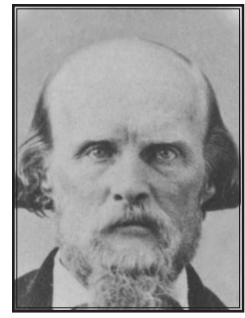


## LEVI SAVAGE



Born: 1820 Ohio, America

Age: 36

Willie Handcart Company

Beginning with his mission in 1852, Levi Savage kept a daily diary. It survives in the archives at Brigham Young University as the only extant primary source document for Willie company history by a member of that company. Levi Savage is typically recognized in Willie handcart history for speaking his mind in a meeting at Florence, Nebraska, on August 13, 1856. Levi recorded in his diary similar instances during his life where he spoke his mind honestly. Yet once he made his opinions known, he was willing to humbly follow the counsel of his leaders and publicly repent if it seemed to be needed. (Referring to a disagreement prior to this August 13 meeting, Levi wrote, “I asked Bro Willeys and the Saints forgiveness, for all that I had said and done wrong.”) From his efforts with the Mormon Battalion in 1846-47, to his missionary activities in Burma from 1852-56, to his faithful service in the Willie handcart company and to the end of his life, Levi Savage Jr. was known for faithfulness in serving others.

Levi Savage was the second of fifteen children, born just two weeks after the family’s comfortable home and fine furnishings burned to the ground. The family rebuilt, and eventually moved to Michigan where Mormon missionaries from Nauvoo visited the family. The family embraced the gospel, and after the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, “decided to seek a home in the then unknown western wilds of the Rocky Mountains.” In his autobiography, Levi wrote:

“My father and mother, being members of the church, decided to share the weals and woes of the exiled saints. ... So we prepared as well as we could for a long journey into a strange and to us wholly unknown country. ... We bid adieu to the old homestead in Van Buren County, Michigan, and directed our course westward, not knowing the place of destination, only we expected to locate somewhere in the western wilds of the Rocky Mountains. ... At Council Bluffs, Missouri River, we met Colonel Allen, a United States Officer, offering to enlist 500 men from the Mormon immigrants in the United States Army against Mexico. Notwithstanding our government allowed us, the Mormons, to be mobbed from our homes; our leaders, Brigham Young and the council advised the enlistment, or at least approved of it, and the battalion of 500 was raised. I ... was one of the ones to enlist for one year. ... We marched on foot 200 miles down the River Missouri to Fort Leavenworth; thence, to Santa Jose 1100 miles, then to San Diego some 1400 miles, thence 300 miles to Los Angeles, lower California. Our year enlistment was expired and here we were discharged and started for home. But we knew nothing of the whereabouts of our home or friends.”

Levi arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on October 16, 1847. His mother had died on the westward trek, but his father and younger brother, Mathew, had arrived about three weeks before Levi. Jane Mathers had worked as a cook for Levi’s father on this trek. “I had formed some acquaintance with this Miss Jane Mathers while traveling from the vicinity of Nauvoo to Council Bluff. We renewed our acquaintance and on the 23rd day of January 1848, I married her. ... On the 11th of January 1851 she gave birth to my first child, a son. ... On the 29th day of December 1851 his mother died, and on the last day of the year she was buried.”

At the October conference of the Church in 1852, Levi was called on a mission to Siam. “I was called with Elders Ludington, Bly, Dewey and Chancey West. ... I left my little boy ... with my sister Hannah, the wife of Ira Eldrege.”

Aboard the ship *Monsoon*, which departed from San Francisco, Levi recorded his feelings: “Our gallant ship, propelled by a gentle breeze, steered her course across the boisterous deep for our places of destination; leaving behind us our much loved native land. The shores now rose with gentle hills behind us. ... This view brought fresh to our minds past scenes, both pleasant and unpleasant which caused deep, sensitive feelings and varied reflections in the minds and breasts of every Elder on board. But the shades of night soon hid from our natural view the pleasant landscape of our native country and each sought his own place for meditation, and there reflected upon the comforts of his home, the affections of his beloved wife and children or friends, and the happy communion of the Saints in Zion; all of which blessings he so recently enjoyed. But now he was called to take up his abode in the remote parts of the earth, and for what? For the sake of heaping up gold and silver, or to secure for himself the honors, pomp and splendor of this world? No, verily no! But in obedience to the commands of the Lord to carry the message of truth and proclaim salvation to the benighted and superstitious nations.” [Lightly edited for readability]

