

## The Advance Pioneer Company

In the early spring of 1847, Brigham Young led a small company across the prairies of what are now called Nebraska and Wyoming, over the mountains, and into the dry region of the Great Basin. They realized that the distance from Iowa to the Salt Lake Valley would be too long for everyone to complete the journey in one summer. The "Pioneer Company," as Young called it, would go first and fast to prepare the way for thousands of other Latter-day Saints who would soon follow.

The company improved the trail by clearing trees and rocks from the path and marked the trail. They also wrote guides to help people know where they could find campsites with fresh water, fuel, and places to feed the animals.

The advance company was mostly men. However, there were three women, two young boys six and seven years old, and teenage boys. Two or three of the group were not Mormons. There were

also three black men who were called "servants." They were actually slaves. Their names were Green Flake, Oscar Crosby, and Hark Lay.

### Official Diary

Thomas Bullock's diary was the official record of the advance pioneer company. His journal listed the names of each member. He also noted items and animals: "1 cannon, a boat, 71 wagons, 93 horses, 66 oxen, 52 mules, 19 cows, and 17 dogs."

Friday, 30 April 1847

Attended to cattle, hitched up & started . . . traveling over an uneven Prairie & with little grass on it. . . a very Strong North Wind blowing, & being dark, caused the Camp to halt for the night at 6 p.m. under small Bluff without either Wood or Water. . . President Young gave liberty for the brethren to have a dance & enjoy themselves, as they had neither wood to warm, nor good water to drink.



### Green Flake • 1828–1903

At age ten, Green, born into slavery in the South, had been given as a birthday present to James Flake. James Flake was a wealthy Mississippi planter who later converted to the LDS Church. Young James was baptized in the Mississippi River.

The Flake family moved to Nauvoo, Illinois. When the Mormons left Nauvoo, the Flakes were with them. After Brigham Young announced the trip of the advance pioneer company, Flake sent sixteen-year-old Green with supplies to assist the group. He was also directed to build a home for the Flake family in the Great Basin and have it ready for when they came with a later group. Green's grandson later said it was Green Flake who first drove Brigham Young into the valley.

Green later traveled back east to help more pioneers come to the valley. He married Martha Crosby, also a slave of Mormon pioneers. Green Flake, his wife Martha, and their children, Lucinda and Abe, farmed their own property south of Salt Lake City and also were paid to work for others. At some point after the death of James Flake, Green was freed.



## River Crossings

It could take as many as two days to get all the wagons and animals across a river. The longest delay of the entire trek was when the group crossed the wide North Platte River, swollen by spring rains. The men made log rafts and took their own wagons over. Then they started a booming business, charging a small fee for ferrying other companies going to Oregon across the river. Five days were spent at the river. When the people were safely over, nine men stayed to operate the profitable ferry and help future travelers.

## The Rocky Mountains at Last

The advanced company finally reached and crossed the Sweetwater River in Wyoming and then began to travel through the Rocky Mountains. They crossed the Continental Divide, a high ridge of land where rivers begin to flow west instead of east. They took several days to cross the Green River. Once on the opposite shore, they were in what was loosely defined as "California Territory." John Taylor, another church leader, is credited for writing this song about the place:

### The Upper California

*The upper California,  
Oh that's the land for me!  
It lies between the mountains  
And the great Pacific Sea.*

*The Saints can be supported there,  
And taste the sweets of liberty.  
In upper California,  
Oh that's the land for me!*



Continuing their long march, the advanced company finally arrived at Fort Bridger, Wyoming, in early July. They remained two days to rest, repair wagons, and do some trading. The final 116 miles after Fort Bridger were the most difficult because of the mountains they had to get through. The people were weary, and the horses, cows, and oxen were weak from almost 1,000 miles of walking.

Jim Bridger, a well-known mountain man, spent a night with the group. Most of the talk was about the valley of the Great Salt Lake and its possibilities as a home for the Mormons. Bridger advised them not to settle in the Great Basin. He said it was too dry, the water was too cold for seeds to germinate, and food wouldn't grow there. Brigham Young thought otherwise and proved Bridger very wrong.

