent water. The respectability of the town, combined with the beauty of the surrounding country, has rendered it very attractive as a place of residence....The parade, in the centre of the town, is a fine open triangular space, enclosed with iron posts and chains; and on the east side of it is a wide street, erected by the late Sir Benjamin Hammet, which forms a handsome approach to the beautiful church of St. Mary. A substantial stone bridge of two arches crosses the Tone, and connects the town with the village of Northtown, or Nurton....

Taunton was formerly noted for its woolen manufacture, being one of the first places into which that branch of trade was introduced, but it has long since given place to the silk trade, which was begun here in 1778, and is now carried on to a considerable extent: the chief articles manufactured are crapes, persians, sarsnets, and mixed goods; and, as nearly every cottage has a silk-loom, the trade furnishes employment to a great number of persons, principally females. Two patent lace manufactories have been established. The river Tone is navigable, but its course to Bridge-waters being circuitous, and the navigation frequently interrupted, a canal, called the Taunton and Bridge-water Canal, has been constructed, which has given increased activity to trade, considerable quantities of Welsh coal being brought to the town, and in return, the produce of the vale of Taunton being exported to Bristol and other parts of England. The Grand Western Canal, forming a communication with the river Exe, terminates here; and the line of the Bristol and Exeter railway passes by the town. The markets are on Wednesday and Saturday, the latter being the principal; they are well supplied with fish from both channels, with every other kind of provisions, and with fruit in abundance. The



old market-house at the south end of the Parade, is a lofty brick building, supported on each side by an archade, one of which is used as a corn market, and the other by various tradesmen.... On the west side of the Parade is a handsome building of freestone, erected in 1821, in the lower part and rear of which, and on the northern side, are the markets for meat, fish, pork, poultry, and dairy produce; the upper being used as the library and reading-room of the institution before mentioned: it is of the Ionic order, the entablature supported by four handsome columns, and forms a great ornament to this part of the town. The 1st Saturday in every month is called the great market, including the sale of live stock....There is an annual fair in the town on June 17th, and another in the suburb called North-town on July 7th, for horses and cattle.<sup>10</sup>

The church in which James was christened, which no doubt the family attended, was located within the Taunton hundred, but was in a separate parish within the general area of the city.<sup>11</sup> This could mean that the family lived just outside the city, or that they may have traveled this short distance for church. The church of St. Mary Magdalene's is described as "standing near the centre of town," and as originally having been

a chapel to the conventual church of St. James, but was made parochial in 1308, under Walter Huselshaw, then Bishop of Bath and Wells: it is a spacious and magnificent edifice, in the decorated and later styles of English architecture, consisting of a chancel, nave, and four aisles, two of the latter having been probably added at a later date, separated by four rows of clustered columns supporting pointed arches: the quadrangular tower at the west end is an elegant structure in four compartments, containing thirteen windows, which by the variety of their ornaments, add much to its lightness and beauty; it is 121 feet in height, exclusively of its pinnacles of 32 feet, which are richly adorned with carved work, and

the top crowned with most exquisitely delicate battlements.<sup>12</sup>

Willie family histories also refer to his education in Taunton. Of its schools, Samuel Lewis tells us

The free grammar school was founded in 1522, by Exhard Fon, Bishop of Winchester, and endowed in 1554, by William Walbee, clerk, with property now producing about L36 per annum: the school-house is on the south side of the Castle green, and adjoining it is a house for the master, whose appointment is vested in the Warden of New College, Oxford: there are no boys on the foundation. The school of industry, in which 80 boys and 50 girls are clothed and instructed, is supported by subscription and there are also a National school, a Lancasterian school, and two infant schools; a school-room for one of the latter was erected near St. James's church in 1828.<sup>13</sup>

While not specifically dealing with young Willie, this information provides a general picture of the environment in which he lived and gives some impressions of his life.

Both of Willie's parents, William and Mary Sutton Willie, were natives of the city of Taunton.<sup>14</sup> It is not known why the family had moved to Murrell Green, where James was born, nor why they then moved back to Taunton.

As a young man Willie continued this tradition of restlessness when he moved to Bristol to work as a dry goods clerk.<sup>15</sup> In a diary that Willie kept while serving a mission for the Mormon church he wrote of walking the streets of Bristol and of visiting places and people that were familiar in his youth, and with a touch of nostalgia he noted that "it looked as it did 20 years

ago." This journal entry was made on August 9, 1855, suggesting that he had been in Bristol about 1835. Willie would have been twenty years of age at the time.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1830s Bristol was a large city, and was considered a county of England itself. It is about forty miles northeast of Taunton, and is situated near the mouth of the Bristol Channel, which is today called the British Channel.<sup>17</sup> Again Lewis' book, A Topographical Dictionary of England, paints a good picture. Bristol

is pleasantly situated in a valley, near the confluence of the rivers Avon and Frome, and, from the circumstance of many of the houses being built on the acclivities of the hills, and from its circular form, has been thought to bear a striking resemblance to ancient Rome. The old town, which forms the nucleus of the present city, consists of four principal streets, diverging at right angles from the centre, and intersected by smaller streets. The houses in the interior of the town are mostly ancient, being built of timber and plaster, with the upper stories projecting; but in the exterior parts and spacious streets and squares, both ancient and modern, containing houses uniformly built of stone and brick, and possessing a high degree of elegance. The town is well paved, lighted with gas, and amply supplied with excellent water from springs, and from public conduits originally laid down by the monks, in convenient situations. A handsome stone bridge of three wide arches over the Avon, which flows through the town, was completed in 1768, on the site of a former one, connecting the northern with the southern part; and over the river Frome is a swing bridge, to admit the passage of ships.<sup>18</sup>

This again is general information but it gives some clue to James' life.

And then, at the age of twenty-one, James Willie took one of the decisive steps of his life, leaving England for

New York on June 1, 1836. It is most likely he sailed from Bristol.<sup>19</sup> Nothing is known of his particular reasons for migrating. During the decade of the 1830s, 599,000 immigrants came to the United States from every corner of Europe. Of this number, approximately half were from the British Isles. Their impact on the United States was incalculable, not so much because their numbers were great, but because the relative smallness of the United States made their influence significant.<sup>20</sup>

Reasons for migration to the United States in the early decades of the 1800s were diverse, some reflecting the need to escape and some the draw of new opportunity. For one thing, conditions in England were changing. In the century following 1750, the population doubled. This unprecedented increase can be explained by improved medical techniques, absence of the serious plagues of the past, improved sanitary conditions, and increased food supplies as new farming methods were introduced. Also economic conditions were changing as Maldwyn Jones points out:

The most striking transformation of all resulted from the growth of the factory system. Originating in England in the middle of the eighteenth century and spreading from there to the Continent, the Industrial Revolution destroyed the old system of domestic manufacture and threw countless artisans out of employment. In Great Britain many displaced artisans moved to nearby factory towns to become wage-laborers, but a considerable number preferred emigration to America as a means of 'perpetuating a rural existence.'<sup>21</sup>

It must be assumed that James' parents were in quest of work when they moved from the rural area of Murrell Green to a larger city. James was probably making the same kind of move when he took passage to America. As Jones explained, knowledge of the American economy at that time was an important factor for migration.

If increasing knowledge of American opportunity contributed to the emigrant's decision to leave Europe, the state of the American economy largely determined the time of his departure. The relative strength of expulsive and attractive forces naturally varied with time and place, but statistical studies have made it clear that, except in periods of unusual disaster or unrest in Europe, a close connection existed between American economic conditions and cyclical fluctuations in the flow of immigration.<sup>22</sup>

America thus represented "free land", opportunity, and escape for the potential immigrant. It held a magic lure for many. Whether James' motives were economic or emotional, they ultimately proved to be reason enough to send him to America.

Once the decision to go to America was made, it was no easy thing to get there. Money was not plentiful. Often the cost of the ship's passage took all the funds people had. Once passage was secured the voyage was almost always a difficult one. The era that brought James to America was before laws were passed in England that protected passengers from insufficient food and poor living conditions on board ship. Oscar Handlin, in The Uprooted, tells of the tight living conditions for the

general immigrant in the era of James' trip:

Below decks in the place, its usual dimensions seventy-five feet long, twenty-five wide, five and a half high. Descend. In the fitful light your eye will discover a middle aisle five feet wide. It will be a while before you can make out the separate shapes within it, the water closets at either end (for the women; the men must go above deck), one or several cooking stoves, the tables. The aisle itself, you will see, is formed by two rows of bunks that run to the side of the ship.

Examine a bunk. One wooden partition reaches from floor to ceiling to divide it from the aisle, another stretches horizontally from wall to aisle to create two decks. Within the partitions are the boxlike spaces, ten feet wide, five long, less than three high. For the months of the voyage, each is home for six to ten beings.

This was the steerage setting. Here the emigrants lived their lives, day and night. The more generous masters gave them access to a portion of the deck at certain hours. But bad weather often deprived the passengers of that privilege, kept them below for days on end.<sup>23</sup>

Handlin goes on to point out problems of sickness and disease.

It was no surprise that disease should be a familiar visitor. The only ventilation was through the hatches battened down in rough weather. When the close air was not stifling hot, it was bitter cold in the absence of fire. Rats were at home in the dirt and disorder. The result: cholera, dysentery, yellow fever, smallpox, measles, and the generic 'ship fever' that might be anything. It was not always as bad as on the April, on which five hundred of eleven hundred Germans perished in the crossing; the normal mortality was about 10 percent.<sup>24</sup>

Handlin also mentions food shortage as a major problem. Most ships did not carry enough rations for the journey and passengers often went hungry. If James was one of the common people who made their way to America, as it seems

certain he was, his passage would not have been an easy one.

Willie would have arrived some time in the month of July, 1836, and as he recorded in a handwritten self-history, his ship put in at New York City.<sup>25</sup> There are passenger and immigration lists of those who arrived in New York City in 1836, but the name of James G. Willie is not listed. While extensive, these lists are certainly not complete.

A life sketch of James Willie, written by a granddaughter, reports that Willie was engaged in a government tanning operation in New York City.<sup>26</sup> Nothing specific can be found of any governmental activities in the city of New York relating to tanning. This does not discredit the information however, because government records are very sketchy at this early time period.

At that time tanning had not moved into the machine age. Traditional techniques were used, techniques that took a great deal of time and effort. It is not known if James learned some of these skills in England, or if this was his first contact with the trade. An in-depth discussion of the tanning trade and its employment possibilities appears in Appendix I.

Nothing else is known about Willie's life during his first five and a half years in New York. He must have lived as other immigrants did at that time, which was

poorly. Many immigrants stayed in the area in which they disembarked because of their poverty. Jones brings this point out:

Analysis of the influences which determined immigrant distribution in the United States may begin with the fact, already noted, that the overwhelming mass of newcomers came on their own initiative and without assistance. A great many immigrants were completely without resources once they had paid their fares and, on reaching America, were immobilized by their poverty. The authorities in every immigrant port from Boston to New Orleans constantly complained that, while the more prosperous and able-bodied dispersed throughout the country, the more helpless and destitute remained wherever they happened to disembark.<sup>27</sup>

James was among those who came to America only to find the harsh ghetto conditions of the large cities. Whatever he encountered in New York City it was not the dream he had in mind when he came to America. Soon, however, James would find a dream, a dream founded in his future Mormon church membership. But it was a dream that he certainly could not have anticipated when he made the decision to come to America.

In these pages I have tried to establish some roots for James G. Willie. Much that has been discussed has been drawn from general information, but it provides personal clues as to his upbringing and childhood. It pieces what is known on James together, and ties it into the general flow of events around him. With this attempt it is hoped that a basis has been established for visualizing Willie's early life.



Footnotes

1 "James Grey Willie," Genealogical Family Group Sheet, L.D.S. Church Genealogical Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

2 Samuel Lewis, A Topographical Dictionary of England. 4 vols. (London: S. Lewis and Co., 1831), vol. 3, p. 336.

3 Institute of Historical Research, The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1911; reprint ed., Folkestone & London: The University of London, 1973), pp 66-67.

4 Ibid, p. 93.

5 G.M. Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History. 5 vols. (New York: David Mckay Company, 1955), vol. 4, pp. 1-2.

6 Maud W. Willie, and Glenna Austin, "The Life Story of James Grey Willie", (typewritten).

7 "James Grey Willie".

8 Willie and Austin, p. 1.

9 Lewis, Vol. 4, p. 281.

10 Ibid., pp. 281-282.

11 Ibid., p. 282.

12 Ibid, p. 282.

13 Ibid., p. 283.

14 Willie and Austin, p. 1.

15 Ibid., p. 1.

16 James Grey Willie, "Missionary Journal, 1852-1856", Utah State University Library, Special Collections, Logan, Utah, August 9, 1855.

17 Lewis, Vol. 1, p. 329.

18 Ibid., p. 330.

19 James Grey Willie, "16th Seventies Quorum

Record, February, 1847, Winter Quarters, Nebraska." L.D.S. Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

20 Maldwyn Allen Jones, American Immigration, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960) pp. 93-94.

21 Ibid., p. 96.

22 Ibid., p. 100.

23 Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted, 2nd Ed., (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973) pp. 45-46.

24 Ibid., p. 46.

25 Willie, "16th Seventies Quorum Record"

26 Willie and Austin, p. 2.

27 Jones, pp. 118-119.

CHAPTER III  
THE START OF A JOURNEY WITH MORMONISM

In December of 1841 James Willie was in Norwalk, Connecticut, on some unknown business. While there, he met a man by the name of Quartus S. Sparks. Sparks was serving as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, "The Mormon Church". It was through Sparks that Willie was introduced to the church.<sup>1</sup>

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was organized by Joseph Smith on April 6, 1830, at Fayette, New York.<sup>2</sup> Smith claimed to have received direct revelation from heaven with the divine authority necessary to establish a church. The most important of these revelations was the information from original records kept on many thin gold plates. These records told the story of the ancestors of the American Indian, a group of people who lived in the Americas between 600 B.C. and 421 A.D. Translated by Smith, this record was published as the Book of Mormon.<sup>3</sup>

With the church's organization in 1830 came a strong movement for proselyting work, which led to fast and steady growth. Rapid growth and unique teachings caused conflict with neighbors, and the Mormon headquarters were moved from New York to Ohio and later to Missouri. Finally, because of heavy persecution, the church moved in

1839 to a city established by the Mormons in Illinois called Nauvoo. The church remained centered in Illinois until after the death of the prophet Joseph in June of 1844.<sup>4</sup>

After learning something of the Mormon church, Willie made his way back from Norwalk to the New York City area, and continued to pursue his interest in the new religion. He met a woman by the name of Elizabeth Pettit, and they attended church together in the New Rochelle, New York, branch.<sup>5</sup> New Rochelle was a small village about sixteen miles northeast of New York City's Grand Central Station.

Elizabeth Ann Pettit was born December 3, 1818 in New Rochelle, the child of William Pettit and Mary Odell. Her father worked as a cabinet maker in the New Rochelle area. Elizabeth became a seamstress in her late teens, and then to New York City to practice her trade. On June 27, 1841, Elizabeth joined the Mormon church, and was subsequently disowned by her parents. After joining the church Elizabeth moved back to the New Rochelle area where she met James.<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth and James seemed to fill each others needs, both being lonely and needing friendship.

Through Elizabeth's friendship and the teachings of the Mormon church, Willie became a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in January of 1842.<sup>7</sup> He was baptized by Charles W. Wandell, who did a great deal of missionary work in the Eastern States area.<sup>8</sup>

James became a member of the small Mormon branch at New Rochelle.<sup>9</sup>

As the months passed James and Elizabeth grew closer, and on June 13th, 1842, they were married<sup>10</sup> (see Appendix II). According to family tradition, they were married by Samuel Brannan, one the interesting characters in Mormon history.<sup>11</sup>

Brannan was born in Saco, Maine on March 2, 1819. He spent his early working years as a printer in Ohio, and later in New Orleans and Indianapolis. He later moved to Kirtland, Ohio, where he lived with his sister Mary Ann. Mary Ann and her husband were strong Latter-Day Saints, and subsequently Brannan was baptized into the religion. In the early 1840s he moved to New York where he became acquainted with William Smith, the brother of the prophet Joseph Smith. Brannan was involved with church activities in the New York area until the death of Joseph Smith in 1844. At that time Brannan supported the claims of William to succeed his brother as leader of the church. Because of his non-support of Brigham Young, who succeeded Joseph Smith, Brannan was disfellowshipped.<sup>12</sup> He later made a trip to Nauvoo to visit with Brigham Young, and was reconciled and reinstated in the church. Brannan then returned to New York where he was assigned to work with Parley P. Pratt and Orson Pratt on the Mormon publication The Messenger.<sup>13</sup>

In September of 1842, Willie was ordained an elder in

the church, an important achievement for one baptized only seven months before. Through this ordination he became involved in the work of the Eastern States Mission.<sup>14</sup>

The early history of the Eastern States Mission had in large measure been the history of the Mormon church in the New York area. From the church's organization in April of 1830, to April of the following year, about one hundred members had joined the church in the state of New York.<sup>15</sup> In January of 1832, Joseph Smith received a revelation calling for Orson Hyde, Samuel Smith, Lyman Johnson, and Orson Pratt to preach the gospel in the "eastern countries", thus formally initiating the Eastern States Mission.<sup>16</sup> From this point many missionaries were called, and much work accomplished in this area. As the church moved west to Missouri, later to Nauvoo, and finally to the Rocky Mountains, the Eastern States Mission became an organizational half-way point for converts coming from Europe.

Thus after joining the church, James was put to work in the Eastern States Mission activities. Very little is mentioned in the mission records of his role. Indeed, only once is Willie listed by name but events are listed in which both he and Elizabeth were probably involved.

On November 29, 1841, for example, a conference was held in New York City in which Apostle John E. Page was presiding as president of the mission. One hundred and seventy-nine members, from five different branches around

the New York City area were represented.<sup>17</sup> Being a new member of the church, it is likely that Elizabeth would have been in attendance at an important meeting such as this. The presence of a visiting apostle like Elder Page would have been a strong incentive indeed for her to be there.

Other mention is made of meetings in the area of New York City and New Rochelle at which high Mormon officials were present. For example, meetings were held on March 18 and October 11 of 1843 at which leaders tried to raise tithing money for the construction of the Nauvoo Temple. These meetings were well publicized and reportedly well attended by the members.<sup>18</sup> Another meeting was held on April 3rd and 4th of 1844. At this conference William Smith and the president of the Eastern States Mission were presiding. The New Rochelle branch was reported as having fifteen members present. It is not known if James or Elizabeth were present, but it is one of the few references to the New Rochelle branch in church manuscript records.<sup>19</sup>

On May 16, 1843, there was a meeting held at the Colombian Hall, Grant Street, New York City. At it were 387 members from fifteen branches. Each branch gave a report, with John Anthony Woolf representing the New Rochelle Branch. His report provides a brief sketch of the situation in which the Willies found themselves. "There are at present one high priest, two elders, two

priests, two teachers, and twenty-five members all in good standing, except two. Seven have been added since last conference, two removed to New York and one cut off."<sup>20</sup> Significantly this conference also voted to send "Elder B.S. Wilbur, and J.G. Willie, with Charles W. Wandell to Canaan, Connecticut, to investigate the affairs of the branch there, and make a report of their doings to the clerk of this conference."<sup>21</sup> This ties Willie into the New Rochelle branch on a confirmed basis, and also makes it clear that by this time he was working with active missionaries like Wandell who had baptized him a year earlier.

A history written in Willie's own hand, when he was made a Seventy at Winter Quarters, Nebraska in 1847, speaks of his activity in the eastern states missionary work. This history was very brief, but does give some important details of his life. In it Willie writes of another calling in the spring of 1843 when he "was sent with Elder Godfrey on a mission to Vermont by the New York conference." In a note that suggests he was acting as a full-time missionary by this point he continued, "on my return in the fall [I] accompanied Elder C.W. Pell to New Haven, Connecticut, and preached in that region of the country till the ensuing spring."<sup>22</sup> This missionary experience was extremely important in committing Willie to the work of the church and helps explain his later roles as a missionary leader.



In June of 1844 Joseph Smith was assassinated at Carthage, Illinois. This event changed the plans of the church which was ultimately forced to abandon its headquarters in Nauvoo by the end of 1845 or face further persecutions.<sup>23</sup>

While this decision was being made, Samuel Brannan was considering the possibility of chartering a ship to take Mormons from the New York area around the South American tip to California.<sup>24</sup> The idea had been approved by Apostle Orson Pratt, then the Mormon leader in the eastern states area.<sup>25</sup> It was hoped that from California these people would be able to join the main body of the Mormons in whatever western destination they decided upon. As things worked out, Brannan chartered a vessel, the Brooklyn, and James and Elizabeth signed up to sail aboard it.<sup>26</sup> Their friendship with Brannan, which is evident by his performing their marriage, no doubt influenced his decision to travel on the Brooklyn rather than join the Mormons in Nauvoo for the trek west.

On November 12, 1845, Orson Pratt was requested to return to Nauvoo to help prepare Mormons there for the actual evacuation. In a special meeting held that day, Pratt informed the eastern saints:

I grieve to leave my loyal workers that I have learned to love and depend on, but I must go home to prepare our people, and especially my own family, for the long trek across the plains which now faces us. We must leave the first of February, in the dead of winter, Governor Ford (of Illinois) tells us. I want to warn the poor

among you here not to go to Nauvoo--the Church cannot help you. Already we have more destitute there than we can take care of. To the rest of you, I want to say that if you have enough means to buy horses, wagons, tents, equipment and food enough to pay your passage by water to the west coast it will be an easier journey....We do not want one Saint left in the United States after this time. Let every branch in the east, west, north and south be determined to flee out of Babylon either by land or sea....If all want to go, charter a half dozen or a dozen vessels and fill each with passengers and the fare among so many will be but a trifle.<sup>27</sup>

Having heard the speech, or heard of it, the Willies must have been even more determined to leave their home and travel aboard the ship Brooklyn.

Brannan's plans were finalized, and the ship sailed from New York City on February 4, 1846, with 238 Mormon passengers on board.<sup>28</sup> As it turned out, however, the Willies were not among those who sailed with the Brooklyn. Elizabeth was taken ill, and the couple feared the effects of a long ocean voyage on her health.<sup>29</sup>

The Brooklyn did arrive in Yerba Buena (San Francisco) on July 29, 1846, after a little more than six months at sea.<sup>30</sup> About 140 of the party eventually found their way to Salt Lake City, and joined the main body of the saints. The rest remained in California, with most leaving the Mormon church. Brannan's was among those who left the church,<sup>31</sup> remaining to play a significant role in California's history. As H.H. Bancroft's History of California records:

Brannan participated in the early scenes of California's pioneer life--the discovery of

gold; the wild speculations in San Francisco real estate; became an organizer of mining, milling and railway companies; purchased a great distillery, and became a large land proprietor both in California and in Sonora, Mexico; and for a time was known as the richest man in California.<sup>32</sup>

Had the Willies been able to join with Brannan and the others aboard the Brooklyn their story might have been greatly different.

The same day the Brooklyn set sail for California, Charles Shumway, a man who will come into play in Willie's life, was leading the first group across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo, and establishing a camp on Sugar Creek.<sup>33</sup> While the Mormons in Nauvoo were beginning to travel west, James and Elizabeth made preparations to join them. Very little detail is known about how the Willies made their way to Nauvoo, and then on to Winter Quarters, Nebraska. Willie's brief statement indicates they left New York City on April 21, 1846, and arrived in Nauvoo some time during the summer months.<sup>34</sup>

By the summer of 1846, very few of the L.D.S. remained in Nauvoo. Those who did were either sick and afflicted, or could not afford to start west. Hostilities against those who remained were intense as the anti-Mormon element became increasingly impatient with the slowness of the withdrawal.<sup>35</sup> It must have been a keen disappointment for the Willies and others who traveled through Nauvoo at this time to see their once beautiful and thriving center deserted and downcast.

After a stay of only two weeks in Nauvoo, the Willies moved on to join the new Mormon settlement at Winter Quarters, arriving shortly after it was established on September 16, 1846.<sup>36</sup> Winter Quarters served a very definite purpose in the so-called Mormon exodus. Its first purpose was born of necessity, as B.H. Roberts points out:

The lateness of the arrival of the Camp of Israel upon the Missouri had rendered impossible any attempt that season to lead more than a small and an especially equipped company of Pioneers into the Great Basin of the Rocky Mountains. The time employed in raising the battalion for the United States army, together with the reduction of efficient men in the camp by reason of so large an enlistment, made it impractical now even to send an efficient company of Pioneers across the plains and into the mountains.

Meantime a place for winter encampment to which most of the saints on the Missouri could be gathered was sought....Some twelve miles north of the main camp's first ferry on the Missouri was a 'high plateau overlooking the river' and this was the site selected for temporary abode, and given the name of 'Winter Quarters', the present Florence, Nebraska, some five or six miles above the city of Omaha.<sup>37</sup>

Winter Quarters also functioned as the primary point of departure during the next two years. The spring and early summer of both 1847 and 1848 would see many leave from Winter Quarters on their way to the Great Basin. Food was grown and a variety of shops set up to provide for the many needs of the members as they outfitted for their journey. This was to be a headquarters as well as a winter quarters. People divided into groups and put to work laying out streets, building a stockade and

blockhouse for protection from possible Indian attack, and a water powered gristmill. People also built houses and dugouts, mostly log cabins from large cottonwood trees on the river bottoms. By January there were over 700 houses at Winter Quarters, and by spring nearly 1000.<sup>38</sup>

A large building was constructed for public and church meetings. The new city was divided into thirteen wards, with bishops to preside over them. By the time winter came this number had increased to twenty-two wards. The primary responsibility of the people was to provide shelter for themselves and others, and to grow as much food as possible for the coming winter and the journey to the Great Basin. This was largely a community affair, with the bishops spearheading the effort.<sup>39</sup> The activity that seemed to involve everyone was the care of the sick. By far the most common ailment experienced, and the one that caused the most death, was the "chills and fever", or malaria. Conditions were just right for such a sickness. As described in the journal of Thomas L. Kane.

During a considerable part of summer and autumn, the climate of the 'Missouri Bottom' is singularly pestiferous. Its rich soil, resembling a compost heap, is continually the repository of the decaying, lush vegetation that grows along the river. Streams and creeks freely water the surrounding land giving it a swampy nature. In the season of drought these streams and river dry down till they run impure as open sewers, exposing foul broad flats interspersed here and there by limbs of half buried carrion tree-trunks, or by occasional yellow pools of tepid water; all together steaming up thick vapors redolent of the diseases of the swamp.<sup>40</sup>

The "chills and fever" seemed to infect most people during the late summer and autumn months, at the height of the mosquito season. The symptoms were prostration, often for weeks at a time, burning fever alternating with a cold, clammy sweat, and infectious sores. One third of the deaths at Winter Quarters were from this disease.<sup>41</sup>

It is reported in many of the Willie family histories that James Willie was among those afflicted by the chills. These histories also report that he lost almost all of his thick curly hair as a result of the fever, and never got it back.<sup>42</sup> He was never particularly robust thereafter and may well have suffered some permanent loss of health as well as loss of hair.

Even though many suffered sickness, and many died, Winter Quarters was largely a success that served its purpose.

Another important event in James' life at occurred Winter Quarters. On February 6, 1847, he was ordained a Seventy in the Priesthood, a calling the primary function of which is missionary work. James was also made a counselor of the 16th Quorum of Seventies, which was organized at Winter Quarters. This was an important call, one that was to lead to other significant commitments. As mentioned before, it was customary for Seventies to submit personal histories for quorum records. The following is from James' history:

Genealogy of James G. Willie, born at Murrell Green, Hampshire, England Nov. 1st 1814 son of William and Mary Willie of Yarcombe Somersetshire England. Left England June 1st 1836 for New York and in Dec 1841 first heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ at Norwalk Connecticut by Q.S. Sparks and was baptized by Elder C.W. Wandell, Jan 1842 and ordained an Elder in September of the same year. In the Spring of 1843 was sent with Elder Godfrey on a mission to Vermont by the New York Conference and on my return in the fall accompanied Elder C.W. Pell to New Haven, Connecticut and preached in that region of country till the ensuing Spring. April 21st 1846 left New York for Nauvoo bound for California; and at the City of Winter Quarters of the Camp of Iseral was ordained a councillor in the 16th Quorum of Seventies Feb 6th 1847 by Elder Joseph Young, Burr Frost and George D. Grant.<sup>43</sup>

The only reference to Willie at Winter Quarters, other than the Seventie's Quorum history, was in the journal of John D. Lee. Lee was a devout Mormon and personal friend of Brigham Young, who participated in many important events during the trek west. Lee later became involved in the tragic Mountain Meadows Massacre, and was the only man brought to trial. He was eventually convicted and executed for the crime on March 23, 1877. History now seems to point out that Lee was a scapegoat for the event, and was taking orders from local Mormon officials in southern Utah.<sup>44</sup>

Under the date of February 27, 1847, Lee records that he was attending a meeting with Brigham Young and other leaders of the pioneer trains preparing to head west with the break of spring. They were discussing preparations generally, and the subject of the need for leather boats came up. These boats were to be taken by the lead parties,

and left at river crossings. James G. Willie was assigned to work with the hides. Lee's diary reads:

The subject of building a rawhide boat was then agitated in the form of 2 large canoes and lash them together when used. Use of the wagon boxes or rather the bottom boards for flooring and when done ferrying the boat could be used for wagon bodies. Pres. Young said that 18 men could lodge in one of these boats and that we build one of those boats of sole leather well stuffed with bees wax and tallow, and then when we are done with them the leather is still worth the cost to tap our boots and shoes, but for experience let us build another of rawhide which is said by some to be preferable to tanned leather. Lastly the above constructed named boats were decided upon. Pres. B. Young said that he would build the rawhide boat, decided that Pres. (B.Y.) superintend building of the boat. Bro. John Richards volunteered to saw the lumber. E.T. Benson volunteered to furnish a stick of white oak timber 22 feet in length, from 6 to 12 inches at the small end, and John Lytle will do the ironing. Edward Hunter furnishes the iron, and Bro. Weeks, Kesler, Ensign and Cooks... and we will assist them in other things. Both boats will have to be building at the same time and those men can carry on better. Let the hides be furnished by the Co. wherever the Capts. can find them. Bros. Woodruff volunteered to furnish 1 beef hide, Bro. J. Vance 2, I. Morley 1, Chas Shumway to secure the sinews. After deliberation it was considered preferable to build both boats of rawhide. Let Bro. Jas. G. Willey take hold and dress the hide for the boats and that Bro. Jas. Hart assist him.<sup>45</sup>

As it turned out, only one of the leather boats was taken by the pioneer wagon train. It was named the "Revenue Cutter". It was put to good use at a crossing of the Platte River near present day Casper, Wyoming.<sup>46</sup>

As Willie mentioned in his Seventies history, he supposed the Mormons' destination to be California. This was written four months before James left Winter Quarters,



Nebraska, and two months before the advanced party of Brigham Young headed west. The decision of destination was still in abeyance and Willie's speculation that they were bound for California was a legitimate one. California was a much more indefinite designation than now, and would have actually applied to parts of the Great Basin. During the period of preparation Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders had read publications of John C. Fremont and Lansford W. Hastings that named an isolated and protected area on the shores of the Great Salt Lake.<sup>47</sup> Although this information was not acted on to become a final decision until the advanced party reached Fort Bridger, Wyoming, the region of the Great Salt Lake was clearly seen as a possibility.

In organizing the massive migration effort of 1847, Brigham Young is said to have received a revelation from God instructing him on how to go about it. In part it specified:

2 Let all the people of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and all those who journey with them, be organized into companies,...

3 Let the companies be organized with captains of hundreds, captains of fifties, and captains of tens, with a president and his two counselors at their head, under the direction of the Twelve Apostles...

5 Let each company provide themselves with all the teams, wagons provisions, clothing, and other necessaries for the journey, that they can.

6 When the companies are organized let them go to with their might, to prepare for those who are to tarry.

7 Let each company, with their captains and

presidents, decide how many can go next spring; then choose out a sufficient number of able-bodied and expert men, to take teams, seeds, and farming utensils, to go as pioneers to prepare for putting in spring crops.

8 Let each company bear an equal proportion, according to the dividend of their property, in taking the poor, the widows, the fatherless, and the families of those who have gone into the army, that the cries of the widow and the fatherless come not up into the ears of the Lord against this people.