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Due to war and other problems, Levi never made it to Siam. He arrived in Burma in August, where he and his companions stayed with Brother McCune, the only member of the Church in the area. Levi wrote: "I found a Burmese boy that could talk some English. I made an engagement to teach me Burmese and I would teach him English. He is 13 years old and can read and write well." Levi's diary shows that he continued to serve with great dedication in Burma as well as in Calcutta, India. He wrote in a matter-of-fact manner about visiting the natives in these countries and eating the fish and rice prepared by them in their "filthy manner." The many unsanitary and primitive conditions, however, did not keep Levi from praying for these "friends" and loving them as he attempted to teach them the gospel. Neither did it muffle Levi's sense of humor. He recorded: "September 25, 1854, Monday, Karane Village. This morning when I awoke I could only find a part of myself for during the night the mosquitos had carried away a large portion by piecemeals."

Levi arranged for a translation of the Pearl of Great Price, which at that time included Joseph Smith's account of The First Vision, into the Burmese language. He also organized a school where he taught English. He did have some baptisms, but mostly despaired of any successful feelings. He struggled with the traditions and superstitions of Buddhism which taught that "the height of happiness ... is annihilation of both soul and body." Some acknowledged Levi's teachings as "good" but refused to believe that God was not dead or that He gave revelations. Levi wrote on April 23, 1855: "My faith in regard to their receiving the gospel has become much shaken and my hopes nearly blasted. When I think upon the untiring exertions and the long continued efforts to introduce the gospel among them and without the least success or prospects of success, it is truly discouraging."

Levi began his return journey in October of 1855 aboard the ship *Herbert*. After a rather unpleasant voyage, he arrived in Boston in February 1856. He recorded: "The wind had increased into a perfect gale and the sea was foaming mad and running mountains high in the most irregular form imagineable. When the sea broke upon the ship it would shake and tremble with great violence from stem to stern. As she rode over them, she was lifted high into the air and would drop with great force as if she would go to the bottom. She took great quantities of water in over her bow, over her stern and over both sides, which was dashed from one side to the other with great violence. ... There was scarcely a dry place there to be found. As she rolled from her beam ends on one side to her beam ends on the other, trunks, boxes and lamp from the bunk, which had heretofore remained perfectly secure, were now hurled from their places and thrown across the cabin with great force. The ship screamed and cracked as if she was breaking in pieces. Some of her bulkhead was carried away and a small leak was started in her stern, but that was soon stopped. All on board now carried long faces, I assure you.

"I went into my room and offered up my prayer ... but whether we would sink or swim was uncertain to me. ... Sleep was utterly out of the question for the cracking and crashing noises that the seas made as they broke upon and beat against our ship, her violent tremblings and the heaving and springing of her decks as they struck her in the stern, gave us to fully understand that she could not endure such knocks long. Her continual rolling ... raised [her stern] so high in the air that she stood nearly erect in end [and] made [it] utterly impossible for a man to either lay, sit or stand without bracing against or holding on to something. ... I certainly thank the Lord for landing me safely on my native shores again."

Levi worked and preached in America until June when the *Thornton* arrived with about 500 Saints of the James G. Willie company. Levi assisted Captain Willie in leading this group from New York to Iowa City. Levi was then asked to continue with the handcart company to Utah. On July 11, 1856, Levi recorded his response to this request: "Today, agreeable to council, I reported myself to Brother Daniel Spencer, the agent for forwarding the Saints. He requires my assistance, and I commenced." Levi served as a sub-captain over a group of 100.

