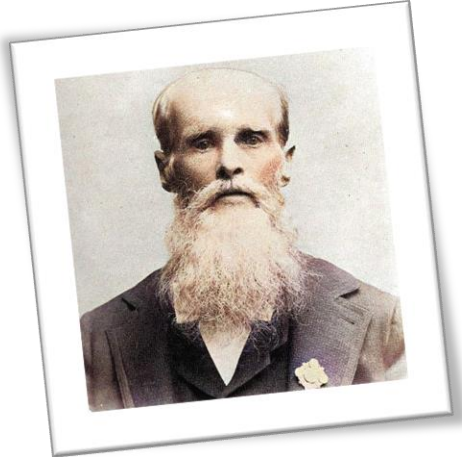


“I Will Die With You”



Many of you have heard the story of Levi Savage, heard it or watched it in a movie. Levi Savage was one of the sub captains of the Willie Handcart Company who on August 13, 1856, stood in a public meeting at Florence Nebraska and opposed the idea of taking the Willie Handcart Company forward onto the plains so late in the season. What many do not know is that Levi was joined in that opposition by another sub captain named Millen Atwood. Levi said,

Brother Atwood said to me last night that since he had been a member of this Church, with all of his experience, he had never been placed in a position where things appear so dark to him, as it does to undertake to take this Company through at this late Season of the year.

The following night, August 13, 1856 the meeting was held to decide the matter with the Willie Company. Levi recorded the events as follows,

Florence Nebraska Territory, Wednesday 13th Aug 1856. We held a meeting in Camp. Brother Willey exhorted the Saints to go forward regardless of suffering even to death; after he had spoken, he gave me the opportunity of speaking. I said to him, that if I spoke, I must speak my mind, let it cut where it would. He said, “Certainly, do so.” I then related to the Saints, the hardships that we should have to endure. I said that we were liable to have to wade in snow up to our knees and should at night wrap ourselves in a thin blanket. and lie on the frozen ground without a bed.... I spoke warmly upon the subject, but spoke truth, and the people, judging from appearance and after expressions, felt the force of it.



George Cunningham was a young man in the Willie Company. He was in that meeting and recorded that as Levi spoke,

The tears commenced to flow down his cheeks and he prophesied that if such undertook the journey at that late season of the year, that their bones would strew the way.

At the urging of Church leaders, Savage and Atwood were both voted down. At which point Levi Savage is reported to have said,

Brethren and Sisters, what I have said I know to be true; but, seeing you are to go forward, I will go with you, will help you all I can, will work with you, will rest with you, will suffer with you, and, if necessary, I will die with you. May God in his mercy bless and preserve us. Amen.

That is the powerful story that most of us have heard or watched from the beginning, but



there is a sequel. Not too long after that, out on the plains of Nebraska, those same returning missionaries and church leaders who had encouraged the saints to go forward back in Florence, caught up with the Willie Company bound for the west. That evening, a meeting was called. In that meeting people complained about Levi Savage. He was publicly rebuked in that meeting for dissension and a lack of faith in front of all the company assembled. George Cunningham said it even went so far that,

Brother Savage was called up and was told that he would have to take back what he said at Florence of which I have already mentioned or be tried for his fellowship. He was forced to do so.

Now if that were me, I might have been tempted to say something rather harsh and walk away from that company leaving them to their own devices, but not Levi Savage and not Millen Atwood. Everything and more that Levi had predicted would come to pass, came to pass. More than seventy people of the Willie Company would die and the suffering of those people was incalculable. And yet, in the very worst of their sufferings, after the snow had come at Willie Meadows and at the crossing of Rocky Ridge and Rock Creek Hollow and on into the valley, John Chislett said,

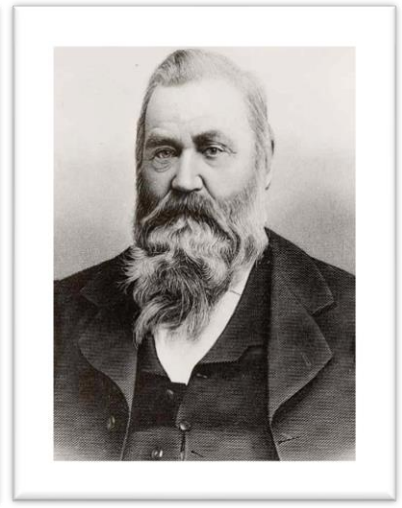
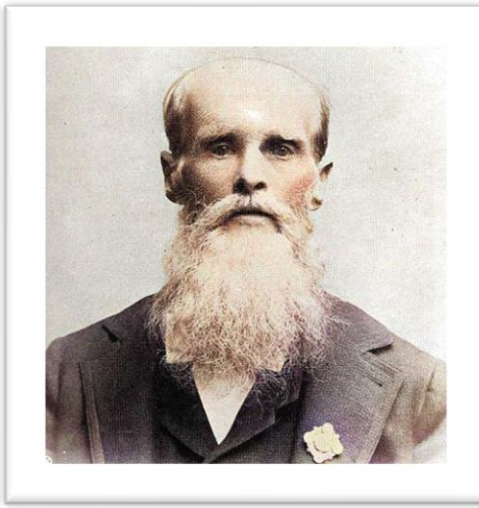
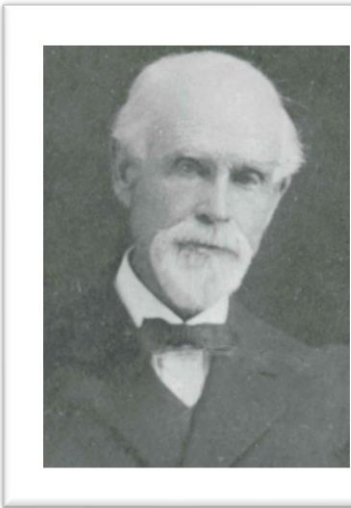
Brother Savage was true to his word; no man worked harder than he to alleviate the suffering which he had foreseen, when he had to endure it.

William Woodward, another valiant sub captain in that company said in a letter to President Joseph F. Smith in 1907,

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.

George Cunningham concluded that by the time the ordeal of the Willie Company was over the captains were completely exhausted and unable to walk. They had to be hauled the balance of the way into Salt Lake City. Then he named them, they were James G. Willie, Millen Atwood, William Woodward, and Levi Savage.

Brethren, is that not the kind of men and ministers we want to be?



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