

Barnard's Boots by William G. Hartley

Fashion had always been important, until survival became more important.

How teenager Barnard White dressed mattered a great deal to his mother. Widow Mary Ann White felt that her boy should wear clothes that told the world he was a gentleman of breeding. So when Barnard tried to enlist in the British navy, to trade his tailored clothes for a sailor's uniform and his genteel life for common labor with ruffians, she agonized. Luckily Barnard proved to be a lump-on-the-head too short for military size and was rejected. He would try again, Mother White knew, when he grew another half inch. She pondered what to do to change his mind.

The Whites, new converts to Mormonism in 1854, hoped to emigrate some day from London to America. But problems with the estate after Mr. White's death slowed them down. The family could not all emigrate, Mother White decided, but Barnard could. One way to keep him out of the navy but to still give him sea adventure was to put him on a Mormon emigrant ship to New York City. So in July 1855 Barnard, dressed in a broadcloth suit and silk hat, boarded the Cynosure and "went to sea." He traveled alone, but Mormon missionaries became his shipboard companions.

One day Barnard stood on deck in his gentleman's attire when a sudden gust of wind blew loose his silk hat and spun it down into the sea. With this symbol of his breeding gone, he now looked like so many other bareheaded immigrant boys when he stepped ashore in bustling New York City.

Reaching the city in September 1855, Barnard found work in Apostle John Taylor's office, helping publish an LDS newspaper, the Mormon. He received board and room but no pay. Within weeks he saw his English suit become threadbare and too small for his growing teenage body. He needed money. "What shall I do?" he asked Elder Taylor. The Apostle thanked him for his labors, wished him well, and then gave him a special blessing. "You will find work and make more money than you ever have earned before," he promised the boy, and then added: "In life you will always succeed financially."

The promise proved true but slow. Barnard's first job was low-paying, menial, and smelly. How his mother would have pained to see Barnard, his landlady's laundry basket in hand, walk to the fish market, fill the basket, and then peddle fish throughout the city. But it was a living. Slowly, day by day, his fish turned into American coins that added up.

Just when Barnard calculated he had enough money, 60 dollars, to buy a cart and horse to expand his business, a local Mormon leader called him aside. "The Lord wants you to be a missionary," Barnard was informed. Loyally the teenager gave up his fish business to be a

fisher of men. "Priest White," as locals called the 15-year-old, filled a good mission during the six months his fish money lasted.

When his mission ended Barnard looked for work again. Not fish odors this time but pungent cow barn aromas became part of his new lot in life. He ventured into the New York countryside where farmers, he had heard, needed milkers for cows. "Can you milk?" they asked the English boy. "No," he answered honestly, thereby losing the job. One time, desperate for work, he changed his answer to "I think I can" and was hired. But when he sat on the wrong side of the cow and could get no milk from it, the supervising lady accused him of lying. "I only said I thought I could," he answered. She liked his forthrightness so taught him how to milk. He traded city-boy clothes for farm workers' apparel. Mother, he knew, would cringe to see him dressed in dumpy work clothes and rough leather work boots.

Farm hours were long and the work hard. Barnard's days started at 3:00 A.M. and ended after dark. But he earned some needed pocket money. And, more important, his body developed strength and endurance—strength he would need to avoid disaster later that year in Wyoming.

On June 20, 1856, the anchor of the Mormon charter ship Horizon had barely plopped into Boston Harbor when a small sailboat tied up next to her. Barnard, hoping to welcome his family to America, climbed aboard from the sailboat. Mother White spotted her son, started to rejoice, but gulped when she saw his clothes. Eighteen-year-old sister Elizabeth was shocked too and broke into tears: "My poor brother Barnard!" she sobbed. "What have they done to you?" No broadcloth suit. No silk hat. Common laborer's pants and shirt. Ugly work boots. However, the reunion soon showed the Whites that their teenager had become a man during his 11 months in America, and they liked his maturity.

Soon, click-clattering train cars carried the Whites and other English Saints to the Mormon Trail outfitting point in Iowa City, Iowa. Here Barnard's work clothes suited frontier life well, more so than his fastidious family's foolish fashions. That first night in Iowa gave Barnard's boots their first frontier test. According to sister Elizabeth, the Saints had to hike four miles from the train to the campground:

"We all started, about 500 of us, with our bedding. We had not gone far before it began to thunder and lightning and the rain poured. The roads became very muddy and slippery. It was late in the evening before we arrived at the camp. We all got very wet. The boys [including Barnard] got our tent up, so we were fixed for the night, although very wet."

