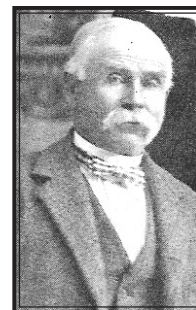


## WILLIAM (FIELD) WOODWARD



Born: 4 January 1833 in England

Age: 23

Willie Handcart Company

William was born not far from London, England, to William and Sophia Woodward Field. His parents separated when he was 10 months old. He went to live with his maternal grandparents and assumed the name of Woodward. He had a good education and went to school at an early age. His interests were varied and he loved learning, especially Latin, history and geography.

At 15 years of age, William was working on the London railway where he heard talk and ridicule of a peculiar people who had rented a small school house. One Sunday night William decided to go see for himself what it was all about. He wrote (in third person) that he “sat close by the door so he could retire if the services did not suit him. The opening exercises were simple: singing, prayer, and singing. Nothing remarkable in these proceedings, but when the preacher commenced his discourses, it was electrifying. William had never heard the like before. It was Bible doctrine, and William was not familiar with the scriptural passages given. He did not want to leave the meeting till it ended.”

William soon joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and studied all he could. He wrote: “My parents were opposed to the religion I had embraced and I got no encouragement from them. I used to spend much of my evenings at the homes of the Latter-day Saints. I received the doctrine of the Church like a thirsty ox does water.” William also received the doctrine of gathering “with joy,” arranging to leave England in January 1850. William turned 17 years old that month, and wrote: “The second of January came; my mother had been crying nearly all night. It was hard to separate. I bid farewell to my mother in tears. I hurried to the Railway Station to be in time for the train. Several Saints were waiting for the train who were ready to bid farewell to their native land. We arrived in Liverpool the same night.... I got on board the same day and slept there till I got to New Orleans. I sent my mother a letter saying I got there safe and was well. She sent me one saying they were sick and broke her heart and wanted me to return. My mind was made up before I started that I was to go to the Valley.... We sang the songs of Zion as we were going out of the dock.”

William finally arrived in the Valley just before General Conference in 1851, at the age of 18. He said, “This was the occasion that I had wished to see—To see the leaders of the church, the First Presidency and Apostles. Brigham Young—his form and features and above all his plain simple preaching, his wise counsels filled my soul with joy and admiration. I felt repaid for my journey and trials, and resolved in my heart to continue in the faith I had accepted, and to try to live a life of devotion ... and spend the rest of my life in trying to build up the Zion that was instilled into my mind.”

William eventually worked and boarded with Heber C. Kimball and also returned to school at the University of Deseret, where the “terms of education per quarter was 5 dollars.” William had barely been in the Valley for one year when he was called with several other Elders to serve a mission to Europe. He had two weeks to prepare. After serving faithfully in England for a period of over three years, William was released from his labors and prepared to return home. On his 23rd birthday, before he left England, he noted in his diary: “I ascended a hill overlooking the sea in the morning, and sang a hymn, and engaged in prayer thanking the Lord for preserving my life up to the present time, and asking him to bless and preserve me through this present year.” William had no money for the clothing and other things he would need, but soon his friends and Saints in England provided for him.

When William arrived in Iowa City, Iowa, he helped get the first three handcart companies on their way that season. He said that “the returning missionaries were held to labor for the welfare of Mormon Emigrants till they arrived in Salt Lake City.” On June 3, 1856, he records going “to the woods to chop logs for “hand-cart” timber 6 miles distant from camp.” When James Willie’s group arrived at Iowa City, William was appointed to assist them and traveled to Zion as a sub-captain over a hundred. His was the third of five companies of one hundred, principally Scotch. He spent his time assisting and leading others, standing guard and fulfilling other assignments.

William would later state this opinion: “We never ought to have left M[issouri] River. ... While at Florence a meeting of our Company was held—I had been sent to Omaha & Council Bluffs, when Levi Savage told of the cold & suffering [that] might be expected on the trip. Bro. Willie assumed all responsibility & Bro. Savage was condemned for his recital of what might be expected on our journey. Bro. Willie gave me the information when I returned from Council Bluffs. Every word spoken by Bro. Savage came true.”

