

## WOMEN OF THE RESCUE

In 1855 the Saints in Utah were subjected to drought and a grasshopper plague. Many of them were struggling with their own basic needs.<sup>1</sup> But when Brigham Young began issuing calls to rescue the immigrants still on the plains, the sisters responded without hesitation.<sup>2</sup> Lucy Meserve Smith said that in one meeting, the women “stripped off their petticoats, stockings, and everything they could spare, right there in the Tabernacle, and piled [them] into the wagons to send to the Saints in the mountains.” After this the sisters continued to gather necessary items. Lucy said: “We did all we could, with the aid of the good brethren and sisters, to comfort the needy as they came in with handcarts late in the fall. ... As our [Relief] society was short of funds then, we could not do much, but the four bishops could hardly carry the bedding and other clothing we got together the first time we met. We did not cease our exertions til all were made comfortable. [When the handcart companies arrived, a building in the town was] loaded with provisions for them. I never took more satisfaction and, I might say, pleasure in any labor I ever performed in my life, such a unanimity of feeling prevailed. I only had to go into a store and make my wants known; if it was cloth, it was measured off without charge. [We] wallowed through the snow until our clothes were wet a foot high to get things together.”

Lucy had a personal perspective of what the immigrants might be facing. In 1849, she was traveling from Winter Quarters to Utah with the George A. Smith/Dan Jones wagon company. They were caught in winter storms that came even earlier than those in 1856. On October 1, 1849, Lucy wrote: “We traveled until 11 o'clock at night to get to the willows, as we found no food for the animals as it is snowing very fast.” Like the Willie company, Lucy's company traveled through a snow storm until late at night in order to reach the camp at Rock Creek.<sup>3</sup> Reports say that 60 to over 70 of their cattle died there as the storm continued for the next few days. Lucy wrote: “We were oblige[d] to stay a number of days before we could move on, the snow was so very deep, had it not been for the help from the valley, we must have left a portion of our wagons in the willows.”

Another pioneer woman who sacrificed was Ellen Breaknel Neibaur. Her husband, Alexander, had been educated to become a Rabbi. He graduated from the University of Berlin as a surgeon and dentist and spoke seven languages. After the Neibaur family joined the Church in England, they gave up their high station of wealth and moved to Nauvoo, where Alexander taught the Prophet Joseph the Hebrew and German languages and was also his dentist. The family came to Utah in 1848 after being driven from multiple homes in Nauvoo.<sup>4</sup> They lived through the first winter in Salt Lake in a tent with seven children.<sup>5</sup> A granddaughter wrote of a sacrifice Ellen made that may have been for the 1856 pioneers: “When they got settled and began to make a little money, Alexander bought his wife a nice pair of shoes and then she knitted herself some stockings that were blue and white striped. She was very proud of them and thought they were very pretty. She had only had them for a short time when the Brethren came around collecting clothing to take back with them to meet another company of pioneers, and when they came to the house, Alexander said he had nothing to give them, but Ellen answered, ‘Yes, we must give something,’ and she took them from her feet, the pair of new shoes and stockings, and gave them to the Brethren, binding her own feet in rags. When that next company of Saints arrived in Salt Lake, the people turned out to welcome them, and among them was an old friend of Ellen's that she had known in England, and she was wearing Ellen's shoes and stockings.”

Sources: *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society*, 2011, 36-37; Smith, Lucy Meserve, “Autobiographical sketch,” Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; meserve.org; lds.org/gospellibrary/pioneer; neibaur.org/journals/Ellen.htm.

<sup>1</sup>Sarah Ellen Neibaur wrote: “In 1855 came the grasshoppers. I can never forget it, we had nothing to eat but bran mush and pigweeds and I, like the seagulls, couldn't keep them down, and many times I would faint from weakness.” Sarah was 6 years old.  
<sup>2</sup>Through the next ten weeks of rescue calls, the women continued to participate in the rescue. Women at Fort Supply sent freshly baked bread with their husbands. When the last immigrant train neared the Salt Lake Valley in mid-December, the women began sending cooked food.

<sup>3</sup>The camp site at Rock Creek has been verified through the research of Jolene Allphin.

<sup>4</sup>Ellen was sick with a fever when a mob drove her family from Nauvoo. She had a 10-day-old baby and 6 other children at the time.

<sup>5</sup>From autobiography of Sarah Ellen Neibaur, daughter of Alexander and Ellen.