

PETER MADSEN

Born: 1794 Denmark (Died in Echo Canyon)

Age: 62

Willie Handcart Company

Peter Madsen was one of the group of Danish Saints who emigrated with the group under the Presidency of James G. Willie. Peter was married to Emmerenze or Emmelen Hermana Abel of Modum, Norway. She died in 1853. They were the parents of at least two children, Petrea and Christian August. Petrea emigrated with her father. Christian came two years later. Christian's wife died along the way. Christian remarried and had at least one son. Christian helped establish the sugar industry in Gunnison and he was Bishop of the Gunnison Ward for 26 years. He was released from this position only four years before he died at the age of 85.

About 1852, Peter Madsen joined the Church. The missionaries had come to Denmark just two years before. This new religion wrought great changes in him, as evidenced by the remarks of his son: "I gave careful attention to his appearance and behavior. The look in his eye was clear and more definite than before. There was a great and attractive change in the expression on his face. Over it rested a calm, satisfied, and happy smile which was very fascinating. This excited in me a thirst to know the cause of the transformation."

Peter and Petrea (age 36) joined 162 Danish Saints bound for their land of promise in 1856. Peter was appointed clerk of this group and wrote an official record as part of his duties. The Madsens became part of the Willie handcart company in Iowa City. At age 62, although accustomed to the heavy labor of a farmer, Peter could not stand up against the deprivations of hunger, cold, and fatigue associated with the experiences of this company. Petrea buried her father in Echo Canyon, with only a few days' journey left to reach their destination in Zion.

Following are a few interesting excerpts from Peter Madsen's diary (Don Smith translation), while on this journey:

"Saturday, April 26, 1856. Weather: unstable. The brethren were called to council at 10 o'clock by President Ahmanson [returning missionary and translator for Danish Saints] who made it known to the brethren that 40 rigsdaler were needed for running expenses. This came in by freewill offering. ... Thereafter the president invited those who were in need of help to make it known. Peder Jensen from Blangs arose and made it known that he was in need of provisions for four persons. Jens Sandberg likewise needed provisions for one person. They were without money and needed provisions on the trip to England. It was proposed and unanimously approved to provide. ... Peter Mortensen offered to feed Sandberg on the trip to England. Teachings and encouragement were given the company ... and the council meeting was closed with prayer.

"Saturday, May 3, 1856. Weather: beautiful. ... President Franklin D. Richards came on board with the brethren of the presidency [and] spoke to the company. ... [He] wished us well and asked the blessings of the Lord to follow us. This was answered with repeated cheers by the company who was happy and thankful for the consideration that was shown us. ... Elder Willie [was] appointed as the president for the whole group during the complete trip to the valley.

"Elder Ahmanson was chosen as his counselor, assistant, and president of the Scandinavian division of the company to whom he gave several instructions and recommended cleanliness and order. ... some tinware was purchased and the payment advanced in behalf of those who couldn't pay. ...

"Wednesday, May 21, 1856. Weather: unstable. ... During the night a fire broke out and burned between the decks, but the Lord preserved us so that the fire did not overpower us. An English boy who had stowed away on the ship was discovered. He had accompanied us without permission and ticket. For this action he would have been punished and caused to bear a wooden jacket or barrel; but since he was a member of the Church he was forgiven. The two pounds which Captain Collins required for his passage were collected by free-will offering. The Danish Saints gave three dollars. 5 o'clock the president held council and instructed the brothers who had watch at night to have

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close supervision over the young people that no unallowable association and coming together would take place. It was discovered that such had taken place among the English; and an unclean spirit was found which should be rectified. On the other hand such lewdness was not found at all among the Danish saints. 10 o'clock Captain Collins commanded the whole company to go on deck a few hours while the rooms were cleansed and aired. This was a necessity which must take place in order to prevent sickness, such as cholera or other pestly diseases, that could be dangerous to the company. He will therefore be very strict with those who will not obey when they are able. ...

