The Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company, commonly referred to as the Perpetual Emigration Fund (PEF), was a corporation established by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) in 1849. The purpose of the corporation was to provide economic assistance to more than 30,000 individuals who sought to emigrate to the Salt Lake Valley and surrounding regions.

The PEF used both church assets and private contributions to aid impoverished converts to the LDS faith when they moved west. As funds were limited, converts seeking aid were ranked by their useful skills and by the duration of their membership in the church. Limits on funds led to innovative preparations and travel methods, including the establishment of handcart companies, to reduce expenses. Once established in their new homes, the converts were expected to repay the funds to the company in cash, commodities, or labor, with minor interest, so others could receive help.

Ten handcart companies made the journey of over a thousand miles overland to Salt Lake valley between 1856 and 1860. Of the almost 3,000 members of these companies about 250 died en route. It had been predicted that those walking, pulling, and pushing the handcarts bearing all their earthly possessions, could travel with greater speed than the wagon trains hampered by slow moving ox teams. The first three companies tended to bear out the prediction. The fourth and fifth and now famous Willie and Martin companies resulted in stark tragedy. Only the prompt action of Brigham Young and his associates in sending out rescue parties kept the number who died as low as it was.

Although the church leaders reported that the 1856 tragedies did not discourage them, and a group of missionaries were sent east by handcart from Utah to demonstrate how practical this mode of travel was, only five more companies made the trek during the years from 1857 to 1860, when the tenth and last group with their two-wheeled vehicles arrived in Utah.

Today the handcart experiment is one of the many curiosities in the annals of western history. With the pony express, the trail drives, the rush for gold, trapping for beaver, vigilantes, Indian massacres and other phenomena, the story of the handcart migrations with the accompanying heartaches, tragedy, faith, and devotion adds color to the many threaded tapestry which is early western history.

Appropriate illustrations and a map of the handcart route add interest and enhance the good workmanship that has come to be expected in the publications of the Arthur H. Clark Company. Professional historians, western history enthusiasts, those interested in Mormon church history, and other lay readers will find interesting information available to them in this useful study.

CHURCH TEAM EMIGRANTS, 1860-1868

In 1860 Mormon leaders abandoned the handcart experiment in favor of the church ox-team method. This was done for two reasons: the discovery that loaded ox teams could be sent from Utah to the Missouri, pick up emigrants (and merchandise), and return to Utah in one season, and for better use of the church's own resources, that is to save money.

By means of these "down and back" trips, the Mormons could export their own flour, beans, and bacon to supply the emigrants, and use the cash saved to buy and freight back needed supplies not available in Utah. Furthermore emigrants could be saved the expense and trouble of obtaining their own wagons or carts and draft animals to take them west.

The 2,200-mile round trip could be made in approximately six months. Each wagon was pulled by four yoke of oxen or mules and carried about 1,000 pounds of supplies. The teams were expected to reach the Missouri River at Florence in July and return with ten to twenty emigrants per wagon and all the freight they could load.

This system lasted for the period 1860-1868, and required about 2,000 wagons 2,500 teamsters, 17,550 oxen and brought approximately 20,500 emigrants to Utah.

The Utah Settlements included

1. Streets laid out in grid pattern
2. Very wide main and side streets, Irrigation ditches ran beside most streets
3. Extremely large city blocks, four acres or larger in size, for homes and large gardens
4. Public buildings and parks, called squares, in the center of towns. The buildings were usually a church house and sometimes a temple, business offices, and stores. Celebrations were often held in the public squares.
5. Farmlands beyond the city center. Tall poplar trees, used as wind breakers, surrounded the farms

The leaders of the church were also the leaders of the government. The people were divded into “wards” according to where they lived. “stakes” were groups of wards, each ward and each stake had leaders who were in charge of temporal and religious matters. The leader of each ward was called a bishop, and the leader of a stake was called a stake president. Land was given according to the needs of each family, and any extra food was to be given to the bishop. Bishops gave food to the poor and to new immigrants who hadn’t had time to grow their own food.

The first pioneers in Utah faced several challenges:

1. They were in an unfamiliar environment. The land was fertile but very dry. Any trees or crops that the people wanted had to be planted and watered. In other places of the world where they had lived, rain had watered the crops. In Uta, there was not enough rain to do hat. Some immigrants had trouble getting used to the cold, snowy winters and hot summers.
2. They were isolated from the rest of the world with no fast communication to the east.
3. They were living on land inhabited by American Indians. Inndians saw them as inruders. This caused problems for both groups.
4. Every year thousands of new immigrants arrived with no money, homes, or jobs. Everyone had to work with people of many different cultures and languages to build a cooperative community.
5. When non-Mormons came, there was often friction between the two groups. The Mormons stuck together and often excluded others because they wanted to run the towns their way. Church leaders were also government leaders, which upset non-Mormons. Racial friction also existed, just as it does today.

Expanding across the land

During the first decade some 100 settlements were established, from the Bear River Valley in Idaho to Arizona and Nevada. Major settlements such as Provo, Manti, and Tooele became hub communities around which were located other small villages. A large expansion of pioneer settlements occurred when the people of established several new settlements at Alpine, American Fork, Lehi, Payson, Battle Creek (Pleasant Grove), and Springville… Three settlements were north of Salt Lake near Ogden

On May 10, 1869, the “wedding of the rails” took place at Promontory Summit, Utah. A railroad then stretched across the continent. The whole country celebrated as a transcontinental telegraph reported the blow of a silver sledge hammer, driving a golden spike to complete the railroad. This was almost the end of wagon train travel to Utah, settlers could now take a train and save themselves 3 months of travel time.