9 Let each company prepare houses, and fields for raising grain, for those who are to remain behind this season; and this is the will of the Lord concerning his people.<sup>48</sup>

Verse seven directed Young to form an advanced party of "able-bodied and expert men" to go ahead of the rest preparing the way both along the trail and at the final site. Also groups were to be organized into outfits of one hundred, under the direction of the Twelve Apostles.

It was decided that four additional groups of one hundred families or units would follow Brigham Young later in the season. These companies would travel together as a single contingent but always camp a half mile apart to preserve their integrity and identity. Daniel Spencer was captain of the first hundred, while Edward Hunter was captain of the second (with the cooperation of John Taylor). Jedediah Grant was over the third, and Abraham Smoot was in charge of the fourth hundred. James and Elizabeth Willie were assigned to Jedediah M. Grant's hundred. They were also assigned to Hazen Kimball's group of ten families.<sup>49</sup>

Organization was the key for migration success, and

successful they were, as this comment from a prominent western historian, Ray Allen Billington, makes clear:

So well had Brigham Young and his pioneers labored that the caravans which followed their trail experienced few difficulties. The first left Camp of Israel on March 1, 1846, 'without confusion, without hurrying or even discord'; other followed at regular intervals until they formed a giant procession three hundred miles long. Each wagon train, following Young's instructions, was divided into 'hundreds' or 'fifties' under a captain; these in turn were subdivided into 'tens' controlled by a lieutenant who kept order, settled disputes, and supervised the day's march and nightly encampment. Rarely in history had a mass migration been accomplished with so little difficulty.<sup>50</sup>

The Mormons are many things to many people, but even their critics would agree that they have a marvelous talent for organization. There can be no doubt that Willie was being schooled in the organization of migration as he went about his preparations to leave.

Brigham Young's advanced party left Winter Quarters on April 7, 1847. The outfit numbered one hundred forty-three men, three women, and two children. The original plan was to take no women along, but one wife was sick with malaria and was allowed to leave the river bottoms with her husband. This opened the door for Brigham Young's wife Clara, and Heber C. Kimball's wife Ellen to join their husbands. The two children were of the sick woman's family. The pioneers took with them the finest equipment for travel, with tools for farming which could be used upon their arrival. They also took a few

scientific instruments and maps that would help them to pinpoint their location on the trail. The outfit had seventy-three wagons, ninety-three horses, fifty-two mules, sixty-six oxen, nineteen cows, seventeen dogs, and a few chickens.<sup>51</sup>

The trek of the advanced party is well documented. It was a successful trip, with only a few problems along the way. Two members arrived in the valley of the Salt Lake on July 21, 1847, with other small groups arriving on July 23. The main party with Brigham Young entered the valley on the celebrated day of July 24, 1847. Brigham Young was reported to have said, "This is the right place".<sup>52</sup>

The experiences of those who followed Brigham Young are not so well documented. Grant's third hundred, of which James and Elizabeth were part, is only recorded in very sketchy detail. It left Winter Quarters on June 17, 1847. Traveling with it were John Young, a brother to Brigham, and a military party from Nauvoo Legion, commanded by Charles C. Rich.<sup>53</sup> An incident reflecting the eagerness of Grant's company on the trail is depicted in a biography of Jedediah M. Grant, written by Gene Sessions:

The third hundred moved very well during the first few days, so well in fact that it overtook and passed the second company and an irate John Taylor, who subsequently stormed into Grant's camp on horseback June 24 to accuse Grant and Young of disobeying orders and being out of place. When Parley P. Pratt, the ranking

apostle in the emigration, arrived in the camp that evening, he listened patiently while Taylor harangued the leaders of the third company for 'being disobedient and insulting to the priesthood,' and then, in Rich's words, 'gave us a good lecture.' On Pratt's advice, Grant agreed to obey counsel and to apologize to Taylor, and the incident passed.<sup>54</sup>

Sessions then goes on to tell of another far more important problem that the third hundred encountered on the trail:

The trek was going well for the third hundred until a few miles west of Grand Island on the Platte on the night of July 12. The companies were camping all together for the first time, feasting on buffalo meat and enjoying a social respite from the grueling journey along the muddy river. During the night the cattle and oxen in Grant's company broke out of the yard, smashing in the process several wagons and killing and maiming some of the livestock in the camp. The third company had no choice but to stay over in order to repair equipment and find the scattered stock while the other three proceeded. Four days later Captain Grant still counted as missing seventy-five precious head of cattle, including twenty yokes of oxen. So critical was this loss to the third hundred that the other companies slowed up while volunteers dropped back to assist in search for the cattle, but few were found. Finally, on July 23, nearly two weeks after the breakout, Grant's party limped into view of the other companies at a place called Cedar Bluffs. The next day, as Brigham Young was entering the Valley of the Great Salt Lake for the first time, Jedediah Grant and his company of Saints fell again considerably behind the rest of the trekkers still on the Platte. It would be a long and difficult journey the rest of the way into the promised land.

From July 24 on into the dusty days of August, the third hundred struggled to keep up with the rest of the emigration. Realizing that better progress could be made in somewhat smaller groups given the short livestock situation, Grant divided his company early in August, Bates Noble and his fifty being allowed to press ahead separately. He sent his ailing

wife ahead with the girls while he remained most of the time in the rear with Williard Snow and his fifty, keeping them going and trying to ease the hardship somewhat with his presence. But no matter what efforts the group expended, the h his presence. But no matter what efforts the group expended, the third hundred continued to lag several miles behind the other three companies, while all four were yoking up cows and sometimes men to keep the wagons moving along the trail.<sup>55</sup>

James and Elizabeth were part of the Bates Noble fifty that pressed on ahead of the rest of Grant's group.<sup>56</sup>

As Grant's company, which by this time was in the rear, came to an area between Independence Rock, and modern day Fort Laramie, Wyoming, they entered a harsh country choked with alkaline soil and with very little vegetation. The area was strewn with dead animals and valuables of the heavily loaded wagons of those who had gone before. Susan Noble, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Bates Noble, wrote later about entering that harsh country:

Oh, that smell was terrible, especially when it was seasoned with the nasty water. It was enough to kill us all--men and beast. Even to this day, at the scent of carrion, I am carried backward to those days on the plains. We didn't blame the travelers ahead of us so very much, for we could do but little better for those who were to follow us, but we did, however, drag off all dead critters from the camping places.

My, how we boys and girls worked day after day to keep our cows and sheep from taking too large a dose at one time of this brackish water. The weather was so hot, though, and the animals increased in their thirst by the salty country, that in spite of our pounding, and pleadings, they would gorge themselves upon the moribific, soap-bubbly stuff and then almost immediately begin being sick. An epidemic of cholera had broken out, spreading first among the animals

and then attacking the people, especially the children. As the days passed and the conditions grew no better, the malady increased in severity. I remember one afternoon when our best milch cow stretched out and died. This was the first of our animals to go. All through camp, oxen, horses, sheep, pigs, and even the chickens were affected alike. As the human sick list grew, greater loads were added to the weary cattle. Oh, it was just terrible the vomiting and purging and knifelike cramps that sapped the vitality in just a few hours, bringing some of the strongest to the wagons and keeping them there for days and finally leaving them pale and weak.<sup>57</sup>

Grant's hundred left the harsh country behind them and moved to the welcome relief of the Sweetwater River Valley. They lost many animals to the alkaline grass and poison water, which further slowed their progress. On September 8th, the group received relief when Brigham Young and others arrived in camp on their return to Winter Quarters, bringing additional animals to strengthen Grant's teams. It was, however, short-lived, for while the two parties were recessing together, a band of Indians made off with forty mules and horses. They were pursued but few of the lost animals were recovered. Before leaving, Brigham dispatched a message to Salt Lake City, asking for more relief for Grant's party. He also gave up all the animals his group could possibly afford, inviting members of his party "to take a walk with me to Winter Quarters".<sup>58</sup>

With draft stock dangerously reduced in numbers, it was decided on September 15 to facilitate travel by splitting the outfit even beyond the earlier division, and

the company proceeded in small parties of ten from this point. This seemed to help the progress toward the next major goal of "South Pass".<sup>59</sup> With mixed disappointment and joy, Susan Noble described the pass.

We had heard so much of South Pass that we thought, of course, a dangerous and difficult climb was before us. One can hardly imagine our surprized feeling when we found the continental divide a long, broad, easy upland valley with spendid trails. It was hardly believable until we saw the waters of the Sandy running westward toward Green River.<sup>60</sup>

Just as things began to look up for the saints of the Grant hundred, mountain fever set in effecting many of the wagon units. They were still about 150 miles from the new settlement on the shore of the Great Salt Lake. No record was made of the number of deaths that occurred because of the fever but it is known that Captain Grant lost his wife.<sup>61</sup> Finally the first elements of the scattered company limped into Salt Lake City on October 4, 1847.<sup>62</sup>

James and Elizabeth are only mentioned by name as being part of Grant's group, but they were indeed a part of the toil and hardship. When speaking of the loss of animals, the harsh alkaline grasses, the poison water, or the mountain fever, these are experiences that all endured. The Willies also became a part of the great tradition associated with the Mormon pioneers of 1847 and the broader westering of the American nation. The pioneers of 1847 were, in effect, a modern Israel



traveling to fulfill a destiny of their God.

Already, as they accompanied Grant's company into the Salt Lake Valley, the Willies had journeyed far with their Mormon faith. They had found and married one another. They had found a destiny and given themselves to it. They had helped spread the word of their new religion in the New York area, and they had traveled long and hard to gather with the saints in Zion. But their journey with Mormonism was far from over. It would yet take them to new places, and they would give it even more of their time and effort. They would soon have children and begin strong traditions, which carry on in the Willie family.

Footnotes

1 James Grey Willie, "16th Seventies Quorum Record, February, 1847, Winter Quarters, Nebraska," L.D.S. Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

2 Donna Hill, Joseph Smith, The First Mormon (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1977), p. 106.

3 Ibid., pp. 70-105.

4 Ibid., pp. 405-418.

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CHAPTER IV  
LAYING THE FOUNDATION OF SALT LAKE CITY

This chapter deals with the Willie family in Salt Lake City from their arrival in 1847 to the time James was called on a mission in 1852, as well as Elizabeth's activities in Salt Lake City during her husband's mission. Since only a few details exist about the Willies for this period, it will be important to talk generally of the growth of the "City of the Saints" between 1847-1852.

The pioneers in the Valley banded together to build up the city and help one another survive during these early years. Because there was unity there was a sameness of experience that exemplifies what was happening with the Willies.

By the time they arrived, Salt Lake City had been laid out and some buildings constructed. Many of the projects necessary in building a city began immediately upon the arrival of the advanced group on July 24, 1847. Leonard J. Arrington, in his work Great Basin Kingdom, paints a marvelous picture of the activities of that advance party of saints.

Consciously, then, but effortlessly--as if by force of habit--the advanced company was divided into cadres or 'committees' for work. One group staked off, plowed, harrowed, and irrigated thirty-five acres of land, which was planted in potatoes, corn, oats, buckwheat, beans, turnips, and garden seeds. Another party

located a site for a temple and laid out a city of 135 ten acre blocks, with the Temple Block in the center. Each block was divided into eight home lots of an acre and one-fourth each. The streets--uniformly eight rods wide--ran east-west and north-south, and were named, starting from the Temple Block, First East, Second East; First South, Second South; First West, Second West, and so. The city was named "Great Salt Lake City, Great Basin, North America," and names were given to various creeks and streams in the valley, and to some of the peaks surrounding it. Regulations were adopted that the sidewalks be twenty feet wide, that the houses be built twenty feet back from the sidewalks, and that the houses be constructed of sun-dried, clay adobe, after the manner of the Spanish. Lots around Temple Block were apportioned to members of the Quorum of the Twelve (the First Presidency was not selected until December 1847), and other lots were distributed ny lot. One of the blocks was selected for a fort or stockade of log cabins within which the pioneers would live until permanent structures could be erected on the city lots.

A large group was then assigned to build log cabins and a wall around the fort: "Sixty to hoke, twelve to mould and twenty to put up walls." Within a month, twenty-nine log houses had been built in the fort, each eight or nine feet high, sixteen feet long, and fourteen feet wide. A Block was set aside for a public adobe yard, and an adobe wall was constructed around the three open sides of the fort.

Another committee of the advanced party located timber in a nearby canyon, constructed a road, extracted logs for the cabins, and dug a pit for a whipsaw. A boat was made for use in the creeks, a blacksmith shop was set up, corrals were built, and a community storehouse was erected. Others were assigned to hunt for wild game, try their luck at fishing, and extract salt from Great Salt Lake. In eight days the hunters had been able to bag only 'one hare, one badger, one white wolf, and three sage hens'; the fishing expedition had netted 'only four fish'; and the salt committee had made 125 bushels of 'coarse white salt,' and one barrel of 'fine white table salt.'<sup>1</sup>

With the arrival of the four companies into the

Valley in late September and early October of 1847, the work initiated by the advanced party was continued. The first concern was food and shelter to get the saints through the winter. By the fall of 1847 there were 1,681 persons who planned to spend the winter in the Valley.<sup>2</sup> All 1,681 of these would need food and shelter. Many of the crops that had been planted did not mature. This made for a somewhat hungry winter. Shelter was also a problem for the first year settlers. Work on a fort had been begun in August. B.H. Roberts writes of this structure in his Comprehensive History of the Church:

It was also decided that one of these ten acre blocks should be enclosed by building houses of logs or adobes--sundried bricks--in the form of a fort, as a protection against possible Indian assaults. There were to be gateways on opposite sides of the enclosure; the buildings to be 8 or 9 feet high, 14 feet wide and 16 or 17 feet long; the chimneys were to be made of adobes, the hearths of clay. All openings were to be on the inside of the enclosure, except such port holes on the outside as might be judged necessary for observing the approach of an enemy. The block selected for this enclosure was four blocks south and three blocks west of the temple site, long afterwards called the 'Old Fort' then 'Pioneer Square,' now a public park and playground for children. Work upon the fort began on the 11th of August.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the first settlers resided at the "Old Fort" during the first winters. Very few houses were constructed outside its protection. The Willies were among those who spent that first winter in the "Old Fort." Even though the times were difficult, the



settlers were lucky that the first winter was mild. They were reported to be still plowing in December of 1847. Parley P. Pratt, in a letter to this brother Orson, in England, reported that the "mild winter" with the "light snows" allowed the animals to winter well. "Horses and cattle were better off after the winter than before its start."<sup>4</sup>

Spring planting began early. Those who had been allotted plots worked their own ground, while others worked jointly on a large track of ground known as the "big field." The planting looked very promising at first, but a late frost destroyed a large portion of the crop. Soon after the frost came hordes of crickets. Crickets had been noted by the pioneers as being abundant in the foothills the year before. But in May of 1848 they came by the literal millions. Roberts' history of the Mormon church records the following:

They devoured all before them as they came to it. Their appetite never abated. They were cutting and grinding day and night, leaving the fields bare and brown behind them. There seemed to be no end to their numbers. They could not fly, their only means of locomotion was by clumsily hopping a scant foot at a time--hence, once in the field, the difficulty of getting them out; and they came in myriads, increasing daily. Holes were dug and for the radius of a rod the pests were surrounded by women and children, and driven into them and buried--bushels of them at a time; and this was repeated again and again; but what was the use? This method seemed not to affect the numbers of the pests. Then the men plowed ditches around the wheat fields, turned in the water and drove

the black vermin into the running streams and thus carried them from the field and destroyed them by hundreds of thousands--all to no purpose; as many as ever seemed to remain, and more were daily swarming from the hills. Fire was tried, but to no better purpose, Man's ingenuity was baffled. He might as well try to sweep back the rising tide of the ocean with a broom as prevail against these swarming pests by the methods tried. Small wonder if the hearts of the colonists failed them. They looked at each other in helpless astonishment. They were beaten.<sup>5</sup>

The event that followed is as notable, and as famed in Utah history as any other event. Roberts goes on to describe it.

Then the miraculous happened. I say it deliberately, the miraculous happened, as men commonly view the miraculous. There was heard the shrill, half scream, half plaintive cry of some sea gulls hovering over the wheat fields. Presently they light and begin devouring the crickets. Others come--thousands of them--from over the lake. It is noted that when they were glutted with crickets they would go to the streams, drink, vomit and return again to the slaughter. And so it continued, day after day, until the plague<sup>6</sup> was stayed, and the crops of the Pioneers saved.

It is not certain in history if the seagull event was miraculous. It is a bit cynical however, for historians to judge it as not being such. To the people of Salt Lake City, it was miraculous, whether its impact was great or small in comparison. The Willies were most likely among those who thought of it as an act of God, and a great miracle.

Despite the frost and crickets, the settlers were able to get a good harvest with replanting. The food supply was expected to be enough for the winter, but with

the large number of immigrants in 1848, and the hard winter of 1848-49, food was in short supply. Brigham Young returned to the Valley with the 1848 migration. He found the spirits of the saints somewhat depressed as a result of the harsh conditions and the thought of entering another winter with inadequate food and shelter. Many felt the church would be better off to forsake this area for a greener Oregon or California. Ray Allen Billington in his Far Western Frontier, tells of Young's solution to the problem with the saints:

This was the situation that faced Brigham Young when he returned from the East on September 20, 1848. To one of his abilities, both the problem and its solution were clear. The Saints, he realized, had relied too much on God and too little on themselves. They could prosper in that inhospitable environment only by constant effort; this, moreover, must be a joint effort, for the forces of nature were too powerful to be combated by individuals.<sup>7</sup>

Young outlined many programs for the saints upon his return to the Valley. Cooperative efforts were more strongly enforced, with plans for a "great city" more fully followed. It was decided it was time to break up the "Old Fort", and move the people into the city proper. Great fence projects were planned and initiated to organize and better use the land. Willie was among the fence builders. An agreement was drawn up awarding him five acres of land in return for his labor. The actual piece of ground he received was to be decided by drawing lots.<sup>8</sup>

The drawing was held at the 1848 October conference in the old bowery.<sup>9</sup> James G. Willie received a lot on block 32 of the Orson Pratt survey. It was on the corner of Fifth South and First West. The ten acre block on which he was to live was divided into eight equal lots, one and a quarter acres in size. The Willies were listed in the Salt Lake County abstracts and titled as the "original owners" of this lot.<sup>10</sup> It is not known if Willie received any other land. He probably did since he signed up to take five acres and worked on the fence as specified in the agreement. One possibility is that he shared communally with others in some of the pasture or farm lands further outside the city.

James and Elizabeth immediately went to work building a house on their new lot. It was a small one room log cabin that could have been constructed of "Old Fort" materials.<sup>11</sup> They may not have completed their home, and may have spent the winter of 1848-49 in the "Old Fort" again. They also became members of the Salt Lake City Seventh Ward, in the original Salt Lake Stake, in which there were nineteen wards. The Seventh Ward consisted of a nine square block area between Third South Street on the north, East Temple Street on the east (East Temple is today Main Street), Sixth South Street on the south, and Second West Street on the west.<sup>12</sup> On February 22, 1849, the ward was officially organized with William G. Perkins as the first bishop, which suggests that the

actual movement onto the land by Willie and other Seventh Ward members took place during the winter and early spring of that year.<sup>13</sup>

Fortunately, some histories have been written on the Salt Lake Seventh Ward. The Mormon church, in its archives, has a small "manuscript history" of most of its ecclesiastical subdivisions including the wards. The manuscript history of the Seventh Ward is fairly detailed in its early history. Also a brief but interesting sketch history was written in 1955 by members of the Sixth and Seventh wards, which by that time had been combined. These two histories provide a specific source of information on James and Elizabeth and what was happening around them.

In the first meeting held after the ward's organization, it was decided to fence in the entire nine block ward area. The fence was constructed with poles and adobe wall, also with deep trenches that could double as water ditches. There were eight gates constructed out into the main cross street openings.<sup>14</sup> The following year, however, Brigham Young encouraged the members to fence each of the nine blocks of the ward separately. These fences were most likely constructed out of the same type materials as the previous fences. This project was completed in 1851. Also that year a combination school house and ward meeting house was completed. It was of adobe construction and measured twenty feet by thirty

feet. This building served the needs of the people until 1877. All ward members were part of the projects that helped to make the Seventh Ward one of the finer areas in the Valley.<sup>15</sup>

The first winter in the Valley had been a mild one, and the second was severe. The limited harvest of 1848 took its toll. Many were not prepared for winter, and many suffered. At least for short periods that hard winter many of the saints subsisted on roots and thistles, some even on rawhide. H. H. Bancroft, in his History of Utah, tells of the shortage of food.

Milk, flesh (meat), and the small quantity of breadstuffs that remained were, however, distributed among the poor in such quantities as to prevent actual starvation. On April 1, 1849, each household was required to state the smallest allowance of breadstuffs that would suffice until the forthcoming harvest. Some received half a pound a day, and others four ounces. Until the first fruits were reaped the famine continued....<sup>16</sup>

By contrast, the harvest of 1849, and of the six years that followed, were bountiful.<sup>17</sup> This allowed the saints to firmly entrench themselves in their new homes. They followed the plans of Brigham Young in irrigation projects, the temple projects, city building projects and housing. An irrigation system was constructed that had few equals in the United States. Construction began on the temple. Housing and roads were extended out rapidly from the city center. The Mormon dream of an empire in the West was becoming a reality.

Also settlements were starting all along the Wasatch Front. Bountiful, Ogden, Centerville, Farmington, Provo, Kaysville, and Manti, were among those newly settled. As more settlers arrived in Salt Lake City people spread out to colonize new areas.

The Mormons had great hopes for their western empire. They had given it the name of "Deseret," which comes from the Book of Mormon and refers to the honey bee.<sup>18</sup> Deseret was large, encompassing all of Utah and Nevada, part of southwestern Wyoming, half of Colorado, the west half of New Mexico, and most of Arizona. It extended into California to include the seaport of San Diego, and took in a small part of Oregon and the lower part of Idaho.<sup>19</sup> Brigham Young launched a strong Mormon community, but it would soon be bridled by the United States Government and was ultimately cut down in size.

Willie's occupation in Salt Lake City was again that of a tanner. In the 1850 territorial census, he was listed as an "oil dresser."<sup>20</sup> Dressing was a process by which oils were applied to soften and preserve the leather. Employment in this craft could explain why Willie received only a small parcel of land. In the Mormon effort to be self sustaining, tanning was an essential industry. In a letter dated November 26, 1849, Brigham Young wrote to Edward Hunter of the need to bring tanners and tanning goods from St. Louis. Brigham states: "You are aware of our need of tanners, bring the best

tanners you can get, and enough of them."<sup>21</sup> With Brigham Young's knowledge of James' tanning skills and assignment on the leather boats at Winter Quarters, there is little doubt that Willie became involved early in the Salt Lake City tanning operations. Moreover, in a notice from the first Presidency under the date of September 22, 1851, the saints were advised:

Experiments at tanning hides, and making leather, have as yet, been very limited in the Valley. Much leather is needed in this country, and many thousands of the best hides have rotted or been wasted, for want of sufficient help to erect tanneries, and to convert those hides into leather. There are plenty of materials available to prosecute the business to advantage, and prevent the necessary heavy importations, at enormous expense; and if some of the brethren who are tanners, would come home and attend to their calling here, they would receive the blessing of many souls. Brethren, the harvest here is great, but the laborers are few.<sup>22</sup>

Thus it would seem Willie's job was one of great importance in the Valley at that time. It is not clear where he was employed. He could well have been employed by Samual Mulliner, who was the first in the Valley to establish a tanning operation, but if he waited until the year 1850, there were many outfits that he could have worked for.<sup>23</sup> One has to wonder why Willie did not establish his own tanning business, given his past experience and his early arrival while both need and opportunity were great.

Unfortunately documentation of tanning in early Salt Lake City is very limited. It is mentioned only three



times in the massive day by day "Journal History" of the Mormon church. This refers only to the need for a tannery, and to the subsequent establishment of two.<sup>24</sup>

As mentioned above, James did list his occupation as "oil dresser," so it seems clear he would have been involved in an operation that used the oil tanning technique. This was an outmoded procedure, but must have been needed in the isolation of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>25</sup>

The leather made in early Utah gained the nickname of "Valley Tan" because of its inferior quality in comparison with imported leather. As time passed any articles made with this lower grade leather gained the nickname "Valley Tan." The name soon became synonymous with all Utah manufactured items, to distinguish them from imported items.<sup>26</sup> (See Appendix I).

A potentially important incident recorded in the "Journal History" related to an interest taken in the Willie family business in England by Brigham Young.<sup>27</sup> It seems that James' brother, who had an estate in Calcutta, India, died. This estate was to be divided among his brothers and sisters and was being settled in Calcutta through family members in England. James Willie's share amounted to what he hoped would be 500 pounds sterling. Brigham Young sent a note to England giving Apostle Franklin D. Richards instructions to secure the power of attorney for James. Brigham also wrote Richards a letter on September 13, 1851, further instructing him on the

matter. This letter is recorded in the "Journal History," with a reply letter from Richards on February 2, 1852, stating he had acted for James G. Willie and was pursuing the necessary actions that would allow James to collect his money. He also told Young that he had arranged for the lawyer handling the brother's estate to send Willie the necessary forms and instructions to act on his behalf with a power of attorney. Richards also mentioned to Young that the estate settlement looked as though it would amount to 400 pounds rather than 500.<sup>28</sup>

Nothing more is mentioned about the estate until James was in England on his mission, at which time he indicated in his journal that the settlement was still pending. On July 12, 1853, Willie recorded that he spoke to a lawyer concerning the matter and thereafter he maintained close touch with his family and lawyer for two years while the estate settlement proceeded.<sup>29</sup> Finally on November 17, 1855, Willie recorded in his journal that he would receive a settlement:

In the afternoon I received a letter from Wm Burgess notifying me that my claim on my late Brother's estate was settled at Calcutta....I was most agreeably surprized to find that it is at last settled, tho I shall not have more than one half that legally is my due, but I feel truly thankfull to my heavenly father for the blessing he has bestowed upon me, for frequently when least expected the blessing comes. I felt to bow my knees in gratitude to the Almighty for his goodness to me for I shall now be enabled to pay on my return home, all indebtedness against me during my present Mission. Such is the desire of my heart for I wish not to owe or be in debt to any one if possible....<sup>30</sup>

From these various references it appears that Willie's settlement may have been about 200 pounds. However, other evidence suggests that even 200 pounds was probably far more than he was ever able to apply to his personal needs. He refers to paying for "his return home" and "indebtedness against me during my present Mission." Steerage passage for Mormon emigrants under the Perpetual Emigration Fund was said to be about nine pounds when connected with the handcart scheme. It seems highly unlikely that he had accumulated 190 pounds in mission debts. Thus it would seem certain that Willie's settlement was far from 200 pounds. Another possibility which might find support in Brigham Young's interest in the settlement is that much of Willie's estate settlement was actually diverted into the emigration fund.<sup>31</sup>

Three children were born to the Willies during the first years in Salt Lake. William was born in the "Old Fort" on July 12, 1848, just nine months after his parents arrived in the Valley. Mary was born two years later, May 31, 1850, in the Willie home on Fifth South, and John was also born there on May 12, 1852.<sup>32</sup> James and Elizabeth were sealed as a couple, and the three children were sealed to their parents, in the Salt Lake City Endowment house on July 12, 1852.<sup>33</sup> In Mormon parlance to be "sealed" means to be bound in a Mormon ceremony as husband and wife, and also as family members,

for "time and all eternity." When James and Elizabeth were sealed to each other, and also to their living children, they would be automatically sealed to all children yet to be born to them.<sup>34</sup>

On August 28 and 29, 1852, a few weeks after the family sealing, there was a special conference in Salt Lake City. At this meeting 106 men were called on missions for the church. James was among them. He was called to serve in the British Isles Mission under the direction of Franklin D. Richards. His mission call was recorded in the Deseret News,<sup>35</sup> and also in the "Journal History" of the church.<sup>36</sup> No date is given for Willie's leaving Salt Lake City. He arrived in England on January 5, 1853, so he must have wasted little time departing Salt Lake City after his call.<sup>37</sup> It is possible that the Willie mission call to England may have had some connection with the settlement of his brother's estate. Brigham may have felt that his return to England would not only allow James to participate in further missionary activities, but would also enable him to secure a settlement in the estate. Brigham also may have hoped this money would be donated by James to the church or expenses in bringing saints to Utah from Europe.

Elizabeth was now left with three small children to care for. The sketchy details of her activities at this time are told in two family histories, one by Norma Smith Perry on the life of William Pettit Willie, and the other,

a life's sketch of Elizabeth, by Dorothy Louise Wagstaff. These tell something of Elizabeth's story while James served his mission.

William's mother, Elizabeth was left with three small children, William, Mary and John, to support. William, the eldest, was just four years old. They were very poor and Elizabeth endured many hardships trying to support herself and children during the four years that her husband was gone. Elizabeth was an excellent seamstress. She did all her sewing by hand. She was especially good at making men's clothing. While her husband was on his mission she made suits and overcoats for many of the Church authorities (selling most of them to Brigham Young's family) in exchange for food to feed her family. She also worked in the tithing office. Jim S. Willie said she worked in the textile mills in Salt Lake during that time.

Elizabeth Ann, as has been said before, was an excellent seamstress, but she did all her sewing by hand and never owned a sewing machine. She was especially good making men's clothing and made suits for many of the Church Authorities while her husband was on his mission in exchange for food to feed her family. She also worked in the tithing office.<sup>38</sup>

There can be no doubt that Elizabeth's circumstances were trying. During the four years of James' mission, Salt Lake City continued to grow at a fast rate as Mormon converts continued to join the saints there. She, no doubt, was assisted by ward members to a certain degree. They would have watched over the family knowing the husband was in the mission field. Elizabeth worked hard for what she received as was the Mormon tradition, and she had the comfort and support of the church and ward system. At any rate it would have been difficult to have her husband absent for four years.

From the time of their arrival in Salt Lake City, the Willie's were part of the building of a city in the rugged West. These years are well documented in the history of Salt Lake City, but are limited in the recorded events on the Willies. They were blessed with three children, and established a home in the Salt Lake City Seventh Ward. James again became involved with the tanning trade. He had also received word of possibly inheriting a large sum of money from his late brother. With the mission call to England, the life of James G. Willie would drastically change. The next few years would bring Willie new challenges and opportunities for leadership in his Mormon faith.

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CHAPTER V  
IN ENGLAND TO PREACH

When James Willie left in the fall of 1852 for his mission in the British Isles, it must have been difficult to leave his young family in Salt Lake City. Nothing is recorded of his departure and feelings at the time, we can only speculate, but this situation was typical of Mormon missionaries leaving their families for the field. Heber C. Kimball, a member of the first presidency with Brigham Young, records the following about his departure for a mission in England in 1839:

September 14th, President Brigham Young left his home at Montrose to start on the mission to England. He was so sick that he was unable to go to the Mississippi, a distance of thirty rods, without assistance. After he had crossed the river he rode behind Israel Barlow on his horse to my house, where he continued sick until the 18th. He left his wife sick with a babe only three weeks old, and all his other children were sick and unable to wait upon each other. Not one soul of them was able to go to the well for a pail of water, and they were without a second suit to their backs, for the mob in Missouri had taken nearly all he had. On the 17th Sister Mary Ann Young got a boy to carry her up in his wagon to my house, that she might nurse and comfort Brother Brigham to the hour of starting.

September 18th, Charles Hubbard sent his boy with a wagon and span of horses to my house; our trunks were put into the wagon by some brethren; I went to my bed and shook hands with my wife who was then shaking with a chill, having two children lying sick by her side; I embraced her and my children, and bade them farewell. My only well child was little Heber P., and it was with difficulty he could carry a

couple of quarts of water at a time, to assist in quenching their thirst.

