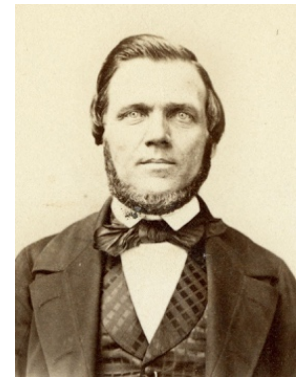


FRANKLIN D. RICHARDS

*Apostle and President of the European Mission,
returning on the trail in 1856*

Born: 2 April 1821

Age: 35



A brief biographical sketch of Franklin D. Richards is included in this collection of handcart Saints' narratives as an important summary of the role he played in emigrating converts from Europe in 1856 and previously. Many of the Saints in England had been waiting for the opportunity to emigrate since their conversion—some had been waiting as much as 18 years. The less expensive mode of travel by handcart made it possible for many more to finally put their plans in place. Some made arrangements and quit their jobs too soon. Some more recent converts lost their employment because of their new religion, and were anxious to escape the persecution and loss of income. Deposits were accepted, loans secured for many, and arrangements made for sailing ships to carry the large number of emigrants across the Atlantic Ocean in 1856.

Emigrating agents in the United States scrambled to procure provisions, handcarts, wagons, animals and teamsters as they established a new campground near the terminus of the railroad in Iowa City, Iowa. Other agents were likewise busy setting up a new outfitting camp at Florence, Nebraska Territory, 300 miles to the west. All were anxious to help the emigrants reach Utah as soon as possible.

After sending the last of the season's emigration on the sailing ship *Horizon*, and closing up the rest of the European mission business, Elder Richards and other returning missionaries boarded a steam vessel which carried them more quickly across the ocean to the United States. This small party was also able to procure horses and mules and light carriages for a faster overland travel. They caught up to the Martin handcart company, and the Hodgetts and Hunt wagon companies in Florence.

Elder Richards held several meetings during the few days they were there. The topic of discussion at these meetings was the advisability of the Martin, Hodgetts and Hunt companies continuing their journey so late in the season. On the evening of August 24, 1856, a final meeting was held in which all members of these three companies were requested to be present. Josiah Rogerson, a teenage boy in the Martin handcart company, later wrote about this meeting:

I can hear, even now, the voice of President Richards, as he stood there and reasoned with us in his fatherly and gentlemanly manner, as to the lateness of the season, as to the possibility of the storms coming on earlier than usual, that no doubt many of the infants and aged might fall by the way, and some others through disease and from the impurities of the water in the streams, fatigue and exhaustion; and that it was left for us now to decide, whether we would go on and take the risks and chances of these possible and probable fatalities; or remain there and around Florence, Council Bluffs[,] and other villages in the vicinity till an earlier date for starting the next year; that if we chose and decided to stay, we could have what provisions and supplies were in the store or warehouse there and ready for loading into our wagons for the journey; that he would purchase for us what more he could with means still in his hands, and assist us in every other way for our remaining there till next spring, and about the only encouraging words we remember as to

our not staying and going ahead were when he said that as it had been one of the largest season's emigrations that had ever been shipped from the British Isles, since he had presided at Liverpool, that it contained hundreds of the first converts to Mormonism from 1837 to 1850, and that the majority of the latter had never been able to emigrate themselves, after their eighteen years in the faith, and doubtless never would have been able, that they were thus far on their way to Zion, he would be gratified by the help and favor of god to see all reach there in safety that season. . . .

Elder John T. D. McAllister, the author of the handcart song, spoke afterward at that meeting for going on, and Cyrus H. Wheelock, General George D. Grant and others; but Brother [Chauncey Griswold] Webb urged that we should not start, but stay there for the winter. His remarks were Webb's alone. Some others spoke and then President Franklin D. Richards, arising at last, advised all to vote with their free agency and responsibility. The vote was called, and with uncovered heads and uplifted hands to heaven and an almost unanimous vote, it was decided to go on. If Webb or any others voted to the contrary I do not remember it, nor the number. Now who was responsible or to blame for the fatalities and the results of the journey—President Franklin D. Richards or the members of the companies and the missionaries? This has been in question for fifty-one years.¹

Elder Richards and his group continued quickly to Salt Lake City, arriving on Saturday, October 4, 1856. They reported to Brigham Young the surprising news that there were still over a thousand Saints in immigrant companies making their way to Utah that season.² These companies were not suffering in snow and cold weather at this time. However, Brigham knew he needed to act quickly. He began organizing resupply for these companies at a Sunday church meeting the next day. When General Conference began on Monday, October 6, an even larger call for assistance was issued.³

