

HARVEY H. CLUFF

Born: 1836 Kirtland, Ohio

Age: 20

Main Rescue Party



Harvey Cluff was one of the so-called “Valley Boys” who were the beloved rescuers of the stranded handcart companies of 1856. He left Salt Lake City with the first group of rescuers with George D. Grant as Captain. He was gone for about two months. His efforts included the rescue of his brother, Moses Cluff, a returning missionary traveling with the Martin handcart company. Harvey is noted for carrying the weak and dying Saints across frozen rivers, and otherwise coming to their aid. Most notably, however, is that he followed the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in placing a signboard on the trail the night of October 20. Following are excerpts from a reminiscence written by Harvey in 1908 (transcribed with light editing for readability by Jolene Allphin):

The year 1856 chronicles my first public service in the Church and I freely record the sentiment I feel in the service then rendered. The Perpetual Emigration Fund Company, an organization created in the Church for the purpose of assisting the poor to gather out from the nations and come to the mountains of the Lord, was directed to a new and rather novel mode of crossing the planes. To purchase wagons, oxen, mules, horses, made the price of an outfit, beyond the means of the poorer classes who were anxious to come to Zion. So the Handcart system was inaugurated. Light carts with two wheels about the size of the hind wheel of a common wagon with a frame or bed of suitable size. Usually two persons would join together pushing and pulling and succeed quite admirably when the roads were good. Families of course arranged their efforts in the most consistent way possible. Their goods, bedding and provisions were of the most meagre supply. With such an outfit several hundred people in separate companies, started for Salt Lake City, a distance of over a thousand miles. The first companies, on the road, reached Salt Lake City before the fall storms set in without any serious difficulty. These first arrived about the first of October singing handcart songs.

“Some must push and some must pull,
As we go marching up the hills”

I attended the October conference of that year which opened on the 6th as usual, having walked from Provo to Salt Lake City. On that day President Brigham Young at the opening of the first session made a call upon the people to furnish teams, provisions and clothing to aid the late Handcart companies in as the winter season was just hastening on, snow having already fallen upon the mountains. The response to the call of President Young was most remarkable. On the following day, October 7th[,] 22 teams - two span of mules or horses to each wagon and each wagon loaded to the bows. There were about fifty young men in the company. Being in Salt Lake City and of an ambitious frame of mind, I volunteered to go. One thing which attracted me, in addition of the interest in the handcart people; was my brother Moses. He was on the plains returning from a mission to England.

Of the most prominent men of the company who went out in that memorable expedition of relief I mention Geo. D Grant; Robert T. Burton; Joseph A Young; William H. Kimball; Daniel W Jones; John R Murdock; Eph H [K] Hanks; Isaac Bullock and Brigham Young Jr. [Murdock, Hanks, Bullock, and B. Young Jr., however, were not in Captain Grant’s advance rescue party with Cluff.]

The relief party proceeded eastward as rapidly as possible and in due time passed over the “Southpass,” the backbone of the continent, being the divide point of the waters flowing into the Atlantic Ocean east and the Pacific Ocean west. Nine miles brought us down to the Sweetwater river where we camped for the night. On arising in the following morning snow was several inches deep. During the following two days, the storm raged with increasing fury until it attained the capacity of a northern blizzard. In protection to ourselves and animals the company moved down the river to where the willows were dense enough to make a good protection against the raging storm from the north. The express team which we had dispatched ahead [rode] as rapidly as possible to reach and give encouragement to the faulterring emigrants by letting them know that help was near at hand. Quietly resting in the seclusion of the willow copse three miles from the road, I volunteered to take a sign board and place it at a conspicuous place at the main road. This was designed to direct the express party who were expected to return about this time so they would not miss us.