*Only three women and two young boys traveled with 143 men in the advance pioneer company. The women were Harriet Wheeler Young, wife of Lorenzo D. Young; Clarissa Decker Young, wife of Brigham Young; and Ellen Saunders Kimball, wife of Heber C. Kimball.*

*Fort Bridger, Wyoming, was a welcome resting place for the members of the advance pioneer company. You can see the location of the fort on the map on page 112.*

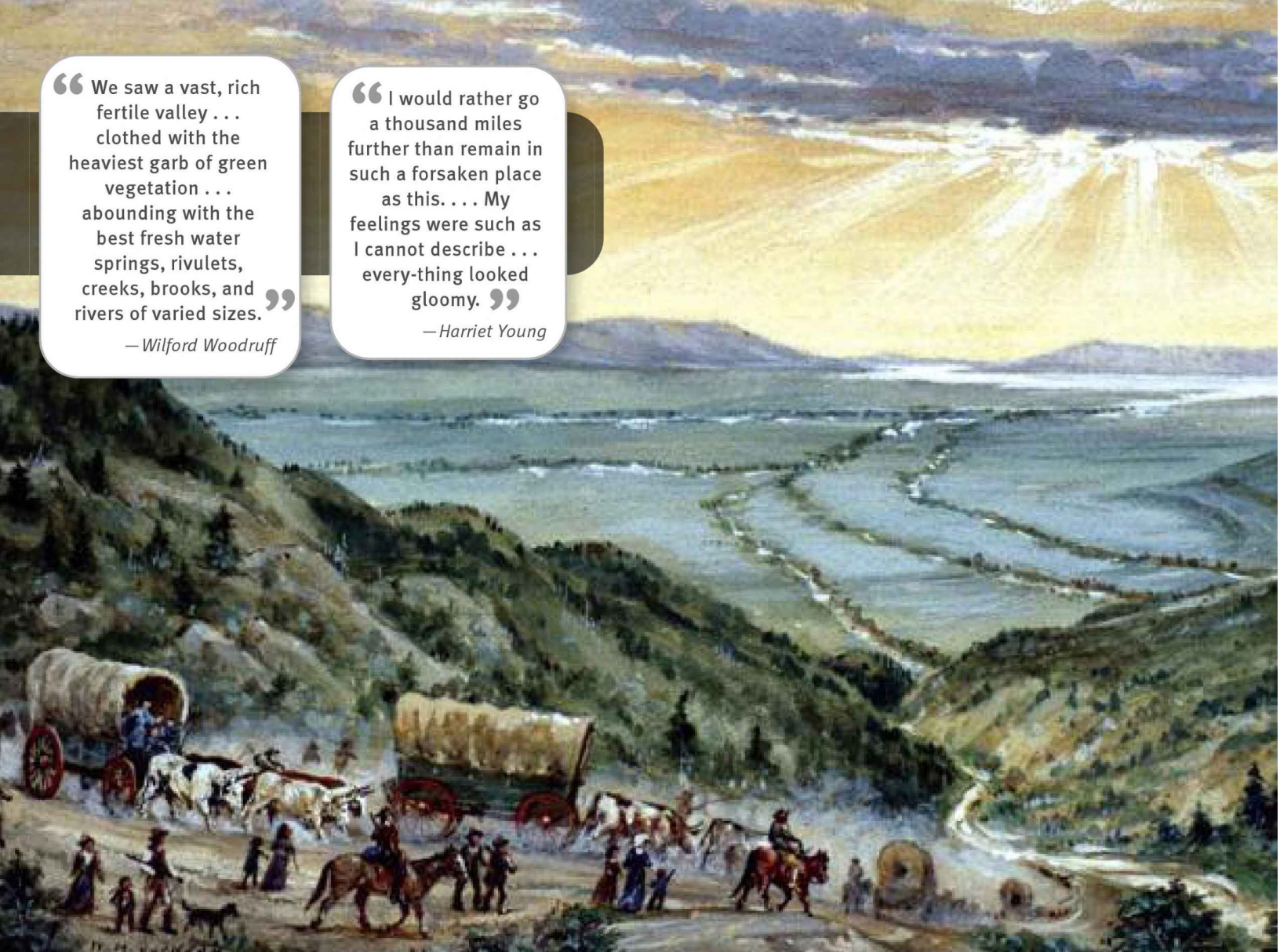


“ We saw a vast, rich fertile valley . . . clothed with the heaviest garb of green vegetation . . . abounding with the best fresh water springs, rivulets, creeks, brooks, and rivers of varied sizes. ”

—Wilford Woodruff

“ I would rather go a thousand miles further than remain in such a forsaken place as this. . . My feelings were such as I cannot describe . . . every-thing looked gloomy. ”

—Harriet Young



*William Henry Jackson painted this view of the pioneers' first view of the Salt Lake Valley. Why might the artist have painted the sun's rays shining down over the valley? What sources of water did Jackson paint?*

## Into the Valley

Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow led a scouting group ahead of the main group. They worked on removing brush and rocks from the trail cleared by the Donner party the year before. Pratt and Snow left a few men working on the trail, and then they rode to the top of Big Mountain and looked out over the Salt Lake Valley for the first time. It was July 22, 1847. Upon viewing the wide valley for the first time, both men shouted, “Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!” and threw their hats into the sky.