It was with difficulty we got into the wagon, and started down the hill about 10 rods; it appeared to me as though my very inmost parts would melt within me at leaving my family in such a condition, as it were almost in the arms of death. I felt as though I could not endure it. I asked the teamster to stop, and said to Brigham, 'This is pretty tough, isn't it; let's rise up and give them a cheer.' We arise, and swinging our hats three times over our heads, shouted: 'Hurrah, hurrah for Israel.' Vilate, hearing the noise, arouse from her bed and came to the door. She had a smile on her face. Vilate and Mary Ann Young cried out to us: 'Good by, God bless you.' We returned the compliment, and then told the driver to go ahead. After this I felt a spirit of joy and gratitude, having had the satisfaction of seeing my wife standing upon her feet, instead of leaving her in bed, knowing well that I should not see them again for two or three years.<sup>1</sup>

Almost all of the early missionaries went out with very little money, some "without purse of script," relying entirely on Providence for food, money, or a place to stay. Willie went in much the same way. He departed without knowing even how he would pay for his trip to England. Of the circumstances of his journey his son, William Pettit Willie, later wrote in a family history:

Jim S. Willie says he has heard that James G. Willie left Salt Lake in 1852 for his mission on horseback with very little money, and while he was in St. Louis, on his way to England, he was out of funds. He prayed and asked the Lord for assistance that he might continue the journey. Immediately after his plea he looked down and at his feet lay a \$20 coin. He regarded this as a direct answer to his prayer.<sup>2</sup>

Willie arrived in New York, and by unknown means was able to get a ticket for Liverpool and sailed on December 17, 1852.<sup>3</sup> It was a rough but quick crossing with "a

continuation of Gales and tremendous sea with fair Wind" enabling the ship to "make Liverpool on January 5th, 1853."<sup>4</sup> Willie's arrival was recorded in the "British Mission Manuscript History" under the date of January 5, 1853, along with other elders who traveled aboard the ship American Union.<sup>5</sup> Of their crossing Elder Benjamin

Brown wrote:

Sailed from New York, December 17. Landed in Liverpool, 5th January 1853. Company consisted of 21 in number. We came together every morning and evening to pray, sing, and speak freely our minds, some expressing themselves as feeling greater portion of the Spirit of God. All were in good spirits and expressed their gratitude to God and their confidence in Him, and that the blessings placed upon them in the Valley of the mountains had been more than realized thus far. From the time we left Sandy Hood the wind blew a gale, and sometimes a violent storm, but with very little exception was favorable to our passage. When the wind fell, or the storm and raging sea tossed the ship we called on the Controller of the elements to temper the breeze, and it was answered sometimes before we asked.<sup>6</sup>

Willie was entering an important field of labor. The missionary work in England had been launched very early. Proselyting had first spread into Canada from which it extended to England. Several of the converted saints in Canada were from England, and had friends still in their native country. These converts pressured the church leaders to send missionaries to England.<sup>7</sup> In response the work was launched on the British Isles, "on or about the first of June, 1837."

Heber C. Kimball, one of the Twelve, was set apart by the spirit of prophecy and revelation,

prayer and laying on of hands, of the First Presidency, to preside over a mission to England, to be the first foreign mission of the Church of Christ in the last days. While we were about ordaining him, Orson Hyde, another of the Twelve, came in, and upon listening to what was passing, his heart melted within him. . . and offered to accompany President Kimball on his mission to England. His offer was accepted, and he was set apart for that purpose.<sup>8</sup>

Accompanying Hyde and Kimball were Willard Richards and Joseph Fielding.

These first four elders left for England on June 23, 1837, and arrived in Liverpool in just under a month. On July 23, 1837, they were in the town of Preston, about 30 miles from Liverpool. Fielding had a brother there, who was a preacher of a local congregation. That day (Sunday) the newly arrived missionaries were surprised to be invited to speak from Rev. Fielding's pulpit. As it turned out, this was the opening of a very successful experience for the church. The next few months would find thousands joining the church from the British Mission. Many of these would soon find their way to church headquarters in the States, where they added significantly to the numbers of the young Mormon church.<sup>9</sup>

The British Mission is rich in history and tradition. Since many of the early church members were converted in England, stories of the mission labors became an important part of Mormon tradition. The first Mormon branch in England was organized in Preston on August 6, 1837. This was followed in the same year by eight other

branches.<sup>10</sup> In the years of 1838 and 1839, nineteen additional branches were created, as the church continued to enjoy a tremendous growth.

By 1840 the work in England was a major emphasis for the church. The two apostles in England were replaced by seven. This gave fresh impetus to the work, and contributed even more to the already tremendous growth. In 1840 twenty-five new branches were organized to accommodate the growing number of converts. Many others were organized in Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and the Isle of Man.<sup>11</sup>

With the large number of branches in the British Isles, it became necessary for the apostles to divide the branches into conferences. Six conferences were organized in 1840, with eight more added in 1841 to facilitate the steady growth of. By 1852 there were fifty-one of these conferences and 742 branches,<sup>12</sup> with approximately 33,000 members.<sup>13</sup> These flourishing times made it necessary to further group conferences into pastorates. Each pastorate was presided over by a "most efficient elder" called pastor. Pastors were almost always elders from America, while the presidents of conferences were both elders from America, and British converts who had proven themselves.<sup>14</sup>

The first headquarters of the British Mission were in Manchester. In 1842 headquarters were moved to Liverpool, where they remained until 1929. There were important

reasons for the headquarters being in Liverpool, chief being the growing importance of the Mormon gathering. Andrew Jensen, a past church historian explains the role Liverpool played:

During the time that the mission headquarters were at Liverpool, that port was the place of embarkation of nearly all Later-day Saints emigrants leaving for America. This included also most of the emigration from the other missions in Europe. The first group of emigrating saints to leave England was a company of 41 souls, in charge of Elder John Moon, which sailed from Liverpool on the ship "Britannia" June 6, 1840 for New York. At least 150 sailing vessels, with a total of about 89,500 emigrating saints, left England for America between the years 1840 and 1868 inclusive. Upon the arrival of these emigrants in America they were met at ports of entry by Church emigration officials, who piloted them to the outfitting places where they were assigned to caravans of mule or ox trains, or made part of handcart companies which crossed the plains and mountains before completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.<sup>15</sup>

Willie would later play a singular role in the immigration from England to Zion.

Obviously then, the Mormon British Mission was as highly organized as the rest of the church. At the time of Willie's mission, Apostle Franklin D. Richards the head of the church in England and Europe. Directly under Richards were separate mission presidencies over areas such as the British Isles, the French Mission, the Gibraltar Mission, and Wales.<sup>16</sup> Under the individual presidencies were the pastors or presidents of districts. In England there were approximately fifteen pastors for the fifty-one conferences in 1852. In 1854 this number

was reduced to 36 conferences with 12 district presidents.<sup>17</sup> This figure changed little until 1860.<sup>18</sup>

Functioning under the pastors were the presidents of conferences. These men presided over the eight to fifteen branches that made up their conferences. The branch, or a ward-parish organization, was the nucleus of the membership, and was presided over by a branch president who saw to both the spiritual and temporal affairs of the members. Within this structure was the proselyting elder who worked under the conference president in converting and fellowshipping new members. Not all elders were called from the States. Indeed, many came from Europe, as did most branch presidents.

Upon his arrival in England Willie became a vital part of this system, and on January 22, 1853, was assigned by Franklin D. Richards as pastor of the Southampton and Dorsetshire conferences.<sup>19</sup>

Richards, who was to play an important role in Willie's life, was extremely active in the church. In late 1848 he was called as member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Eight months later he was sent for a second mission to England. He first served under Apostle Orson Pratt, who was in charge of the entire European area as President of the British Mission. He was headquartered in Liverpool, where he directed the emigration of saints to Zion. In February of 1851, Pratt was called home, and

Richards took over as the top official of the church in the European area.<sup>20</sup>

Willie's call as pastor was an important appointment for one to receive after only seventeen days in the mission field. It placed Willie in a significant position that put him somewhat in the limelight and resulted in frequent entries about him in the "Manuscript History of the British Mission." This record was kept by a mission recorder on an almost daily basis, and reference was made to Willie twenty-seven times. The manuscript history references to Willie fall into the following categories: citations in the Millennial Star, the church organ in Britain; participation at conferences; his arrival and departure; references in semi-annual reports; and various callings including his ordination as pastor and his role in connection with the handcart assignment. Most of these are only references by name in connection with events, but as a few samples illustrate, they do throw some light on Willie's mission experience.

On March 9, 1854, a letter from Willie to the British Mission President was recorded. In it he reported on his pastorate, telling of a meeting place that had been secured and that meetings were well attended. He spoke also of the trouble with a disrupter at their meetings, but concluded "we got the law after him and he was fined."<sup>21</sup>

Also reported was a special council held on June 26,



1854, at the Cumberland Street Chapel in London. It was attended by all church officials in England including Apostle Richards. Willie was in attendance representing the pastoral district under his charge.<sup>22</sup> During the second day of this conference, Willie was asked to give a report on his area. It was recorded as follows:

Elder James G. Willie, Pastor of the Southampton and Dorsetshire Conferences - I rise with pleasure to give a representation of the district in which I have been appointed to labor. When I was first appointed to this district, I presume that no Conference on the British Isles was in a better condition than the Southampton Conference--everything was prosperous and everything looked well. We took every precaution that we considered necessary to carry out the instructions of the Presidency in Liverpool. We baptized ninety in the first five months. Elder Bramwell and I were one in all things which we had to take in hand. So it is with Elders Allred and Smith--we are united in our labours. The Presidency of the British Isles are acquainted with all the particulars pertaining to what has transpired in this Conference, which extends over a country of about 110 miles in length. It is an Agricultural district, and through parsons and farmers it is with the greatest difficulty that an Elder can get into a village to preach the Gospel. We have two Elders from the Valley, who have been labouring indefatigably, but have accomplished nothing, on account of the priests and farmers. If you want to see tyranny and oppression, go down to the Southampton Conference, there you will find sufficient of them. The difficulty that I complain most of in the Southampton Conference was created last year, and has not been fully removed. It is a very easy thing for another brother to come from the Valley and destroy the influence of a faithful Elder for a time. Probably Elder Bramwell and I and Elder Allred had more trouble last year than any other three Elders on the British Isles. It was not with the travelling Elders as with the Saints, for the Elders were united after being shown their true position by Elder Bramwell; some of them had got the same

spirit which caused us the trouble, but when it manifested itself before Elder Bramwell he showed them the consequences, and they at once renounced it, and labored faithfully in connexion with us afterwards. We were in hot water all the time, and have yet to cope with a portion of the same influence.

In the Dorsetshire Conference there are 199 members. They have had the same things to contend with as the Saints of Southampton Conference have had, and which have arisen from the same causes. I will say a word about Elder Smith at Dorset. He is a good man, and is beloved by the Saints in that Conference, and looked upon as a gentleman by those out of the church. The Saints are very poor, and not able to support Smith's wife, who is obliged to remain at Birmingham, and do the best she can. Those Saints that were this morning represented as scattered belong to this Conference, and are regularly represented. I have no doubt but if a Branch could be built up in Wellington, it would be better for those Saints to be amalgamated with them. The prospects of a work being done there are tolerably good, if we had any means to take a room with, but we have not. Elder Smith would like to go in there, and I would also, as Taunton is my native town, but we have no resources to assist us in such an undertaking. If an Elder be sent there we are willing to relinquish those places.

As to President S.W. Richards, the Saints love him, and would like to see him, but his multiplied labours will not admit. I travelled with brother Samual twelve or fourteen years ago, and had it not been for his care of me at that time I should now have been in my tomb.<sup>23</sup>

Elders Isaac Allred and William Smith whom Willie mentioned were the two conference presidents of his district. The event mentioned at the end of Willie's talk involving Samual W. Richards, must refer to a mission experience in 1842 in the eastern states. S.W. Richards had evidently saved his life through his care in a time of need. No other mention of this event can be found.

Samual was the brother of Apostle Franklin D. Richards. This connection with Samual W. Richards could be an explanation for Willie's appointment as pastor. Such an important calling would generally be reserved for a person who had proven himself by working up through the ranks of leadership. A prior friendship with Willie would give Samual a basis in judgment for such an appointment.

On October 28, 1854, the British manuscript history recorded an article written by Willie that appeared in the Millennial Star. In it he indicates "the problems, spoken of in the preceding June conference, have now cleared up. The work is progressing very well, and a great deal of money has been raised to help fund the indebtedness of the mission in Liverpool." He speaks highly of his area, and again praises the men he works with.<sup>24</sup>

Two letters from Willie to Apostle Richards are recorded in the mission records of 1855 and give us added clues about his activities. The first is a report of his area and appears on July 13. The second letter is very much like the first, but gives more detail and reflects more of James' personality. This letter was written only a few months before his release from the mission field. It is a lengthy letter, sober and responsible in tone and fully Mormon in spirit. Because it reveals Willie as a thoroughly committed part of the mission effort it is worth recording here. It was under the date of October 11, 1855.

Elder F.D. Richards.

Dear Brother--It is with pleasure I write a few lines to inform you in relation to the present and future prospects of the district which has been committed to my watch-care.

The Southampton and Dorsetshire Quarterly Conference have just been held, and I have had the pleasure of attending them. A good spirit prevailed amongst the Priesthood and Saints generally, and I feel there is an increased desire on their part to keep the commandments of our Heavenly Father, as revealed through His servants who hold the Holy Priesthood upon the earth.

There have been but few baptized during the past quarter, but every exertion has been made by the Priesthood and Saints to awaken the attention of the people, by published lectures, out-door preaching, the dissemination of the printed word, and in bearing testimony to the great work the Almighty has commenced upon the earth in this day; but few appear to receive our testimony, and I feel like the Prophet Isiah, that darkness covereth the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people. However we shall continue to thrust in our sickle, and use every means in our power to awaken the people from the supineness and self-security they are in, in relation to the important events which will transpire in this generation.

In relation to financial affairs, I can say we are in quite a healthy and prosperous state. The Southampton Conference Book and Star debt has been considerably lessened during the past quarter, as all the Stars, Journals, and Seers in stock at the January last have been paid for, and are being gratuitously distributed among the people.

The debt of the Dorset Conference also has been gradually lessened, and its indebtedness to the Office is now less than it has been for some years past, which good result attribute to the zeal and indefatigable exertions of Elder (William) Woodward, who, in connexion with Elder (Job) Wellings, of the Southampton Conference, has made arrangements for a still further reduction of their respective indebtedness during the present quarter.

The call you made upon this district for the building of the Temple was cheerfully responded to by the Saints, and I feel it a pleasure to record the fact, that they have not only paid the sum apportioned by you to them,

but have exceeded it by some pounds.

Elders Woodward and Wellings are one with me in all things for the advancement of the great work we are engaged in; so are the Priesthood, almost without an exception; and as a natural consequence the Saints follow their example.

The Lord has blessed us, and there has never been a time while I have laboured in the Pastorage, when so great a union existed amongst the Saints as at present. My feelings are, they are a good people, and are willing to carry out the counsels of those who are appointed to preside over them in the Lord.

The principal subject that appears to be impressed upon my mind is the emigration Fund, and measures were adopted at the late Conference, to carry it into effect. The Priesthood and Saints feel the spirit of it upon them powerfully, and their faith and works will be concentrated to augment this fund during the present quarter, and from the spirit and feeling manifested, a large sum will be raised.

There is not one family in the Southampton Conference that has means to emigrate with to America, and in the Dorset Conference there is but one family and two single brothers that will emigrate this coming winter. That is all that can go by their own resources in this district, as far as I know at present. But the Saints are not anyway discouraged. We have no rich, as far as pertains to this word's goods, but the Saints manifest their desires and faith to be emigrated, by contributing a portion of their weekly income.

I have counselled the Saints to sell off all their pictures, and all other superfluous property, and convert them into cash so as to assist. I have got peculiar feelings towards this people over whom I have presided nearly three years, but I am certain the only source the Saints here can look to for deliverance and escape from Babylon is the P.E. Fund.

I have, in connexion with Elders' Welling and Woodward endeavoured to impress upon the Saints the necessity of sustaining the P.E. Fund, not as in times past, by contributing a few pence per week, when they could have done more; but to feel that their emigration depends in full upon sustaining it; and hence the necessity of arousing themselves, and letting the P.E. Fund be the Great Savings Bank where in should be deposited all they can save from their

weekly income.

Well, they are taking hold of it in good earnest, for not only will pence and shillings be paid, but pounds, by individuals this quarter to increase the Fund.

To show you how the 'leaven the spirit' works amongst the Saints in emigration matters, I have concluded to mention a few cases out of many. At our Conference recently held, a brother agreed to donate L2 as a free-offering, and another agreed to give 5s. per week to the first of January next, also a donation to the P.E. Fund. Many others will do likewise, according to their circumstances.

I can truly say the emigration spirit is universal here, and most of the Saints appear to be impressed with the belief that 'God helps them that help themselves.'

I feel well in body and mind, and I can say my labours in the ministry are sweet to me this year, for I feel I have the entire confidence of the Saints; and my prayer continually is, may my Heavenly Father bless this people, and in His own time gather them to Zion's happy land, and finally save them in His kingdom with a Celestial salvation. Even so. Amen.

In conclusion I would say, I feel it a pleasure to carry out any counsel you may deem it necessary to give, and believe me to be with love,

Your Brother in the Gospel Covenant,  
James G. Willie 25

The letter speaks of William Woodward, who was at that time the Dorsetshire conference president. Woodward would later come be involved with the handcart experience. Elder Job Wellings is also mentioned. He was president of the Southampton conference. The letter also speaks of the Perpetual Emigration Fund which was the backbone of the Mormon gathering.

There are several references to Willie in the mission records of 1857, after he had returned to Salt Lake City. One of these is a very fine tribute to him. G.W.

Thurston, who was an elder under Willie's charge, wrote the following in a letter preserved in the mission history.

I was 44 days on the plains, 44 days in the states, and 44 days on the water from New York to Liverpool. According to appointment I went to the Southampton conference to labor under the Pastoral charge of Elder James G. Willie. I remained under his direction and labored with much pleasure and satisfaction in that and the Dorsetshire conferences for nearly two years. I wish to say here that though I left my father in Zion, his absence was compensated to me in the presence, care and instructions of Pastor Willie.<sup>26</sup>

Willie obviously cared about people. He took time to make a difference in this elder's life. He is mentioned again, in a letter to Apostle Richards from John C. Hall, his successor as pastor, who reported that he was "holding to the programs adopted by Pastor Willie because of their continued success."<sup>27</sup> Obviously Willie had made enough of an impression that he was remembered long after he left the mission field.

Thus the mission records are a useful source for understanding Willie's mission. Fortunately, a much more detailed account is found in Willie's diary which covers from the time of his arrival in England January 20, 1853, to December 2, 1855, to well into the handcart episode, on an almost daily basis. This document provides by far the most intimate view of James G. Willie's life. From it a profile may be built that reflects not only the character of the man but shows his activities including his role as

a pastor.

In order to understand the basic history of Willie's missionary experiences, it is necessary to understand his very involved call as pastor over the Southampton and Dorsetshire conferences. The duty of the pastor under the British mission organization was to travel among his conferences and work with the respective presidents, with elders functioning as missionaries, branch leaders, and individual members of the church. Other than in his speeches, Willie rarely taught the gospel to people not of the faith except on occasions when he was working with an elder or leader who was personally teaching a non-member. In this process Willie traveled extensively through his areas of Southampton and Dorsetshire, usually not having one place as a main base. He stayed with the elders or members that he was visiting. He traveled to a different locality on an almost every other day basis, thus making it very difficult to give a basic locational synopsis of his mission.

However, it is clear Willie spent almost all of his time within the general county boundaries of Southampton and Dorsetshire. Most of the conferences listed in the British mission at that time were names of counties. Southampton was discussed in Chapter II as the place of Willie's birth. However, he was so young when he lived there that he did not know people or places. The other area under his jurisdiction was the county of Dorsetshire



which is directly adjacent to Southampton on the west. They are both located along the southern coast of England.

The two conference presidents were the men that Willie worked with most. From the beginning of his assignment until January of 1855, these were Elder William Smith over the Dorsetshire conference, and Elder Isaac Allred over the Southampton conference. They were replaced by Elder William Woodward in Dorsetshire and Elder Job Wellings in Southampton.

Willie spent more time in the city of Southampton working with Elder Allred than any other area. They became close friends, and worked well together on many assignments. Elder Smith worked out of the city of Dorchester in Dorsetshire County. Willie visited him frequently in order to maintain his role as pastor. On the first of his many visits to see Smith, Willie went to the town of Crewkerne which is about twenty miles from Dorchester. It was a small town approximately 10 miles from Taunton, where Willie was raised. On February 23, 1853, Willie recorded in his journal that it "appears about the same as it did when I saw it 23 years since...."<sup>28</sup> He always wanted to go to Taunton, but if he did so, it was never recorded in his journal.

Each summer there was a mission conference for leaders and missionaries. In both 1853 and 1854, the conference was held in London. In 1855 it was changed to Liverpool. At each of these conferences Willie was asked

to speak. He also recorded conference events in his journal. Conferences were special times for Willie, for the contact with mission leaders always seemed to lift his spirits. He had the opportunity to see some of the sights while at these gatherings. For example, he visited Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, and museums and art galleries. But he spent little time in recreation. Soon he was back at his district.

Towns mentioned frequently in his journal are Southampton, Portsmouth, Salisbury, Poole, Dorchester, Bridport, and occasionally he would visit the Isle of Wight, just off the shore of the Southampton mainland. On November 26, 1853, he mentions in his journal entry that he visited the place of his birth in Murrell Green. He even located the house that he lived in, but does not give any details.<sup>29</sup> Traveling from town to town, working with the leaders and members of his district, was the pattern of his entire mission.

James did visit with his sisters in England. Two lived in the vicinity of London and a third in Bristol. They were not members of the Mormon church and James would use his visits as an opportunity to spread the gospel. Although they did not join the church, he frequently sent them letters and received letters from them. While he was still in England, on June 13, 1855, his sister Mary passed away in London. James missed the funeral by a few hours, but was able to be with members of his family on this

occasion.<sup>30</sup>

Willie also traveled to the Channel Islands, or the "French Isles," as he called them. These are small islands off the coast of England, about 100 miles directly south of Dorsetshire county, off the coast of France. They are and were a part of the British Empire. Willie visited the city of S. Helier, on the largest island of Jersey. Mormons there fell under his jurisdiction and his visit was official business. Willie only made this journey once but he stayed there for over two weeks during August and September 1854.<sup>31</sup>

This is a thumbnail sketch of Willie's mission. He left his assigned area very few times for conferences, or to visit his sisters and see places of his youth. Occasionally on the way he would do a little sightseeing but mostly he attended to the business of his district.

Three Willie diaries have been preserved. They were given by the Willie family to the Utah State University Library in Logan, and are housed in the Special Collections of the Library. The three books are all the same size, measuring 3 3/4" by 6 3/4". They all appear to have been purchased from the same place, one has a London patent printed inside the cover. They are leather bound, one red, one brown, and one black. The notations are written in longhand with ink, and are very well preserved. The paper was unlined, thus complicating reading at times, but most is legible.

There are many experiences contained in the diaries that can give us a better understanding of the man James Willie. I will recount here those things that are personally interesting and revealing.

It seems that the missionary stories most cherished and repeated have to do with priesthood blessing experiences. With the Mormon belief of a restored priesthood of God, comes the practice of exercising that divine priesthood as the savior did in healing the sick or rebuking evil spirits. The Willie journal records many such events, but three stand out.

February 21, 1853-- Fasted and prayed all day with Brother Armstrong at Sister Chards house. in behalf of Sister Martha Hanam. who is afflicted with the Kings evil: anointed her and blessed her in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and rebuked the disease that was preying upon her body and feel by the spirit of God it well stand rebuked and that the Lord will bless her with health.<sup>32</sup>

September 21, 1853-- In the evening administered the ordinance to a young brother afflicted with a fever ect. he obtained immediate relief: the fever left him instantly.<sup>33</sup>

March 30, 1854-- Retired to bed about 10 P.M. and in the night Bro Paull came into our room with his son, who was taken very sick, we administered to him immediately, and rebuked the disease in the name of Jesus, and he instantly recovered, and he had good sleep...<sup>34</sup>

These results, from the exercising of the priesthood through blessings, whether they are taken as fact or not, were certainly a strength to Willie and to the feelings of belief he felt for his religion.

James' diary indicates that his activities did not

always involve pastoral duties. At times the members got together for social activities, which promoted a oneness among the members, and were used by the missionaries as fellowshiping tools. Willie recorded one such event on June 1, 1853:

This day many of the Saints and President Spencer and all the Priesthood with myself visited the Oyster House and freely partook of them till we were filled and then went into a field and played Crickett and other play'es till evening when we returned home very tired, but thankfull to the Lord for the priveledge of assembling to-gether and enjoying ourselves in simple and innocent amusement.<sup>35</sup>

There were times that Willie may have needed relief from his duties. Indeed personal problems and controversy sometimes threatened to undo the entire work of the mission. These things he took to heart, feeling keenly his own responsibility and sensing fully the tensions created. Perhaps one of Willie's most trying circumstances involved one Elder Armstrong who was filled with a contentious spirit and determined to act in a fashion completely unbecoming to a missionary. He was also insubordinate and difficult to deal with personally. The Armstrong case which long cankered affairs in Willie's pastorate may be considered at some length for what it reveals about both Willie's activities and his character.

August 3, 1853--...took a walk with Bro. Allred and conversed on Bro. Armstrongs case...had further conversation with Brother Armstrong. He promised at this evenings meeting he would make acknowledgements etc. Attended meeting with the Saints at 8 O'clock Singing and prayer by Elder Parkes, when Elder Allred expressed his feelings

on many things in relation to influences. I then spoke and remarked that there was a difference between Back biting, and putting down iniquity when it manifests itself and then when I called on them to tell me the truth if they refused the Spirit of God would leave them and there minds become darkened in consequence of so doing. Elder Armstrong then arose to make an apology but acknowledged nothing but what we proved him guilty off. I proved and he acknowledged he had disre= my instructions in regard to intimacys with the Sisters. I having forbid Kissing and other familiarities with the Sisters. He acknowledged after it was moved. that he wickedly endeavoured to destroy my influence with the Saints. he having twice disregarded my instructions on the matter. Also that Brother Spencer counceled him to leave the Sisters alone, and no more Kissing to be done. I proved and he acknowledged he had broken Brother Spencers council in again Kissin and taking libertys with the Sisters. Bro. Allred then arose and stated his views on the subject and expressed that Elder Armstrong had made no confession at all, for it had all been proven home to him before he acknowledged anything, Elder Allred then remarked that Bro Armstrong also had used an influence against him in this conference, and it was not Bro Armstrong, but the devil that was in him, the influences of which led him to conceal his iniquity until it was proved home to him. He then gave council and advice to the Saints in relation to the subject. Elder Armstrong then arose and denyed having used an influence against him, and called upon Men, Angels and God to witness it, and after Elder Allred had expressed the words he made use of, he acknowledged he had some recollection of it 'thus lying before men, Angells and God. I then arose and reiterated all that had transpired since I was appointed to preside as Pastor over this Conference. teaching the Saints principle and giving them instruction upon those things. remarked Elder Armstrong had made no apology or confession at all it had all been forsed from him by positive proof. I spoke in relation to Forgiveness that Justice must have its demand. before Mercy can claim the creature, but the practice amongst the Gentile nations was the reverse. that a murderer according to their theory could go into the presence of God. I concluded by disfelloshipping him from officiating in the

Priesthood in the Southampton & Dorchester Conferences for setting at naught mine and Brother Spencers instructions, and practising both by precept and example. as or instance, Kissing an hugging and other libertys with the Saints.

I feel in my heart if those things had not been put down that it would not have been long before blood of Saints would have flowen. The Saints unanimously renounced the Spirit that had been taught them By Elder A- and voted to sustain the principles of truth and righteousness.

August 4, 1853--...This morning Brother Armstrong called to see me. Myself Brothers Allred and Parks and Armstrong went into a field together and had conversation with each other. Elder Armstrong manifest the same spirit as last evening, a spirit of justification and not a meek and humble one I told him he must go to Liverpool to Brother Samual Richards, and gave him the best counsel and advice I could, and I pray he may yet humble himself before the Lord and the Presidency at Liverpool, so that he yet may be saved in the Kingdom of God. for Jesus Christ Sake. Amen.

August 11, 1853--This morning had conversation with Elders Webb and others in relation to the proceedings of Elder Armstrong in this town and the conduct of others. Sister Ashment that Elder Armstrong informed her that he and another from the Valley had the priveledge granted to them of having another Wife...in this land: Allso that Brother Willie had not those priveledges granted him;...Elder Armstrong allso said that my Wife (Elizabeth) was opposed to the plurality, and would not consent to my having anymore Wives, being the reason of my not being priveledged as he was. Brother Slade testifies has seen him with two singles Sisters, one on each Knee Kissing them, and other libertys. Left Crewkerne at 4 O'clock And arrived Winsham at 1/2 past 5 O'clock at Brother Singletons. Sister Singleton testifies, that Elder Armstrong remarked that no one cancelled him not to Kiss the Sisters he should Kiss them above board and did not care for any man, this was after I had counceled him to leave the Sisters alone...My soul is truly grieved at the abominations which have been practiced here. here prevails the Spirit of Adultery and I feel

bowed down in Spirit and feel my usefulness curtailed, in this conference in consequence of the wicked teaching of the brethren, that was sent---<sup>36</sup>

There can be no question that this series of events brought real pain and sorrow to Willie. He cared deeply for these elders, and also cared about the damage that such things would do to the missionary work. He writes of this a few days later.

August 18, 1853--...called on Sister Ballston, who received me very cooley. It evidently is not all right. The Spirit which Elder Armstrong inculcated must be renounced, before union peace and love can prevail with the Saints here. I feel glad Elder Allred is determined to deal with all such spirits and if they repent not be severed from the tree of life.<sup>37</sup>

This problem and others like it brought necessary action from the church. As the presiding officer Willie was required to see that action was brought against such elders as Armstrong. As an important event, the church trial of Armstrong is duly recorded:

September 6, 1853--...President Spencer called upon me to read the evidence taken before the council, for and against the charge against Elder Armstrong. After which Elder Allred addressed the council in a forcible and argumentative manner in support of the charge. Elder Armstrong then arose and denied being guilty of the charge he was accused being guilty of--I then addressed the meeting a few minutes and remarked that I considered the testimony of such a nature as proved the charge to be sustained. President Spencer then arose, and in a calm and concise manner, adverted to the testimony given, and then taking up each evidence, examined it seperately, and reasoned from the motive that influenced the Sisters to give them--evidence, and then addressing Elder Armstrong told him he considered the charge against him and called upon him to repent and



humble himself before God, that he may be forgiven, and told him he had been a Wolf amongst the Sheep; hid teachings and practises causing death and sorrow...he ended his remarks by demanding his license, and withdrew the hand of fellowship from him.<sup>38</sup>

Armstrong was not the only elder Pastor Willie had problems with. Another incident involved more elders as well as the problematic Armstrong. This incident was of a far more bizarre nature and even more difficult to deal with. Willie describes it as follows:

January 7, 1854--This morning called on Elder Davis and had some conversation with him in relation to a Secret Society of which he was a member, he accompanied me to our lodgings and made statements of facts in relation to a society called the 'Eblampus vitas' society, instituted by Margett and Armstrong, the society is secret, the members being admitted by an oath to keep secrecy, with signs, grips etc, and the object to seduce Women.

Upon a Member being admitted he or she was blindfolded, and then the oath was administered, upon which the covering was taken from the eyes,...(Willie then describes some of the details of their obscene rituals using drawings and obscenities for key words.) Their meetings was characterised by Drinking and singing and using the most badly and indecent language.<sup>39</sup>

There can be no doubt that a movement of this type was a challenge to the missionary work. With the already adverse image because of polygamy, public knowledge of events like this would have explosive effects among members of the church and non-members alike. One result would certainly have been an enhanced appreciation on Willie's part for elders like Allred who stood by him and provided strong support.

Action was taken against the elders who formed the secret society, but all surprisingly remained in the mission field, even the recalcitrant Armstrong. Willie also reveals later that Charles Davis was involved in an embezzlement of funds from the district. This in connection with the secret society problem, was reason for cutting him from the church. On March 12, 1854,

Elder Allred and myself addressed the Saints in relation to Elder Charles Davis and the wicked and improper course he has pursued, and all were unanimous in cutting him from the church, for his wicked conduct.<sup>40</sup>

Willie, at a later date, mentions the difficult task of making up these embezzled funds for the district:

July 2, 1854--...I arose and addressed the conference, as I was led by the Holy Ghost upon the necessity of liquidating out debts. more particularly the 32,10 that Davis cheated us of and which the Office in Liverpool hold us accountable for. The Lord was with me by his holy Spirit and gave me power over the people and I prophesied we would raise 20L at the conference towards paying the debt and sure enough we did, for we raised 26L and made arrangements for the whole to be paid in monthly instalments in three months namely by Oct. 1st next...<sup>41</sup>

With all of these problems combined, it is little wonder that he mentioned the troubles of his area in the mission conference speech of June 1854. But Willie comments in the speech that things were going to get better, and according to his later journal entries there were no more such problems. The letter to Apostle Richards under the date October 11, 1855, also points this out. These must have been trying times for Willie but

dealing with them must have given him much confidence. Hard work seemed to be the key to his success in overcoming the obstacles of his job.