In facing a northern blast up hill I found it quite difficult to keep from freezing. I had only been back to camp a short time when two men rode up from Willies handcart company. The signboard had done the work of salvation. Had Captain Willie and his fellow traveller, [Joseph Elder], from his company continued on the road they certainly would

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have perished as they would have reached the Sweetwater where the storm first struck us. The handcart company was then 25 miles from our camp, and as they had travelled that distance without food for themselves or horse and no bedding they must have perished. I have always regarded this act of mine as the means of their salvation. And why not! An act of that importance is worthy of record and hence I give a place here.

Preparation[s] were made and early in the morning of the following day we were on the road pushing our way for Captain Willies camp. The depth of snow made the travelling extremely difficult. ... When the people of the camp sighted us approaching they set up such a shout as to echo through the hills. Arriving within the confines of this emigrant camp a most thrilling and touching scene was enacted, melting to tears the stoutest hearts. Young maidens and feeble old ladies, threw off all restraint and freely embraced their deliverers expressing in a flow of kisses, the gratitude which their tongues failed to utter. This was certainly the most timely arrival of a relief party recorded in history, for the salvation of a people. Five hundred people with handcarts, [There were only about 365 people in the Willie Handcart Company at this time, as approximately 100 had dropped out at Florence, and 35 had died since leaving Iowa City.] a scanty supply of clothing, bedding and a less supply of provision, upon the plains in snow ten inches deep.

... You no longer wonder at the joy manifested by that perishing people when they saw salvation pull into their camp. Twenty odd wagon[s] drawn by four animals to each and each wagon loaded to the bows with vegetables, meat, flour, groceries[,] clothing for both sexes, and bedding and footwear. To give an idea of the critical condition of those people I will say that our camp was pitched about fifty yards from the tents of the emigrants and each meal was over in our camp and the bones and crumbs from our meals were thrown out on the snow, young men would gather them up[,] know and suck them as long as they yielded any substance. Of course caution was necessary in dealing out provisions as too liberal a supply of food at first would, no doubt, prove fatal, after being in a starving condition for days. Six well loaded wagons[,] teams and teamsters were left with [the Willie] company and the rest of us pushed on for as yet we had no information as to where the other two handcart and two independent wagon co[m]panies were. [The Jesse Haven Handcart Company and the Edward Martin Handcart Company had left Iowa City, Iowa, close to the same time, but as two separate companies. They were then consolidated at Florence, Nebraska, under Captain Martin. This may be what Harvey meant by “two” handcart companies, or it may just be a mistake in remembering.]

On arriving at Devils Gate we found the expressmen awaiting our coming up for as yet they had no wind as to where the companies were. ... Devil's Gate is formed by the Sweetwater river cut through a mountain of granite rock 1000 feet in length 130 feet wide with perpendicular walls of 400 feet in height. Irregular ranges of low hills or mountains dot the irregular plains. The hills are covered sparsely with cedars and scrubby pitch pine timber. The plains formerly were pasture for buffalo, deer and antelope, but those animals except an occasional antelope, had gone to other parts. Fort Devil's Gate consisted of a small stockade and a few log houses, located on a plane near where the river enters the deep gorge through the mountains.

Our camp was pitched in a lovely cove in the mountain across from the fort where we had plenty of fuel and forage for animals. Deliberations on the uncertainty as to the best course to pursue in our dilemma resulted in selecting two good horsemen [there were three: Joseph A. Young, Abel Garr, and Daniel W. Jones] who were to ride as rapidly as horses could endure. Four days was the extent of time they were to be gone. If the emigrants were not found within that length of time the two men were to return and the conclusion would be that the companies had gone into winter quarters. The return of the two horsemen at night of the fourth day brought the news that companies were on the upper crossing of the Platt river sixty five miles away. Ah! Then there was hurrying to and fro! And on the following day, every team but one, and all the men but ten started out on forced march for to meet the companies who as soon as the two men found them, began anew their journey from the place where the first snowstorm tied them up until the news of approaching help reached them, then new life, as it were, invigorated them, when they could sing as my father did.

