

Journal of ARCHER WALTERS



*Explorations in Iowa History
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The Mormon migrations to Utah form some of the more colorful chapters of the history of the American frontier. In their search for a safe place to practice their religion, the followers of Joseph Smith moved from settlement to settlement in the Midwest. Finally in 1846 and 1847, Brigham Young led the Mormons to their new homes in the Salt Lake Valley.

Eight years later (1855), Brigham Young planned the migration of 1300 Mormon converts through Iowa. He suggested that they travel between New York City and Iowa City by rail. From Iowa City to Salt Lake City, they could travel on foot, moving their families and their goods by pulling handcars. To the leader of the Liverpool, England converts, Brigham Young wrote:

"Fifteen miles a day will bring them through in 70 days, and, after they get accustomed to it, they will travel 20, 25, or 30 with all ease, and no danger of giving out, but will continue to get stronger and stronger; the little ones and sick, if there are any, can be carried on the carts, but there will be none sick in a little time after they get started."

Archer Walters, a 47-year-old carpenter from Sheffield, England, joined the Handcart Expedition at Iowa City. His wife, Harriet, and five children (Sarah, age 18; Henry, age 16; Harriet, age 14; Martha, age 12, and Lydia, age 6), accompanied him. He joined the Mormon faith in 1848. He stated that he would give his life if he could reach "The Valley of the Mountains in the Land of Zion, with my family, that they may grow up under the influence of the Gospel of Christ."

Walters reached Salt Lake City. His journal ends on September 14, 1856. The first Handcart Expedition entered "The Valley of the Mountains" twelve days later. However, he died from dysentery caused by eating cornmeal and molasses two weeks later. His wife and five children survived the journey.

Walters kept a journal. The following are excerpts from it which describe their trip through Iowa.

Excerpts from Journal of Archer Walters From Iowa City to Missouri River

June 11, 1856 – Journeyed 7 miles. Very dusty. All tired and smothered with dust and camped in the dust or where the dust blowed. Was captain over my ten of 18 in number but they were a family of Welsh and our spirits were not united. Had a tent but Bro. Ellsworth would not let me use it and had to leave my tent poles behind.

June 12, - Journey 12 miles. Went very fast with our handcars. Harriet is still very ill....

June 15 – Got up about 4 o'clock to make a coffin for my brother John Lee's son named William Lee, aged 12 years. Meetings Sunday as usual and at the same time had to make another coffin for Sister Prator's child. Was tired with repairing handcars the last week. Went and buried them by moonlight at Bear Creek.

June 16 – Harriet very ill. Traveled 19 miles and after pitching tent mended carts.

June 17 – Traveled about 17 miles; pitched tent. Made a little coffin for Bro. Job Welling's son and mended a handcart wheel....

June 21 – Traveled about 13 miles. Camped at Indian Creek. Bro. Bowers died about 6 o'clock; from Birmingham Conference. Went to buy some wood to make the coffin but the kind farmer gave the wood and nails. It had been a very hot day and I was never more tired, but God has said as my day my strength shall be.

- June 22 – Got up at break of day and make the coffin for Bro. James Bowers by 9 o'clock and he was buried at 11 o'clock. Aged 44 years 5 months 2 days. His relatives cried very much after I lifted him in the coffin and waited to screw him down. 11 o'clock washed in the creek and felt very much refreshed. Meeting Sunday 2 o'clock until 7.
- June 24 – Traveled about 18 miles. Very hot. Bro. Ellsworth being always with a family from Birmingham named Brown and always that tent going first and walking so fast and some fainted by the way....
- June 26 – Traveled about 1 mile. Very faint from lack of food. We are only allowed about $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. of flour a head each day and about 3 oz. of sugar each week. About $\frac{1}{2}$ of a lb. of bacon each a week; which makes those that have no money very weak. Made a child's coffin for Sister Sheen – Emma Sheen aged 2-1/2 years.
- June 27 – Got up before sunrise. Cut a tomb stone on wood and bury the child before the starting from camp.
- June 28 - ...Rose soon after 4 o'clock. Started with high wind. Short of water and I was never more tired. Rested a bit after we camped then came on a thunderstorm, and rain, blowed our tent down. Split the canvas and wet our clothes and we had to lay on the wet clothes and ground....
- June 29 – Rather stiff in joints when we rose....Busy all day. My wife and Sarah mending. Short of provisions. Children crying for their dinner.
- June 30 – Rose in good health, except Harriet, and started with our handcarts with but little breakfast...but never traveled 17 miles more easily....Sleep very well after prayers in tent.
- July 1, 1856 – Rose soon. It looked very cloudy and began to rain. Traveled about 15 miles. Walked very fast, - nearly 4 miles an hour. Bro. Brown's family and some young sisters with Bro. Ellsworth always going first which causes many of the brothers to have hard feelings...my children cry with hunger and it grieves me and makes me cross. I can live upon green herbs or anything and do go nearly all day without any and am strengthened with a morsel. Repaired handcarts.
- July 3 – Ever to be remembered. Bro. Card gave me $\frac{1}{2}$ dollar for making his daughter's coffin. Start with my cart before the camp as others had done but was told not to and had to suffer for it. Went the wrong way; about 30 of the brothers and sisters, and went 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles the wrong way. We put our three handcarts together and made beds with all the clothes we had and laid down about $\frac{1}{2}$ past 10 o'clock. 11 o'clock Brother Butler who had charge of the mule teams came with the mules and wagon to fetch us. Got to camp when they were getting up. Laid down about an hour and started with the camp.
- July 5 – A deer or elk served out to camp. Brother Parker brings into camp his little boy (age 6) that had been lost (3 days). Great joy right through the camp. The mother's joy I can not describe. Expect we are going to rest. Washing, etc., today. Jordan Creek. Made a pair of sashes for the old farmer. Indian meal; no flour. Slept well.
- July 6 – Made 2 doors...3 dollars and boarded with farmer.
- July 7 – Harriet better. Lydia poorly. Traveled about 20 miles.
- July 8 – Traveled a round about road about 20 miles. Crossed the river Missouri and camped at the city of Florence. Very tired: glad to rest. Slept well. Lydia better and Harriet. All in good spirits. Expect to stop some time....