Among other things James did a great deal of speaking while on his mission. He seem to enjoy it since public speaking was his only real chance to preach the gospel. In the individual areas he not only worked with the missionaries and leaders, but spoke to the numerous congregations. On many occasions he addressed the saints several times in one day, as the following illustrates:

May 15, 1853--This morning being Sunday attended meeting and addressed the Saints and strangers present on their duties towards God and his Son Jesus Christ met again at 1/2 past 2 and partook of the Sacrament of the Lord Jesus Christ and spoke to the Saints on the responsibility they are under to God in bringing up their children in his fear and told them God would require it of them in a coming day; instructed them to instill into their minds the pure pricipals of Eternal Life. Met again at 1/2 6 O'clock and spoke to a large congregation amidst the greatest attention. upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ and feel that seed was sown that will bring forth fruit to the honour and Glory of God and Heavenly father and Jesus Christ the Savior of the World.<sup>42</sup>

In his speeches he not only taught gospel principals, but at times rebuked the saints for evil practices and slothfulness in their duties.<sup>43</sup> Willie was well known in his later life for his great speaking abilities. It was likely in England that he perfected his skill through speaking at least twice a week and sometimes more often. Willie's journal only mentions the speeches but not the context.

Another thing Willie did a great deal of on his mission was walk. One can infer this from the fact that every day or two he was in a different city although he rarely recorded specific distances. Exceptions to the rule were notations for several days in June of 1854, when he walked respectively seven miles on June 18, six miles on the 19th, eight miles on the 20th and ten miles on the 21st. In addition each of these days was filled with meetings and appointments.<sup>44</sup> He often recorded walking many miles in harsh weather, sometimes up to twenty miles a day, for an appointment.<sup>45</sup>

With all this walking and exposure came some sickness. There were days when he was unable to do his duties because of rheumatism in his legs.<sup>46</sup> He occasionally spent a day in bed with severe colds or flu. There were many days he worked when he should have been in bed, testimony to his strong dedication to the work at hand.

Generally speaking James seemed to enjoy being back in England again. As mentioned, he enjoyed points of interest in the cities such as art museums and beautiful structures. More important was his response to the beauty of the countryside. Its variety and moods often filled him with reverence. Frequently this love for his native land found place in his diary as did the following example.

August 19, 1854--Spent the day visiting the

Saints and in the afternoon took a walk and ascended the highest point of land in this country and the view was grand in the extreme, being enabled to view the country for 20 Miles round also a view of the Sea. My mind enjoyed the peace and comfort which cause my heart to rejoice...<sup>47</sup>

Most of all James enjoyed his association with the elders and saints that he had grown to love. Some were particularly close and dear. He was quick to mention these in his journal and often expressed his appreciation for them. Indeed throughout his writings it would appear as if he were not the leader, but that they were. This was his fashion of leadership; to ask nothing of others he was not willing to do himself. His tendency was to allow others to play an important role in the decision process, rather than dictating orders himself. He received great respect from these elders, and he in turn showed great respect for them. Perhaps nowhere is this more feelingly apparent than in his entry on the departure of one of his key subordinates on February 10, 1855. "This morning," he wrote

Bro Allred left for L-pool. I felt to take the parting hand with Bro Allred praying heaven's blessing may attend him and he be preserved to enjoy his family in peace. We have laboured together under the most trying circumstances and have enjoyed each other's counsel and I feel in my heart to pray he may be preserved from the hand of the destroyer...<sup>48</sup>

He often recorded similar sentiment for the elders who worked with him. He had a genuine love for them and always wished the best for them.

These aspects of Willie's journal are by no means a complete picture of his mission experiences, but rather are samples that help personalize his mission experience for the reader. He was dedicated to his job through bad times as well as good. He left the pastorate of Southampton and Dorsetshire a better place for his having served there.

The Willie diaries are significant to any effort to know the man, yet they were a disappointment in some ways. There are various ways to keep a diary. Some diarists write for posterity. Such diaries are at times exaggerated or incomplete. Other write their innermost feelings, thus giving a personal view of the writer. Then there are those who write the journal for themselves. They record the mechanics of the day, "where I went," "who I met," "what I or they said." They do not record much feeling or emotion, merely events that will allow them to read the entries in the future and call to mind the activities of that particular day. Such a journal is of course helpful, but still leaves much unknown to one who writes a biography long after his subject is dead. Willie's journal was such a journal.

He mentions very little of his feelings for his wife, children, and home. He talks very little about his growing up in England, mentioning only briefly items when in a familiar area. He speaks little about feelings for himself, his church, his calling, his family still in

England, his companions, and his leaders. These things are mentioned only as they deal with the mechanics of an individual day.

His journal does give the impression that he worked hard, and that he cared deeply for the missionary work in England. One gets the impression from the Willie journal that this was a good man, a decent respectable person, a man one would want to know. And somehow, their emphasis on the mechanics of life notwithstanding, after having read the journals, you feel you do know James G. Willie.

A period of relative obscurity in Willie's mission, was between December 8, 1855, and May 3, 1856, the sailing date of the ship Thornton that took him back to the States.<sup>49</sup> There must have been a great deal of preparation between these dates as Willie and others secured passage for the saints who would come to Zion in the famed handcart migration. Willie could not know what lay ahead when he was placed in charge of migration on the ship Thornton, and the long overland journey to the Mormon mountain.<sup>50</sup>

Hopefully the mission experience of James Grey Willie has become clear and meaningful. It was the highlight of his life in terms of leadership. His role as pastor placed him over approximately 2000 people, and he led with much love and devotion. The people of his district responded with great respect, as they watched their leader act with honesty and integrity. Willie was often kind

hearted in his discipline, as he found it difficult to pass judgment over the elders, but he was an able administrator and a good follower of mission policy and programs. He worked with diligence and patience in always giving the work of the mission labors all of his efforts.

His appointment as pastor had initiated a six-year period of important leadership roles. This mission experience would result in new assignments; one would bring him fame.



Footnotes

- 1 Edwin F. Parry, Sketches of Missionary Life (Salt Lake City, Ut.: George Q. Cannon & Sons Co., 1899), pp. 36-39.
- 2 Perry, p. 2.
- 3 Willie, "Missionary Journal," December 17, 1852.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 "British Mission Manuscript History," January 5, 1853.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints 7 vols. (Salt Lake City, Ut.: Deseret Book Company, 1978), vol. 2, p. 490.
- 8 Ibid., pp 489-490.
- 9 Joseph Fielding Smith, p. 167.
- 10 Jenson, Encyclopedic History, p. 93.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Edward W. Tullidge, Tullidge's Histories 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, Ut.: Juvenile Instructor, 1889), vol. 2, p. 302.
- 13 P.A.M. Taylor, Expectations Westward (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), p. 20.
- 14 Jenson, Encyclopedic History, p 94.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 "British Mission Manuscript History," June 26, 1854, p. 1.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Taylor, p. 20.
- 19 "British Mission Manuscript History," January 22, 1853.
- 20 Tullidge, vol. 2, pp. 294-305.

- 21 "British Mission Manuscript History," March 9, 1854.
- 22 Ibid., June 26, 1854, p. 1.
- 23 Ibid., June 26, 1854, p. 5.
- 24 Ibid., October 28, 1854.
- 25 Ibid., October 11, 1855.
- 26 Ibid., February 10, 1857, p. 2.
- 27 Ibid., July 6, 1856.
- 28 Willie, "Missionary Journal," February 23, 1853.
- 29 Ibid., November 26, 1853.
- 30 Ibid., June 13, 1855.
- 31 Ibid., August 29 - September 15, 1854.
- 32 Ibid., February 21, 1853.
- 33 Ibid., September 21, 1853.
- 34 Ibid., March 30, 1854.
- 35 Ibid., June 1, 1853.
- 36 Ibid., August 4, 11, 12, 1853.
- 37 Ibid., August 18, 1853/
- 38 Ibid., September 6, 1853.
- 39 Ibid., January 7, 1854.
- 40 Ibid., March 12, 1854.
- 41 Ibid., July 2, 1854.
- 42 Ibid., May 15, 1853.
- 43 Ibid., December 21, 1853.
- 44 Ibid., June 18, 19, 20, 21, 1854.
- 45 Ibid., October 15, 1855.

- 46 Ibid., July 9-21, 1854.
- 47 Ibid., August 19, 1855.
- 48 Ibid., February 10, 1855.
- 49 "British Mission Manuscript History," May 4,  
1856.
- 50 Ibid., May 4, 1856.

CHAPTER VI  
A HARD WAY TO REACH HOME

As his mission ended in the spring of 1856 Willie prepared for the long trip back to Zion. He could not, of course, foresee what would happen, nor could he know that the next months would highlight his entire life. But nevertheless, a sequence of events were unfolding that would bring him to a kind of accounting that few have shared. As this chapter will explain, the church had already initiated the handcart scheme which ended in a tragedy that eclipsed even the awful fate of the Donner party of a decade before. From first to last the journey Willie was undertaking was one of epic character. In all its parts it partook of the stuff that sets the American experience apart generally and lent the Mormon gathering specific elements of greatness. First was the time of preparation in England, followed by the ocean voyage, the railroad journey to the Mississippi River, the outfitting in Iowa City and confusion of the first days on the trail, of poorly made carts and worse made decisions at Florence, and, finally, the test, as winter caught Willie and his party on the plains of Wyoming, and the church scrambled to minimize the damage and save face.

Much has been written about all this. While Willie

has received his due in literature, he has never been singled out for specific attention. In the pages that follow he will. Considering the handcart tragedy from the standpoint of one of its major participants will not only allow the reader to see that man's role, but will throw significant new light on the entire episode.

As a method for gathering Mormons to the Rocky Mountains, handcarts were almost forced onto the church in 1856. Many converts were poor. The church was in need of a program that would bring them to Zion to join the saints. The Perpetual Emigration Fund had been created in 1852 to lend money to converts to finance their trip. Recipients were to repay the Fund (on schedules much like a modern-day bank loan) as they established themselves in their new home, and, in turn, new converts were helped to gather.<sup>1</sup>

The Perpetual Fund worked with relative smoothness until the massive agricultural problems that began in 1855. Harvests in Utah had generally been good, indeed had progressively improved after 1850,<sup>2</sup> but the summer of 1855 brought serious grasshopper and drought problems. This reduced the 1855 harvest by up to two-thirds, depending on the area.<sup>3</sup> Because of the heavy crop losses and short pasture, the church was forced to find new grazing lands for livestock. Among the beneficiaries was Brigham Young, who acquired land in Cache Valley by a legislative grant. It was decided that this land would be

used to graze the cattle, even though the area was thought to be too cold.<sup>4</sup>

A ranch was established, wild hay cut for winter, and the needed corrals and cabins for the hands built. Some 3,000 head of cattle were trailed north to the Cache Valley, 2,000 of which were church cattle.<sup>5</sup>

As fate would have it, a severe winter followed.<sup>6</sup> Three quarters of the herd in Cache Valley was lost. Similar losses were reported in all the northern Mormon settlements.<sup>7</sup>

With the hard winter also came problems for the Perpetual Emigration Fund. Historian Leonard J. Arrington writes of the dilemma in his Great Basin Kingdom:

The terrible events of 1855-56 had brought the Mormon community so close to starvation that tithing receipts dropped sharply, and donations to the Perpetual Emigration Fund were almost negligible. It was clear to church officials that some phases of the church's development program would have to be severely curtailed or abandoned. The most expensive of these, in terms of cash, was 'the gathering of the poor.' The principal source of revenue for the immigration program, as previously related, was to have been the repayments of those who had been assisted to Utah in prior years, but their dire economic condition--and perhaps some disinclination--made it virtually impossible for them to meet these obligations. By April 1856, some 872 of the 'Lord's poor' who had been emigrated during the period 1849-1855 owed more than \$100,000 to the Fund. Moreover, the winter having killed nearly all of the P.E. cattle, it was quite impossible for the company to finance operations by selling, as it had sometimes done, the livestock which had been purchased in previous years and driven to Utah.<sup>8</sup>

The question of canceling the 1856 migration

altogether arose, but Brigham Young was strongly committed to the gathering effort and proposed that the poor come to Zion by handcart, thus maximizing the resources in the Perpetual Emigration Fund.<sup>9</sup> Elaborating on this proposal Young continued:

I have been thinking how we should operate another year. We cannot afford to purchase wagons and teams as in times past, I am consequently thrown back upon my old plan--to make hand-carts, and let the emigration foot it, and draw upon them (the carts) the necessary supplies, having a cow or two for every ten. They can come just as quick, if not quicker, and much cheaper-- can start earlier and escape the prevailing sickness which annually lays so many of our brethren in the dust. A great majority of them walk now, even with the teams which are provided, and have a great deal more care and perplexity than they would have if they came without them. They will need 90 days' rations from the time of their leaving the Missouri river, and as the settlements extend up the Platte, not that much. The carts can be made without a particle of iron, with wheels hooped, made strong and light, and one, or if the family be large, two of them will bring all they will need upon the plains.

If it is once tried, you will find that it will become the favorite method of crossing the plains....I do know that they can beat any ox train crossing the plains. I want to see it fairly tried and tested, at all events, and I think we might as well begin another year as any time, and save this enormous expense of purchasing wagons and teams--indeed, we will be obliged to pursue this course, or suspend operations, for aught that I can see at the present.

Actually the handcart idea was not new. Young had conceived of it soon after settlement in the Salt Lake Valley.<sup>11</sup> But the idea had lain unused until necessity demanded its application. Church agents in England estimated that it would cut the costs from sixteen

pounds to nine pounds (British currency) per person.<sup>12</sup> When word reached church agents to go ahead with the handcart scheme in the early months of 1856, 1,900 European saints signed up immediately.<sup>13</sup>

The Mormon organizational network was put into motion, preparing details for the journey of those on their way to Zion. As in previous migrations, the journey began by boat from Liverpool to one of several American ports. Next the people would be taken by train to Iowa City, Iowa, the end of the railroad at the time. At Iowa City they would be outfitted for the handcart journey to the Salt Lake Valley. It was hoped supply stations could also be established along the way, but as it turned out this precautionary measure had proven to be more than even the hard-driving Brigham Young could accomplish under the conditions.

For Willie the handcart experience was his last mission assignment, one that would be accomplished while returning home. His journey began with the ship Thornton which the group boarded on May 1, 1856, and took possession of their individual berths. All told, there were 761 people together aboard: 560 adults, 172 children and 29 infants.<sup>14</sup> James recorded the following about the preliminaries for the sea voyage in a digest written after the handcart experience and preserved in the "Journal History" of the church.

On Thursday May 1, 1856 on the ship



"Thornton" Captain Collins received the Saints (761 in number) in the Brammerley-Moore docks, Liverpool, England, and on the following day, Saturday President Franklin D. Richards, accompanied by the government inspector and doctor came on board, and the Saints answered to the usual inspection and were all pronounced by those officers to be in good health. President Richards appointed myself (James G. Willie) Captain of the company with Elders Millen Atwood, Moses Clough and Jahan A. Ahmanson my counselors. Afterward in a few appropriate remarks he exhorted the people to strict obedience on the passage, as otherwise they could not expect, and would not have a prosperous journey. President Richards then blessed them in the name of the Lord and by authority of the holy Priesthood. I then (Captain Willie) made the usual appointments for the promotions of cleanliness and good order, and on Sunday May 4, at 3 a.m. the company was tugged out of the river by the pilot.<sup>15</sup>

Like Willie, Franklin D. Richards could not have anticipated the trials that would come to this band of people. But it is interesting that he did shift the responsibility for the success of the entire migrational effort off the shoulders of the church and its agents and onto the spiritual and moral worthiness of the saints.

The "British Mission Manuscript History" confirms that Willie was placed in charge of the Thornton Mormons by Apostle Richards. It further states that 484 of the ship's passengers were aided by the Perpetual Emigration Fund.<sup>16</sup> Because of the surprisingly large number of people in the 1856 migration, the last groups to leave England (the Willie and Martin companies) were well behind schedule. The British officials had hoped to get everyone en route no later than the middle of April. But it was

hoped the time could be made up and, as company clerk, William Woodward, reported, government inspectors and doctors came aboard and gave the ship a hasty final approval.<sup>17</sup> Willie went back ashore with the inspectors to receive last minute instructions from Franklin D. Richards.<sup>18</sup> By the time he returned to the ship, it had experienced its first birth, a boy.

It was a fitting beginning to a very lively month and a half. At 8:30 that same morning the Thornton hoisted sail.<sup>19</sup> Willie called a meeting at 11:00 a.m. on the deck of the ship. The clerk records that Willie offered the prayer, and then along with Elder Millen Atwood "addressed the meeting upon the necessity of the Saints being cleanly and maintaining good order and carrying out the instructions given from time to time." That same day Woodward also notes that Atwood married Allen M. Findlay and Jessie Ireland.<sup>20</sup>

The next morning at 3:00 a.m. the excitement continued with the birth of a second child, a son delivered to Sarah Moulton.<sup>21</sup> By sun-up there was a great deal of sea sickness that continued for three days. These days of sickness were difficult for Willie and his counselors, who were busy attending to the needs of the stricken along with the ship's doctor and Captain Collins.<sup>22</sup> Willie said later of Collins:

The ship's captain yielded to the influence which surrounded him and was kind and affable to all, often voluntarily giving from his own table

for the comfort of the sick and infirm, and otherwise ministering to their wants with his own hands. He seemed to be a good man, and I felt all the time and still feel to say, 'God bless Captain Collins.' By his sanction, meetings (at which he was generally present) for preaching and bearing testimony were held on the quarterdeck, and every liberty which could in reason be expected was granted by him. He often in polite terms complimented the Saints upon their cleanliness and upon their ready compliance with his requests from time to time, and he said he never wished for a better or more orderly lot of passengers.<sup>23</sup>

Cooperation between Collins and Willie continued throughout the journey.

The first mortality of the ill-fated journey occurred on the second day, with the death of a sister Rachel Curtis. She was seventy-five years old and declining in health when she came on board. Sea sickness was not supposedly the cause, but it could have added to her declining health.<sup>24</sup> She was buried at sea the next day. William Woodward added a somber note to the journey's log:

This morning sea sickness remained, though gradually recovering. At 10 a.m. the bell tolled as a signal that the hour had arrived when we were to consign the remains of our beloved Sister Curtis to the sea to await the resurrection of the just. Great solemnity prevailed among all present. Prest. J.G. Willie offered up a prayer to the Almighty. She was buried in the mighty deep. The Captain manifested much kindness on the occasion.<sup>25</sup>

The events of the day brought more sorrow when a second death took place a few hours after the Curtis funeral.

Woodward records:

At 4 p.m. Sister Rasmine Rasmussen, born in

Jutland, Denmark, died from inflammation of the brain, having been afflicted with it for three months previous and in consequence of mortification ensuing, it was deemed prudent by Captain Collins and sanctioned by Prest. Willie that she be consigned as soon as possible to her final resting place. At 5 p.m. the tolling of the bell, Captain, Officers and Crew with many of the passengers assembled to witness the consignment of her remains to the great deep. Elder Ahmason offered up a prayer in the Danish language, and after a few remarks by the Captain she was buried in the sea.<sup>26</sup>

By morning of May 9th, the sickness was generally gone among the passengers. Willie experienced some illness health himself on Sunday May 11. Although his illness did not keep him from addressing the saints, he was unable to speak very long.<sup>27</sup> All were in good health by the end of the week. At the next Sunday meeting Willie relayed the captain's request that the water ration be cut from three quarts a day to two quarts. This was because of strong gale winds from the northwest that forced the ship to take a more southerly line. Rationing was necessary to preserve water for a possibly longer trip.<sup>28</sup>

On Tuesday of the same week, the decks were cleaned with "fumigation of tar and chloride of lime,"<sup>29</sup> to prevent an outbreak of ship's fever resulting from unclean living quarters. That night at 11:00 p.m. a fire broke out in the passengers' galley, but was promptly extinguished.<sup>30</sup> The next day the ship passed and communicated with a ship bound for Liverpool from New York, the W.M. Chamberlain. A third birth aboard ship

ended in sorrow when Hanna Bayliss had a stillborn child.<sup>31</sup>

The next day's recording by Woodward notes the day was filled with routine matters, but an event was recorded that suggests the mounting excitement on board:

A meeting was called between decks by Prest. Willie to take into consideration the necessity of more strictly guarding the interest of those committed to our care and among other things the necessity of the young men removing to the forepart of the ship, and all young men were to be at their berths by 10 p.m. Prest. Willie and Elder Atwood spoke and a number of the brethren were appointed Sargeants of the guard. We had a real good meeting, the Spirit of the Lord was with us.<sup>32</sup>

Boys will be boys at all times it seems. The important point is discipline was maintained.

Heavy seas kept the passengers below deck for the next few days, with very little activity recorded. On May 28, the year-old son of Red and Mary Marley died. No reason was given, but it could have been related to the cold. They were running in cold waters and many icebergs had been sighted around them. The child was buried at sea that same day, with Willie saying words for him.<sup>33</sup>

Bad news was replaced with good when the following day Willie married Samual Crook and Sarah Haines. Woodward records the spirit of the day:

Elder Atwood proposed three cheers for the ship Thornton, and Prest. Willie proposed three cheers for the Captain, Officers and Crew; also for Doctor. Three cheers were also given for the Bride and Bridegroom. Captain Collins came forward and returned thanks and proposed three cheers for Prest. Willie and Atwood.<sup>34</sup>

On May 30, one of the great tragedies of the entire journey occurred when an eight-year-old boy fell twenty feet through a hatch and fractured his skull. The boy died on June 2, and again Willie was asked to say words over him when he was buried at sea. The same day the full water rations were restored.<sup>35</sup>

Two more deaths occurred within the next week. A three-year-old girl died of fever on June 5th and a ten-year-old girl of consumption on June 7th.<sup>36</sup> However, the day after the loss of the second girl, nine fishing boat were sighted, exciting the passengers as they realized they were not far off the coast of America. As they neared the shores, however, they encountered thick fog. On Tuesday the 10th of June a "pilot" from New York City boarded the ship and guided it into port. That same night the first lighthouse was sighted at Montark on the northeastern tip of Long Island.<sup>37</sup>

With the journey coming to an end it was decided to compose a testimonial for Captain Collins which the passengers signed. They also made one for the ship's doctor. The "British Manuscript History" recounts that

Brother Willie read to the Saints two testimonials, one for the Captain and one for the Doctor, and took a vote upon them. They were adopted without a contrary vote. He then presented to the Captain, the one for him. He received it with tears of gratitude, and came forward and addressed the Saints. He said that he had done nothing but his duty, that he never crossed the sea with so good a company of passengers before--they had always been willing

to do anything he wanted, when he told their President, Mr. Willie, what he required. He wished the Saints prosperity in all their future works, and said he would remember them with the warmest feelings as long as he lived. He asked God to bless them. Here his feelings overcame him, and he had to stop speaking. He then presented a testimonial to President Willie, signed by himself, his chief officer, and surgeon. President Willie presented the surgeon with his testimonial. He came forward to speak, but the tears choked him, and he could not proceed. He asked God to bless the Saints.<sup>38</sup>

The good feelings between the crew of the ship and the passengers is to some degree a reflection of Willie's leadership. His ability to create good feelings is very evident. Responding in kind, the saints wrote a testimonial "expressive of their confidence" in Willie.<sup>39</sup>

One June 14 the ship was in the harbor and was towed to Staten Island where doctors and customs officials boarded for inspection. When it was cleared, the vessel was taken to "Castle Garden," and the passengers were able to debark. Immediately after the landing, the saints were visited by church officials from New York City.<sup>40</sup>

It had been a tedious but gratifying month and a half, that neither the passengers nor Willie would soon forget. The crossing was marked by three marriages, seven deaths, two births, and one stillbirth. Willie had given nine recorded speeches and perhaps others. He had performed one marriage and blessed two children. His leadership had been tested and was appreciated by his

people. America's shore had been reached, Zion seemed just beyond the horizon.

The next leg of the journey was by rail from New York City to Iowa City, where provisions were being readied for the handcart trek. Two days were spent in New York City, meeting with church officials and putting luggage in shape for the trail.

On the 17th of June the group set out by barge for the Erie Railroad Station where their luggage was weighed. That evening they took another steam barge for Peir Mount, where they arrived at 11:00 p.m. They boarded a train for Dunkirk, a New York town south of Buffalo on Lake Erie. It was a 460 mile trip that took them almost two full days. Willie and his counselor did not accompany them, but returned to New York to attend to unfinished business. Elder Levi Savage, a veteran of the Oriental missions of 1851, joined the group and was put in charge of the passage to Dunkirk.<sup>41</sup>

The group arrived at Dunkirk on June 19th at noon. At 2:00 p.m. they were joined by Willie and Atwood. They hurried to secure a few provisions and boarded the steam boat New Jersey which left port that evening. The Great Lakes leg of the journey was 280 miles to Toledo, Ohio. Steerage passage was inadequate, so the women slept below while the men slept on deck. Woodward recounts that it was a warm and pleasant trip, with one stop in Cleveland for provisions.<sup>42</sup> On the morning of June 21, the New



Jersey put in at Toledo. The immigrants disembarked and made their way to the railroad station where reservations awaited them for the train trip to Chicago. Problems were encountered with the railroad officials. As Willie put it "the railway authorities at Toledo manifest a very unkind spirit toward us, putting us to every inconvenience in their power."<sup>43</sup> This is the strongest language ever recorded by James G. Willie. He was a man of few words, and they were almost always of a positive nature.

The train left for Chicago that evening, traveling through the night, into the next day, and arriving at 5:00 p.m. They spent the night, as arranged, in a railroad warehouse. The next day they were forced to divide into two groups to get to Rock Island, Illinois. The first train, carrying mostly English converts, left the station at 3:00 p.m. The second left at 5:00 p.m. The lead train was forced to stop at Pond Creek because a bridge over the Mississippi River was out. The passengers spent the night in the cars, and were joined in the morning by the second train. At 5:00 p.m. the two trains at long last moved on toward Rock Island. They arrived there at 11:00 p.m. and had to spend a second night in the cars.<sup>44</sup>

The next morning, June 25th, arrangements were made to ferry across the Mississippi River to get back on the railroad line. The leaders made arrangements for the company to spend the following night at another railroad warehouse. Much of the day was spent in transporting

luggage to the ferry for the early morning crossing.<sup>45</sup>

William Woodward recorded that there was a possible "mob" problem that night at the warehouse.

Quite a rowdy spirit was manifested by many, desiring access to the building, and in the evening, we had to keep a steady guard, as we received a report through some friends that a mob intended to attack in the night and gain access to our young women. The Lord overruled all for our good for which we feel to be grateful and to express our thankfulness to Him. Obtained all the provisions we could get.<sup>46</sup>

It must be remembered that this was only ten years after the saints had been exiled from Nauvoo, Illinois. Anti-Mormon sentiment still ran high at Rock Island, which is a little more than one hundred miles up the river from Nauvoo.

On the morning of June 26th, they boarded the ferry at 9:00 a.m. and arrived at Iowa City at 1:30 p.m.<sup>47</sup> It had been only a ten day journey from New York, but its logistics were impressive indeed. Willie's effort had been almost unceasing to secure sleeping quarters, provisions, steamboat passage, ferry passage, four railroad transfers, and to avoid violence. All this was done for over 700 people, all new to the country.

The time spent in Iowa City between June 26 and July 15, 1856, is not so important for what happened, as it is for the sheer passage of time. Things should have proceeded at a much faster rate. Critical time had been lost with the slow start from England. The ship voyage was long. Delays between New York and Iowa City moved the

unsuspecting emigrants ever more deeply into a web spun of delays. The Willie outfit and the company directed by Edward Martin, which was just behind them, could afford no further delays. But delayed they were, and critical summer traveling time was lost. No real blame can be established, church officials had not anticipated the large number that came. Also there were problems with handcart and tent manufacturing. Delays seemed to be unavoidable, but the decision to push on so late in the year was questionable.

Upon arrival in Iowa City on the 26th, the group found that there would be little shelter for them in the Mormon camp outside of town. However, a very large "engine" shed was found to shelter them from a hard rain. That night the Willie company was visited by church officials. The next day they moved their luggage to camp.<sup>48</sup> Woodward records that they "received a cordial welcome from President [Daniel] Spencer and brethren generally."<sup>49</sup> The next day Willie received instruction from Spencer, who was in charge of preparations at Iowa City, directing him to continue "for the time being" as leader of the group.<sup>50</sup> Willie's people were without tents, and the rains were heavy. Willie's first responsibility was to get the men building handcarts and the women sewing tents.

The Willie company would need 120 carts, all of which had to be made, as none were available as expected. Ann

and LeRoy Hafen, in their classic work, Handcarts to Zion, throw the following light on the cart construction for both the Willie and Martin companies:

For the Perpetual Emigration Fund travelers, more than 250 handcarts and dozens of tents were required. Whether the failure to have the carts ready for the Saints upon their arrival was due to lack of timely advice from England concerning the number needed (Mail service then being very slow); to inability to get the required help or materials for construction; or to belief that the Saints could better afford to help make the carts than to pay for their being made, can hardly be determined....Chauncey G. Webb, who superintended the making of the carts at Iowa City, put every available man to work on construction of the vehicles.<sup>51</sup>

The Hafens go on to say that these outfitting delays cost the Willie group an additional nineteen days of badly needed time.

Brigham Young's original plan called for far greater organizational development of the handcart scheme. Not only were delays to be avoided in outfitting the companies, but stations were to be constructed along the trail from Iowa City to Salt Lake City allowing for restocking from time to time. Only one was constructed. As a result even the three handcart companies that preceded the Willie and Martin groups, with good weather and adequate time, were in desperate need of supplies 300 miles outside of Salt Lake City. It was only through rescue parties that they avoided tragedy.<sup>52</sup> Actually there were several serious problems with the Mormon handcart migration of 1856. These included lack of money

and organization, inadequate communication, and lack of specific responsibility for some problems. Wallace Stegner in The Gathering of Zion, points a finger at Brigham Young for his judgment in the whole affair.

It is perhaps fairer to say that in this instance Brigham was letting his impatience for growth and strength cloud his usually sound judgement, or was perhaps depending too incautiously on the caution of his agents.<sup>53</sup>

This judgment seems fair when one contrasts Brigham Young's plans for the handcart migration of 1856, with what actually happened. Most of the problems were due to poor planning in the details of the operation. On paper the plan looked good, but because it was rushed and poorly funded, problems compounded. In this case Stegner was right, Young's desire to get people to Zion clouded his judgment. Others, too, responded with clouded judgment.

Tents became Willie's immediate concern at Iowa City. His best effort notwithstanding, they were not completed until July 8th. Woodward records that it rained four days during this time, adding to the urgent need.<sup>54</sup> Once the tents were finished the wait was for handcarts. Gathering and packing provisions also took time. Each person was allowed seventeen pounds of luggage, which was checked and weighed by the leaders.<sup>55</sup> With the 120 handcarts and approximately 500 people, the Willie company would have four or five people per cart. With the seventeen pounds of luggage each and the few cooking and camping tools needed, each cart would carry about 100

pounds.

Complicating affairs was the late arrival of the Martin company of 800 on July 9th. Supplies and shelter had to be provided for them.<sup>56</sup> On July 12th Willie's designation to be the captain of the fourth handcart company was confirmed.

Also chosen were elders Millen Atwood, Levi Savage, William Woodward (who also served as company clerk), John Chislett, and John Ahmanson, who were to be sub-captains of the hundreds within the Willie company of 500 people,<sup>57</sup> which was composed of those whom came on the Thornton and had traveled with Willie from New York. Most depended on the Perpetual Emigration Fund. The remaining 280 Thornton passengers were not dependent on the Fund and had means to secure ox teams and wagons. They reached Salt Lake in the more traditional fashion under the direction of captains W.B. Hodgetts and John A. Hunt.<sup>58</sup>

On July 15th, all was ready for the departure. Loss of time had been costly, but only hindsight would show just how costly. For the moment, the hurried events at Iowa City seemed to be another successful test of Willie's leadership. His motivation and organizing skills had prevented even greater delays.

As it moved out, Willie's outfit consisted of 120 handcarts, 5 wagons (which largely carried supplies), 24 oxen, and 45 beef cattle and cows.<sup>59</sup> Efforts had been

made to equalize the company as much as possible by assigning the strongest people to the handcart units. The two dozen tents were divided among the groups, with approximately twenty to a tent. Sleeping units were arranged to accommodate families and singles.<sup>60</sup> Little distance was covered the first day on the trail, as half the day was spent in getting started.