“Come, let us anew”

“Our journey pursue”

The one team and ten men immediately began hauling from the hills the cedar and the pine wood to the stockade and clearing the snow off so the emigrants could be comfortable when they arrived. In several days we made every effort possible to get things in good shape. It was a Sunday evening when the handcart veterans pulled into the quarters provided for them. Every room[,] nook and corner was taken.

Wagons and tents were filled to their utmost capacity, to protect the people from the northern blizzard then raging. Every possible assistance from the boys from Utah was freely given, And these young hardy men from the Rockies were a mighty force and power in the salvation of that people. No more efficient help could have been furnished. They had crossed the dreary plains, knew what hunger, thirst, starvation, weary travelling with sore feet meant; hence with the subsequent experience in the valleys gave them the [vim?] to endure and they did endure and they worked valiently

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for the poor emigrants. But Oh! What a sight to see. And men, women, children and young maidens plodding along through the snow several inches deep with icicles dangling to their skirts and pants as they walked along pushing and pulling their handcars, the wheels of which were burdened with snow. The roaring fires of cedar and pitch pine wood soon cheered the weary souls and the youthful of both sexes were singing the songs of Zion around the campfires. Herein lies the secret or cause of the success which the Latter day Saints have had in coming out from Babylon, and crossing the plains into a wilderness. ...

Northern blizzards prevailed, the thermometer showing ten to twenty degrees below zero, making it utterly impossible to proceed forward. Finally a lull in the raging wind from the north permitted the handcart companies to cross the river and go up to the cove where we had camped as previously mentioned. Men of old age and women were carried across the river on the backs of these sturdy mountain boys. In this instance, as in many others, the value of the boys from Zion was of great help to the weary Saints. Camp was made, tents set, supper over and the people retired for the night when a snowstorm accompanied by a raging wind from the north, came over the mountain and with a terrific whirl around the cove levelled every tent to the ground. Here again the Utah boys found that their services [were] very much needed. To rescue the people from beneath their tents and re-set the tents in the dark hours of the night was a very trying ordeal for the boys and also the people. But marvilous as it may seem, not a single person was seriously injured.

Now again the blizzard set in with increased fury, the snow covering the grass [,] compelling the cattle and horses to forage upon the willows along the river bottoms. Cattle died daily. The situation was, indeed, very criticle. No power could save the people from death but that of God. To our rescue O Lord God Almighty seemed the fervent prayer constantly offered to our Heavenly Father. The carcass[es] of dead cattle were preserved in a frozen state from wolves for food for the people in case we should be winter bound; which really seemed inevatable. Over four hundred miles of mountainous country lay between the emigrants and their destined home in Utah where snow in winter frequently falls to a depht [depth] that stopes all travel by teams.

The only glimmer of hope that seemed to reconcile our feelings and that was the utmost confidence in President Brigham Young's inspiration that he would keep companies coming out to meet us and thereby keep the road opened. They knew, or least the boys from Utah knew, that presidents foresight and excellent judgement would be sufficient to grasp the situation of the emigrants and their needs in such an inclement season and therefore teams and supplies would be forwarded train after train until the last Saint should arive safely in Zion. These relief companies following one after another and only but a few days apart would keep the road open, thus insuring the possibillity of our companies moving out as soon as they could leave Devil's Gate. Patience finally rewarded our hopes. "The clouds ye so much dread" finally lifted and we start[ed] out homeward bound. Our travel was very slow at first, five or ten miles a day was all we could make, but that was more satisfactory than remaining in camp.

The independent ox teams [Hodgett and Hunt wagon companies] cached the most of their merchandise at the Stockade Devil's Gate before leaving which enabled them to travel more successfully than the handcart people. Jesse Haven conducted one of the independant wagon companeys and with him Moses and I lodged and borded. [Moses Cluff was Harvey's brother who had traveled home from his mission with the Martin handcart company and the Hodgett wagon company.] Our company[,] I mean the company of Bro Haven, started out ahead of the handcarts which improved or benifited their travel. Elder Daniel W. Jones and several other men were chosen to watch the goods until teams could reach them in the spring.