After traveling nearly 1,000 miles, it became much colder and food rationing began. Many of the company members felt they would perish. They met the first signs of relief on Oct. 19th: “An Express from the relief train met us about Ice Springs in the Sweetwater Valley, C.H. Wheelock, Jos. A. Young, Steve Taylor and a Bro. Garr. Some of these brethren advised us to give out all the flour we had at night to our famished people. We did so. A snow fell on us that night about a foot deep. It was a sorry sight, over 400 people with hand carts, short of bedding, & to sleep on the cold ground. One thought is enough for a lifetime.

“James G. Willie and Joseph B. Elder started out to find the relief camp, & found it on the Sweetwater. They came to us next night. Had it not have been for the timely aid sent us, it seems we must have all perished. A few might have got to Fort Bridger; but the women & children the sick & feeble would have succumbed to the cold & hunger. Teams & help with food & clothing [were] sent by the good people of Utah to our rescue, God bless them. Levi Savage who was censured for his truthful statement at Florence, was I think the best help we had -- resolute & determined his whole soul was for the salvation of our company.

“In crossing the Rocky Ridge two of our teamsters abandoned their teams. Millen Atwood & myself took the teamsters’ places -- Bro. Savage was with us -- we picked up all the stragglers & our wagons were filled. We had about 3 steers & 3 Arkansas cows to our wagons & toiled along as best we could. We arrived at a small stream with a steep hill to pull up after we got over the creek. It was dark at night, all other teams gone, Levi Savage went to camp. Teams were gathered to help us & relieve our loads, & teamsters sent to relieve us, & best of all bread sent to feed our hungry loads of people. What kind boys they were who were sent to our help. Prest. Brigham Young seemed to be inspired and seemed alive to the occasion. God bless his memory.”

William also later wrote: “Snow was on the ground and looked dismal. ... Crossing the Rocky ridge was a severe & disastrous day to health. The weather was cold & it snowed & blowed some of the time making it bad for the sick who rode in the wagons & for those who pulled the handcars. The next day we buried 13 souls near Willow Creek on the banks of the Sweetwater.<sup>1</sup> From that time till we entered the Valley many died. They were the old, the infirm, & the debilitated. Oftentimes the snow had to be cleared from the ground that the tents might be set & the people have a place to sleep. The provisions were given out every night & often it was from 10 to 12 p.m. before all the camp could retire to rest. Help, in the shape of wagons & provisions continued to reach us till we arrived in G.S.L. City.” William arrived with the Willie Company on November 9, 1856.

Years later, William’s son, Cecil, shared the following story: “A number of years after the handcart trek, William Woodward was at a general conference in Salt Lake. He met a woman who had been one of his Hundred. She reminded him of some good rawhide shoes which were owned by one of the men in the party. William did remember them, and she then asked if he ever wondered what had happened to them. [They had evidently turned up missing during the trek.] The woman told William that she had taken them one night and made soup with them.”

In a 1906 letter to Albert Jones of the Handcart Veterans Association, William wrote: “Seeing an announcement in the Deseret News of Sep 3, I was anxious to correspond with you. ... Some of you tell of hardships; hardships they were truly. We buried 68. I kept the camp journal as our clerk gave out. Our butcher died, so I became butcher. In crossing Rocky Ridge, two of our teamsters gave out in a bitter snow storm. Atwood and I had to take their places and we picked up the stragglers. Our wagons were full of people, we got to camp away in the night; next day we buried 13 and the 2nd morning 2 more besides them. We arrived in SL City Nov 9th. To talk of our experiences is a thrilling theme. ... I have lived here more than 46 years. Yours T W. Woodward. ... I would like to see a history of the companies of 1856 published. I was a returning missionary at the time 23 years old. W.W. Albert Jones, I think I saw you once in Franklin.

William married Harriet Hogan in February 1857. He eventually settled in Franklin, Idaho, where he died and was buried in 1908.

<sup>1</sup> Although the camp was at Rock Creek, it was not named that until 1858. Guidebooks commonly called it “Branch of Sweetwater,” but diarists, including company clerks, often just called it “Sweetwater.” Willow Creek is only two miles west of Rock Creek, and was the closest defining landmark.