The second day only three miles were covered, indicating it would take a few days for the company to get in shape for walking and organized for travel. The third day, on July 17th, they stopped for meetings with Daniel Spencer and an Elder Ferguson from Iowa City, who wanted a list of all the people in the company. This was followed by more "counsel and encouragement" from Captain Willie and elders Atwood and Savage. The leaders evidently used this day for instructions about the activities and progress the leaders expected. They made eighteen miles in the next two days. The third day after the meeting was Sunday, July 20th, the only Sunday spent resting between Iowa City and Florence, Nebraska.<sup>61</sup>

The first week of the journey took its toll. Four adults and two children left, having decided this was no way to reach Zion. However, Woodward recorded that generally spirits were good throughout the first week.<sup>62</sup>

On Monday, July 21st, the bugle flew at 4:00 a.m. Breakfast was eaten, carts were greased and loaded, and

the group was on the trail by 7:30 a.m. That week was filled with sickness, and even the death of a woman from eating too many "green plums." Another family of six deserted.<sup>63</sup> There were rumors of mob violence, and some harassment from locals in the populated areas of Iowa through which they were traveling. It would not be until they reached Florence that they left all signs of civilization. Willie records the opposition from the local people.

On our way considerable opposition was shown towards us by the people from time to time, and threats of personal violence were sometimes made of us though never carried into effect, because they could not find any just complaint. We were persecuted by a posse of men with a search warrant from some justice of the peace authorizing them to search the bottoms of our wagons for young women, who as was alleged were tied down there with ropes.<sup>64</sup>

That incident took place on Friday, July 25th. The night before the group had been harassed by thirty men, who on seeing the guard, left them alone.<sup>65</sup> Considering the size of the group, with a total number larger than most towns they passed through, it is little wonder the mob threats were only idle talk. Yet it would doubtless have been a nagging worry and have taken important time and energy.

Definite improvement was made in the traveling efforts. The second week three times the distance was covered as in the first week. There were still some sick, but they were "mending very fast." Willie was busy



attending to the needs of the sick, and at the same time encouraging people in talks delivered in the evenings. Under this attention and care, the company was beginning to take shape as a trail outfit. Daily travel was becoming routine with the discipline necessary for the long journey on foot.

The third week Willie picked up the pace even more. The company had traveled roughly sixty miles the second week, and they traveled ninety the third.<sup>66</sup>

On one day they traveled more than they had in any two days previously. Woodward records:

Wednesday July 30th. We arose had breakfast, prayers, &c., and were on our journey by 7 o'clock, the air beautiful. We proceeded on our journey about 8 or 10 miles when we halted for about 2 hours, and were on our journey again at 2 o'clock intending to go about 4 miles to the next creek, but the Danes having the lead went some distance by the Camping ground through some misunderstanding, & after consulting a while, it was thought better to proceed to the next creek, rather than turn back. And being misinformed about the distance we pursued our journey as far as Fort Des Moines Iowa without coming to a convenient camping ground. We arrived about 7:30 p.m. all very tired. Wood and water is plentiful here. We stopped just outside the Town and had many visitors from the Town to see us & kept themselves very quiet. We traveled 21 miles this day.<sup>67</sup>

This is the only mention of trouble involving the group's different nationalities. They all considered themselves "Saints."

Not surprisingly the group fell back to only six miles the next day (July 31) because of the fatigue of the twenty-one-mile day.<sup>68</sup> That same day they were

pleasantly surprised by an unusual act of kindness. Willie himself was taken by this act, and records it in his digest.

I wish to here mention an act of kindness performed by a gentleman, (Mr. Charles Good at Fort Desmoines.) He presented me with 15 pairs of childrens boots which I readily accepted as he seemed to be interested by a sincere desire to do good.<sup>69</sup>

The week passed with only one tragic incident, when a fourteen-day-old infant died. Desertions continued to sap at morale as the group lost one more of its members. There were rumors of more outside threats, but again they passed with no confrontations.

The last week of the journey from Iowa City to Florence, found them again picking up on distance traveled as they hardened into the trail. Although they added ten miles to the previous week's total, it was not enough. On Tuesday of that week, Willie delivered a stern speech reproving his people for their "Dilatory," or delaying and tardy, manner. He added that they must repent or they would not have the "blessings of the Lord" and would not get through to Salt Lake City that season.<sup>70</sup> These were strong words for a group which was walking ten miles a day, but Willie knew that valuable days were slipping away, and they were still far from their destination.

Finally on Monday, August 11th, they arrived at Florence, Nebraska. The 277 mile journey from Iowa City had taken 28 days, much too long for the miles covered.

Moreover, they would stop for almost a week, plagued with costly delays involving the repair of handcarts. Even more important was the discussion that decided whether or not they should push on so late in the season.

The poorly constructed handcarts were the first business at hand for Captain Willie. Together with church officials at Florence, he organized the refurbishing and repair of the carts. J.H. Latey, an official at Florence, reported:

The companies stay here longer than they otherwise would in consequence of their carts being unfit for their journey across the plains; some requiring new axles, and the whole of them having to have a piece of iron screwed on to prevent the wheel from wearing away the wood.<sup>1</sup>

With the greater delay came discussion about going on so late in the season. Here the record can speak for itself. John Chislett, who was a member of the Willie company, wrote the following on the discussion.

The elders seemed to be divided in their judgement as to the practicability of our reaching Utah in safety at so late a season of the year, and the idea was entertained for a day or two of making our winter quarters on the Elkhorn, Wood River, or some eligible location in Nebraska; but it did not meet with general approval. A meeting was called to consult the people about it.

The emigrants were entirely ignorant of the country and climate-simple, honest, eager to go to 'Zion' at once.... Under these circumstances it was natural that they should leave their destination in the hands of the elders. There were but four men in our company who had been to the Valley, viz.: Willie, Atwood, Savage, and Woodward; but there were several at Florence superintending the emigration, among whom elders G.D. Grant and W.H. Kimball occupied the most

prominent position. These men all talked at the meeting just mentioned, and all, with one exception, favoured going on.<sup>72</sup>

Levi Savage, a captain of a hundred in the Willie group, who had been with them since New York, kept a journal during the handcart journey. As the issue came to a head Savage was the only one to openly oppose the decision to go on.

August 12, 1856, Tuesday, Camp of the Saints, Florence, Nebraska Territory. Today we commenced preparing for our journey and ascertaining who wished to go on this fall and who wishes to remain here. Many are going to stop. Others are faltering and I myself am not in favor of, but much opposed to, taking women and children through when they are destitute of clothing, when we all know that we are bound to be caught in the snow and severe cold weather long before we reach the valley. I have expressed my feelings, in part, to Brothers McGaw, Willey and Atwood. Brother Atwood said to me last night, that since he had been a member of this Church, with all of his experience, he had never been placed in a position where things appear so dark to him, as it does to undertake to take this company through at this late season of the year.

August 13, 1856, Wednesday, Florence, Nebraska Territory. Today we continued preparations for starting. Evening we held meeting in camp. Brother Willey exhorted the Saints to go forward regardless of suffering even to death. After he had spoken, he gave me the opportunity of speaking. I said to him that if I spoke I must speak my mind, let it cut where it would. He said certainly to do so. I then related to the Saints the hardships that we should have to endure. I said that we were liable to have to wade in snow up to our knees and shovel at night, lay ourselves in a thin blanket and lie on the frozen ground without a bed. I said that it was not like having a wagon that we could go into and wrap our selves in as much s we like and lay down. 'No,' said I, 'we are with out wagons, destitute of clothing and could not carry it if we had it. We must go as we are.'

The handcart system I do not condemn. I think it preferable to unbroken oxen and inexperienced teamster.' The lateness of the season was my only objection to leaving this point for the mountains at this time. I spoke warmly upon the subject, but spoke truth, and the people, judging from appearance and expressions, felt the force of it. (however, the most of them determined to go forward, if the authorities say go.) Elder Willey then spoke again in reply to what I had said, evidently dissatisfied. He said that the God that he served was a God that was able to save to the uttermost. He said that was the God that he served, and he wanted no Job's comforters with him. I then said that what I had said was the truth, and if Elder Willey did not want me to act in the place where I am, he is at full liberty to place another man in my stead. I would not think hard of him for it, But, I did not care what he said about Job's comforters, I had spoken nothing but the truth and he knew it. Elder Atwood then spoke mildly and to the purpose. He said that he had been listening to what had been said. He exhorted the Saints to pray to God and get a revelation and know for themselves whether they should go or stay, for it was their privilege to know for themselves. The meeting was dismissed, all manifesting a good feeling and spirit.<sup>73</sup>

It is clear that the vision of James Willie was clouded at this point. He could have influenced his group to find a suitable place to spend the winter. It was a costly mistake in judgment on his part, one no doubt that haunted him for many years to come. The church officials in Florence knew better also. Wallace Stegner gives his impressions of the church agents.

Taking part in the debate were several of the Iowa City agents, including W.H. Kimball and G.D. Grant, who had hurried on to the Missouri as soon as Iowa City was cleaned out. Like many other present, they knew the trail and the uncertain fall weather of the mountains; like many others, they were intoxicated with zeal to prove the handcart plan sound. They joined, and to some extent probably strengthened, the

eagerness of the tenderfeet to go on. These told themselves that they had not come this far only to winter in a dugout out along the Platte. They had come to join the Saints in Zion, and they had come by God's own plan.<sup>74</sup>

These men had ulterior motives in their decision. To let the emigrants stay would show weakness in the handcart concept. It would also cost money for winter supplies. For Willie there was no hidden motive, only the blind zeal of his religion that allowed him to feel that God would do all to protect them.

Savage, a returning missionary, was the voice of logic in a sea of emotions longing for Zion. He is to be respected for his foresight and courage to stand alone, but most of all for his integrity to stay with the group and offer his continued service. Many would owe their lives to this hardy experienced man who encouraged them throughout the trip.

History offers hindsight; Willie did not anticipate what would happen. But given the lateness of the year, the long journey ahead, and the inexperienced and ill-equipped nature of his company, along with his own experience with the journey and the western country, one cannot help but be critical of his decision. As was mentioned in connection with James' missionary experience, he was the "good follower" and fine administrator of mission policy. It was the wish of his superiors, Daniel Spencer and Franklin D. Richards, that he take this group through to Salt Lake City. Willie accepted the decision

that had been made by church officials. He did not have the luxury of Levi Savage, who was not in charge, or who did not have strong ties with the church leaders in Europe, and would be able to speak with less restraint. It is clear there were pressures on James to make the decision he did.

Equipped and ready again the company hurried on from Florence on August 16th. It is uncertain how many remained in Florence, but it was definitely not a large number. This time the carts were more "heavily laden" than before, as the teams and wagons could not carry all the necessary supplies for the long trip to Salt Lake City.<sup>75</sup> Willie records in his digest that they set out in "real earnest," traveling eighteen miles the first day, including the crossing of the Elk Horn River.<sup>76</sup>

With the heavy loads in the handcarts came breakdowns. Chislett records the following:

The only drawbacks to this part of our journey were the constant breaking down of carts and the delays caused by repairing them. The axles and boxes being of wood, and being ground out by the dust that found its way there in spite of our efforts to keep it out, together with the extra weight put on the carts, had the effect of breaking the axles at the shoulder. All kinds of expedients were resorted to as remedies for the growing evil, but with variable success. Some wrapped their axles with leather obtained from bootlegs; other with tin, obtained by sacrificing tin-plates, kettles, or buckets from their mess outfit. Besides these inconveniences, there was felt a great lack of a proper lubricator. Of anything suitable for this purpose we had none at all. The poor folks had to use their bacon (already totally insufficient for their wants) to grease their

axles, and some even used their soap, of which they had very little, to make their carts trundle somewhat easier.<sup>77</sup>

Chislett goes on to note that after about twenty days' traveling time the problem of breakdowns became less of a problem. He states that the added weight to the carts was from 100 pounds of flour placed in each. This was depleted by the end of a twenty day period. As the weight was reduced the group bettered its time.

As luck would have it, however, they were forced to load on more supplies. Levi Savage describes the situation in his journal.

Brother I. Elder and I went on horseback and endeavored to get a buffalo calf or cow. The old bulls would not let us have any. They formed themselves in battle array, ready to receive their enemy. Their large herds are to be seen in all directions. We did not get to camp until after dark.

September 4, 1856, Thursday, Near Chutah Lake. Sometime last night thirty of our best working cattle left us. We had a guard around them, but no one knows when or where they went. I and a number of the brethren, spent the day unsuccessfully hunting them.<sup>78</sup>

It was supposed that the large buffalo herds had something to do with the cattle loss. At any rate, with oxen gone, Willie was forced to place 100 additional pounds in each handcart. With the wagons lightened Willie filled in his teams by using beef and milk cattle.<sup>79</sup> Chislett records that for all practical purposes this also ended the milk and meat rations as milk production fell and beef animals were diverted from slaughter to draft use.<sup>80</sup>



By this time the group was 265 miles from Florence.<sup>81</sup> They had made good time, but could have made much better time if they had not been forced to carry as much in their weakened carts. The system proposed by Brigham Young to place stations long the trail would have eliminated this problem. Nevertheless, all had gone quite well up to this point, even with the loss of the cattle. Many had long since forgotten the words of Levi Savage in Florence. But soon cold autumn nights on the plains and mountains began to take their toll.

On September 13<sup>th</sup>, Franklin Richards and his express group caught up with the Willie company. Richards had arrived in Iowa City shortly after the Willie group departed. After helping to tie matters up there, he departed for Salt Lake City. Chislett describes the comfortable way the Mormon Apostle was traveling, and also the words of encouragement he gave the company.

Each vehicle was drawn by four horses or mules, and all the appointments seemed to be first rate. The occupants we soon found to be apostle R.D. Richards, elders W.H. Kimball, G.D. Grant, Joseph A. Young, C.G. Webb, N.H. Felt, W.C. Dunbar, and others who were returning to Utah from missions abroad. They camped with us for the night, and in the morning a general meeting was called. Apostle Richards addressed us. He had been advised of the opposition brother Savage had made, and he rebuked him very severely in open meeting for his lack of faith in God. Richards gave us plenty of counsel to be faithful, prayerful, obedient, to our leaders, etc., and wound up by prophesying in the name of Israel's God that though it might storm on our right hand and on our left, the Lord would keep open the way before us and we should get to Zion in safety.<sup>82</sup>

Chislett went on to say that before leaving, the party of returning missionaries requested some "fresh meat" from the handcart company. Woodward confirms this.<sup>83</sup> The group offered one of its finest calves. Chislett adds: "I am ashamed for humanity's sake to say they took it."<sup>84</sup> Richards also promised that supplies would be waiting at Fort Laramie.

With Richards' speech the matter of Savage's opposition to starting late in the season resurfaced in a way that suggests that it had produced some tension among the companies leaders. As Savage noted:

After singing and prayers Brother Richards commenced to speak, and I soon perceived that the meeting was called in consequence of the wrong impression made by my expressing myself so freely at Florence concerning our crossing the plains so late in the season. The impression left was that I condemned the handcart scheme, which is very wrong. I never conveyed such an idea, nor felt to do so; but, quite to the contrary, I am in favor of it. Also, the meeting was called, more particular in consequence of someone, unknown to me, informing Brother Richards of the disagreeable words that took place between Brother Willey and myself concerning Brother Siler's teams traveling between the handcarts and fund wagons, which I supposed was settled. When I asked Brother Willey's and the Saints' forgiveness for all that I had said and done wrong, Brother Richards reprimanded me sharply. Brother Willey said that I had manifested a bad spirit from Iowa City. This is something unknown to me and something he never before expressed. I had always the best of feelings toward him and supposed he had toward me until now.<sup>85</sup>

All of the journals and accounts are unclear about the Siler incident. However, Savage's comment does represent

one of the very few criticisms toward Willie by any of the handcart company members. Willie also must have felt that the words of Savage at Florence, if not strongly put down by Richards and himself, would only serve to discourage the group if they met severe troubles.

On October 2nd they did reach Fort Laramie, and to their disappointment, found no supplies waiting. With this, they pooled funds to buy supplies from the fort. Also Willie outlined a plan for rationing the food supply.<sup>86</sup> On October 12th rations were cut even further. Flour was cut to ten and a half ounces for men, nine ounces for women, six ounces for children, and three ounces a day for infants.<sup>87</sup> Willie had received a letter from President Richards sometime after leaving Fort Laramie informing him that supplies could be expected a South Pass. With these further reductions it was hoped that the group could make it that far without running out of food.<sup>88</sup>

However, food was not the main problem in reaching South Pass. It was cold weather. Chislett gives this heart-rending account of the Willie handcart company and their bout with the cold.

We had not travelled far up the Sweetwater before the nights, which had gradually been getting colder since we left Laramie, became very severe. The Mountains before us, as we approached nearer to them, revealed themselves to view mantled nearly to their base in snow, and tokens of a coming storm were discernable in the clouds which each day seemed to lower around us.

Our seventeen pounds of clothing and bedding was now altogether insufficient for our comfort. Nearly all suffered more or less at night from cold. Instead of getting up in the morning strong, refreshed, vigorous, and prepared for the hardships of another day of toil, the poor Saints were to be seen crawling out seen their tents haggard, benumbed, and showing an utter lack of that vitality so necessary to or success.

Cold weather, scarcity of food, altitude and fatigue from over-exertion soon produced their effects. Our old and infirm people began to droop, and they no sooner lost spirit and courage than death's stamp could be traced upon their features. Life went out as smoothly as a lamp ceases to burn when the oil is gone. At first the deaths occurred slowly and irregularly, but in a few days at more frequent intervals, until we soon thought it unusual to leave a campground without burying one or more persons.

Death was not long confined in its ravages to the old and infirm, but the young and naturally strong were among its victims...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.<sup>89</sup>

One is touched by the plight of these people. Many died from lack of good food, the severe cold, and the hard toil.<sup>90</sup>

Snowstorms began on October 19th that eventually brought the group to a standstill among the willows, near the fifth crossing of the Sweetwater River, about fifteen miles west of modern day Jeffrey City, Wyoming. A light wagon driven by Joseph Young and Stephen Taylor was sighted by the group at this time. They brought word of rescue parties near by. This lifted spirits somewhat, and spurred progress despite the snow, but by evening they

ground to a halt in the Willow camp.<sup>91</sup> Chislett records what they experienced that morning.

In the morning the snow was over a foot deep. Our cattle strayed widely during the storm, and some of them died. But what was worse to us than all this was the fact that five persons of both sexes lay in the cold embrace of death.

The morning before the storm, or, rather, the morning of the day on which it came, we issued the last ration of flour. On this fatal morning, therefore, we had none to issue. We had however, a barrel or two of hard bread which Captain Willie had procured at Fort Laramie in view of our destination. This was equally and fairly divided among all the company. Two of our poor broken-down cattle were killed and their carcasses issued for beef. With this we were informed that we would have to subsist until the coming supplies reached us. All that now remained in our commissary were a few pounds each of sugar and dried apples, about a quarter of a sack of rice and a small quantity (possibly 20 or 25 lbs.) of hard bread.

Being surrounded by snow a foot deep, 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.<sup>92</sup>

It was that same morning that Willie, along with a companion, struck out in search of the rescue party.

The story of the rescue of the beleaguered handcart companies is one of great organization and heroic effort on the part of the church and its members in Salt Lake City. Where the church organization had failed the group in Iowa City with poor preparation and bad advice, it was extremely well organized in the rescue of the handcart companies.

Franklin D. Richards and the returning missionaries had arrived in Salt Lake City on October 4, 1856. They

had made the trip in about six weeks with their well-equipped outfit. When they reported to Brigham Young that there were over 1,000 saints still on the trail in handcarts, Young was deeply concerned. Church leaders in Salt Lake City had not dreamed that this large group would venture out so late in the season. They supposed they would winter at a location in the mid-west and come the following summer.<sup>93</sup>

Richards, however, was very optimistic about the future of the handcart companies still on the plains. In the church's conference meetings on October 5th, Richards

could still speak of the handcart pilgrims' faith that it would be an open fall, and that God would 'overrule the storms that may come in the season thereof, and turn them away, that their path may be freed from suffering more than they can bear.' He was inclined to feel that 'such confidence and joyful performance of so arduous labors to accomplish their gathering, will bring the choice blessing of God upon them.'<sup>94</sup>

Brigham Young did not share the optimism of Apostle Richards. He made the handcart rescue the theme of the entire October conference of the church. He also set to work the great organizational powers of his people. They put together wagons, teams, food, clothing, and men to get out on to the trail as soon as possible. The first of many groups to leave was George D. Grant's, which found the Willie outfit at the last crossing of the Sweetwater River.<sup>95</sup>

With supplies brought by the Grant rescue party, the

Willie company was able to pull itself together and start again on October 22nd. Woodward records that it made eleven miles that day, with good roads. The Grant party had divided its forces in half. Grant took his half and pushed on to rescue the Martin handcart company. W.H. Kimball was left in charge of the Willie rescue. Still the group was very weak, and lost two more people that day.<sup>96</sup>

The most tragic of all days in the journey was October 23rd, when the group struggled five miles up what was called "Rocky Ridge" on their way to South Pass. Chislett records the terrible costs of that day in his assignment:

A few days of bright freezing weather were succeeded by another snowstorm. The day we crossed the Rocky Ridge it was snowing a little--the wind hard from the north-west- and blowing so keenly that it almost pierced us though. We had to wrap ourselves closely in blankets, quilts, or whatever else we could get, to keep from freezing. Captain Willie still attended to the details of the company's travelling, and this day he appointed me to bring up the rear. My duty was to stay behind everything, and see that nobody was left along the road.<sup>97</sup>

Chislett did his best to bring up the slower members of the group, but found that the numbers were becoming too great and he returned to the main body for help.

After some time I came in sight of the camp fires, which encouraged me. As I neared the camp I frequently overtook stragglers on foot, all pressing forward slowly. I stopped to speak to each one, cautioning them all against resting, as they would surely freeze to death. Finally, about 11 p.m. I reached the camp almost

exhausted. I had exerted myself very much during the day in bringing the rear carts up the ridge, and had not eaten anything since breakfast. I reported to Captain Willie and Kimball the situation of the folks behind. They immediately got up some horses, and the boys from the Valley started back about midnight to help the ox teams in. The night was very severe and many of the emigrants were frozen. It was 5 a.m. before the last team reached the camp.

Levi Savage also gives a graphic account of this day's happenings.

October 23, 1856, Thursday Morning. We buried our dead, got up our teams and about nine o'clock a.m. commenced ascending the Rocky Ridge. This was a severe day. The wind blew hard and cold. The ascent was some five miles long and some places steep and covered with deep snow. We became weary, set down to rest, and some became chilled and commenced to freeze. Brothers Atwood, Woodard and myself remained with the teams. They being perfectly loaded down with the sick and children, so thickly stacked I was fearful some would smother. About ten or eleven o'clock in the night we came to a creek that we did not like to attempt to cross without help, it being full of ice and freezing cold. Leaving Brothers Atwood and Woodard with the teams, I started to the camp for help. I met Brother Willey coming to look for us. He turned for the camp, as he could do no good alone. I passed several on the road and arrived in camp after about four miles of travel. I arrived in camp, but few tents were pitched and men, women, and children sat shivering with cold around their small fires. Some time elapsed when two teams started to bring up the rear. Just before daylight they returned, bringing all with them some badly frozen, some dying and some dead. It was certainly heartrending to hear children crying for mothers and mothers crying for children. By the time I got them as comfortably situated as circumstances would admit (which was not very comfortable), day was dawning. I had not shut my eyes for sleep, nor lain down. I was nearly exhausted with fatigue and want of rest.

That next morning thirteen were found dead. Because of



the weakness of the company it was decided to rest a day. Camp was moved a short distance into some willows for shelter, and the day was spent trying to recover from the day before.<sup>100</sup>

On October 25th the journey was resumed, and they made it to South Pass. There they met a party of seven wagons under the direction of Reddick Allred.<sup>101</sup> Not only did Allred bring badly need provisions, but the travellers were able to discard some of the handcarts, and a few could ride in the wagons. Once they passed to the west side of the continental divide, through the famed South Pass, the weather moderated. Still death visited them daily, as the journey's effects lingered.<sup>102</sup>

On the 30th of October they came to Green River, and on the 31st were met by another supply train from the Valley. On November 1st they arrived at Fort Bridger, and were met by more supply trains. The next morning the company left Fort Bridger, abandoning all the remaining handcarts, as all could ride in the fifty wagons that had joined them.<sup>103</sup> Woodward also records that on this day James' feet froze and he was unable to walk.<sup>104</sup> Even though many from Salt Lake City had come to help the Willie company it appears that James was still in charge.

On the 5th of November the group entered Echo Canyon. They were plagued with snow again, but they were able to roll into the Great Salt Lake Valley on November 9th.<sup>105</sup>

The survivors were well cared for as they entered the Valley. Willie commented gratefully on the fine treatment received.

On our arrival there the Bishops of the different wards took every person who was not provided with a home to comfortable quarters. Some had their hands and feet badly frozen; but everything which could be done to alleviate their sufferings was done, and no want was left unadministered to. Hundreds of citizens flocked around the wagons on our way through the City, cordially welcoming their Brethren and Sisters to their new home in the mountains.<sup>106</sup>

Willie's company lost seventy-seven people between Liverpool and Salt Lake City.<sup>107</sup> Sixty-eight had died on the handcart trail. The Martin company had lost between 135 and 150 people on the handcart leg of the journey.<sup>108</sup> There was an unestimated number of deaths on the Hodgett and Hunt wagon trains.<sup>109</sup> Nearly one out of five who left Iowa City for Salt Lake City died.

With the tragic experience behind him, James was home with his family after four long years. The William Willie history records the following about his return.

November 9, 1856, his father, James G. Willie, returned from his mission after an absence of four years. William, now eight years old, was so anxious to see him that he walked to the mouth of Emigration Canyon. There he met his father who was the captain of the ill fated Willie (fourth) Handcart Company. His father was delighted to see him and lifted him into the wagon so that he could ride back with him. James G. Willie's feet and legs were wrapped in burlap sacks because his shoes had worn out. Both feet had been badly frozen when he went to find the rescue party. It was feared they would have to be amputated. James didn't think he would have the use of them. 'There was nothing but the power of the priesthood and

administration that saved his legs' related Elizabeth (his wife) to her granddaughter Maud W. Hendry. Maud states, 'after that he walked with a cane for the rest of his life.'<sup>110</sup>

The handcart journey had cost James a great deal. Not only did he suffer from the cold, but he had also watched his people suffer. In his digest he wrote the following in conclusion for the journey.

I feel to conclude by saying that on the whole the Saints bore the heavy trials of the journey with a becoming and praiseworthy fortitude. I may add too, that in consequence of their having to cross the North Fork of the Platt and the Sweetwater several times through the cold water and to sleep in the snow, (each person having only 17 pounds of luggage including bedding) and through other privations necessarily incident to the journey at so late a period of the season many of the aged and infirm failed in strength and died. The diarrhea also took firm hold on many. Our wagons were crowded with the sick, which broke down our teams and thus we often were obliged to refuse the admission of many who were really worthy to ride.

In crossing the Rocky Ridge we had to encounter a heavy snow storm accompanied by a strong north wind. It was the most disastrous day of the whole trip, fifteen dying from fatigue and exposure to the cold. We had on this day as on previous and subsequent ones to clear away the snow in order to make places for pitching our tents. Not withstanding the disadvantages of our position in crossing the Rocky Ridge, we traveled 16 miles on that day with our handcarts.

The total number of deaths in this company from Liverpool was 77....<sup>111</sup>

Willie did not reveal his personal feelings on the handcart tragedy, but did show his pride in the people he led. He also reflected some impressions on how he was moved by the entire experience. This is the only account of James Willie speaking in retrospect on the handcart

event.

This being the most well-known achievement and leadership role of Willie's life, it is important to look at the opinions and feelings of others who served with him in this handcart experience. The Woodward journal is filled with references to Willie attending to his duties. It also records that even when the journey became desperate, and his decisions were difficult to accept, his followers bore the burden to the best of their ability. The Savage journal would support this also. And even though Willie and Savage were at odds a few times, Savage still records the respect he had for Willie. However, there is nothing specific in any of these journals, other than the testimonial given to Willie aboard the Thornton, that tells the group's feelings for him. One has to read the accounts, with their daily mention of his duties, concerns and actions, to understand how people felt about him. They addressed him as "Father Willie," our "faithful Captain," our "good Captain."

What the records do not say about Willie also becomes important in an evaluation of his role as leader. It is not said that he did an inferior job, or made bad decisions on the trek. Nowhere is it said that he was a harsh ruler, or indecisive. This in itself is a tribute to Willie, as it is human nature to point out error, but it is slow to recognize good.

James G. Willie had led a group of unprepared people

from England to Salt Lake City. It was a major accomplishment. The journey was marred with great tragedy, but this too added to the Willie legacy.

No one has summed up this journey better than Wallace Stegner.

Perhaps their suffering seems less dramatic because the handcart pioneers bore it meekly, praising God, instead of fighting for life with the ferocity of animals and eating their dead to keep their own life beating, as both the Fremont and Donner parties did. And assuredly the handcart pilgrims were less hardy, less skilled, less well equipped to be pioneers. But if courage and endurance make a story, if human kindness and helpfulness and brotherly love in the midst of raw horror are worth recording, this half-forgotten episode of the Mormon migration is one of the great tales of the West and America.<sup>112</sup>

Many died, many suffered, and the handcart program was not the marvelous success that Brigham Young had hoped it would be. The debate began as to whose fault it was, why they left so late in the year and why the carts were not ready. James G. Willie would be forever stamped with "Handcart Fame." What the future held for him will be the topic of the following chapters.

Footnotes

- 1 Arrington, pp. 77-79, 97-106.
- 2 Ibid., p. 150.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid., p. 151.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid., p. 156.
- 9 "Thirteenth General Epistle," October 29, 1855, Millennial Star, XVIII (1856), pp. 51-52.
- 10 "Brigham Young to Franklin D. Richards," September 30, 1855, Millennial Star, XVII (1855), p. 813.
- 11 Stegner, p. 222.
- 12 Arrington, p. 157.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Woodward, May 1, 1856.
- 15 "Journal History," November 9, 1856, p. 8.
- 16 "British Mission Manuscript History," July 6, 1856, p. 1.
- 17 Woodward, May 3, 1856.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid., May 4, 1856.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid., May 6, 1856.
- 22 Ibid., May 6-8, 1856.
- 23 "Journal History," November 9, 1856, p. 8.

- 24 Woodward, May 7, 1856.
- 25 Ibid., May 8, 1856.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid., May 9, 11, 1856.
- 28 Ibid., May 18, 1856.
- 29 Ibid., May 20, 1856.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid., May 21, 1856.
- 32 Ibid., May 22, 1856.
- 33 Ibid., May 28, 1856.
- 34 Ibid., May 29, 1856.
- 35 Ibid., May 30, June 2, 1856.
- 36 Ibid., June 5, 7, 1856.
- 37 Ibid., June 10, 1856.
- 38 "British Mission Manuscript History," May 4,  
1856, pp 3-4.
- 39 Woodward, June 11, 1856.
- 40 Ibid., June 14, 1856.
- 41 Ibid., June 17, 1856.
- 42 Ibid., June 19, 20, 1856.
- 43 "Journal History," November 9, 1867, p. 9.
- 44 Woodward, June 22, 23, 24, 1856.
- 45 Ibid., June 25, 1856.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid., June 26, 1856.
- 48 Ibid., June 26, 27, 1856.
- 49 Ibid., June 27, 1856.