During the days that followed, most Saints busied themselves building handcarts. But not the Whites. Barnard felt a touch of social

superiority when his mother clinked gold coins into agents' hands to pay for a sturdy wagon and team. Barnard, the man of the family, became the White's teamster and boss of four oxen, two cows, and one good wagon.

The Whites joined the John A. Hunt wagon train, a Mormon company of 50 wagons and 240 people. The train carried some baggage for the handcart companies. Like too many groups that year, they started late and gambled they could thread their way to Utah before winter storms struck. They left Iowa City on August 1 and reached Florence, Nebraska, by September 1. "The family had to walk," Elizabeth said, "except when we went through water. We would travel from 15 to 20 miles per day." Walking, they discovered, quickly wore out shoes and boots. If winter waited the Whites hoped to see Utah by early November. But winter came early that year.

Near Fort Laramie in Wyoming a buffalo herd stampeded the train's cattle. Elizabeth said that Mrs. Walters, driving the team ahead of the White's, "was knocked down and trampled by oxen. She never spoke but died in a few minutes, leaving a young baby. This affair cast a gloom over our camp. She was sewed in a blanket and buried." (Barnard later married one of the Walters girls.)

On October 19th the Hunt wagons caught up with the Martin handcart pioneers in mid-Wyoming. "Many of them were quite worn out," Barnard noted. That evening the Hunt, the Martin, and the Hodgett wagon train companies marshalled courage and crossed the frigid Platte River. Of the harrowing crossing Elizabeth recalled: "Our company camped on the east side and the handcart company passed over that night. All our able-bodied men turned out to help them carry women and children across the river. Some of our men went through the river 75 times." By then Barnard's leather boots probably had been soaked, frozen, and thawed many times.

That night many of the soaked river-crossers suffered severely from the cold. About seven inches of snow fell by morning. "Their suffering was intense that night," Barnard said of the handcart Saints. "The next morning there were 13 dead bodies in camp."

For a week the companies camped, waiting for the snow blanket to melt and icy winds to stop. The handcart people, tired and overexposed to snow and cold, sagged. "They would rather die than live," Barnard observed. "They appeared to be like a lot of worn-out cattle and had no feeling for anything except to eat and die. I cannot find language to express the sufferings of those people, and God forbid that I should ever witness such scenes again." The Hunt train shared its dwindling food with the handcart sufferers.

Snow buried plants and grasses. "Our cattle were drooping for want of food," Barnard said, "and from this time on we had to cut down trees

for them to browse upon and still they died off fast." Sometimes stinging winds blew snows off the ground, exposing precious grass for the starving cattle. Sometimes Barnard chopped crusted willows to feed the White's team. When cows died their tough meat was added to the travelers' shrinking diets. At one point, Elizabeth said, her ration of flour was reduced to one tablespoon per day! Mixed with snow water it made a very thin gruel for hungry teenagers like Elizabeth and Barnard.

The companies decided that to survive they must keep moving. They started West again. On November 1 another snowstorm mixed with rain slowed them down. One night after dark, whoops and yells awoke the Whites and terrified the shivering campers. "Indians!" someone shouted. But, once awake, the camp discovered that their noisy invaders were a relief party from Utah, sent by President Brigham Young, with wagonloads of food. New shouts of happiness muffled across the night-covered, snow-covered plains. "They were loaded with all kinds of provisions," Elizabeth said of the wagons, "flour, bread, butter, meat of all kinds, but frozen very hard. Everything was so good. The bread was like cake, so sweet and nice." They had to cut everything with hatchets to cook or eat it. "Oh, how thankful we were that the Lord had answered our prayers and saved us from starvation," she said. Baking fires burned through the night.

On November 5 the Hunt train reached the rundown log shelters at Devil's Gate and could move no further. Snow stood eight to ten inches deep—to the tops of Barnard's boots—and hemmed the travelers in. Hundreds set up camp there. The ground froze so hard Barnard could not pound tent pegs in, so he secured the tent edges with piles and chunks of heavy snow.

By then "three of our oxen and one cow had died," Elizabeth said. "We had nothing to burn, only the sage brush from under the snow." Some dilapidated cabins became firewood. Barnard, Elizabeth, and other youths tried to make the best of their dangerous situation at Devil's Gate. One night, according to Elizabeth, "when we had made the campfires, the boys had cleared the snow away and several of us young folks were sitting around the fire singing."