The company left Iowa City and traveled about 300 miles on the first leg of their journey. When the company reached Florence, Nebraska Territory, there was a meeting held to discuss the viability of continuing the last 1,000 miles of their journey. Levi recorded his feelings of concern:

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“Camp of the Saints, Florence Nebraska Territory Tuesday 12 Aug 1856 Today we commenced preparing for our jour[ney] and ascertaining who wishes to go on this fall and who wishes to remain here. Many are a going to stop. Others are faltering, and I myself am not in favor of, but much opposed to taking women & children through, destitute of clothing, when we all know that we are bound to be caught in the snow, and severe cold weather, long before we reach the valley. I have expressed my feelings, in part, to Brother McGaw; Willey; & Atwood. Brother Atwood said to me last night that since he had been a member of this Church, with all of his experience, he had never been placed in a position where things appear so dark to him, as it does to undertake to take this company through at this late season of the year.”

“Florence Nebraska T<sup>u</sup> Wednesday 13th Aug 1856 Today we continued preparations for starting. Evening we held meeting in camp. Brother Willey exhorted the Saints to go forward regardless of suffering even to death. After he had spoken, he gave me the opportunity of speaking. I said to him that if I spoke I must speak my mind, let it cut where it would. He said certainly do so. I then related to the Saints the hardships that we should have to endure. I said that we were liable to have to wade in snow up to our knees and shovel at night, wrap ourselves in a thin blanket, and lie on the frozen ground without a bed; that it was not like having a wagon, that we could go into, and wrap ourselves in as much as we liked and lie down. No, said I, we are without wagons, destitute of clothing, and could not carry it if we had it. We must go as we are, &tc. The handcart system, I do not condemn. I think it preferable to unbroken oxen and inexperienced teamsters. The lateness of the season was my only objection of leaving this point for the mountains at this time. I spoke warmly upon the subject, but spoke truth, and the people, judging from appearance and after expressions, felt the force of it (but yet, the most of them, determined to go forward if the authorities say go.) Elder Willey then spoke again in reply to what I had said, evidently dissatisfied, and said that the God that he served was a God that was able to save to the uttermost, that was the God that He served; and he wanted no Job’s comforters with him &tc. I then said that what I had said, was truth; and if Elder Willey does not want me to act in the place where I am, he is at full liberty to place another man in my stead, and I would not think hard of him for it; but I did not care what he said about Jobes comforters. I had spoken nothing but the truth, and he and others knew it. Elder Atwood then spoke mildly, and to the purpose. Said that he had been edified in what had been said, &tc. He exhorted the Saints to pray to God and get a revelation, and know for themselves whether [they] should go or stay, &tc. For it was their privilege to know for themselves. The meeting dismissed, all manifesting a good feeling and spirit.” [Lightly edited for readability. Underlined emphasis by Savage.]

Brother Atwood’s mild speaking apparently calmed many of those present at this meeting, although about 100 Saints decided not to continue to Utah that year. The Willie Company was left with about 400 members. Levi Savage remained committed to help them get through. George Cunningham, age 15, wrote: “I remember being at a meeting when Brother Levi Savage, a returning missionary, arose and spoke. He counseled the old, weak, and sickly to stop until another spring. The tears commenced to flow down his cheeks and he prophesied that if such undertook the journey at that late season of the year, their bones would strew the way. At length we started, but the number was greatly reduced, about a hundred remaining [in Florence].”

Emma James, age 18, wrote: “Brother Savage, with tears streaming down his cheeks, he pleaded with the people. ‘Brothers and sisters, wait until spring to make this journey. Some of the strong may get through in case of bad weather, but the bones of the weak and old will strew the way.’ I can remember that when he finished there was a long time of silence. I was frightened. Father looked pale and sick. I turned to mother to see what she was thinking, and all I saw was her old determined look. She was ready to go on tomorrow. There were many others like her. We really didn’t have much choice. There was no work here for us to keep ourselves through the winter, and our family had to live. ‘We must put our trust in the Lord as we have always done,’ said mother, and that was that.”

One poignant recollection of Levi’s service was written by Amasa Linford about the day his father died. The stranded Willie company had been entirely without food for 2 days. Before dawn on October 21, 1856, Levi Savage mixed his own few ounces of flour rations he had saved and fed it to John Linford. Amasa wrote: “While father was sick and just before he died ... Levi Savage emptied his flour sack to make him some skilly as it was called; after eating this he died.”