- 50 Ibid., June 28, 1856.
- 51 Hafen and Hafen, p. 92.
- 52 Cornwall and Arrington, p. 1.
- 53 Stegner, p. 224.
- 54 Woodward, June 26-July 8, 1856.
- 55 Ibid., July 1, 14, 1856.
- 56 Ibid., July 9, 1856.
- 57 "Journal History," November 9, 1856, p. 1.
- 58 "British Mission Manuscript History," July  
6, 1856, p. 1.
- 59 Hafen and Hafen, p. 93.
- 60 Ibid., p. 94.
- 61 Woodward, July 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 1856.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Ibid., July 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 1856.
- 64 "Journal History," November 9, 1856, p. 10.
- 65 Woodward, July 25, 1856.
- 66 Ibid., weeks of July 15-20, 21-27, 18-August  
3, 1856.
- 67 Ibid., July 30, 1856.
- 68 Ibid., July 31, 1856.
- 69 "Journal History," November 9, 1856.
- 70 Woodward, August 5, 1856.
- 71 Hafen and Hafen, p. 94.
- 72 Ibid., p. 96.
- 73 Levi Savage, Jr., "Levi Savage Jr. Journal,  
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- 74 Stegner, p. 239.
- 75 Hafen and Hafen, pp. 98-99.
- 76 "Journal History," November 9, 1856, p. 11.
- 77 Hafen and Hafen, p. 99.
- 78 Savage, September 3, 4, 1856.
- 79 "Journal History," November 9, 1856, p. 11.
- 80 Hafen and Hafen, p. 100.
- 81 Woodward, September 3, 1856.
- 82 Stegner, P. 243.
- 83 Woodward, September 13, 1856.
- 84 Stegner, p 243.
- 85 Savage, September 13, 1856.
- 86 Woodward, October 9, 1856, p. 11.
- 87 "Journal History," November 9, 1856, p. 11.
- 88 Hafen and Hafen, pp. 101-102.
- 89 Ibid., pp. 102, 103.
- 90 Woodward, October 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21,  
1856.
- 91 Hafen and Hafen, pp. 103, 104.
- 92 Ibid., pp. 104, 105.
- 93 Cornwall and Arrington, pp. 5, 6.
- 94 Stegner, p. 249.
- 95 Hafen and Hafen, pp. 120-123.
- 96 Woodward, October 22, 1856.
- 97 Hafen and Hafen, p. 128.
- 98 Ibid., pp. 128, 129.
- 99 Savage, October 23, 1856.

- 100 Ibid., October 24, 1856.
- 101 Cornwall and Arrington, p. 15.
- 102 Woodward, October 26, 27, 28, 29, 1856.
- 103 Cornwall and Arrington, pp. 15, 16.
- 104 Woodward, November 2, 1856.
- 105 Ibid., November 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 1856.
- 106 "Journal History," November 9, 1856, 12,
13. Woodward, "a total from entire journal."
- 108 Stegner, p. 256; Woodward, Appendix.
- 109 Stegner, p. 256.
- 110 Perry, p. 2.
- 111 "Journal History," November 9, 1856, pp. 13,
14. Stegner, "Ordeal by Handcart," p. 85.

## CHAPTER VII

## ALL IS NOT WELL IN ZION

With the active years of mission and migration behind him, Willie looked forward to adapting to a slower pace, but the period between November 1856 and the spring of 1859 was anything but slow. He returned home amidst controversy over the handcart experiment. He was made bishop of the Salt Lake City Seventh Ward, a singular advancement and heavy responsibility. He was asked to enter into polygamy. The Mormon reformation was in full bloom in these years. So was the Utah War, in which Willie participated. Finally the Willie family moved to Cache Valley in 1859. These were significant years in the history of Utah and in the life of James Willie. It seems probable that for him they were also filled with lingering regrets over the handcart tragedy.

In a meeting held on November 16, 1856, in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle, Brigham Young washed his own hands of responsibility.

If Saints do right and have performed all required of them in this probation, they are under no more obligation, and then it is no matter whether they live or die, for their work here is finished. This is a doctrine I believe.

If brother Willie's company had not been assisted by the people in these valleys, and he and his company had lived to the best light they had in their possession, had done everything they could have done to cross the plains, and done justice as they did, asking no questions and having no doubting; or

in other words, if after their President or Presidents told them to go on the Plains, they had gone in full faith, had pursued their journey according to their ability, and done all they could, and we could not have rendered them any assistance, it would have been just as easy for the Lord to send herds of fat buffaloes to lay down within twenty yards of their camp, as it was to send flocks of quails or to rain down manna from heaven to Israel of old.

My faith is, when we have done all we can, then the Lord is under obligation, and will not disappoint the faithful; He will perform the rest. If no other assistance could have been had by the companies this season, I think they would have had hundreds and hundreds of fat buffaloes crowding around their camp, so that they could not help but kill them. But, under the circumstances, it was our duty to assist them, and we were none too early in the operation.

It was not a rash statement for me to make at our last Conference, when I told you that I would dismiss the Conference, if the people would not turn out, and that I, with my brethren, would go to the assistance of the companies. We knew that our brethren and sisters were on the Plains and in need of assistance, and we had the power and ability to help them, therefore it became our duty to do so.

The Lord was not brought under obligation in the matter, so He had put the means in our possession to render them the assistance they needed. But if there had been no other way, the Lord would have helped them, if He had had to send His angels to drive up buffaloes day after day and week after week. I have full confidence that the Lord would have done His part; my only lack of confidence is, that those who profess to be Saints will not do right and perform their duty.<sup>1</sup>

Willie was present at this meeting, and was one of the speakers on the program.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately his talk was not recorded that day. One can only imagine the hurt feelings and the sense of irony he must have felt as Brother Brigham spoke. He no doubt pictured in his mind the struggling saints who were doing all in their powers to survive, and the many lonely graves they left behind. To take those deaths and sicknesses and make them the

result of people's own unworthiness, reflected a defensive kind of logic not acceptable from the modern vantage point. Willie's talk however, would almost certainly not have been critical or showed any feelings of resentment, but in his heart he must have rejected Brigham Young's implication that the people of his company had suffered because they had not lived worthily.

Even before the Willie company had arrived in the Valley, other leaders had looked for something to lay blame on. Some blamed the late start, and, by implication, the officers involved. For example, Heber C. Kimball of the first presidency stated on November 2, 1856:

Some find fault with and blame brother Brigham and his Council, because of the sufferings they have heard that our brethren are enduring on the Plains. A few of them have died, and you hear some exclaim, 'What an awful thing it is! Why is it that the First Presidency are so unwise in their calculations? but it falls on their shoulders.' Well, the late arrival of those on the plains cannot be helped now, but let me tell you, most emphatically, that if all who were entrusted with the care and management of this year's immigration had done as they were counseled and dictated by the First Presidency of this Church, the sufferings and hardships now endured by the companies on their way here would have been avoided. Why? Because they would have left the Missouri river in season, and not have been hindered until into September....

Three handcart companies have arrived in safety and in good season, and with much less sickness and death than commonly occur in wagon companies. Does it make a man sick to labor and be diligent? Let me sit down and be inactive in mind and body, let me cease building and making improvements, or doing something useful, and I should not live six months, nor would Brother Brigham, because we have become so inured to

occupation.

If the immigration could have been carried on as dictated by Brother Brigham, there would have been no trouble.<sup>3</sup>

Jedediah H. Grant, also a member of the first presidency, had similar comments.

In relation to hand-cart companies, I have said, and I say it again, that they should start by the first of May, and then they can travel leisurely according to their strength and feelings; they can then have May, June, July, and August for the accomplishment of their journey. They could not travel so leisurely this year, from the fact that there were no grain depots on the route, consequently they had to hurry through, lest their rations should fail. Were grain deposited at convenient points on the route, the trip is, in every sense of the word, a feasible one for hand-carts, for without that advantage, the present year has proved the feasibility of the undertaking.

The grand difficulty with a portion of our immigration this year has been in starting in the fore-part of September instead of the first of May, but even then it is worse with ox teams than with hand-carts, for if the cattle fail the people have no facilities for transporting their tents, bedding, clothing, and provisions. Unless I have different feelings to what I now have, I should never wish to see a train leave the Missouri river after the middle of June, or after the first day of July at the latest, until we can establish grain depots on the route, for I do not consider any train safe in starting late.

I wish to see those who are directly engaged in carrying out the operations of gathering the Saints, to correctly understand the advice given and the system adopted for the gathering, and when they understand that and carry it out, as planned and given by brother Brigham, our immigration will be free from the sad results of mismanagement. But for persons, who are ignorant of the special causes and agents in any unpleasant transaction, to at once blame the head is the height of nonsense, though people in all ages have been prone to censure their leader, in times of special distress.<sup>4</sup>

Both Kimball and Grant were unwavering in their support

for the handcart scheme. They sited organizational failures among church officials in Iowa City as being the main problem. Similarly they condemned the decision to leave late in the travel season. James, of course, was a part of the decision to push on, and, as president of the company, was as responsible as anyone for its performance on the trip. Attempts by high church leaders to seek justification and place blame for the handcart tragedies of 1856 can partially be traced to a movement within the church.

A strong crusade was underway that has been called the "Mormon Reformation." This movement began on September 14, 1856, in the small town of Kaysville. B.H. Roberts writes:

The 'Reformation' was doubtless a much needed moral and spiritual awakening. It must be remembered that for a number of years the Latter-day Saints had not lived under normal condition.

From the exodus from Nauvoo, in 1846, up to the 'Reformation' in 1856-ten years-there had been much of camp life, and of frontier life, in both of which there was much moving about, unrest, absence of settled conditions everywhere, all of which made it difficult to establish regularity of life and to enforce discipline. Again, also, I call attention to the fact that the men who were the leaders in the New Dispensation were largely of Puritan stock and training; and although they had become men of the mountains and plains-men of the frontier wilderness-still at bottom they were men of very deep and very sincere religious convictions-religious convictions that demanded striving for absolute righteousness, and that did not look upon<sup>5</sup> sin, in itself, with any degree of allowance.

Juanita Brooks, who wrote about the massacre of more

than 100 emigrants by Mormon settlers at southern Utah's Mountain Meadows in 1857, also describes the reformation.

In the fall of 1856, the Mormon leader initiated a movement known as the Reformation, which was a vigorous call to repentance among the people. In every town and hamlet, even in the distant forts where only a few families lived, appointed missionaries catechized each person individually. Although the questions asked referred to loyalty to the church, to the Christian principles of honesty and integrity, and even to matters of personal cleanliness, the whole process was a soul-searching affair, often attended by high emotion. Once having either answered the questions satisfactorily or confessed his sins and irregularities, the person was rebaptized in renewal of his covenants. In general, the effect of this movement was to arouse the people to new religious consciousness, but for some who had lived through the persecution of Missouri and Nauvoo and whose covenants included a hope that God would avenge the death of the Prophet and the sufferings of His Saints, the Reformation served to encourage fanaticism. It also helped to cement their group solidarity and to make them feel that Zion must stand against the sins of the world.<sup>6</sup>

Mrs. Brooks points to the zeal created by the movement as contributory to the Mountain Meadows massacre. The handcart tragedy was interpreted from the point of this same zeal.

The spirit of reformation explains why church leaders were so determined in their quest for religious wrongdoing. The people of the church had been stirred to a strong religious fervor that caused them to become very critical of themselves, and of the worthiness of others. Willie was out on those plains, and watched people diligently and courageously endure one of the great



tragedies in the history of the westward migration. He knew that it was not unworthiness that caused the suffering and death, but short food supplies, exhaustion, and cold.

The reformation affected Willie in another way. Bishops in Salt Lake City were under great pressure, as explained by Gene A. Sessions, author of Mormon Thunder, a biography of Jedediah M. Grant, who had initiated the reformation.

In the midst of these familial events and in spite of a growing preoccupation with the worsening plight of the handcart companies still in the mountains, Grant pushed forward with the Reformation, a time of searing self-examination for the Saints, in which they suffered not only for individual sins but also for those elements of society that were, in the minds of Grant and his colleagues, in a state of serious dysfunction. The Salt Lake City bishops seemed to get the brunt of the pressure for a sweeping reformation in Zion. Meeting again with the presiding bishop and the local bishops on October 21, the second counselor placed the burden of carrying forth the Reformation program in the city directly upon their shoulders.<sup>7</sup>

On December 17, 1856, William G. Perkins was released as bishop of the Salt Lake City Seventh Ward, and was replaced by James G. Willie. Perkins had served seven years, and reportedly served faithfully.<sup>8</sup> It would appear that, under the circumstances, he was replaced with someone new who could hopefully excite the people in the reformation movement. In studying the histories of the nineteen wards in Salt Lake City at the time, it is interesting to find that nine bishops were replaced in

1856.<sup>9</sup> This seems to support an idea that Willie was made bishop because of the reformaton. It is also possible that the bishop calling came in recognition of fine service as mission pastor and captain in the 1856 migrational effort, or perhaps it was a move to divert Willie from protesting about the larger administration of the handcart experiment.

On January 11, 1857, Bishop Willie chose Redden A. Allred and Jonathan Pugmire, Jr. as his counselors in the bishopric.<sup>10</sup> Very little is known about Willie's term as bishop of the Seventh Ward. The manuscript history of the ward only lists one event, other than his call and his release in 1859. In consequence of the Utah War and the general move south, the first counselor, Allred, left Salt Lake City. Willie named Pugmire first counselor, and Thomas McLelland became the new second counselor.<sup>11</sup>

With the bishop's call came the responsibility of entering the high order of Mormon marriage. At times polygamy was forced upon, or at least expected of, accepted positions of responsibility in the church. Whether Willie was forced, asked or made the decision on his own, he became a polygamist in January of 1857, only a few weeks after his return to the Valley, and only a matter of days after becoming bishop. He married two women, Elizabeth Tuttle and Charlotte Ann Stillwell Gregory.<sup>12</sup> Charlotte Ann had been married previously to Albert Gregory, who died leaving her with one daughter,

Johanna.<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Tuttle had not been married before. James had a child with Charlotte, a daughter named Katherine. Neither Charlotte or Elizabeth Tuttle joined the Willies in the move from Salt Lake City in 1859.<sup>14</sup> Katherine however, later spent a few summers with her father.<sup>15</sup> Charlotte owned property from her previous marriage and preferred to stay in Salt Lake City with her family.<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Tuttle also decided to remain in Salt Lake City. Because of the quickness of the marriages after Willie was made bishop, along with the fact that only one child was born, and also the fact that the two women did not join Willie in the move, one tends to believe that the marriages were arranged because of the bishop calling. It is also unlikely that the two women moved into the Willie Salt Lake City home. They owned houses and must have remained there. Very little is noted in the family histories about James' polygamy.

Polygamy was by far the most controversial of the early doctrines of the Mormon church. In the early 1830s Joseph Smith received a revelation concerning plural marriage. After receiving this revelation, Joseph kept it secret knowing of its potential for explosive impact. It was not until the 1840s that Joseph took a polygamist wife. Polygamy was not advocated publically until the saints were in Utah.<sup>17</sup> Plural marriage was practiced by a small percentage of the church, and was often reserved for church leaders or men who had the financial

standing that would merit such a call.<sup>18</sup>

With the summer of 1857 came an event that drastically affected the lives of every Salt Lake City resident: the Utah War.<sup>19</sup> As a bishop, Willie would have been important in the resulting organization and mobilization.

Information that an army of the United States was heading for Utah could hardly have come at a better time for Brigham Young. The saints were celebrating their tenth anniversary in the mountains on the 24th of July and had gathered for a three-day event in Big Cottonwood Canyon. Festivities began on July 22, with the trek up the canyon, and were climaxed with a dance on the evening of the 24th. Just before the dance was dismissed, the announcement was made that the Army was enroute to Utah to put down a rebellion. The information came as a shock to the people, who had the United States flag flying above their pavillion. Not surprisingly, they regarded the advancing Army as an act of aggression toward them and planned to resist.<sup>20</sup>

The reasons for the Army coming to Utah were complex, centered in misunderstandings by the federal government of the Mormon cause, and a peculiar mixture of national politics. The government was suspicious of the devout religious group, isolated in the middle of the western territories. Federal appointees sent to Utah sometimes looked upon the Mormons unfavorably because they

themselves were not well received. These bad feelings turned to wild rumors creating concern as to what was going on in Utah. There were also difficulties involving the slavery issue in the western territories, which became connected with polygamy. As one historian has explained:

An important contributor to this unfortunate episode (the Utah War) was the involvement of Mormon polygamy in national politics. The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, granting popular sovereignty on the question of slavery to those territories, unleashed a flood of opposition that led to the organization of the Republican Party. Some Republican orators used the marriage customs of Utah, which would certainly be supported by popular vote in the territory, as an argument against the principle of "Squatter sovereignty." By 1856 Republicans were insisting on the right and duty of Congress to 'prohibit in the Territories those twin relics of barbarism-Polygamy and Slavery.' The Democrats, not wishing to imply support of polygamy by their support of slavery, became as vehement as were their political opponents in denouncing the Mormon institution of polygamy.<sup>21</sup>

When combined with the wild rumors, this twist of national politics put pressure on President James Buchanan to send an army to Utah. The Army's assignment was to put down any rebellion, to set things in order, and seat a new governor.

The Mormons were first concerned with getting the 1857 immigration outfits safely into the Valley. Second, Mormon leaders felt their chances against the Army would be better if they could force it to winter on the plains. To this end the Nauvoo Legion was mobilized, fortifications built and raiding parties dispatched.<sup>22</sup>

The feelings of religious fervor and animosity towards outsiders was greatly increased by the news of the coming army. Church leaders generated even more hostility in speeches designed to raise the emotional level of the people, and build a commitment in them that would help in defending their home. This emotion reached its horrible zenith with the events of the Mountain Meadows Massacre in southern Utah.<sup>23</sup>

In the fall of 1857, Willie was called to participate in the mustering of a militia that would construct and man a fort in Echo Canyon. His role is mentioned in a family history, but no other record was found.<sup>24</sup> However, the effort to slow the coming Army by burning grasses, running off stock, and destroying provisions was successful; the Army spent a hard winter near Ft. Bridger. During the winter, feelings were toned down between the Mormons and the federal government, and Brigham Young decided to avoid any confrontation with the Army by pulling out of Echo Canyon and deserting Salt Lake City.

General Albert Sidney Johnson, who was later involved in the Civil War, entered Salt Lake City with his Army on June 26, 1858. They found the city completely deserted and without food of any kind. Mormon men were ready to burn the city, but the Army passed through with no incident, and pushed south the establish Camp Floyd.<sup>25</sup>

Two days after the Army arrived in the Valley, the

saints received word from their leaders that it was alright to return to their homes.<sup>26</sup> Soon the Civil War began, Camp Floyd was deserted, and the Utah situation largely forgotten by the federal government. The conflict had been a war of misunderstanding, and largely a waste for both sides. The worst tragedy, ironically, was the killing of over 100 emigrants near Cedar City by southern Utah Mormons.

Amidst the turmoil of the Utah War, the Willies' son James Nephi Willie was born on September 27, 1857.<sup>27</sup> Tragically, on May 5, 1858, seven-month-old James died. The cause of his death is not recorded. The baby was buried in Salt Lake City.<sup>28</sup> Just one month before the Willies left Salt Lake City, on April 28, 1859, the last of their children, Emma Elizabeth, was born.<sup>29</sup>

Why the Willie's would leave Salt Lake City is a puzzling question. The family was settled, after twelve years in the Valley. James had the calling of bishop, they had a home on a nice lot close to the center of town, and Elizabeth and the children must have been comfortable, with many friends. The reasons for leaving must have been strong.

There are a few possibilities that suggest themselves. The first is that James may have received a call from the church to settle in Cache Valley. This seems unlikely since most who settled in Cache Valley were not called to do so, and James did not receive any

important church assignments there. Another possible reason could have been James' reluctance to continue in the tanning trade. It is conceivable that he may have wished to move away from an area where he was locked into an occupation with no room for growth. Once in Cache Valley any connections with tanning would have been severed.

It is also possible that lingering resentment about the handcart experience influenced Willie to make the move. There can be no doubt that it was a sore point. Over the years he excluded all reference to it from his sermons, as is evident in the Mendon Ward records where hundreds of his speeches are summarized. His misgivings about the incident may also be inferred from the fact that his descendants uniformly view the handcart experience with embarrassment and reticence. If indeed resentment or regret ran deep, his role as bishop in Salt Lake City may have involved Willie in relationships from which he wanted to escape.

Another possible factor in Willie's decision to leave Salt Lake City may have been related to plural marriage. Apparently Willie entered polygamy with some reluctance and was clearly unsuccessful in establishing a close relationship with his polygamous wives. If not an actual reason for the move the marriages were certainly no deterrant to it. Indeed, the progressive estrangement of the Mendon years strongly suggests that the move put



polygamy behind him.

Perhaps the strongest reason for the move was a desire to retreat from the limelight. James was a simple, quiet man who had been asked to do a great deal for his church in the previous six years. Those years had been significant in terms of accomplishment, but they would have been trying years for a man who yearned to lead a simple life.

The Salt Lake City house and property were not reported sold until June 9, 1860, over a year after the Willie's left.<sup>30</sup> It may have taken that long to sell, but it was well located and with the large number of settlers coming into Salt Lake City, it seems unlikely that the property was on the market for an entire year. Perhaps they waited to sell to provide insurance in case the move to Cache Valley did not work out. In any event, the house and the acre and a quarter lot sold for two hundred dollars.<sup>31</sup>

This chapter traces Willie's return home with the handcart company, his appointment as a bishop, and his entrance into polygamy. Times were troubled in Salt Lake City, the reformation was in full bloom, and blame for the handcart disaster was being cast in all directions. The Utah War was waged, bringing with it much turmoil. The Willie family suffered a personal tragedy with the loss of a son, but experienced the joy of the birth of a daughter. The coming years would be filled with the work of building

a home in Cache Valley. After years of activity, James seemed to be seeking a quiet, simple life. He would find it in Mendon.

Footnotes

- 1 "Journal History," November 16, 1856, p. 1.
- 2 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Journal of Discourses , vol. 4, p. 91.
- 3 Ibid., p. 65.
- 4 Sessions, p. 238.
- 5 Roberts, vol. 4, pp. 119, 120.
- 6 Brooks, pp. 11-13.
- 7 Sessions, p. 229.
- 8 Salt Lake City Sixth-Seventh Ward, pp. 20-22.
- 9 Jenson, Encyclopedic History, pp. 742-758.
- 10 "Manuscript History of Salt Lake City 7th Ward," Manuscript Collection, L.D.S. Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 "James Grey Willie."
- 13 Willie and Austin, p. 2.
- 14 Ibid.; Perry, p. 4.
- 15 Ibid.; Ibid.
- 16 Perry, p. 4.
- 17 Hill, pp. 335-361.
- 18 Bruce E. Campbell and Eugene E. Campbell, "Pioneer Society," in Utah's History ed. Richard Poll (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), pp. 289-292.
- 19 Roberts, vol. 4, p. 181.
- 20 Brooks, pp. 15-18.
- 21 Eugene E. Campbell, "Governmental Beginnings," in Utah's History ed. Richard Poll (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), p. 165.

- 22 Roberts, pp. 198-256.
- 23 Brooks, p. 69-96.
- 24 "James Grey Willie."
- 25 Perry, p. 3.
- 26 Arrington, p. 192.
- 27 Perry, p. 3.
- 28 Arrington, p. 193.
- 29 "James Grey Willie."
- 30 Salt Lake Country, p. 32.
- 31 Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII  
MENDON: ITS BEGINNINGS

Situated on the western side of Utah's Cache Valley is the town of Mendon, where James Willie spent the remaining thirty-five years of his life. With its isolation from other Cache Valley settlements, its family and church oriented traditions, and its small rural population, Mendon made an appropriate setting for James Willie. Indeed, the town in many ways paralleled the character of the man. It was established in 1859 and within five or six years became essentially what it was to be for the remainder of Willie's life. For this reason Mendon's first years will be the object of this chapter, although an effort will be made to keep Willie's contributions in focus.

The history of Mendon began with Cache Valley's settlement. Earlier the valley had been home to Shoshoni Indians, who lived by gathering from its rich resources.<sup>1</sup> By the 1820s the Indians were joined by mountainmen in search of beaver. The valley's history is replete with names like Peter Skeen Ogden, Osborne Russell, and Jim Bridger, mountainmen and trappers who frequented its streams.<sup>2</sup> The name Cache Valley is

associated with this fur trade heritage, designating the practice of caching furs along its streams.<sup>3</sup>

Others also visited Cache Valley prior to Mormon settlement. Explorers like John C. Fremont made record of its tremendous potential. Surveyor Howard Stansbury visited the valley in 1849 and recommended it be reserved for the grazing of Army stock. Animals were brought in for the winter of 1849-50, but were moved to Fort Hall in the face of harsh winter conditions.<sup>4</sup> The same same problem faced the church in the winter of 1855-56, when much of the church herd was lost to the cold.

In 1856, a group led by Peter Maughan settled Cache Valley. Maughan had lived at Tooele, but became dissatisfied because of drought and crickets. He persuaded Brigham Young to let him start a new settlement in Cache Valley. Maughan was joined by eight or nine men, seven of whom had families.<sup>5</sup>

A settlement was started at Wellsville, in the valley's southeast corner. Because of the lateness of the season, there was only time to erect temporary log cabins for the approaching winter. These were arranged in two rows facing each other, forming a fort for protection from possible Indian attack.

The next spring the settlers plowed, planted and dug ditches. Many had predicted that grain would not ripen in Cache Valley because of the short growing season but the harvest of 1857 was abundant. In October Brigham Young

ordered Maughan and his settlers to withdraw because of the Utah War, and it was not until the spring of 1859 that they returned. By that time news of Cache Valley's merits had spread by word of mouth and articles in the Deseret News. This attracted a large number of new settlers including the Willie family.<sup>6</sup> Cache Valley was different from other areas of Mormon settlement. These people came because they wanted to, rather than in response to a colonising call, as was often the case.<sup>7</sup>

Using Maughan's Fort as a center the newcomers moved on to other parts of the valley. In the spring of 1859 land was divided for farming at Mendon, Providence and Logan. Among those who took land near Mendon were the Willies.<sup>8</sup> Because of the Indian threat, most of the Mendon settlers actually lived at Wellsville that first summer and traveled to and from their farms.<sup>9</sup> In his "Manuscript History of Mendon," Issac Sorenson, one of the original settlers, described the labors of that first period.

They all set to work making beams for their Ploughs, and three cornered Wood Harrows with Wooden teeth, and some of them whose teams were to poor to break Land with two yokes put on four Yokes of Oxen ploughing one day for one man and the next for the other, then each using their own teams for sowing the land.<sup>10</sup>

James was among the men who worked the ground that first summer at Mendon.<sup>11</sup>

By August of 1859, Maughan determined that the Indian threat was mild enough that Cache Valley settlers could

begin building permanent settlements in their respective areas. In Mendon, work began immediately on a structure similar to the Maughan fort. The following is a description of the fort from Mendon Ward records:

These first settlers of Mendon erected their primitive pioneer cabins in fort style, in order to protect themselves against Indians. John Richards, Jr. completed the first house in the fort. On the 10th of August, 1859, Jesse W. Fox, Sr. surveyed the fort, assisted by Robert Sweeten and others. The fort consisted of one street running east and west, the houses fronting on both sides of the street. Corrals and stock yards were built in the rear of the houses, and gardens were made behind the corrals.<sup>12</sup>

This fort was home for the people of Mendon for the next four years. Sorenson reports that it was designed to have a continuous solid barrier along the sides, with walls to be constructed between houses that did not take up their allotted width. This, Sorenson says, "was never done," which implies there was no great threat from the Indians.<sup>13</sup> In fact, in a 24th of July celebration held at Wellsville that first summer, "a great number of Indians" were in attendance and fed.<sup>14</sup>

The major task of the Mendon community for the fall of 1859 was to harvest grain. It was a good crop, yielding an average of twenty-five bushels per acre. Separating and threshing machines called "chaffpilers" were brought from the main settlements, but Sorenson indicates they were not used at Mendon. There, thrashing was done by hand.<sup>15</sup> The grain was then hauled



twenty-eight miles to Brigham City and ground into flour. The process took much of the fall season.

With the harvest finished Mendon people focused their attention on preparing their homes for winter. The houses, which had been put together quickly in August, were strengthened and made weather tight. On the east side of the valley men cut and hauled logs from the mountains to a sawmill in Millville. With the sawed lumber the settlers added floors to their cabins, and made other modest improvements.<sup>16</sup>

In William Willie's biography, the activities of the early winter are described.

At a meeting held in November 1859, in the home of Charles Bird, Elder Ezra T. Benson, accompanied by Orson Hyde, named the community Mendon. At that meeting Andrew Shumway was sustained as bishop, which position he held for ten years. During the winter meetings were held in the cramped quarters of private cabins. Roger Luckham lead the singing and Ira Ames played the fiddle. The winter of 1859-1860 the men, including James G. Willie, obtained pine logs from the canyons and built at the fort an 18 by 24 feet meeting house. It was ready for use by early spring and served for worship, school, and recreation. The benches, which were logs hewed on one side and raised to the proper level by sturdy props, were moved around the edges of the hall when there were dances. Many a good time was enjoyed dancing with tallow candles to give light and Ira Ames doing wonders on his violin. Dancing was indulged in to quite an extent during the winter.<sup>17</sup>

Some histories claim that the naming of Mendon came at a later time. Charles Shumway, who had departed from Nauvoo on the same day Willie started west from New York, served as bishop of Mendon for the first six months. Willie was

one of his counselors. But Shumway had work elsewhere, and spent the winter at the Maughan fort. For this reason his son Andrew Shumway was ordained bishop. Charles Shumway was called upon extensively by Brigham Young to settle new areas. He spent several years opening remote spots in Cache Valley before being called to settle northern Arizona.<sup>18</sup>

It is not known if the Willies spent the first winter at the Mendon fort. Some of the family histories report that they wintered in the security of the Maughan fort as did the Charles Shumway family.<sup>19</sup> But, from the preceding quote it would appear they remained in Mendon. Whether the Willies were there or not, twenty-five families spent the winter at Mendon. There were minor problems with the cold; however it was reportedly a successful experience.

The year 1860 saw Mendon grow as new settlers continued to come. Many who spent the winter at Maughan's fort returned to establish permanent homes at Mendon. There was, of course, work in the fields, spring planting, and new building, but the major work of the summer was the construction of a small dam for irrigation. Issac Sorenson reported the following:

In the spring of 60, the Gardners and Hancocks and Bakers made their homes in Mendon, and well it was that numbers increased, as a big labor this year had to be completed, there was also other families Edward Wood and others. The land in near vicinity of Town was first claimed, and then it became necessary to make a dam on

Gardners creek 3 miles south of Mendon as it would be impossible for the few who had to water thier land from the Gardner creek as it was then called to make it alone, it was thought right that those who had taken lands on the creeks where there was no dams needed should help make this big dam, as it was not considered safe to locate Mendon or to settle permanent without the number that now sat taken up claims, consequently all agreed to work until the dam was completed, half working one day and the other half the next day. The Dam was built and water in the ditch in good time for irrigation, but to the great disadvantage of the builders the Dam broke away, although much discouraged, for it was a heavy piece of work yet they took hold with a will again and made the Dam, this time strong enough to stand.<sup>20</sup>

Today Gardner creek is called Mill creek, and the small body of water is Mill Pond. Although nothing is mentioned in the records of Willie being a part of the Gardner Dam construction, it is likely he helped as all were asked to do their part.

In the 1860 Cache Valley census James G. Willie listed himself as a "Dairy" farmer.<sup>21</sup> The family histories only indicate that he farmed during these years. The following is recorded in the history of William Willie, which tells much of what is known about James Willie's farming.

All farms and meadow lands were in one common field, and all cattle and sheep were merged into common herds. The settlers worked together to fence the "big field." Jim S. Willie stated: 'Grandmother (Elizabeth) said that Grandfather bought the first team of horses that were owned in Mendon. Their colts grew up from them and Father (William) and Uncle John always had extra good horses--other people mostly used oxen.' Each family, including James G. Willie owned a few sheep for the purpose of providing wool for their clothing....

He always had his garden plot, which was slogged, spaded and kept it well farmed. He had three cows that his wife Elizabeth milked because he was crippled with arthritis. James was always considered a poor farmer but he did like to stack the hay and did an excellent job.<sup>22</sup>

The Willie family did have dairy cows, but three animals could hardly be considered a herd. The Willies might have planned to get into the dairy business, and James listed an occupation he hoped would be a reality. It is also possible that the selling or trading of their extra milk, did much to provide for the family. It seems apparent from the family histories, however, that farming was the mainstay of the Willies in these early years in Mendon.

The Cache Valley 1860 census listed over 500 dwellings and a total of 2,605 people. Of this number 1,655 were born in the United States, with 833 being born in Utah. The remaining number were mainly immigrants from Europe. There were 328 farmers listed in the census, along with many other occupations such as laborers, farm workers, shoemakers, blacksmiths, millers, and three tanners.<sup>23</sup>

James could easily have resumed his old trade of tanning and been in on the ground floor of a new business, however, there is no evidence that he did. This would support the notion that James was not fond of the tanning trade.