Brigham Young, who had probably been bitten by a tick, was ill and so did not enter the valley for two more days.

Tradition says that when he rose up from his sickbed in the back of a wagon and looked over the Salt Lake Valley for the first time he said, “It is enough. This is the right place. Move on.” He later said that he had seen the valley in a dream and recognized it when he saw it.

When Young and the rest of the party entered the valley on July 24, the scouting party had already begun planting a crop and digging irrigation ditches. Young was pleased with what he found.

After staying in the valley only six weeks, Young and several other men left the Salt Lake Valley and returned to Nebraska. They wanted to help organize plans and prepare the rest of the group, including their own families, for the long journey to the Great Basin.

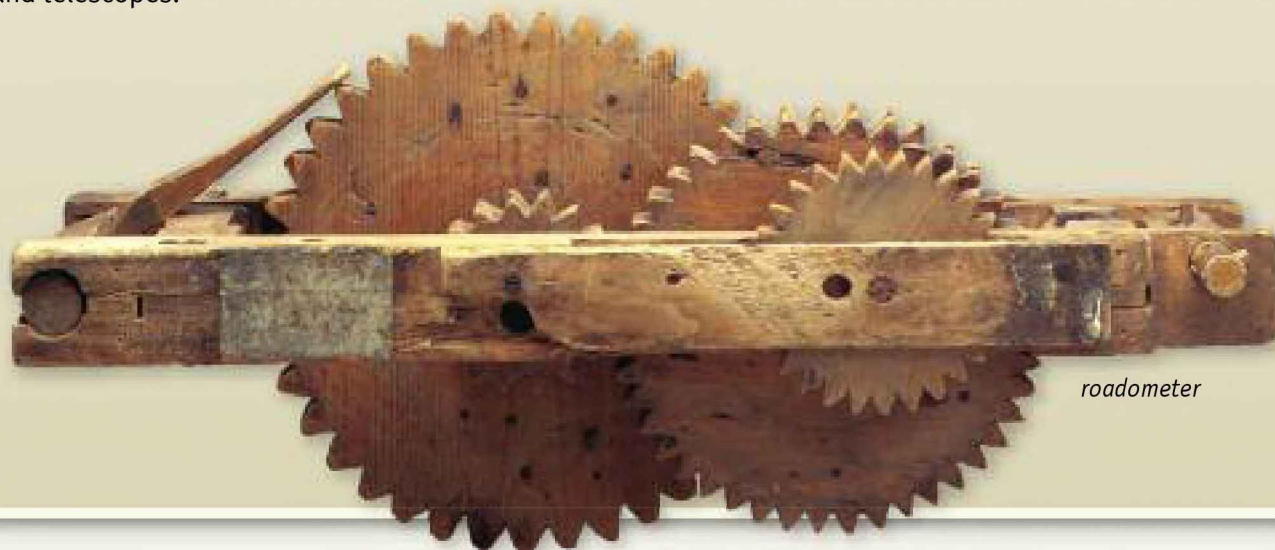
## Traveling Tools

Appleton Milo Harmon, along with Orson Pratt and William Clayton, devised a “roadometer” to help track the daily distance traveled by the group. They made a wooden wheel that revolved once in 10 miles, showing each mile. It was a happy day for Clayton when he could stop counting the rotations of a red rag tied to a spoke of a normal wagon wheel.

The leaders of the advance company took along some interesting items. Orson Pratt kept track of the weather and measured the location of the group with barometers, sextants, and telescopes.

The brethren fixed up a tent for [a Sioux chief and wife] to sleep under; Porter Rockwell made them some coffee, and they were furnished with some [food]. The old chief amused himself very much by looking at the moon through a telescope. . . .

—William Clayton, 1847



## Watched by Indians

When the first Mormon pioneers arrived in the Great Basin, they established “Great Salt Lake City” in the neutral buffer zone between the territorial grounds of thousands of Shoshone and Ute peoples. Not many Indians lived in the Salt Lake Valley at the time, but some had watched the pioneers coming through the mountains and knew when they arrived in the valley, as this report by a modern Shoshone woman explains:

Making Peace with the Past  
By Stacey Kratz, *Standard-Examiner*, June 15, 1997

To the Mormon pioneers who bumped their wagons down Emigration Canyon in late July 1847, the valley of the Great Salt Lake looked like a clean slate ready to be filled with prosperity and posterity. But the land they took possession of was already full of generations of people living an abundant life.

“The Indian people watched the pioneers come in,” said Mae Parry, a modern Clearfield resident and member of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation. “They were lying in scrub oak and bushes. I don’t know that the settlers knew they were there,” she added with a smile, “but they were.”