News of the location and suffering of the late companies was finally received in November. Brigham publicly chastised Franklin D. Richards and other returning missionaries and emigration agents for not using their authority to stop these Saints from continuing their journey across the plains that year. Brigham scolded:

If, while at the Missouri river [Florence], they had received a hint from any person on this earth, or if even a bird had chirped it in the ears of Brothers Richards and [Daniel] Spencer, they would have known better than to rush men, women, and children on to the

¹ Josiah Rogerson, "Martin's Handcart Company, 1856," *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, 27 October, 1907, 21 [No. 3]. Within three days of arriving in Salt Lake City, J.D.T. McAllister, Cyrus H. Wheelock, George D. Grant, and Chauncey G. Webb, returned on the trail to rescue the late companies. The first rescue party was led by George D. Grant. In reality, the large number of emigrants may have had a worse time if they had stayed in Florence. It was one of the most severe winters on record, and they would have had difficulty finding jobs and shelter for everyone.

² Although letters were sent to Brigham Young, the eastern mail was delayed for several months that year and Brigham did not know the Willie and Martin handcart companies, or the Hodgetts and Hunt wagon companies were coming. One example is a letter written by John A. Hunt, captain of the last emigrating company of 1856. Hunt wrote the letter on September 16, 1856, two weeks after leaving Florence, Nebraska Territory, behind the Martin handcart company. The letter was not received in Salt Lake City until March 24, 1857. (See Letter from John A. Hunt to Brigham Young, Church History Library, 1234 1_b0024_f0022, items 55-58.) Brigham Young also wrote to Erastus Snow and John Bernhisel in the states on the first of October, indicating that there had been no mail received from the east.

³ These rescue calls—public and private—continued for eight weeks, bringing the last of the season's emigrants to the valley by mid-December.

prairie in the autumn months ... to travel over a thousand miles. [If] they would have stopped and considered for one moment, they would have stopped those men, women, and children there until another year.⁴

A good summary assessment from the book *The Price We Paid* by Andrew D. Olsen, is included here for more context of Elder Richards' role in the 1856 emigration as well as his previous life experiences:⁵

Assessment of the Efforts of President Franklin D. Richards

Franklin D. Richards had been a key figure in the handcart emigration of 1856. Though not involved in the day-to-day details of the journey, he had been the primary promoter of the plan and had overseen its implementation. When the first three companies arrived safely in Salt Lake City, his efforts seemed successful beyond expectation. When tragedy struck the next two companies, those same efforts were criticized.

Before judging Franklin D. Richards too harshly for his role in the Willie and Martin tragedies, it is important to understand the context of his words and actions. Why was he so sure about the plan that he perhaps overreached in promoting it and making promises about it? One reason was that the plan had come from Brigham Young, the prophet of God, and Franklin D. Richards was a man who did all he could to support the prophet. Another possible explanation for President Richards's boldness about the handcart plan was that Brigham Young had been similarly bold. The words of President Richards almost always take their cue from those of Brigham Young—with very little embellishment.

In promoting the plan, Brigham Young had said that people who pulled handcarts could out-travel any ox-drawn wagon train. He had said that pulling handcarts would make people stronger, not weaker. He had also said that pulling handcarts would cause less distress, anguish, and death than traveling by wagon.⁽¹³⁾ In making promises about traveling by handcart, Brigham Young had written in a general epistle, "Let them gird up their loins and walk through, and nothing shall hinder or stay them."⁽¹⁴⁾ With these words from Brigham Young, it is easy to see why Franklin D. Richards could feel justified in expressing similar confidence about the handcart plan—and perhaps even feel a mandate to do so.

It might seem easy for President Richards to promote pulling handcarts while writing editorials from his office in Liverpool, knowing he wouldn't be pulling a handcart himself. It also might seem easy for President Richards to ride up to the handcart companies on the trail in Nebraska and promise them safe passage when he would speed comfortably ahead of them the next day in his carriage. Was this a case of a leader enjoying comfort and privilege that put him out of touch with the experience of the common people? Given his life to that point, probably not. President Richards was no stranger to sacrifice and suffering.

⁴ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 4:68.

⁵ Andrew D. Olsen, *The Price We Paid: The Extraordinary Story of the Willie & Martin Handcart Pioneers*, Deseret Book, 2006. Endnotes from this quoted section of Olsen's book are included here as numbered in the book.

