

FRANCIS WEBSTER

Born: 1831 England

Age: 25

Martin Handcart Company

As Francis Webster and his wife, Ann, prepared to leave London, they had sixteen hundred dollars in cash. With this money they would be able to outfit themselves in luxury for a trip from London to Salt Lake City. Francis placed five hundred dollars with a Church agent to purchase for him a good wagon with full camp equipment and two yoke of good cattle. He planned to pick it up at the point in America where the Mormons started across the plains. Soon after this order was placed, advice came from Brigham Young to the Saints of England, for the well-to-do to share with and give assistance to the poor members of the Church so that they also might come to Zion.

Francis Webster heard that advice and was ready to obey counsel. The price of that good Outfit he had ordered would pay the passage of nine additional persons to Utah. So, even knowing that a baby would be born to them on the plains, the Websters canceled the wagon order and elected to travel by handcart so that the money might bring nine more souls to Zion. They would obey counsel and trust themselves to the providence of God.

The following is from Francis' own words: 'I was married on the 5 day of December to Miss Ann Elizabeth Parsons. On the 23 of Dec. I was ordained a Priest. [In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.] On the 23 of May 1856, I left Liverpool on board the ship Horizon paying the fare for 9 persons besides myself and Wife to Salt Lake City. Landed at Boston on the 30 of June. Traveled through the States to Ioway city by railroad. I started from Ioway for Salt Lake city with hand Carts on the 27 of July. I had the diarrhea all the way from Ioway city to Florence so bad that I have sat down on the road and been administered to by the Elders and got up and pulled my hand cart with renewed vigor. I started from Florence on the 3rd of September. At Wolf Creek on the Platt my Daughter Amy Elizabeth was born on the 27 of September. I arrived in Salt Lake City of the 30th day of November 1856. On the second day of Dec I started with the brethren for Cedar City. I paid my Tithing on the little clothing I brought with me . . . My own feet were badly frozen on the journey.'

Francis' daughter, Amy, in a letter to her cousin, later wrote: "Grandfather Middleton drove one of the provisions wagons. I think Grandmother could have rode some of the time, but that she walked to keep Mother company, and to help carry me, the latter part of the journey, I have no doubt.

"They were living on a quarter of a lb. of flour a day each, Father had lived for 5 days on dead Buffalo meat without salt, when they were met by the relief train. Father had done that so grandmother and mother could have his quarter lb. of flour."

Francis Webster became a leader in the Church and a leader in the communities of southern Utah. The following is an account from the writings of William R. Palmer about

an incident in an adult Sunday School class in Cedar City at which over fifty men and women were in attendance: 'Nathan T. Porter was the teacher and the subject under discussion was the ill-fated handcart company [Martin] that suffered so terribly in the snow of 1856.

"Some sharp criticism of the Church and its leaders was being indulged in for permitting any company of converts to venture across the plains with no more supplies or protection than a handcart caravan afforded.

"One old man in the corner sat silent and listened as long as he could stand it, then he arose and said things that no person who heard him will ever forget. His face was white with emotion, yet he spoke calmly, deliberately, but with great earnestness and sincerity.

"He said in substance, 'I ask you to stop this criticism. You are discussing a matter you know nothing about. Cold historic facts mean nothing here, for they give no proper interpretation of the questions involved. Mistake to send the Handcart Company out so late in the season? Yes! But I was in that company and my wife was in it, and Sister Nellie Unthank whom you have cited here was there, too. We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation, but did you ever hear a survivor of that company utter a word of criticism? Every one of us came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives for we became acquainted with Him in our extremities!

'I have pulled my handcart when I was so weak and weary from illness and lack of food that I could hardly put one foot ahead of the other. I have looked ahead and seen a patch of sand or a hill slope and I have said, I can go only that far and there I must give up for I cannot pull the load through it. I have gone to that sand and when I reached it, the cart began pushing me! I have looked back many times to see who was pushing my cart, but my eyes saw no one. I knew then that the Angels of God were there. [See painting below.]

'Was I sorry that I chose to come by handcart? No! Neither then nor any minute of my life since. The price we paid to become acquainted with God was a privilege to pay and I am thankful that I was privileged to come in the Martin Handcart Company."

"The speaker was Francis Webster. And when he sat down there was not a dry eye in the room. We were a subdued and chastened lot. Charles Mabey, who later became Governor of Utah, arose and voice the sentiment of all when he said, 'I would gladly pay the same price to personally know God that Brother Webster has.'"



“When The Angels Come”

Painting by Clark Kelly Price. Used by Permission

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