Willie's Mendon real estate was valued at \$800 in the 1860 census.<sup>24</sup> The William Willie history records the following on these land holdings.

August 10th, 1859 Jesse W. Fox, a surveyor, laid out the plat for the Mendon fort Mr. Fox, with assistance, also surveyed and laid out the plat for the Mendon farms lying east, north, and south of Mendon as far as Gardner's Spring and Creek. Each family was allotted a specific number of farm land and hay land in order to save room for more settlers. The amount was probably somewhere between fifteen and twenty acres of each. James received an allotment of twenty acres of farm land and twenty acres of hay land.<sup>25</sup>

The Cache County land records show that James owned fifty acres of ground about one mile northeast of the Mendon town square. This ground was recorded for James' ownership on January 20, 1862 and comprised two twenty acre sections and a ten acre section near the site of the future Mendon railroad depot on the Oregon short line.<sup>26</sup>

The Deseret News recorded that Willie was elected as a "notary Public" on January 18, 1860.<sup>27</sup> At this point Willie began to take on a series of jobs. Among other things, he established himself as an active participant in governmental and civic activities. While most men in that era were involved in manual labor activities, James was beginning to lean towards office work. He had physical problems that may have contributed to this decision. He had trouble with rheumatism in his legs which had occasionally kept him from his missionary duties in England. His feet had been badly frozen in the handcart trek, and as a result he used a walking cane. He also had arthritis in his hands. With these problems

James may have been forced to retreat from farm labors.

By this time the Willie's children would have begun to form mental impressions of the physical characteristics of their father. They described him as being a "stocky heavy set man, weighing about 180 pounds." He had "black eyes and was almost bald headed, having lost his thick hair from the fever" at Winter Quarters, Nebraska. His children also reported him being "neat and clean in his appearance."<sup>28</sup>

James is recorded to have performed the first wedding ceremony in Mendon, uniting James H. Hill and Christena Sorenson.<sup>29</sup> While this was not an important historical event, it does imply his prominence in Mendon at this early time. He no longer held high church positions, but the respect in which he was held was evident.

In these early Mendon years, all business was done with the Salt Lake Valley settlements. Grain was taken to Salt Lake City and traded for supplies. Short grain years brought short supply years, such as the harvest of 1860.<sup>30</sup> Also, Indians were continually stealing the settler's livestock, which added to the difficulty of farm production in lean harvest years, and made it necessary to keep a constant watch over the animals.<sup>31</sup>

Because of a prolonged drouth, grain production again fell short in 1861. Also, much of the livestock in Mendon had to be taken into the country west of Brigham City to

find grazing.<sup>32</sup> However, the winter of 1861-62 brought heavy moisture to Cache Valley. Snow stayed on the ground long into the spring--delaying plowing and planting into May and June. Despite the late planting, the harvest of 1862 was successful for the Mendon settlement. These wet conditions continued in 1863 allowing for another fine grain harvest and abundant pasture.<sup>33</sup>

Conditions in the Mendon fort during these wet years were not good. As the William Willie biography makes clear, "the 1861-62 winter was long, hard, cold, and wet. Rain fell almost continually until the middle of January." The dirt-roof houses leaked as often as the moisture came, making it "impossible for the settlers to keep dry."<sup>34</sup> Everyone was aware that living in the fort was temporary, and neglected making necessary improvements.

Beginning in 1860-61 children attended school during the winter months in the town meeting hall. A.W. Baker was the first teacher, and as Sorenson records, the conditions were crude, but an effort was made to provide the best schooling possible. According to Sorenson:

The schools in those early days were run but a small portion of the time. A.W. Baker was the first schoolteacher, the school and meetinghouse the only one in town was fitted with desks all around the sides with long slab benches for seats, or perhaps some planks was used also. Reading writing Arithmetic and spelling were the main studies, The teacher would hitch up a team when his quarter was out, and gather his pay for teaching which consisted of wheat flour and what could be got from the people.<sup>35</sup>

This was typical of most schools in the early Mormon settlements

The years of 1861-62 were marked again with confrontations with the Indians. The main difficulties were rustling of stock, and the small skirmishes that resulted when settlers tried to retrieve their animals. A militia had been organized early in Cache Valley. Peter Maughan was its commander as well as head bishop in the valley. He had moved to the Logan settlement, as it was the fastest growing, and most centrally located. From there he supervised all major activities in the valley and kept a watchful eye on the Indians.<sup>36</sup> Maughan being a skilled Indian agent, adopted the Brigham Young policy of "feeding the Indian rather than fighting him," and much trouble had been avoided in the first years of settlement.<sup>37</sup> This changed however, as whites eventually crowded the Indians out of the valley completely.

During the spring of 1862, word came from Salt Lake City that each Cache Valley settlement was to send teamsters with oxen and wagons to Omaha to pick up migrating Mormons. A.W. Baker was chosen from Mendon that year to make the first trip. "Driving an eight ox team," he made the round trip "from Mendon to Omaha" in "five months time."

Mr. Baker made himself so efficient on this trip that he was called to make a second trip



the next year, 1863, thus making him a record of having driven ox teams across the plains five time, a distance of 5,125 miles under campaign discipline, besides having driven an ox team at home, for all of his team work, for a period of forty years, would give him a record of at least 25,000 miles, as a world's record for ox team driving.<sup>38</sup>

One cannot know how 25,000 miles as a teamster compared with others, but this quote is interesting because it points out the level of Baker's dedication to the church and other people. Obviously Baker was not alone in this spirit, as many took their turns in going to Omaha. In the Mendon histories it is evident that these treks became a great source of pride. Not only do they carefully record the number of trips individuals made, but they apparently competed to see who could lose the fewest oxen on the trail. While these teamsters were gone, their farms and crops were cared for by others, exemplifying Mendons' spirit of cooperation that was prominent during these early years.

One of the more interesting events in these two years of 1861 and 1862 took place in the late fall of 1862. A tragic confrontation with a grizzly bear reminded settlers that they were still living in the wilderness. Jens Jensen, an early settler of Mendon, recalled

in the Winter of 1862 and 1863 Thomas Graham was killed by a bear near Muddy River 1 1/2 miles South East of town. Mr. Graham with his son in law Bishop Shumway, went with a span of mules and a sleigh to get river willows for firewood, When they reached what they deemed a suitable place, Graham went to look for willows while Shumway cared for the team. Presently Graham

shouted "Watch the team, here is a bear," immediately the bear charged him and it was thought killed him instantly. Shumway was unarmed so returned to town for help. Wellsville as well as Mendon sent their best armed men to get the bear, which proved to be a big grizzly with two half grown cubs, and it was difficult to dislodge them from the willows. Finally Daniel Hill of Wellsville, proposed to enter the bears den and James H. Hill of Mendon preferred to go with him. When well within the willows on a path to narrow for both to go abreast Daniel Hill took the lead when the bear charged them Daniel Hill aimed and his gun missed fire. The bear being upon him he thrust the barrell of his gun into its mouth and being a strong active man, thus saved his life, as the man behind him had no chance to use his gun. The bear then rushed back to the cubs but within a few moments charged again and rose on its hind legs as bears do when near their prey. James Hill then held his gun over Daniel's shoulder and shot the bear in the heart, killing it instantly, after which the cubs were easily dispatched.<sup>39</sup>

Bear stories are prominent in the folklore of Cache Valley, and an event such as this would no doubt have had a big impact on the settlement. Not only were the people learning to cope with harsh weather conditions, but there was Indian trouble and the reality of actually living in a primitive country. These circumstances when combined, would surely have added to the tight knit nature of the community.

During 1861-62 Willie picked up two more jobs. His son's, who were entering their early teens, were able to take over many of the farm responsibilities, and James was able to spend more time at other jobs. In the early part of 1861, a United States Post Office was established in Mendon, and James became the first postmaster.<sup>40</sup> It

was not a full time job, as there were only approximately seventy-five postal units in Mendon at the time. It was an important responsibility, and a job for an intelligent, well organized person. The next community job that James received was by election in August of 1862 when he became poundkeeper.<sup>41</sup> The position's duties are unclear, but they had to do with the need for control of loose animals. Again, this was not a full time job, nor very glamorous, but one that would continue to pull him from the farm life.

The year of 1863 was filled with Indian unrest that eventually led to a major confrontation. The Mormon policy towards Indians had worked well up to that time, but as Cache Valley settlers began to take more and more land, hostilities increased. In addition Indians in the region frequently raided the emigrant traffic on the Oregon Trail. As a consequence, some 400 troops from Camp Douglas took action to bring the Indians under control.

General Patrick E. Connor had entered the Salt Lake Valley in October of 1862 and established Camp Douglas with a regiment of California Volunteers. Their purpose was to keep an eye on the Mormons and to end Indian problems in Northern Utah and Southern Idaho, where the Shoshone and Bannock Indians had long been a threat to transcontinental roads and communication. In January of 1863, the troops from Camp Douglas moved into Cache Valley, passing through Mendon on the 27th of January. On

the 29th the soldiers came upon a group of Indians who had moved into the valley about twelve miles north of Franklin. Many Indians, including women and children, were killed, and others were taken prisoner. It was a grizzly and tragic affair, but at the time was regarded as an overwhelming victory for General Connor.<sup>44</sup>

The army stopped at Mendon on the return to Camp Douglas. There were forty men wounded and many with frozen feet due to the harsh winter conditions, but all were given aid by the good people of Mendon.<sup>43</sup>

Although this did not end Indian difficulties in Cache Valley, it did seem to "break the spirits" of the Indians. It was not deemed safe for the settlers of Mendon to move out of the protection of their fort that spring, but plans were made to move out the following year. The settlers were still apprehensive about possible trouble, but were much relieved by the results of the Indian defeat.

Aside from the Indian turmoil, 1863 was a productive year for Willie. Harvests were abundant, the Sunday School was organized in Mendon, and James became its superintendent.<sup>44</sup> He was also appointed water master over the Mendon ditches.<sup>45</sup> This required him to schedule water use for irrigation and to organize and direct maintenance and upkeep of the town's irrigation system.

In the spring of 1864 the fort was torn down. Using

materials from it and resources available locally, residents began to build a town. They located on their lots, built fences, planted trees and completed a ditch system to irrigate gardens and orchards. Most built homes of logs but a few built of Mendon's native stone. These cut their own stone, slacked their own lime, made plaster from sand found locally and made lath by hand for plastering the interiors of their houses. Within two years Mendon had taken on a form it would maintain for many years, including several of the rock houses which in years to come would be one of it's special marks.

In important respects these first years provide the basis for understanding what Mendon was during the remaining years of James G. Willie's life. Like all communities it had its firsts. But more than in many towns, the firsts of the years between 1859 and 1864 left lasting imprints. Potential for developing new sources of irrigation was limited. New land was limited by the flow of the Little Bear River below town. Neither timber nor ore provided opportunity for development and change. Later the railroad came to Mendon but the town did not change markedly as a result. Natural barriers and other towns intruded between it and good range land. Commerce, too, fell largely to Logan and Smithfield. Thus, for decades Mendon remained what it had become in its earliest years, a quiet, family-oriented farming community in which well-known routine and simple ways persisted.

During that time of pioneering a pattern had emerged in James G. Willie's life that guided his remaining years. He had moved progressively to work that was less taxing physically. He had avoided major responsibility and the limelight, yet had shown himself willing to serve by accepting many relatively inauspicious positions in the civic, church and commercial realms. In effect Willie had helped create a community that was in many ways the mirror of his own personality. Life in Mendon was satisfying in its well-known routines and close relationships. It was profoundly different from the restless years of change and challenge that Willie had experienced earlier, but it was a life he had chosen for himself, and to all appearances, it was one with which he was happy.

Footnotes

- 1 Ricks, pp. 21-23.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 23-26.
- 3 Russell, p. 9.
- 4 Ricks, pp. 27, 28.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 32,34.
- 6 Ibid., p. 38.
- 7 Jens Jensen, "The Settlement of Mendon Cache County" (Ricks Collection, Utah Reel, Vol. 5, Item 134) Utah State University Library, Special Collections, Logan, Utah, pp. 1-3.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 36-40.
- 9 Sorenson, vol. 1, p. 4.
- 10 Ibid., p. 3.
- 11 Perry, p. 4.
- 12 "Mendon Ward Manuscript History," p. 9.
- 13 Sorenson, vol. 1, p. 4.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid., p. 5.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 6, 7.
- 17 Perry, p. 5.
- 18 Godfrey, pp. 69-75.
- 19 Wagstaff, p. 2; Mary Willie Richards, p. 2; Willie and Austin, p. 2; Vernal Willie, "John S. Willie History," p. 1.
- 20 Sorenson, vol. 1, pp. 8, 9.
- 21 United States Department of Commerce, 1860.
- 22 Perry, pp. 5, 6.
- 23 Ricks, p. 48.

- 24 United States Department of Commerce, 1860.
- 25 Perry, p. 4.
- 26 "Cache County Record Book A," p. 137.
- 27 Deseret Evening News, 18 January 1860.
- 28 Willie and Austin, p. 2.
- 29 Perry, p. 5.
- 30 Sorenson, vol. 1, p. 4.
- 31 Ibid., p. 9.
- 32 Ibid., p. 10.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 11, 12, 17.
- 34 Perry, p. 5.
- 35 Sorenson, p. 10.
- 36 Ricks, p. 53.
- 37 Sorenson, p. 12.
- 38 Baker, p. 4.
- 39 Jensen, pp. 5, 6.
- 40 "Mendon Ward Manuscript History," p. 10;  
Department of Landscape Architecture.
- 41 "Cache County Record Book, A," p. 34.
- 42 Gibson, p. 376; Perry, p. 6.
- 43 Perry, p. 6.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 "Cache County Record Book, A", March 2, 1863,  
p. 48.



CHAPTER IX  
JAMES WILLIE AND MENDON

It may be said that between 1864 and 1895, when he died, James G. Willie was one of those quiet, unassuming individuals who without undue thought of pay or recognition keep communities and institutions running. He continued to carry out a wide variety of necessary but humble functions. In the process he became part of the fabric of Mendon's human experience, an able and trusted figure who helped many and threatened few. The pages that follow will examine his contributions to Mendon and seek to integrate them in the larger context of the town's experience.

The years between 1864 and 1867 were busy for Mendon as people continued to build homes and develop farms. Like their townspeople the Willies worked hard to construct a permanent home. Means were limited and they first built another temporary home, one that would be improved in time. Nevertheless, it was sufficient for their immediate needs. Willie continued to function in his postmaster, watermaster, and Sunday school duties. He remained as Sunday school president until 1866 during which time he helped establish a tradition for excellence that characterized Mendon's Sunday school for many decades thereafter and still make it the central institution in

the town's chief festival, the May Day celebration. He was watermaster until 1867 when it seems possible it's physical demands became more than he wished to carry.

Country records indicated that in 1865 the Willies purchased a city lot from Jasper Lemmon for \$100. Like other city lots it was an acre and a quarter in size. It was located on 1st West between 2nd and 3rd South streets.<sup>1</sup> Willie later purchased or traded for another lot, on 1st West and 1st North, just across the street west of the town square. On this lot the Willie's followed a growing custom in Mendon and built a substantial stone home in 1867. This house is still standing, and is on the National Register of Historic Places, both because of Willie's prominence and the fact that the house is representative of the era's stone homes.

During the next two years James and Elizabeth accepted responsibilities they held for many years. In 1868 the Mendon Relief Society was organized. Elizabeth was the first president, a position she occupied for eighteen years.<sup>2</sup> In 1869 a co-op was organized, and James was appointed clerk and manager, positions he held for 22 years.<sup>3</sup>

There was a definite need for the establishment of the cooperative store in Mendon. Issac Sorenson records the following concerning the economic problems prior to the establishment of the store.

There was not much market for grain in

Cache, and what little chance there was for disposing of Grain and Butter and Eggs, it had to be done at a great loss, as the keepers of Stores was not satisfied with small profits, nor was any Merchants in Utah it was in those times Merchants would spring up like mushrooms, notwithstanding the transportation of thier goods across the plains from Omaha with Oxen and muleteams yet so enormous was their profits, that they grew rich in a very short time. When it is remembered that in these early times, a man would load his Wagons with Wheat or Oats, which had been produced by ploughing the ground with ox teams, watered it and cut it with cradles bound it by hand, thrashed it with chaffe pilars and turned the fam all day for cleaning it, and then hauling it to Salt Lake City and sell it, and obtain less than 2 yrd. of Factory for one Bushel of Wheat, and all other Articles about the same rate yet this was done for many years, and often Breadstuffs would be scarce before the next Harvest would be ready, and sometimes we would go as far as Salt Lake borrow wheat for flower, haul it home to Mendon, and in the fall after harvest haul the wheat back to the party they barrowed it from it from and pay a peck on every Bushel interest,...<sup>4</sup>

In establishing a co-op Mendon was in step with the times. Threatened by commercial developments that followed the construction of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 the Mormon church instigated what economic historian Leonard Arrington has called the "cooperative movement." Z.C.M.I. or Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution, was organized as a parent or wholesale store, Mormon merchants throughout Utah were absorbed into the system.<sup>5</sup> And all Mormons were urged to subscribe money to local outlets and shop at them. In Cache Valley co-op stores were set up during 1869 with a wholesale outlet and a major retail store resembling Z.C.M.I. at Logan designed to provide support to local co-ops in the valley.<sup>6</sup>

In compliance with this church wide effort Mendon's most prominent families gave the co-op their full support. Typically Bishop A.P. Shumway was president. Charles Shumway, Charles Bird, and Andrew Anderson served as the first directors of the board. Willie was appointed clerk and manager with Alfred Gardner as assistant manager. Soon after the cooperative organization, Bishop Shumway was called on a mission to England. His place was filled by Henry Hughes who also became president of the cooperative store board.<sup>7</sup> Willie's appointment as manager and clerk suggests a number of things. It is possible that he was an investor in the co-op and held the position because of financial interest. Church position also had a bearing on the role people played in the cooperative movement as suggested by the fact that Bishops Shumway and Hughes were both president of the board. Finally, it seems likely that Willie's appointment reflects the position of respect and trust that he enjoyed in the community. He was known to be dependable and to follow through on assignments. In addition he had been gravitating to this kind of assignment for some years past. Board members and co-op presidents came and went. Managers became the effective decision making agents of the stores. It was a situation into which Willie fit well.

The store began with a capital of \$620.00 raised from the selling of stock at \$20.00 per share to the Mendon residents. The first business of the store was carried on

in the house of Charles Bird. Later the store was moved to an empty log house belonging to Albert M. Baker. It remained there until 1873 when a rock building was constructed for the store near the southeast corner of the town square, where it remained until 1889.<sup>8</sup>

With the policy of "small profits and quick returns," the store did well in its first years. It not only served Mendon's immediate needs, but its business interests sometimes extended as far as two hundred miles away. Mendon residents not only had a local source for purchasing general merchandise, but they did not have to travel to sell their farm produce.<sup>9</sup>

In 1872, A.P. Shumway returned from his mission. He was not reinstated as bishop, but he did begin helping Willie with store duties as a clerk.<sup>10</sup> By 1879 the operation was doing an annual business of \$10-12,000, with the capital stock increasing in three years by 700%.<sup>11</sup> Willie was reported by those who wrote about the cooperative as being a very able and successful manager. He brought good returns for their produce, and supplied necessary merchandise to the people were.<sup>12</sup>

The co-op was a very diversified business. The following ad was placed in a Logan newspaper on November 20, 1879.

#### COOPERATIVE STORE

Dealers in General Merchandise  
Dry good, groceries, hardware  
Boots and shoes, notions and etc.

## Highest price paid for produce

We give 65 cents for a bushel of No. 1  
clean wheat, 1/2 in cash and 12 in store  
pay subject to market fluctuations

James G. Willie, manager.<sup>13</sup>

James was undoubtedly kept very busy with his duties at the co-op, and the success of the store suggests the Willie' family was doing well economically. While Willie worked at the cooperative store, his sons took over the family farm. They used their father's land, and also expanded with their own purchases to make a successful farming operation.<sup>14</sup>

In 1872-73 the Utah Northern railroad reached Mendon. Its arrival meant much to the farming trade, and to the cooperative stores. Goods could then be brought into the valley at lower cost, and the farming products sold to a much larger market. Railroad connections also made it possible to bring agricultural and industrial machinery into the valley that had been too heavy and expensive to transport. These machines increased the potential of the farmers, and enlarged the role of the cooperative store in trading and buying.<sup>15</sup>

The railroad was brought into Cache Valley as a result of a few year's negotiating between the railroads and leaders of the Mormon church. When the transcontinental railroad was completed through northern Utah, the idea was conceived of taking a line from Ogden, through Brigham City, north to the Petersboro hills, and

east into Cache Valley. Lines could then extend into southeastern Idaho, and eventually into Montana to join with the Northern Pacific Railroad. These were the ideas of John W. Young, a son of Brigham Young, who formed a company and went to the eastern states to secure funds.

Young came back to Utah seeking support from people in Cache Valley to provide wooden railroad ties and labor for the railway. The people of the valley agreed and the church organized labor through the wards. Workers were paid primarily with stock in the company, but some wages were paid.

Mendon was to have a railroad warehouse and a two-story building with an elevator and basement to accommodate freight. This would give it a direct tie with the railway. The first efforts of the company were to build a road from Brigham City to Logan, passing through Mendon. Ground had been broken at Brigham City on August 26, 1871, and the work was completed to Mendon on December 22, 1872. The Hill family history describes the arrival of the first train.

December 19th, 1872, the first railroad steam engine--nicknamed 'John W. Young'--with its tender, ran into Mendon City on the Utah Northern Railway.

December 22nd, 1872, the first railroad train, including one passenger car, one box car and a couple of flat cars, drawn by a steam engine, ran into Mendon City on the Utah Northern Railway, and the children were invited to take a ride. Though the grasshopper scourge of last year had laid the farms in ruin around Mendon the throughout the Valley, yet this pest had not obstructed the railroad improvement; for the men

and boys turned out with their picks, shovels, scrapers and teams, and soon brought the steam whistle to their doors.<sup>16</sup>

By January 31, 1873 the railway had reached Logan where the rail center for the valley would be established. The following summer the railroad was constructed from Brigham City to Corrine, which was the terminus of the Central Pacific. Additional line was completed from Brigham City to Ogden to join with the "Utah Central" and Salt Lake City. Brigham Young hoped the additional line would eliminate the main rail station at "Gentile" Corrine, and move it to the Mormon settlement of Ogden. By February 5, 1874, Cache Valley was fully connected to the main settlements along the Wasatch Front.<sup>17</sup>

In 1874 the united order movement was established in Mendon. The united order was an attempt by the Mormon church negate the effects of the outside world on its people. It was an effort to live communally, with property belonging to the united order. The order then distributed staples to the members according to their needs. It was a program designed to promote unity, order, and oneness among the Mormon people, and to eliminate the more individualistic and pluralistic traits in society. It was heavily promoted by Brigham Young and other church leaders but reluctantly accepted, or rejected outright, by many rank and file church members.

Only a third of the people in Mendon participated in the united order, and the Willie family was not among



them.<sup>18</sup> Bishop Hughes was serving on a mission at the time, and most of the Mendon ward members waited for his return to follow his initiatives. Hughes wielded a great deal of power in Mendon, even in his absence. When Apostle Erastus Snow visited with orders from Salt Lake City to start the united order movement, acting Bishop Foster told Snow that they could not enter in such a thing without Bishop Hughes. Apostle Snow was furious, asking Foster "if the Kingdom of God had to come to a stop until Henry Hughes returned."<sup>19</sup> Mendon's "order" was judged to be a success by Apostle Brigham Young, Jr., who was the resident Cache Valley general authority in 1874.<sup>20</sup>

However, when Bishop Hughes returned in 1875, he informed the ward members that he had had a dream about the united order question. He dreamed that the "tide was not yet high enough to flood the ship," but added, "after a while it would be so and then he would take the brethren of Mendon and with the rest of the church they would make the united order work successfully."<sup>21</sup> Hughes ended the united order movement in Mendon with his negative feelings, sharply dividing the town. Some people in Mendon referred to the program as the "Golden Calf" and may have used Hughes negativism as an excuse to stay out of, and eliminate a program that did not have a lot of popularity churchwide.

Hughes was bishop for thirty-one years, and as demonstrated in the united order affair had great

influence. He was Willie's superior in the ward, and the president of the board of the cooperative store. He was a powerful leader, at times dogmatic and boastful of his wealth, but overall a force for good. Hughes had been among the first settlers in the valley, but had not settled in Mendon until 1863. He was very active in governmental affairs as well as in church assignments. Hughes was known to not take counsel gracefully, however a bishop in those days took a back seat to no one in his own community.<sup>22</sup> Willie must have gotten along with Hughes who later chose him as one of his counselors.

1874 was the beginning of May Day festivities referred to above. The William Willie history records the following on the first Mendon May Day.

Larsina (Seny) Sorenson was the first queen of the May Day celebration. Hannah Baker was chosen as the second May Day queen. She was sixteen years of age at the time, which would place the event May 1, 1874. She wore a white petticoat with a hand embroidered short nightgown over it. Mrs. Muir curled her coarse back hair in ringlets using sugar and water to make it hold. Hannah, in her lovely attire and with her snapping brown eyes, must have made at least one young man's heart flutter that day--William's in particular.<sup>23</sup>

Hannah would later become the polygamist wife of William Willie. James' daughter Mary was involved in the May Day event as a runner-up to the first queen.<sup>24</sup> Because of Willie's English descent and recent return from England, it is possible that he could have been involved somewhat in bringing the May Day tradition (which is English) to

Mendon. The May Day celebration has always been a function of the Sunday school, and as mentioned, James was the first Sunday school superintendent.

The next documentation of Willie family activities in 1882 when both of Willie's sons were called to serve missions. No doubt their father's willingness to serve a mission had influenced them. The youngest son John was called to the Southern States Mission, which was mainly in Virginia.<sup>25</sup> William's call to England allowed James to send funds to his son that helped with genealogical research of the Willie family.<sup>26</sup> James had been interested in researching his family when he was in England himself serving a mission. On two occasions he had attempted to go to Yarcombe, which as he states "was the birthplace of my Fathers."<sup>27</sup> Yarcombe is not far from Taunton where he spent his youth. Work or change of plans prevented James from actually going to Yarcombe while he was in the mission field, but William, with his father's support, was able to accomplish much of this work.

A portion William Willie's biography was taken from his missionary journal, and speaks of the genealogical labors:

November 13, 1882, William was transferred from Liverpool Conference to Bristol Conference. William was excited because that is where his father, James G. Willie, had come from, and his father wanted him to gather genealogy and visit his relatives. Two days after arriving in Bristol he records in his diary: 'Wednesday Nov

15th went and visited two of my cousins who keep a furniture Store near Draw Bridge in the City of Bristol they made some enquires about the people and country gave me some information of my father's familey, but did not invite me to there residences to see there families....' Another entry reads: 'Friday Nov 17th 1882 weather very frosty and cold & clear went down to Bristol called on my cousins they took me through there large house of furnishing and carpets business got more information of relatives slept at Con (conference) house.'

While William was in the Bristol and Taunton area he wasted no time and was persistent in visiting all his relatives and searching out his genealogy. No doubt his father was writing and encouraging him on. Friday, January 12, 1883, he records: 'left (Curland) there walked to Bishop Wood. called on a cousin of my Fathers Mr. John Willie age 79 years Very pleased to see me here from my father and etc. went to Charles Willie caled on him and introduced my self. got some thing to ear. he being well I went down to Blackden. hired good bed 6<sup>d</sup> supper 6' 'Saturday Jan 13 breakfast 9 (9<sup>d</sup>) walked back to Charles Willie took dinner with them got a chance to ride with Mr Cox, cahdel (cattle) pedler, 7 miles Cattleigh. James Loosmar very pleased to see me and kind.'

'Tuesday Jan 16th 1883 left Mr Loosmars and Wife, James Willie walked to Charles Willie Otterford went and visited the Church yard got many names of family from Tomb Stones, back to 1692. stayed at Char. (Charles) Willie'<sup>28</sup>

William supplied James with many names that he took to the Logan temple for Mormon ordinance work.<sup>29</sup>

Within this same period of time James served a short term as mayor of Mendon. He was not elected to the position, but was appointed to complete a portion of a two-year term of an elected mayor who moved. Issac Sorenson refers to Willie's role as mayor, along with some indication of how the city of Mendon functioned.

Aa City officers G.W. Baker was the first Mayor of Mendon. Charles Bird Sen succeeded him. acting some 4 years Bp Henry Hughes succeeded C. Bird and acted a number of years. John Donaldson was next elected but acted on one Year, he move to Snake River J.G. Willie was the next Mayor Acting only a short term. Robert Sweeten was the next, elections was held every two years funds for running the city was obtained from selling City Lots, and Mercantile Licenses, the expences for running the City was small, the Mayor and Councilars for many years working free gratis., this practically was the only way so small a city could be carried on without oppressing the people.

Each of those previous Mayors, and City Councils had opposed a Cach Tax hence there had been none except Dog Tax, and city Pole Tax.<sup>30</sup>

A townsite deed dated April 1, 1883 was signed by Mayor James G. Willie,<sup>31</sup> placing his term between 1882 and 1884. The duties of mayor would not have been very involved, but it was a role that reflected trust from the town's people. One has to wonder why James did not run for mayor in the next election.

On June 3, 1884, James was again asked to fill a position vacated by a man who moved from Mendon. John Donaldsen, the second councilor in the bishopric with Bishop Hughes moved to Teton in the Snake River Valley, Idaho. James was asked to fill his position.<sup>32</sup> This was the third bishopric Willie served in, and may explain why he did not seek to continue as mayor of Mendon.

In addition to his bishopric duties Willie frequently spoke at Mendon ward meetings. Between the early 1880s and the early 1890s he spoke nearly once a month. The custom was for speakers to be called extemporaneously. As

a ward stalwart, much of the speaking burden obviously fell upon him. Willie also spoke at over half of the funeral services, which again shows the high respect and love for Willie in the Mendon ward and community.<sup>33</sup>

The Willie family has many traditional stories about James' speaking abilities. He spoke loudly, and was said to have been audible at a great distance from the church. He was a powerful and emotional speaker, and chose themes which his audience appreciated and understood. Mendon ward minutes contain synopses of some of the speeches.

July 22, 1883-Sacrament Meeting

Elder James G. Willie said we must all sooner or later give an account of the deeds done in the body when our true Characters will be brought to light, the object of our being here upon this Earth is to work out a Salvation for ourselves and our posterity and to assist in building up Zion temporally and spiritually.<sup>34</sup>

January 25, 1885-Evening Meeting

Bro. Jas. G. Willie being called upon said there is but two churches upon the earth the one is the church of Jesus Christ and the other is that evil one, or Christianity yet among Christianity there are many honest headed men that are serving God to the best of their ability, there is a dark cloud hanging over this people and it is necessary for us to live near to God and keep his commandments in order to have the spirit of God to be our constant companion.<sup>35</sup>

April 19, 1885-Sacrament Meeting

Counselor James G. Willie being called upon said, I think it is the greatest honor that can be conferred upon mortal man, is to hold the Holy Priesthood of the 'Son of God' This kingdom will advance in power and dominion until it will circumscribe every denomination upon the face of the earth and bring all with in its

folks, not withstanding all the power of earth and hell have been and will be combined against us for our overthrow, we have covenants with the heavens to assist all within our means to bring about his grand work so we have no time to loose but it will require all our time to accomplish this labor.<sup>36</sup>

May 31, 1885-Sacrament Meeting

Councilor James G. Willie being called upon spoke of the advent of the second coming of the son of Man it is now at hand. Also spoke of his coming in the maridian of time he then comes as a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief and while here upon the earth had no place to lay his head, also poked of the Prophet Joseph Smith when he asked God the eternal Father which of the different sects were right it seems as though all Hell was arrayed against him and the work of God and since that time we have been persecuted as a people and we will be persecuted until God has a humble and a (unledgible) people.<sup>37</sup>

October 18, 1886-Sacrament Meeting (Willie Conducted, presided and said the prayer)

Bro Jas G. Willie said, I have been requested to announce to you that our Bishop who has presided over us so long and with such wisdom and judgement has had to leave, for the testimony of Jesus Christ and for keeping the law of God spoke to some length upon the Law of Celestial marriage I know it is from God, it has caused the best blood of the nineteenth century, according to the testimony of one of the Twelve apostles not over three weeks ago said his said which is not upon will not cease until every latter day saint has been thoroughly tested every right guaranteed to us by the Constitution of the United States will be taken away from us there never was a time since the organization of the church when the saints needed to be more prayerful than today.<sup>38</sup>

(Note: Bishop Hughes left Mendon to avoid the U.S. Marshalls who were enforcing the anti-polygamy laws.)