Other members of the company also recorded Levi’s continuing service:

“Our captains set the example. They would crowd ahead and be the first in the streams to help others across and they were the last out. They waded every stream, I might say, a dozen times between Iowa City and Green River, with the exception of the Missouri River. Their feet were worn and bleeding, they became exhausted and had to be

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hauled the balance of the way, some of them not being able to stand. Among these heroic leaders were: James Willie, our captain; Milan [Millen] Atwood, Levi Savage, William Woodard [Woodward] and another Danish brother whose name I have forgotten.” [Johan Ahmanson or Neils L. Christiansen] (George Cunningham, age 15)

“Levi Savage ... was I think the best help we had—resolute & determined his whole soul was for the salvation of our company.” (William Woodward, returning missionary and subcaptain)

On the 9th of November, 1856, after being away for four years, Levi had a happy reunion with his son. He was deeply grateful to his brother-in-law and sister for caring for him so well. Levi married Ann Brummel Cooper in 1858. She had also been in the Willie handcart company. He spent the majority of his life in Toquerville, Utah, where he died December 13, 1910.

Sources: “Diary of Levi Savage,” original diary at L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU; *Journey to Zion: Voices From the Mormon Trail*, by Carol Cornwall Madsen, 1997; “They Required My Assistance,” artwork by Julie Rogers, art description at tellmystorytoo.com by Jolene Allphin; *More Than Miracles*, by T.C. Christiansen and Jolene Allphin, Deseret Book, 2012; “Autobiography of Levi Savage,” in *Levi Savage Jr. Journal*, compiled by Lynn M. Hilton, 1996, pgs. xi-xiii; letter from William Woodward to Joseph F. Smith, Utah State Historical Society, Cache Valley Chapter; Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; “Autobiography of George Cunningham,” March 29, 1876; “John Chislett and the Chislett Narrative,” by Jolene S. Allphin, unpublished research paper, April 2012. See *Follow Me To Zion* by Andrew Olsen and Jolene Allphin, *Deseret Book*, 2013, for artwork and more Levi Savage stories and history. Levi Savage is the main character in T.C. Christiansen’s movie *17 Miracles*.

For ready reference, Levi Savage’s diary entries for October 23/24, 1856, are included here.

Thursday <morning> Oct 23<sup>d</sup> we beried our dead, got up our teams, and about [4 or 9] oclock A.M. commenced ascending the Rocky Ridg. This was a severe day. The wind blew awful hard, and colde, The ascent was some five miles long, and some places, steep and covered with deep snow, We became wery, set down to rest, and some became chilled, and commenced to frieze, Brothers Atwood; Wooderd; and myself; remained with the teams, they being perfectly loaded down with the sick, and children, so thickly stoeed, I was fearful, some would smuther. About 10 or 11 oclock in the night, we came to a creek that, we did not like to attempt to cross without help, the being ful of ice and freezing colde. Leaving Bros. Atwood and Wooderd with the teams, I started to the camp for help; I met Bro Willey coming to look for us, he turned for the camp as he could do nogood a loan. I passed several on the road, and arived in camp after about four miles travel, I arrived in Camp; but few tents were pitched, and men, women, and children sit shivering with colde around their small fires, Some time alapsed when two teams started to bring up the rear; Just before daylight they returned, bringing all with them, some badly frozen; some dying, and some dead, It was certainly heartrending to hear children crying for mothers, and mothers, crying for children. By the time I got them, as comfortably situated as circumstances would admit- (which was not very comfortable) day was dawning. I had not shut my eyes for sleep, nor lain down, I was nearly exhosted with fatiguae, and want of rest.

Friday 24<sup>th</sup>; This morning found us with thirteen corps for berral. These were all put into one grave, Some had actually frozen to death, We were <obliged> to remain in camp, move the tents and people behinde the willows to shelter them from the screaching wind, which blew enough to pearce us through. Several of our cattle died here.



*They Required My Assistance*  
by Julie Rogers  
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