"Wednesday, June 11, 1856. Weather: beautiful. ... Many sea horses appeared over the water. This morning our belongings were put in order and labels were pasted on all trunks and bags with the address: To Iowa City and the owner's name. ... President Willie presented Captain Collins with a testimonial that he had authored ... which expressed the thankful feelings of himself and the whole company who were grateful to him for his human acts of good will, obligingness, and care for their well being. For this the saints asked the blessings of heaven upon him and his family and those who had taken part in the guidance of the ship. This found universal approval and was applauded with three cheers. Captain Collins replied with much feeling. He presented a testament to Willie in which he expressed his feelings and gave the testimony that the saints' journey had been particularly satisfying to him. It delighted him to see the obedience which the people showed their leaders. No company which he had transported to America could compare with them. He expressed good wishes. ... This was unanimously accepted by the company with three cheers. ... Everyone was happy.

"Saturday, June 14, 1856. Weather: unstable. 8 o'clock there came an American steamship [tug] of unique appearance with machinery on deck. It took the ship Thornton in tow which with its great power gave us good speed. This brought a great stir among the members of the company who for the most part were on deck in order that they might view the land which the Lord has promised us. Here we shall obtain the gifts and exaltation which are promised us if we continue to be faithful and obey the laws of heaven.

"Sunday, June 22, 1856. Weather: beautiful; very warm. ... We arrived in Chicago at 6 o'clock and were placed on a flat, grassy area until evening. As quarters for the night we were assigned a railway warehouse. ... The people in this city are not good. They tried to disturb us.

"Monday, June 30, 1856. Weather: beautiful. . . . Talks by [leaders] against grumbling, dissatisfaction, and complaining which have crept in among the company by some individuals who have not yet learned their duty and obedience to God's law and his servants. [Several of the brethren, including Danish brethren, were called from Iowa City on missions to St. Louis to purchase cattle to drive to the Valley.]

"Friday, July 4, 1856. Weather: beautiful. ... The freedom which one has here is not known in Denmark. Several hundred [acres] of land, exceptionally good ground, is like our own property. Upon it our oxen and mules graze. In the woods we obtain the needed fuel supply. ... The company had shooting practice and gatherings in order to celebrate the day upon which the North American people won their freedom and a constitution.

"Saturday, July 5, 1856. ... Some of the brethren went to Iowa City with transport handcarts loaded with bedding and other items for sale. Some went through the city and sold miscellaneous items for a low price. [At an auction place] the bedding was sold at 27 to 55 cents per pound. Linen and clothing did not sell well. Much effort is required in order to dispose of our surplus items, if one is to be reimbursed for the money expended in transporting extra weight to this place. It cost me \$8.00 for 105 pounds of overweight. The freight from here to the valley is so high that the materials sent would have to be of good quality in order to be profitable.

"Tuesday, July 8, 1856. Weather: unstable; thunder with much rain. ... This evening part of an English company arrived here during a rain and thunderstorm. The group numbers 800 [Martin Handcart Company], who for the most part will travel with a handcart company. They were cheerful and happy to arrive. ...

"Wednesday, July 9, 1856. Weather: beautiful. ... Orders were given to pack up with the return of our beloved brother [Daniel] Spencer. [Immigration agent at Iowa campground.] He has prepared the way for us. We are glad that the time is so near for the continuance of our journey, upon which we will gather experiences that will follow us into eternity. The Lord will bless and preserve the faithful who will do his will. ...

"The Danish division numbers 93 persons ... divided into 5 tents. Each tent has 3 regular handcarts and one covered handcart for the children. ... Each tent was assigned its captain and its people.

"Monday, July 21, 1856. Weather: beautiful; very warm. ... This evening some strangers tried to disturb us and by threats tried to drive us away. President Willie, who knew the people in Illinois, made a comparison and upheld the brethren in arming themselves for battle. Our enemies found it unadvisable [to carry out their threats] and failed to appear.

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Thursday, July 31, 1856. ... 3:30 the horn was blown to get up. 5 o'clock prayer, departure thereafter. During the morning hours we passed through [Fort Des Moines] City, a large city which had many nice houses and the inhabitants were also some nice people. Through the city flows the [Des Moines] River by which we camped, outside of the city, where we found water and abundant grazing for the cattle. Here we purchased the necessities. 8 o'clock prayer. Some strangers tried to disturb us so Willie gave orders that the brethren might be dressed and prepared to come when called. The strangers did nothing more than make a little noise. ...

