

Editor's Perspective

IN JUNE 2006, several hundred people gathered in Iowa City and Coralville to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Mormon Handcart Treks of 1856 and 1857. In those two years seven handcart companies outfitted and left from a camp outside Iowa City in an area now part of Coralville. Some 200–300 of those who participated in the commemorative events spent a day listening to scholarly papers treating the events in some detail. Five of the papers from that symposium are gathered in this special issue of the *Annals of Iowa*.

In the articles that follow, William G. Hartley provides an overview of the experience, setting it in the context of the overall overland trail migration from the 1840s to the late 1860s. Don H. Smith discusses the leadership, planning, and management of the 1856 handcart migration. He argues that those aspects of the plan were executed with care and skill and that the disasters that befell the last two companies of 1856 were due to factors beyond the leaders' control. Fred E. Woods, often using the voices of the emigrants themselves, narrates the experiences of those emigrants as they made their way by ship from Liverpool to the United States and then by rail to Iowa City. Lyndia Carter picks up the story from there, following three of the handcart companies—the Willie, Haven and Martin companies—across Iowa as they were tested to see if they were up to the challenge of crossing the Plains all the way to the Salt Lake Valley. Finally, Steven F. Faux carefully maps the route the handcart migrants followed across Iowa.

Editing this issue has been a rewarding experience, but, as with most issues, it has presented special challenges. A set of words used repeatedly throughout the articles requires clarification. I am grateful to author Fred Woods for a clear statement of usage of the terms *migrants*, *emigrants*, and *immigrants* and their derivatives. With his permission, I have borrowed freely from his statement to try to clarify the distinctions among those terms.

According to Webster's Dictionary of English Usage, "*Emigrate* and *immigrate* make a case in which English has two words where it could easily have made do with only one. The two words have the same essential meaning—to 'leave one country to live in another'—and differ only in emphasis or point of view: *emigrate* stressing leaving, and *immigrate* stressing entering." To further complicate matters, *emigrate* is used once the *immigrant* has arrived in the new country and begins to move to the West. In the case of Mormon immigration, sometimes foreign immigrants were joined by Mormons who gathered from America's East Coast or merged with other LDS companies at frontier outfitting posts. Such Mormons would properly be termed *emigrants*. In this issue, the authors use *immigrate/immigration/immigrant* and *emigrate/emigration/emigrant* to reflect the situation in which they are used. In addition, the more generic terms *migration* or *migrant* are sometimes used for variety.

Whether the subjects are known as migrants, emigrants, or immigrants, the authors' attention to the details of their experiences enhances our understanding and appreciation of the pioneering adventure. In the 1970s the University of Iowa and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) partnered to preserve the campsite outside Iowa City and to restore adjoining prairie. Their joint effort recognized that the handcart trek was a significant part of the heritage not only of the church but of Iowa and the nation as well. In opening remarks at the sesquicentennial symposium, Willard L. "Sandy" Boyd, who was president of the University of Iowa when the campsite preservation effort was launched, reflected, "At this campsite the cross-continental railroad once ended. Here the dense, tall, prairie grasses greeted the [Mormon] converts. . . . At this place those believers built the handcarts they pulled and pushed over more than 1,000 miles of prairies, mountains, and streams to create a new state. That arduous trek exceeds our modern comprehension. The physical and spiritual strength of those Mormon converts exemplifies the commitment and faith that builds civilization."

—Marvin Bergman, editor