It was near the middle of November [Nov. 9] when the line of march was resumed[,] the ox train taking the lead, thus opening the road. Not many days after the departure of the companies from Devil's Gate they were met by a train of wagons with supplies from Zion. Following this train came another and then another and from that time on the road was kept pretty well opened. As the trains came the number of handcarts diminished as the aged were taken into wagons and made quite comfortable. By the time we reached Ft. Bridger the entire handcart people were being carried with their goods, in wagons.

At Green river I was selected to take a light team and hasten on to Salt Lake with a son of C[hauncey] G[riswold] Webb who had his feet frozen so badly that amputation would be necessary. [See Edward Milo Webb in rescuer section of *Tell My Story, Too.*] I[,] making a night drive of ten miles[,] I got my feet frosted so that both of my big toes blackened. At the end of the ten miles I turned my oxen out, made a fire of small sage brush sufficient to thaw my boots so I could get them off. Soon after getting into bed, in the wagon, my feet warmed and during the following two hours it seemed that my feet were in coals of fire. In reaching [the] upper end of Echo Canyon I met the brother of the young man I had in charge, who naturally wanted to accompany his afflicted brother home. [Edward Milo's own

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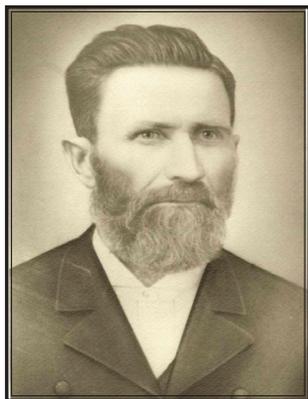
account says it was his father who met him.] I therefore took his team and went back to Ft. Bridger and he took my team and returned to Salt Lake.

Ariving at Bridger where the remnant of the last handcart company were waiting for assistance[,] I loaded up my wagon with goods and as many people as could conviently get in and began my way homeward. All the teams of the company were loaded likewise, taking in all but a few carts the remnants.

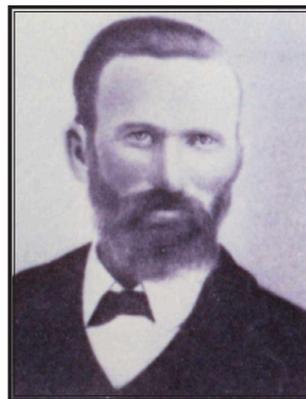
Reaching East creek at the base of the Big mountain[,] the snow [was] about four feet deep, a recent fall of snow having filled up the track. Now came the tug of war so to speak. Every workable man was lined up in double file as far apart as the wagon wheels, and thus they proceded up the mountain in advance of the train. At regular distances we would make [a] side track for the lead team to pull out and fall in behind, thus we continued up the up the [*sic*] four miles and near the summit a cut with shovels had to be made through a snow drift twenty feet deep. The whole day was consumed in getting over the mountain and camp was made between the Big and Little mountains. The journey over the Little mountain into Emigration was uneventful beyond the unusual cheerfulness which beamed upon every face as they looked down upon Salt Lake Valley, which from this summit spread out in grandure amid the mountains surrounding it wrapped in snow. Into Salt Lake City we pulled that day, arriving in the evening.

How inadequate is language to depict, or pen to write, the soul stirring plesure, and gratitude to the Allwise Creator for our safe arrival home. It was near the close of December of the year 1856 when I arived at my home in Provo City.

Sources: Harvey Cluff handwritten autobiography, as transcribed by Jolene Allphin, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU, Provo, Utah, 18-25; *Harvey H. Cluff*, Harold B. Lee Library, Mormon Americana BX 8670.1 C623, pages 25-34.



Joseph Cluff, also a
rescue participant



Moses Cluff, returning
missionary assisting the
Martin handcart company
and the Hodgett wagon
company; rescued by his
brothers