The rescuers, trying to outrace disaster, organized a survival push from Devil's Gate to Utah. Carefully they loaded the very ill into Utah wagons and then recruited older girls, including Elizabeth, to ride along as nurses. Reluctantly she left her mother and family, and lonesomeness plagued her for weeks. Mostly she rode, but when the wagons ascended mountains she had to walk. At the foot of Big Mountain, a day away from Salt Lake City, snows stood so deep she had to put on men's boots. Taller people walked in each other's tracks, but Elizabeth was too short: "I had to make my own road up, frequently falling down as the snow was so deep and drifted." When they reached the summit and could see Salt Lake Valley below, Elizabeth said, "the

men took off their hats and we waved our handkerchiefs." She reached the city safely on November 30, two weeks ahead of her family, and stayed with friends.

Meanwhile, back at Devil's Gate, the Utah rescuers reorganized wagon and handcart companies. Many carts and half the wagons had to be parked for the winter. "Leave your stoves, boxes, and tools here," the Whites were told; "only take along sufficient clothing and bedding to keep you warm." For four days Barnard and others unloaded wagons and stored belongings in the old log buildings. Carefully he cached his mother's china set, dated 1775, and her silver tea set. (Family records do not say if these treasures were ever recovered.) "We only saved one ox and one cow of our team," Barnard said. "We were disabled and left our wagon and all our trunks and baggage." The Whites then climbed into Brother J. H. Newman's wagon to finish the trip. Some men were "volunteered" to winter at Devil's Gate to guard the piles of baggage, but not Barnard.

Grouped into smaller wagon trains, the rescued travelers rolled slowly southwestward, farther into mountain country. Barnard lived on rations of one-fourth pound of flour per day and cattle that faltered. "We would knock them in the head and cut their throats and take the best meat," he said. (What would his cultured teenage friends in London have thought if they had seen him then?)

The White's group of wagons reached Fort Bridger in southwest Wyoming by December 4. There, Barnard said, "we were forced to camp as our teams were all dead." For three days they waited and hungered. "I shall never forget the feelings of my mother," he recalled. "She called us together and said she had never seen her dear children cry for bread before, but said the Lord would open the way and send us some provisions." That night 14 relief wagons rolled into camp. "The wagons were loaded with flour," Barnard said. "I will leave you to judge our feelings!" Baking fires roared through the night once again.

More rescue teams came and helped the wagon trains into Utah. Referring to his nightly camps Barnard said: "We would clear away the snow and pile some logs up and set them on fire. They would burn all night and helped to keep us from freezing." Ascending Big Mountain he found snow drifted 20 feet deep in places. "We had to cut channels as much as ten feet deep," he said. But what made this final part of the trip so difficult for the teenager was that "I had no shoes or boots on; my feet were in rags."

On December 13 at 4 P.M. Barnard and his family stepped from Brother Newman's wagon into the tithing yard in Salt Lake City. Barnard felt both pleased and humiliated—pleased to be safe and alive but humiliated to walk down the city's streets dressed in ragged clothes and with flannel rags wrapped around his painful feet. No doubt he recalled then the fancy broadcloth suit and silk hat he donned 18

months before when leaving England for Zion. Utahns, he noticed, "wept like children to see our pale, emaciated, and careworn bodies, for we were quite worn out and had but little strength left."

What had happened to Barnard's work boots? They had succumbed to his appetite! While trapped by Wyoming snows Barnard had cut off strips from his worn-out boots and chewed the leather to ease the sharp hunger pains in his stomach—for as his biographer points out, "who can be hungrier than a 16-year-old trying to do the work of a man?"

In Utah Elizabeth married Bishop Isaac M. Stewart and bore 11 children. Barnard served in the Echo Canyon military campaign, settled in Paradise, Utah, and married Elizabeth Ann Walters. In time he became a prominent Ogden lumberman, farmer, rancher, and enterpriser, and a bishop and patriarch. Mother White lived for many years, residing with her children.

Sources: Ruth Johnson and Glen F. Harding, Barnard White Family Book; John A. Hunt, Emigration Company Journal, 1856; Andrew Jenson, "Church Emigration, 1856," Contributor 14 (Feb. and Mar. 1893); LeRoy R. and Ann W. Hafen, Handcarts to Zion.