"Sunday, August 3, 1856. Weather: beautiful. ... In the forenoon we passed a terrain, wave like in form, and observed a phenomenon in the air. A beam of fire like a large rocket went through the sky and left behind a wide stripe with wide dots which developed into small clouds that followed the flow of air in the direction of the beam of fire from west to east. Some minutes after it was followed by a loud clap of thunder in otherwise clear air. t noon we camped on a plain by a river and wooded area. We had good opportunity to bathe and wash. A spring gave us the best drinking water.

"Monday, August 11, 1856. Weather: beautiful. 4 o'clock called up. 7 o'clock prayer, departure thereafter. During the forenoon we traveled through Council Bluffs, a city which several years ago came into being and appears to have made good progress due to its good location. In the afternoon we came to the Missouri River and were ferried over by the steamboat to Florence, a city which has arisen this summer. The place is notable because it was known ten years ago as Winter Quarters by those Mormons who were driven from [Illinois]. They lived here until they were again expelled and had to look to the West where they found rest in the mountain valley where they established a city. ... We have here a supply house for the preservation of provisions and other necessities for emigration. We are going to hold up here several days in order to rest and prepare ourselves for the journey through the wilderness. ... The saints were happy, busy with washing, repairing, and daily provisioning which is now given regularly. ... We bathed and visited the beautiful neighborhood and the Mormon ruins. In the evening five brothers and sisters were baptized, the sick were washed. ... They were baptized [for their health] by Wicklund.

"Thursday, August 14, 1856. Weather: beautiful. ... The wagons were loaded with provisions for the trip. All the wagons and handcars [and] the tents are looked after and repaired. Bewilderment is written [on the faces] of the whole group who will continue with the handcart company regarding what weapons and ammunition they ought to take with them. Some of the English brothers and sisters are remaining behind here and two of the Danish division. ... They have found a place in Council Bluffs where many apostate Mormons are staying and seek to draw others with them. They say that high wages are given. _____ and his wife live there. She has been excommunicated. He visited us and says that he earns 2 dollars, room, and board per day. ... Maren Hansen's possessions were distributed among the poor, [Maren, age 52, had died] and a measurement was taken of the feet of those who needed shoes. Those who needed small shoes were given canvas to use, if they desire it, until they receive new shoes in place of it. ...

"By unanimous vote it was adopted that the presidents, in shifts of half each night, have supervision of the guard. Those who have weapons must be prepared to assemble themselves together when the signal is given on the horn in case the Indians should seek to rob us of something.

"Friday, August 29, 1856. Weather: unstable. ... [We] traveled towards the Indian camp. We met many who came toward us with friendliness and followed us to the camp where we stayed overnight, one mile from the Indian camp. ... Brothers Willie, Atwood, Savage, and Ahmanson presented the chief of the Omaha tribe with presents and paid their respects. They received from him dried buffalo meat. Ahmanson gave him a tattered nightcap. The chief gave him his pipe to smoke and was very friendly towards the brethren. ... They told the brethren that the Cheyenne Indian tribe had killed 2 men and a child on Monday the 25th of August from Secretary Babbit's company of four loaded wagons headed for Utah. These were scattered with the goods and the oxen driven away.

"Saturday, August 30, 1856. Weather: beautiful. ... we traveled past the place where Secretary Babbit's 4 wagons were plundered and 2 _____ were killed by the Indians. We are told the Indians had stolen some mules and were therefore pursued by the military which the United States government has stationed in (Fort Kearney) in order to hold the Indians under observation for peace along the route. The military overtook them and shot 16 Indians. The Indians were furious and sought to revenge them. Babbit who is secretary in Utah is also paid by the states who _____. He is not a Mormon nor his people who drove his wagons. The dead were buried. Some of their things lay about the place which the brethren found bloody and therefore assumed that they were murdered in their beds. Some of the few things that were left nearby were burned [by the Willie Company]. ... Willie shot a large rattlesnake.

