

JOHN HENRY LATEY

Born: January 22, 1835 in England

Age: 21

Hodgett Wagon Company



John Henry Latey, emigration agent at Florence, Nebraska Territory, joined with the Hodgett wagon company when it came through Florence in late August 1856. He traveled with them as far as Devil's Gate, where he stayed for the winter to guard the pioneers' goods left there.

While John was at Florence he wrote a letter to Elder John Taylor in New York, reporting on the companies as they came through. On August 14, 1856, John Latey wrote:

... The first and second companies of emigrants by hand carts, under the care of Captains Edmund Ellsworth and Daniel D. McArthur, ... arrived in Camp on the 17th of July, in fine health and spirits, (singing, as they came along, Elder J.D.T. McAllister's noted handcart song – 'Some must push and some must pull,' &c.) One would not think that they had come from Iowa City, a long and rough journey of from 275 to 300 miles, except by their dust-stained garments and sunburned faces. My heart is gladdened as I write this, for methinks I see their merry countenances and buoyant step, and the strains of the hand cart song seems ringing in my ears like sweet music heard at eventide or in a dream.

The first company had among its number the Birmingham Band, and though but young performers, they played really very well – far superior to anything to be found this far west. In giving you this description of the feelings of the first companies, I give you in effect the feelings of the whole. This is the bright side of the pictures, and is of those who may really be called Latter Day Saints; who have in continual remembrance the covenants they have made; who obey counsel, and may really be called Saints of the Most High God. There are others – for I have seen both sides of the picture – who are apt to forget the God who has delivered them from their gentile chains and taskmasters, and are allured by fine promises and high wages; others there are whose faith is not of that nature to stand the trials they are called upon to undergo, and back out from five to fifty in a company of 300; but the mirth of the one kind does not interfere with the gloom of the other; or, vice versa, each one does what suits him best. Those weak in the faith soon find those who will make them weaker; those who have backed out before them come up with their long faces, smooth words, and melancholy tone, prating away their words of comfort ... and if they will only go away with them there is no end of the money and comfort they are going to have, and a team, ONLY NEXT SPRING, to ride in and go to the Valley. I will say that these apostates, who give their time, and horses, and wagons, to pick up the wavering, are right zealous, and I thought if they were only as zealous in assisting the widow and the orphan, instead of those who are already cared for, they would be driving a good team; but it is all right, the sort that are led away from the line of their duty by such spurious promises and oily tongues – well never mind that – are not wanted in the Valley, and by staying here they save themselves two journeys – one to Utah and one back.

I am prolonging my letter longer than I had any idea of, and will shorten it as much as possible by just giving you dates of arrival and departure of companies, and as I have before said the companies are much alike; they do not need separate descriptions. The first hand cart company (Capt. Ellsworth's) left the ground on Thursday, July 16th [I] saw them off in good earnest to the tune of 'Some must push,' &c., (can't move without that.) The second company (Capt. D. D. McArthur's) started on July 24th, being the anniversary of the entry of the Pioneers into the Valley, and was rendered more memorable to that company from their exodus from winter quarters. The third company, under care of Capt. Edward Bunker, were nearly all Welshmen; they arrived on the 19th of July, and set out on their journey across the plains on the 30th. The fourth company, Capt. J.G. Willie, President ... moved on the ground on the 11th August; part of the company moves out a mile or two to-day, and the remainder go on on Monday. 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.

Another company – perhaps of handcarts [Martin company] – have yet to arrive from Iowa City, in addition to the wagon companies [Hodgett and Hunt]. I will, if I have time and opportunity, give you an account of these companies. I will now conclude by wishing you every good thing, and that you may be preserved in health and strength is the prayer of

Yours truly,
J.H. Latey

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John traveled with his brother, Henry Lash Latey (17), with the Hodgett wagon company. Another brother, William (20), was with the Hunt wagon company. Because these three brothers were somewhat separated, it is likely that they were serving as teamsters for these wagon companies. Their parents are not listed as traveling to Utah at this time, but did emigrate at some time. Their father died in 1882 in Omaha, Nebraska, and their mother died in 1908 in Salt Lake City. The Hodgett and Hunt companies traveled closely with the Martin handcart company, assisting them at all times when they were able and hauling freight for them.

John Bond, a twelve-year-old boy who was with his parents and six brothers and sisters in the Hodgett company, wrote a narrative of his and others' experiences in this company. From this narrative, we learn of the service and sacrifice of John Latey:

The road was fair, though rolling . . . the wind blowing badly, very cold indeed and had every appearance of a snow storm coming which would entail on the tireless, struggling hand cart Saints . . . In the early morn, the Captain [called] to get up and yoke the cattle for a drive to the last crossing of the North Platte River, a distance of some twenty-seven miles. This took two days driving, as the cattle were commencing to get weak and in some cases, lying down by the wayside. October 18 or 19 we arrived at the river the second day and camped for noon on the west side. I was detailed to herd the oxen while my sisters made the food ready. It started raining while I was herding and then the rain turned to sleet, growing steadily colder just as the courageous hand cart Saints arrived on the opposite side of the river. Daniel Tyler gave orders for the Saints of all ages who could stand the stream, to cross. The water was waist deep and running very swiftly, taking even the strong ones off their feet, making them look quite wretched . . . the air was piercing cold and the sleet still fell thick and fast as the Saints pulled the carts into the river. The weaker ones [fell] into the river as they [were] carried off their feet. But with manly courage, John Laty, T. J. Franklin, George H. Dove, George Haines [Ainge] and others [carried] the weak ones to the opposite side of the river and set them down, giving them every care as all were brought from the icy river.

They made several trips, carrying the aged and weak on their backs, exhausting themselves, which is a kind heartedness worthy of commendation to be handed down to future generations. We camped on the opposite bank of the river for a short time to eat the scanty meal. Their clothing was like icicles.

John and his brother, William, became "worthy of commendation" again as they accepted the call to remain at Devil's Gate for the winter to guard the pioneers' things left behind. This was necessary so that those unable to walk could ride in the wagons, and utmost speed could be made in getting the people to the Valley. Many could no longer walk, and the wagons were needed to carry them. (See Dan Jones' story in *Tell My Story, Too* for an account of what the Latey brothers experienced at Devil's Gate that winter.) John H. Latey was appointed the clerk of the company of men that were left behind.

John married Eleanor Jane Thompson in March of 1862. Eleanor was also a pioneer girl, having been born in Nauvoo in 1842. They became the parents of seven children.

Sources: *Handcarts West in '56*, by John Bond; Latey, J.H. "Correspondence from the Camp at Florence," *The Mormon*, 30 Aug. 1856, 2, Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; familysearch.org.