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Mormon Trail, The

William Hill

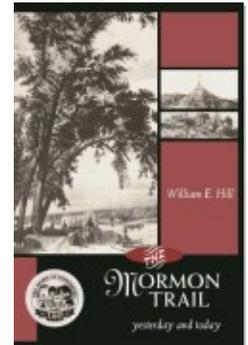
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Artists

THERE ARE ONLY A VERY FEW ARTISTS OR PHOTOGRAPHERS SPECIFICALLY associated solely with the Mormon Trail. There are, however, a number of other emigrant artists who sketched and painted scenes along the Oregon-California trails which include the major portions of the Mormon Trail. There are probably only two artists primarily associated with the Mormon Trail and familiar to Mormon Trail buffs. The first is Frederick Hawkins Piercy, a painter, who traveled from England to accompany a Mormon wagon company to Salt Lake City in 1853. The other is Carl C. A. Christensen who traveled over the Mormon Trail as a young man. He was a member of one of the handcart companies. However, it was not until almost twenty years later that he made his paintings. The paintings were meant as a chronicle of the history of the Mormon Church, and thus only a few depict the trail itself. There is a photographer, Charles R. Savage, who in 1866 left Salt Lake City by way of San Francisco, Panama, and New York to meet and accompany a Mormon wagon company and record its passage to Salt Lake City. Unfortunately, few trail scenes remain as many of the plates for his photographs were destroyed or have been lost. William Henry Jackson and George Simons were both recorders of the westward movement who sketched scenes along the Oregon-California trail systems that were used by the Mormons. The works of other emigrant artists, such as J. Goldsborough Bruff, James F. Wilkins, Albert Tracy, and Peter Hansen, are also used to depict the journey of the Mormons as they moved west to their new Zion in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. The works of three artists, Piercy, Jackson, and Simons, comprise the largest portion of the pictorial section.

Most of Frederick H. Piercy's works included here first appeared in his *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* published in 1855. It

documents his trip to Salt Lake City in 1853. Piercy was born in Portsmouth, England, and by the age of eighteen had one of his paintings exhibited in the Royal Academy. His subjects were primarily portraits and landscapes. The Mormon Church had engaged in an extensive missionary effort in Europe, and by the early 1850s there were widespread conversions. The church was active in bringing its new converts to Utah. Piercy was engaged by the Mormons to travel and record their journey from England across the plains to the new Zion. Piercy himself did not convert to Mormonism but still accepted the position. He traveled to Salt Lake and then returned to England to have the narration of his journey printed. His route was a little different from the route in Clayton's guide. Piercy started his overland journey from Council Bluffs, generally following Clayton's north side route. He did not cross over to the south side of the Platte at Fort Laramie to follow the route as recommended by Clayton but remained on the north side of the Platte. Near present-day Casper the two routes rejoined, and Piercy again followed the original route the rest of the way to the Great Salt Lake. He made sketches of scenes both on his way west to Salt Lake and on his return trip. His works included not only major landmarks but also some of the sites having specific historic significance for the Mormons. They have become even more significant because the works of some other artists who travelled and sketched during the same period have either been lost or destroyed. Piercy's sketches were made into steel engravings or woodcuts. Some critics feel that while most of his work is accurate, some of his paintings are a little too idyllic or romanticized. Thus, notwithstanding the style of his work, it provides us today with one of the few "eyewitness" views of scenes along the trail. His narrative became a useful guide for Mormons and non-Mormons alike. He remained in England after his return and continued to paint. However, his paintings recording his trip to Salt Lake remain his most outstanding contribution to the field of history and art. His last art exhibit was in 1880. He died in 1891.

William Henry Jackson is one of the most famous recorders of scenes and events of the West. He was a photographer and a self-taught artist. In 1866 he decided to go west and signed on as a bullwacker on a freighting outfit heading for the Montana goldfields. En route he changed his mind and continued traveling west to Salt Lake City and then on to California. He returned from Los Angeles in 1867. During his journeys out and back he made many sketches of scenes and events encountered along the way. After he returned, he renewed his interest in photography, and in 1868, he opened a studio in Omaha, Nebraska. He began photographing the westward expansion of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1869. Then, in 1870

he became the photographer for the Hayden Expedition. His photographs taken of the expedition, which included the Yellowstone area, were instrumental in having Yellowstone designated our first national park in 1872. Later he turned many of his sketches and his early photos of the West into paintings depicting the emigrants' migration west. He was born in 1843, the year before Prophet Joseph Smith was killed, and traveled west after most of the Mormons had already migrated. Yet, the scenes along the route had changed little. His interests in photography and painting continued until he died in 1943 at the age of ninety-nine.

George Simons was another of the non-Mormon artists who captured scenes of the Mormons moving west and of the route they followed. He was a pioneer and a gold prospector in Colorado and hunted buffalo with the Indians. He travelled with his wife back and forth over the emigrant trails to California and served as a member of the railroad survey led by Grenville M. Dodge. He was also a poet and an artist. He made many of his sketches while traveling back and forth over the westward trails during the 1840s, 50s, and 60s. Many of his pencil sketches were also made into oil paintings. He was not a professional artist like Piercy nor a photographer like Jackson, yet his works are fine records of the time and events of that period. Like many other artists of that time, such as C. C. A. Christensen and James Wilkins, he also painted rolled panoramic views. His paintings were of scenes along the Missouri River and of the trail from Omaha west to Denver. Unfortunately, like those of some other recorders of the West, many of his paintings, including the panoramas and some sketches, have since disappeared.



PATTY BARTLETT SESSIONS—Daughters of Utah Pioneers

Patty Bartlett Sessions has been called the “Mother of Mormon Midwifery.” During her lifetime she assisted in the birth of nearly four thousand babies. She was an early convert to Mormonism. She lived in Kirtland, Ohio and then moved west with the Mormon Church to Nauvoo, Illinois. She was a member of the first

Mormon party to leave Nauvoo during the exodus in 1846. In 1847 she was a member of the second Mormon company that left Winter Quarters for Salt Lake. She was born in 1795 and died in 1892. She retired from being a midwife in 1872 after a long and successful career. Part of her diary is included in the diary section.