"Wednesday, September 4, 1856. Weather: unstable during the night, heavy thunderstorm and much rain. 4 o'clock up, 7 o'clock prayer. Some oxen had gone away during the night, which the brethren were sent out to find. ... During the night a storm raged with strong hurricane (winds) which upset some of the tents and brought much disturbance ...

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“Friday, September 5, 1856. Weather: unstable with cold air. ... Council ... decided that Elder [Niels L.] Christensen as captain of some of the Danish brethren was to be sent out to look for the lost oxen, 22 in all. They were not found. ... Bishop Smoot and Rockwell visited us and told us that their company was camped on the other side of the Platte River and were willing to carry some of our flour. ...

“Saturday, September 6, 1856. Weather: unstable. ... Elders Ahmanson and Christensen preached repentance from the wickedness that then prevailed or the Lord’s punishment which now had begun would bring death and destruction upon us. ...

“Sunday, September 7, 1856. Weather: beautiful. ... Before prayer we held council in which it was decided that the handcarts should be loaded with sacks of flour and tents from the wagons. These, namely 5 wagons, should then be drawn with 12 oxen and the best cows. This is to be done in order to continue the journey with the strength we have. We can’t move too fast, but necessity dictates that we traverse the wild waste, where we are surrounded by wild people and animals, as fast as possible. 10 o’clock worship service was held with sermons and encouragement.”

It is not known if Peter Madsen had a second diary, but his last entry in this one was on September 8, 1856. Peter made it through the terrible storms and starvation of the next seven weeks of his life. He crossed the icy waters of the Sweetwater and ascended Rocky Ridge. The Lord blessed him to see his daughter within a few days’ safe arrival in the promised Salt Lake Valley.

Petrea married Bradford Leonard as his second wife on February 2, 1858. They became the parents of one daughter. In the book *Women of Faith and Fortitude*, Daughters of Utah Pioneers publication, vol. II of IV, pg. 140, we read:

“Bradford [Leonard] had farm holdings, a Mercantile Store, was a merchant at Camp Floyd and was in a position to maintain a good life for Petrea as well as his first family. Petrea and Catherine lived in Salt Lake City where Bradford passed away 17 Nov 1871 when Catherine was thirteen and Petrea became a widow, raising her daughter, for about five years, at which time, Catherine married Solomon King 17 Jan 1876. Petrea lived only two months after the wedding and passed away 14 Feb 1876, Valentine’s Day. She is buried beside Bradford in the Salt Lake City Cemetery.

“Petrea was a good homemaker, loving to cook and sew. She was called as a Midwife and Nurse, nursing the sick when called on by family and community. She, along with her sister-wife, helped build the early Salt Lake City community.” (Submission for *Women of Faith and Fortitude* by Evelyn Leonard Bjorhn.)

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneer histories; Madsen, Peder, Diary 1856 Apr.-Sept., trans. Don H. Smith, 1972, 19-29, Church History Library. (Now available at Mormon Overland Travel Database website.)

Note: Another translation of Peter Madsen’s diary was completed for Paul D. Lyman in 2006. It is available at <http://handcart.byu.edu/Sources/PederMadsen.aspx>. This website contains other resources and analysis by Paul Lyman that have been combined with Peter Madsen’s diary. See also, *The Willie Handcart Company: Their Day-by-Day Experiences, Including Trail Maps and Driving Directions*, by Paul D. Lyman, Brigham Young University, 2006.

The following source statement is from Paul D. Lyman for the 2006 translation of Peter Madsen’s diary: “Journal of Peder Madsen (Danish), Church Archives. Translated by Tove Holden Jorgensen Johnson. Reasonable attempts have been made to follow the way Peder Madsen spelled names, e.g., ‘President Willie’ is at first spelled ‘President Willard’ and then later spelled ‘President Willei.’ Blank spaces in the journal are indicated by a line _____. Illegible words are indicated by a question mark in brackets [?]. Copyright ownership for this translation rests with Paul D. Lyman, Richfield, Utah, July, 2006. Permission is granted to copy or to reproduce this journal without restriction.”