March 13, 1887-Sacrament Meeting

Counselor Jas. G. Willie being called upon said it is necessary for every latter day saint to

know the mind and will of God for himself. Let us keep the communication open between ourselves and our father in heaven continually that we may be alive in the gospel. This kingdom will stand firm and will overcome all opposition, let us study and become acquainted with the laws of the Gospel.<sup>39</sup>

September 25, 2887-Sacrament Meeting

Counselor James G. Willie, said some of the most important events which have ever transpired upon the earth are coming to pass in our day it is necessary for us to study what we came upon this earth for and then to accomplish that purpose and do all we can for the building up of Zion and the establishment of Gods's kingdom upon the earth. Spoke of the necessity of our training up our children in the fear of the Lord and bring them to sabbath school to our meetings and impressions will be there made upon their young minds that will never be erased.<sup>40</sup>

June 17, 1888-Sacrament Meeting

Counselor James G. Willie was the next speaker he endorsed the remarks of the brethren that had spoken they have been filled with good counsel said he had been laboring in the Temple this last week spoke of the great labors to be performed by us in these temples for ourselves and our dead friends, I desire to be an humble instrument in the hands of God in helping to redeem my dear friends who have passed behind the veil.<sup>41</sup>

October 5, 1890-Funeral Minutes of a small girl

Bro James G. Willie was the first speaker, said we have before us the remains of a child that is as free from sin as an Angle, those who pass away in thier infancy as in the present instance they will come forth in the morning of the first resurrection and will grow up to manhood and womanhood. He spoke many consoling words to the family of the child, spoke of sending our children to sectarian schools to be taught incorrect doctrines the parents of these children are certainly be held responsible for their offspring under these circumstances.<sup>42</sup>

Others in the community also remembered him as an



effective speaker. For example, Jens Jensen, who grew up in Mendon knowing Willie, described him in this way:

I knew James G. Willie from the time I was a boy of five years of age until his death. He was an able public speaker, and was regarded as one of the best in Mendon. He delivered a logical discourse, and never waivered in his testimony concerning the Gospel which he had embraced...

He was a well read man, and considered well educated for his time. He was at perfect ease in any company, and conversed intelligently with all visitors. He was quiet and efficient. He was neat and clean in his appearance...

I remember Jeremiah Baker, who was their ward teacher for several years, remark that Brother Willie was one man who was willing to donate to the Church in the same manner that he preached it should be done from the stand.<sup>43</sup>

James was a man of integrity who practiced what he preached. He also was a straight line Mormon in the way he lived and taught. The speeches indicate he was conservative in his religious beliefs and doctrines. He was very much the authoritarian father figure in his sermons. He gave personal advice and council as they applied to religious principals and current developments. James seemed to be very comfortable behind the pulpit, where he was far more outgoing than in normal life. Often his speeches were "off the cuff," and showed his abilities to think well on his feet. These speeches, perhaps better than any other source used in the work, reveal Willie's personality.

Although James continued to give talks until his death, he was honorably released from the bishopric on September 22, 1890, because of "old age."<sup>44</sup> He was

seventy-six years old. James had lost an eye several months before, which was evidently a traumatic experience, and may have contributed to reasons for his release.

July 6, 1890-Sacramento Meeting

Bro Jas G. Willie was the next speaker: felt very thankful for the privilege of again being permitted to assemble with the Saints through the misfortune of loosing one of my eyes he had been kept from meetings from nearly three months felt as strong in the faith as he ever did. I know this is the work of God it is beyond the powers of this Earth to frustrate the work of Almighty God. The Lord requires of us to magnify the Priesthood which had has bestowed upon us.

I thank Bp. Hughes for voluntarily going to Salt Lake City with me to see me through the Severe operation through which I have passed and bearing his own expense he done this for my express benefit this is true brotherly love. I shall never forget this act of Kindness.<sup>45</sup>

A year after Willie's release from the bishopric the Mendon co-op store was sold to a single stockholder. Hyrum T. Richards had been the principal stockholder up until 1891, when he purchased the remaining stock from the other investors. Money was scarce in Cache Valley at the time, and the store was in some financial trouble from issuing too much credit. For these reasons stockholders felt it to be in their best interest to sell out. Richards then turned the store into a private business, and James left his position as manager.<sup>46</sup>

James was then hired by the Logan Z.C.M.I. store,<sup>47</sup> which opened in 1872. The Logan cooperative had been purchased by Z.C.M.I., and remained in business until 1900.<sup>48</sup> Willie's work in Logan was that of a

clerk, which could imply that the job was somewhat of a retirement position. This is doubtful, however, because after a time at the Logan branch, Willie was transferred to the Ogden Z.C.M.I. branch, where he worked during the week, and traveled home on weekends.<sup>49</sup> The Ogden branch was established in 1869 and remained in business until 1907, when it was bought out by the W.H. Wright & Sons Company.<sup>50</sup>

During the final years of James' life he received the important Mormon church calling of Patriarch, and served in the Cache Valley Stake. He was called in July or August of 1892.<sup>51</sup> The church archives show a record of Willie being a patriarch, but they show no precise ordination date. There is also a special file on him in the patriarch records but no blessings were ever reported under his name.

The office of patriarch in the Mormon church holds no ecclesiastical powers. Patriarch's sole function is to give "Patriarchal Blessings" to worthy members of the church. These blessings reveal lineage through the House of Israel, and designate the tribal affiliation of one of the twelve tribes. The blessings also provide guidelines which are believed by Mormons to be the path to their heavenly reward. Willie may have given many patriarchal blessings, it is not unusual that none were recorded in the church records.

Also during these last years James and Elizabeth did

a great deal of work in the Logan temple. Their daughter Mary Willie Richards recalled that James and Elizabeth made "regular" trips into Logan "to do work for their kindred dead".<sup>52</sup>

In 1895, at the age of eighty, James G. Willie passed away. He had suffered with minor ailments for most of his life, but had enjoyed basic good health until the time of the short sickness that took his life on September 9. Mary Willie Richards records that he died of "rheumatism of the heart," and adds that he had difficulty breathing while lying down and was forced to sit up during the last few weeks of his life.<sup>53</sup>

The funeral services for James were held on September 10th. Mendon business and farming ceased that day, as all attended his funeral services in the Mendon ward chapel.<sup>54</sup> The Mendon Ward Minutes record the Willie funeral as follows:

September 10, 1895-James G. Willie Funeral

Minutes of a meeting convened September 10 1895 for the purpose of paying our last tribute of respect to Patriarch Jas. G. Willie who parted this life on the 9th--

Choir sang "Oh My Father Thou that dwellest."

Prayer was offered by Counselor Gardner

Choir sang "Rest, rest for the Weary Soul."

Bro Robt Baxter of Wellsville was the first speaker said Bro. Willie has fought the good fight of faith and a crown is laid up for him in the Kingdom of God, and when we live up to our principles and perform our duties there is joy and satisfaction in our hearts, invoked the blessings of God to rest upon his family of Bro. Willie.

Bro. James Quale of Logan was the next speaker said he had always known Br. Willie to be a

faithful Latter day saint obedient to the Holy Priesthood in all things, the speaker exhorted us to be faithful to our trust, said we should prepare ourselves so that when the messenger of Death comes he will find us ready to go because we have kept the faith.

Bp Willard Cranny of Petersboro then spoke a short time, said it was pleasing to note that Bro. Willie had kept the faith, he exhorted us to so live that when we are called home that we may be sure of our Salvation.

Counselor Andersen then addressed the audience said we certainly have occasion to mourn for the loss of Bro. Willie's society-but nothing else, for he has lived the life of a latter day saint we should pattern after his honorable example.

Counselor Gardner also spoke very comforting to the family of Bro Willie he eulogized the upright character of the departed he was strictly honest honorable and has fought the good fight and has kept the faith.

Bro Samual Roskelly of Smithfield then edified the saints with some very comforting remarks, spoke very highly of the Character of Bro. Willie he has lived the life of a latter day saint was honest and upright spoke of many of the prophetic remarks of Bro Willie they will come to pass said if we will honor our possitions and keep the covenants wer have made god will not forget us in a day to come.

Elder Elias Davis of Peterboro then spoke a short time spoke very highly of the character of Bro. Willie he had always been faithful and had been exemplary.

Some comforting remarks were then made by the Bishop said he had nothing to say but good of Bro. Willie he was prompted in all his promises and in his actions he was honest in his course through life and was a faithful latter day saint.

Choir sang "my Father in Heaven and Dear Kindred there,

Benediction by Elder Samual Roskelly  
A Gardner Clerk<sup>55</sup>

James was buried in the Mendon cemetary which overlooks the city, a fitting place for one who dedicated so much to Mendon. 56

Willie's death was recorded in the Logan

newspaper,<sup>57</sup> and the Deseret Evening News. It was also recorded in the "Journal History" of the church.<sup>58</sup> The Deseret Evening News records the following obituary:

13 Sep 1895- James Grey Willie

Died in Mendon, of dropsy of the heart, James Grey Willie, born Nov. 1, 1814. He came from England to the United States when about 22 years of age; joined the Church February, 1842; came to Utah in the fall of 1847. He performed a mission to England from 1852 to 1856, and was captain of the last handcart company but one; was caught in the snow. The company suffered much from cold and lack of food, many losing their lives in consequence. He moved to Cache Valley in the spring of 1859, taking up his residence in Mendon where he has since resided up to his death, which transpired on the 9th Sept. He held many important positions, both civil and ecclesiastical, which he filled with honor. Many attended the funeral from Logan and other places. He leaves a wife, three daughters and two sons, and upwards of thirty grandchildren. He died as he had lived, a faithful Latter-day Saint. He held the office of Patriarch when he died.<sup>59</sup>

James was fondly remembered by his children and grandchildren. His daughter Mary described her father in this way:

Father was a well educated man for his time and he helped in all of the movements for the upbuilding of the community...

Father was a kindly man, he was good natured and looked on the bright side of life. He was not given to worrying and took life as it came. He could converse intelligently with anyone and felt quite at ease with all visitors.<sup>60</sup>

A grandchild described him with this recollection:

James was...well read and considered well educated for his time. He was perfectly at ease and conversed intelligently with all visitors.

He was a kind, good natured person, looking on the bright side of life not worrying about things he could not help. He loved children and animals. He talked to his team of horses, Kate and Fan, giving them every care.<sup>61</sup>

James was missed by his family and community. He was respected and loved by both. He spent thirty-five years in church, city and community service in Mendon. His efforts were as steady and quiet as the community. He had lived in Mendon from its beginning helping to build and shape the town. His roles were many and diverse, and in total were significant to its history. His jobs were not glamorous, but his service was spirited, and his influence wide. His second line roles often did not reflect the respect and admiration that was his. Certainly it may be said he was among Mendon's "town fathers."

Footnotes

- 1 "Cache County Record Book A," p. 235.
- 2 "Mendon Ward Manuscript History."
- 3 Sorenson, p. 33.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 18, 19.
- 5 Ricks, p. 187.
- 6 Ibid., p. 188.
- 7 Felix, pp. 91, 91.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Sorenson, pp. 35, 36.
- 10 Ibid., p. 36.
  
- 11 Deseret Evening News, 20 February 1879.  
Daniel B. Richards, p. 258.
- 13 Deseret Evening News, 3 February 1891.  
Perry, p. 8.
- 15 Ricks, pp. 170-185.
- 16 Daniel B. Richards, p. 259.
- 17 Ricks, pp. 170-185.
- 18 Perry, p. 9; D.B. Richards, p. 259.
- 19 Jenson, pp. 12, 13.
- 20 Sorenson, pp. 41-43.
- 21 Schimmelpfennig, p. 12.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Perry, p. 9.
- 24 Abrams.
  
- 25 Vernal Willie, "John S. Willie," Family History (typewritten), p. 2.



- 26 Perry, p. 11.
- 27 Willie, "Missionary Journal," April 10, 1855.
- 28 Perry, p. 14.
- 29 William Pettit Willie, "Mission to England  
Diary Oct. 24, 1881 to Sept. 7, 1883."
- 30 Sorenson, vol. 2, p. 3.
- 31 "Mendon City Records," Deeds File.
- 32 "Mendon Ward Manuscript History," pp. 17,  
18.
- 33 "Mendon Ward Meeting Records."
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Jens Jensen, "James G. Willie," recorded by  
Vernal Willie, Family History (typewritten), p. 2.
- 44 "Mendon Ward Manuscript History," p. 19.
- 45 "Mendon Ward Meeting Minutes," July 6, 1890.
- 46 Felix, p. 93.
- 47 Perry, p. 8.
- 48 Ricks, pp. 194, 195.
- 49 Perry, p. 8.
- 50 Hunter, pp. 404, 405.

- 51 "Mendon Ward Meeting Minutes," July 3, 1892  
and August 14, 1892.
- 52 Mary Willie Richards," p. 3.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Perry, p. 21.
- 55 "Mendon Ward Meeting Minutes," September 10,  
1895.
- 56 Perry, p. 21.
- 57 The Tri-Weekly Journal, 12 September, 1895.
- 58 "Journal History," September 9, 1895.
- 59 Deseret Evening News, 13 September 1895.
- 60 Mary Willie Richards, p. 2.
- 61 Willie and Austin, p. 2.

## CHAPTER X

## A PERSPECTIVE OF JAMES G. WILLIE'S LIFE

To see Willie in perspective it is necessary to see him in the context of his family. With the exception of the polygamous wives about whom little is known, it is clear he lived in harmony with them. Certainly his wife Elizabeth was one of the strongest influences in his life.

Elizabeth Pettit Willie lived eleven years after the death of her husband. She died peacefully while sleeping on January 24, 1906. Her passing was recorded in the "Journal History" of the church, The Deseret News, and the Improvement Era magazine. She was a pioneer of 1847, a claim only a few hundred people could make. Elizabeth was an important silent participant in Willie's story. She was the partner who stayed at home, raised the children, and provided a never ending supply of confidence for James.

Although nothing has been preserved as far as letters from James to his wife, or recorded expressions of his deep love, it is certain that this love existed. They must have grown close in those early years in New York, James a new immigrant and Elizabeth expelled from her family. They traveled a long life together, with loneliness when he was in England, and with intimate support through the years. Elizabeth was a worthy woman

of true spirit. She forged two homes out of rugged wilderness, and she was also a religious leader in Mendon with eighteen years of service as Relief Society president.

A resident of Mendon at the time of Elizabeth's life records the following:

Elizabeth P. Willie was noted for her neatness. Her house was always in order and never disarranged. She was very neat and tidy herself. She usually wore a white collar as part of her dress. She was a good manager and an expert with her needle. Being the first President of the Mendon Ward Relief Society she visited the people in their homes to quite an extent after finishing up her own work at home. Usually upon entering a home Sister Willie would ask them to bring out their darning, mending, or patching for as she said, 'I might just as well be doing something, while I sit here and visit.' She was quiet and even tempered. I never remember her being excited or outwardly disturbed over events.<sup>1</sup>

As one reflects on the accomplishments of James Grey Willie, Elizabeth Pettit Willie should also come to mind, for they experienced over fifty years together as husband and wife.

James Willie's two sons continued farming after the death of their father. Taking homesteads in Holbrook, Idaho, they also maintained homes in Mendon. In 1921 John passed away as the result of complications with a crushed leg; he was 69 years old.<sup>2</sup> William died of a kidney ailment in 1923, at the age of 75.<sup>3</sup>

James and Elizabeth's two daughters married men from

prominent Mendon families. Mary Sutton married Joseph Hill Richards. The couple spent most of their married life in a Mormon settlement in Arizona on the Little Colorado. Mary lived to the age of 91. Emma Elizabeth married John Hughes, a son of Bishop Henry Hughes. They spent most of their years in Mendon. Emma was buried there at the age of 60.

James' daughter from his polygamist marriage, Katherine Elizabeth Willie, married Theodore Angel. They moved to Butte, Montana, where "Kate" spent the remainder of her life.<sup>4</sup>

From these children came thousands of descendants. They are a family who often meet together for reunions, possessing a strong reverence for the proud heritage and name left by Father James G. Willie.

As was obvious in the foregoing pages, James Grey Willie led a full life. His deeds were not earth-shaking, just quiet unpretentious acts. He was not a bold man, nor one who would strive for riches or power. Rather, his was the "quiet power" of a deep and slow moving river.

His life began in an old established country, one that he dearly loved, but one that did not hold his dreams. He came to the United States, as so many did, in search of that illusive "American Dream." As it turned out the dream for James did not lie in the streets of New York City or in the tanning shops. Rather, his dream was to be realized in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day

Saints. It was the same dream as that of a young boy in New York who sought to know which of all the religions was true. This boy was told by his God that through him a church would be brought forth, a church that he, Joseph Smith, later died for. Willie shared this dream. As many others have done, Willie dedicated the rest of his life to its service. Every accomplishment he had for the remainder of his life was connected to his church--the church he served.

Willie was among those who served the Mormon church in its early years. He preached the gospel in the eastern states as a young convert. He followed that gospel belief during the years when death struck its prophet, and when the Saints were expelled from Nauvoo. James and Elizabeth traveled far to join the Mormons as they attempted to find refuge in the West. They became pioneers of 1847, that in and of itself connected them with a great tradition and heritage. They broke virgin soil on their land in Salt Lake City and watched that area grow into a beautiful city in the Rocky Mountains.

James left his loved ones and home, to serve in the Mormon mission field. The year 1853 found him in England, serving in an important assignment as Pastor of a district. He was forced to deal with strange behavior, hard work, and great responsibility. It was the highlight of his life in terms of leadership and of daily activity and accomplishment. He gave the English people three

years of diligent service. Not everyone recognized his missionary effort in this way,, but Willie served out of a deep love for his countrymen.

On his return home from England he was asked to oversee a group of saints who were experimenting with travel across the American plains by handcart. The trip took many lives, for these were not people physically equipped to take such a journey. Willie was forced to leave many behind in lonely graves. It was an experience that propelled him into Mormon fame, but one he seldom spoke of, for to him it was a tragedy. His fame was based on the fact that in hiscompny many died. He could not be proud of that, nor could he take open credit because many did not die. It is fair to conclude, however, that his strong will and wise decisions saved many lives. He could never enjoy the handcart fame. He could not tell and retell the stories of this famous but tragic event. To him it was only the performance of his duty, a duty that he did to the best of his ability because he had been asked by his church. It was the many graves between Salt Lake City and England, graves that he said words over that marked Willie's claim to fame.

Serving as bishop of a Salt Lake City ward was his next assignment, a high church position in those early days. James was again asked to lead through a crisis. The Utah War brought great challenges to the people of Salt Lake City. Here again he performed his duties well,

without seeking to build upon his authority or climb higher in power. His was a quiet expression of simple strength that came from his youth, with its ethics based on work and humility. He had lived a life based on the simple things rather than the complexities of high aspirations, his "common folk" attitude stressed getting a job done with an unassertive diligence that continually provided favorable results.

In search of this type of simple life the Willies came to Cache Valley. James settled in to do a myriad of jobs: notary public, poundkeeper, watermaster, mayor, clerk, cooperative manager, councilor, and patriarch. He did them with this same quiet diligence. There was integrity in James Willie, for when he was given a job, people trusted he would do a fine job. He lived a life full of accomplishments which could fill a book, a book which would depict a man who took what was given him and made it better. It would not be a book that would be popular with all, for only one of his life's accomplishments was of any wide notoriety. But it would be a book worth writing.

James dealt with many interesting men in Mormon history. He had an early association with Sam Brannan, C.W. Wandell, and Q.S. Sparks, who were middle authority workers in the church in the eastern states. In his trek west and early Salt Lake City history, he associated with Brigham Young, and "Mormon Thunder" Jedidiah Grant. His



mission experience found him associating with the Richards brothers, men who helped to shape British Mission history. He worked with Peter Maughan, Charles Shumway and Henry Hughes, men that were a great part of Cache Valley history.

James was in the right place at the right time for events. He was rarely at the forefront of events, but he was often a participant. He was a part of: the ship Brooklyn scheme, Winter Quarters, 1847 migration, Salt Lake City's settlement, Old Salt Lake City fort, the crickets and the seagulls, the British Mission, the perpetual emigration fund, the Utah War, the settlement of Cache Valley, and the settlement of Mendon. It is an impressive list for a man who is known only for handcart fame. Many men and events that shaped his life.

One purpose of this work has been to identify the role of the handcart experience in Willie's life, and to show how the early years shaped his leadership. Before the handcart event James had received many years of experience in the church, including leadership of varied types. After the handcart experience he also received many leadership roles, but these roles diminished to those of a more quiet nature. James came out of the handcart experience basically the same, it was others' perception of him that had changed. Suddenly he was in the limelight, a position his personality was not geared for. He preferred to be behind the scenes doing the job, rather

than out front. Behind the security of a church pulpit he was outward and full of fire and brimstone, but in life he preferred to stand back and only take the lead if duty required. The mission diary shows no sign self praise or aggression in trying to steal any of the glory for himself. Even with the role of pastor, he made no effort to distinguish himself by it.

After the handcart experience he became well known, and soon was given a high position to merit that fame. But James seemed to retreat from that life and find his "Mendon," where he could settle back into a more fitting lifestyle to suit his personality. In our modern age that loves winners, stars and publicized excellence, this form of thinking seems backwards. But for the age that James lived in, for the area and stock he came from in England, this was the norm. James simply possessed qualities that propelled him into assignments of leadership.

We have James G. Willies all around us. They are the people who have lived a simple life, with maybe a few historically notable highlights. They go quietly about their duty, doing the best they can. They take pride in their name and the quality of what they do. They avoid the limelight, but would aggressively defend the ideals and beliefs they hold dear. Willie was not a perfect man, he had weaknesses and imperfections. His lack of aggression could have cost the Mormon church an outstanding Apostle. His intelligence and hardworking

traits could have made him a rich man in his Mormon communities. Willie was not a policy maker, but he found himself by accepting God's policy and ultimately becoming a building brick, solid and firm, full in his support of the kingdom's wall, but lost in anonymity except for those around him, from whom he drew strength and to whom he gave strength, making a whole that was important much more for its vision of what mankind was in the joined time and space of God's merging kingdom, than for what it represented in the way of worldly achievement. Here then, lost in the rank and file of the church, Willie actually found himself. He was a man who was quiet in his nature, yet a man who possessed great power with his abilities, a man of "Quiet Power."

Footnotes

- 1 Jensen, "James G. Willie," pp. 1, 2.
- 2 Vernal Willie, pp. 1-4.
- 3 Perry, pp. 23-25.
- 4 "James Grey Willie"

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## APPENDICES

Appendix I

The following information on the tanning trade was taken from an appendix of a book by Peter C. Welsh, entitled Tanning in the United States to 1850, A Brief History. Welsh was a curator for the Department of Civil History, Museum of History and Technology, at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

THE PROCESS OF TANNING IN 1813... Hides quickly become putrid when in a moist or wet state, but may be preserved for a great length of time by being perfectly dried, but then are hard like horn, and not fit for any useful purpose. These inconveniences are obviated by tanning, and they then take the name of leather. To tan a hide, is to saturate it with tannin, or the astringent principle of vegetables, and by that means to render it incorruptible...In order to prepare a hide for receiving the tan, it is necessary to begin by removing the hair, separating the adhering pieces of fat, &c. These preliminary operations are performed in the following manner:--

When the hides, which are to be tanned, are raw (in which state they are called green hides), they are put to steep in water, in order to clear them of the blood and filth they may have collected in the slaughter-house. They are left to soak in the water for some time, and if the hides are dry, they are steeped a longer time, sometimes for fourteen days; less in hot weather, or more in cold. They are drawn out once or twice to see if they are well softened. The neighbourhood and the command of water are necessary to these operations. Without that the hides cannot be prepared.

After the hides have been well softened they next proceed to cleanse or free them from the hair. With this intention several different

methods are employed; that which is the oldest, and still most generally followed, consists in the application of lime. In all tanneries, pits are formed underground, having their sides lined with stone or brick, in which limestone is slacked so as to form milk of lime. These pits are divided into three kinds, according to the greater or less strength of the lime. The hides intended to be scoured are first put into the weakest of these pits, wherein they are allowed to remain until the hair readily yields to the touch. If this liquor be not sufficiently active, they are removed to the next in graduation. The time they are soaked is longer or shorter in proportion to the strength of the lime, the temperature of the air, and the nature of the hides. . . . as soon as it is perceived that the hair is in a fit state to be removed, it is scraped off, on a wooden horse, by means of a crooked knife, which is not so sharp in any part of its edge as to injure the hide, or, by a whetstone. This operation is not only intended to remove the hair, but likewise the scurf and filth which collects on the skin at the root of the hair.

After removing the hair and filth, the next object is to free the hides from the adhesion of any part of the muscle, or fat, and to render them soft and pliant. Those which are intended for particular kinds of work, such as calves' skins for the upper leather of shoes, and neats' leather for shoulder belts, do not require to be raised or swelled. As soon, therefore, as they are cleansed and freed from the flesh, &c. they are laid in a pit. The hides intended for the soles of shoes, and other strong leathers, are afterwards raised by means of processes which vary in different countries. When lime is employed, the operation is commenced by putting the cleansed skins into the weakest of the lime pits, and another in the strongest. During this operation care is taken to withdraw them, and pile them up in a heap, every two or three days, putting them again into the pit after it has been well stirred. Lime hardens the skin, and in those tanneries where it is used, the hides are put into a ley of pigeons' dung in order to soften them, and this process is termed graining. They are daily withdrawn from the ley and laid up in a heap for half an hour. This operation is usually continued for ten or fifteen days. Sometimes also acid compositions are employed for raising the hides; and this

operation is greatly accelerated by using the acids warm, as well as by the method practised in this country, of removing them from a weaker liquor into a stronger, until they be properly raised or swelled.

The skin being thus prepared, is next subjected to the operation of tanning; and to this purpose vegetable astringents are employed. Those vegetables answer best which contain the greatest portion of the astringent principle, now known under the name of tannin. . . whatever kind of bark be employed, it is previously ground down to powder. The tan-pits are sometimes of a round, and at others of a square form dug out to a considerable depth in the earth, and lined with wood or masonwork; their size being in proportion to the extent of the works. The method of tanning is different in different countries.

According to calculation, from five to six pounds of tan is required to each pound of strong leather; and one hundred weight of hides yields from fifty-two to fifty-six pounds of leather. . . .

After the skin has been cleaned, it is submitted to other operations before it is immersed in the tan liquor. . . the large and thick hides which have undergone incipient putrefaction, are introduced for a short time into a strong infusion of oak bark, and after this they are acted on by water impregnated with a little sulphuric or acetic acid; in consequence of which they become harder and denser than before, and fitted after being tanned, for the purpose of forming the stouter kinds of sole leather. The lighter and thinner skins are treated in a different manner: they are macerated for some days in a ley formed from the infusion of pigeon's dung in water, which contains a little carbonate of ammonia; the skin is thus deprived of its elasticity, and becomes more soft.

The tanning liquor is prepared by infusing bruised oak bark in water; and skins are tanned by being successively immersed in such infusions, saturated in different degrees with the astringent principles of the bark. The first leys in which they are immersed are weak, but towards the completion of the process they are used as strong as possible and in preparing stout sole leather, the skins are kept in an ooze, approaching to saturation, by means of layers of oak bark.

The infusion of oak bark, especially that



obtained by the first maceration, contains principally tannin and extractive matter; the gallic acid, if present, as has been supposed, being at least in an inconsiderable proportion. In the course of the maceration of the skins in these liquors, the tannin combines gradually with the gelatin, which, in an organized form principally constitutes the skin, and forms with it a compound insoluble in water, dense and impermeable to that fluid, while it possesses at the same time a certain degree of elasticity. The extractive matter also enters into the combination; for when skin in a large quantity has exerted its full action on a small quantity of infusion, it at length abstracts the whole dissolved matter, and renders it colourless. From this extractive matter colour is derived, and the skin may perhaps be rendered more dense.

. . .  
The operation of tanning, as now described, requires a number of months, from the skins being successively and slowly introduced into infusions of different degrees of strength.<sup>1</sup>

From a work by Milton R. Hunter, on the settlement of Weber County, Utah, entitled Beneath Ben Lomond's Peak, a description of tanning techniques in early Utah is taken. These tanning processes are similar to those described in the Welsh book.

The hides, usually dry and hard when brought in, were first put in huge wooden vats in salt water. After becoming thoroughly soaked they were placed on tables and kneaded to soften them. Then they were put in a solution of water and lime to soften the hair, and later replaced on the tables where the hair was scraped or rubbed off and used in mixing plaster. The skins were scraped on both sides and again placed in fresh water before the tanning began.

Bark from oak or fir trees was ground to a pulp in a large grinder similar to the old coffee mill. The grinder was turned by a horse, after which the hides were placed in the vats in layers with the ground bark sprinkled on each layer. When all proper ingredients had been put into solution in the vats, the tanning

commenced. In the barks of various trees is found tannic acid which is soluble in water and which when combined with the water and animal skins produces a chemical change, converting the skins into leather. A man called the currier did the finishing or polishing of the leather.<sup>2</sup>

Hunter then goes on to describe the difficulties the early Utah tanneries had:

The Utah pioneers lacked the technical knowledge of properly tanning hides and they lacked some of the materials requisite in producing the best results. Therefore, the leather was of very poor grade. The settlers' boots and shoes were often porous and green in color. They stretched when wet and shrank when dry, becoming very hard. The finished boots or shoes had to be greased or oiled nearly every evening to keep them wearable.<sup>3</sup>

This is the reason for the "oil dressers" who were associated with tanning in early Utah. The oils were needed to soften and preserve the low quality leather that was manufactured.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Peter C. Welsh, Tanning in the United States to 1850 (Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution, 1964), pp. 76-83.

<sup>2</sup> Milton R. Hunter, Beneath Ben Lomond's Peak, (Salt Lake City, Ut.: Publishers Press, 1966), pp. 318, 319.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

Appendix II

The date of the marriage of James and Elizabeth Willie is in question. Because the date presented in this work is different from the date accepted by the Willie family, an explanation is included here.

The date June 13, 1846, is recorded in the genealogical family group sheet on James G. Willie. The author believes that date to be inaccurate, since James and Elizabeth were already on their way to Nauvoo to join the Saints on that date. Also, if family histories are correct, and Samuel Brannan performed the wedding ceremony, this date would be incorrect because, on June 13, 1846, Brannan had already left New York for California aboard the ship Brooklyn. James and Elizabeth must have been married when they traveled together from New York City to Nauvoo in April of 1846. They were probably married when they made plans to travel together aboard the Brooklyn. Therefore, it seems probable that the accepted date of marriage is not correct.

A date that does seem logical is June 13, 1842, the date recorded in a history on James G. Willie by Maud W. Willie and Glenna Austin.<sup>1</sup> This same date is recorded in Kate Carter's works Treasures of Pioneer History.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Carter wrote an article on the handcart experience with a brief history on James Willie. As with most of Carter's material, sources for information were

not provided.

James and Elizabeth became acquainted in the late months of 1841. James was a new immigrant, far from his home in England. Elizabeth was alone after being pushed from her family after joining the church. It would be unlikely that the couple would wait over five years to be married under these circumstances. They were both at what would seem a better age for marrying in 1842. James was twenty-seven and Elizabeth was twenty-three. Add five years to their lives for the 1846 marriage date and their ages seem a little old.

James' priesthood callings and missionary activities after June of 1842 would suggest his being married. In September of 1842, James was ordained an elder in the priesthood. This was only seven months after his baptism, and would be unusual for a single man in the church at that time.

The birth of the Willie's first child, William Pettit Willie, in Salt Lake City on July 12, 1848, does not confirm the later marriage date. The latest possible date of the marriage would have been January of 1846, while they were planning to leave on the Brooklyn and Samuel Brannan was in New York to perform the marriage, which would make it two and a half years between the marriage and William's birth. The Willie's may have had problems conceiving, as their second child was not born for another six years.

Since no original documents or primary sources can be found confirming the marriage date, one can only speculate as to how the date of June 13, 1846 came to be recorded.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Maud W. Willie and Glenna Austin, "The Life History of James G. Willie." Family History (typewritten), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Kate Carter, "Handcart Pioneers," Treasures of Pioneer History, Daughters of Utah Pioneers (January 1956), p. 250.