During his first 9 years as a member of the Church, Franklin D. Richards served five missions in the United States. Over the next 10 years he served three missions in England and was away from his family for more than 7 of those years. Of the first 14 years of his marriage, he spent 10 years away on missions. During those missions he often "laboured under great bodily debility and weakness."(15) Indeed, he was familiar with sacrifice.

Franklin D. Richards was also familiar with suffering. His mission calls took him away from his family for long periods at the most inopportune times. He left on his first mission to England during the exodus from Nauvoo, when his wife was several months pregnant and his little daughter, Wealthy, was in precarious health. His first night in Liverpool, he wrote, "How comfortable I could be if I knew that my dear Jane and the family were well and happy."(16) Soon afterward he wrote, "I have felt very solicitous about my family yesterday and today. I wonder if they are sheltered from the still more piercing winds of the cold, bleak prairies. O Lord, my Heavenly Father, I entreat thee, do not leave them to suffer."(17)

That Franklin D. Richards was sacrificing so much to serve the Lord did not provide any guarantees that all would be well at home. He would soon find out that near Mount Pisgah, Iowa, his wife had given birth to a son who died almost immediately. He would also learn that three-year-old Wealthy died a few weeks later at Winter Quarters, leaving Jane childless and despondent. Then he would learn of the death of his 17-year-old brother, Joseph, who had been mustered into the Mormon Battalion. The depth of both his grief and his faith are revealed in the following writings from that time:

"Am I such a sinner that the Lord should take from me my two children, or cause me or my family to be afflicted as we have been during our absence from each other? . . . Father, I own thy dealings just; thy blessings have been more than [I deserve]; and do I not know that thy goodness never fails? I have feared that I should feel thy hand against me. But now I trust that in this also thou wilt reveal thy hidden stores of goodness and blessings, to counterpoise the deep sorrow of separation from my dear companions and tender babes."(18)

In 1848, Franklin D. Richards concluded his first mission in England and started for America, where he no longer had a home. He found Jane waiting for him at Winter Quarters, and together they made the trek to the Salt Lake Valley. They arrived in October and lived in their wagon that winter.

A few months later, in February 1849, Franklin D. Richards was called to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He was 26 years old. In June 1849, Jane gave birth to another son. Then in October, after only a year back home, Elder Richards was called to serve another mission to England. Again his heart ached as he left Jane alone to face the rigors of pioneer life with a little child, living in a one-room adobe hut with a canvas roof and earthen floor. During his second mission to England, he succeeded Orson Pratt as mission president. He returned home in 1852 and then returned to England as mission president from 1854 to 1856. He later served a fourth and final mission to England from 1866 to 1868.

In addition to showing that Franklin D. Richards knew sacrifice and suffering, these accounts of his missionary service show that he was a person who responded to the prophet's words with his

whole heart, regardless of difficulty or inconvenience. This characteristic provides insight into why he gave Brigham Young's handcart plan not only his support but his passion.

A biography of Franklin D. Richards, written by a grandson 25 years after Elder Richards's death, includes only one paragraph on the handcart experience and does not mention his personal involvement with it.⁽¹⁹⁾ This omission may seem to distance President Richards from the tragedy, but he did not try to insulate himself from the sorrow and suffering that so many experienced. When the Martin company arrived in the Salt Lake Valley at the end of November, President Richards took the family of John Jaques into his own home, helped comfort them after their two-year-old daughter had died during the last week of the journey, and nurtured them back to health.⁽²⁰⁾

Franklin D. Richards's service as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve spanned 50 years. In 1898 he became President of the Quorum, a position he held until his death in 1899. During his lifetime, he oversaw the emigration of more than 30,000 converts.

13. *Millennial Star*, 26 Jan. 1856, 54.

14. *Ibid.*; see also 20 Oct. 1855, 666–67.

15. Orson Pratt, *Millennial Star*, 9 Aug. 1856, 505.

16. West, *Life of Franklin D. Richards*, 102.

17. *Ibid.*, 70.

18. *Ibid.*, 71–72.

19. *Ibid.*, 133–34.

20. See *Life History and Writings of John Jaques*, comp. Stella Jaques Bell (Rexburg, Idaho: Ricks College Press, 1978), 172.

(This biographical sketch of Franklin D. Richards was written and compiled by Jolene S. Allphin for the *Tell My Story, Too* collection, March 17, 2020.)