

CHAPTER 2

EXCERPTS FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARIE MADALINE CARDON

Marie Madaline Cardon and her family were in the first company of Italian saints to emigrate to Utah. They left Piedmont on February 7, 1854 along with the Barthelemy Pons family and five adult children of John Bertoch who remained behind to do missionary work. This story involves Marie Madaline Caron Guild (pictured) and Mary Ann Pons who later married Joseph Harris.



... Some few days before we were to start on our journey, the elders held a meeting with my family. We were given instructions for our journey, both over the great ocean and across the desert plains. They anointed us and laid their hands upon our heads and gave us each a blessing. They prophesied that if we would live as we should in sincerity of heart to our Heavenly Father, every one of my family would reach the end of our journey in health and strength. They said that sickness and even death would stare us in the face, that we would experience many dangers, meet with many accidents and that some of us would come nigh unto death yet we all would live to enter Zion.



A Waldensian church in Angrogna. Members of the first company may have worship here before becoming members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and emigrating.

We realized only in part the magnitude of our journey. This was truly a serious undertaking. Not one of us could speak or understand the language. This was a great trial; for the remainder of our lives on the earth were to be spent among people who spoke this foreign tongue. My father and mother sensed the situation more keenly than we children, but we sensed it more fully when we reached England. There we felt almost entirely lost.

I soon felt the necessity of learning the new language and lost no opportunity in doing so. I earnestly sought the Lord's help in doing so. I fasted and prayed and exercised all the faith possible in learning English. I learned one word after another and reviewed constantly. It was not long until I could understand quite well; far better than I could speak. I kept up courage nothing daunting for I desired to be of assistance to my parents and the rest of the company.

We spent two weeks in London waiting for the saints there to prepare for the emigration. At Liverpool we spent seventeen days waiting for the ship "John M. Wood" to be completed as it was being built. It was a large ship for those days. Our emigration party consisted of four hundred eighty-five persons, all Latter-day Saints. In addition, of course, was the ship captain and crew. . .

When we arrived at St. Louis we rejoiced that we had braved the savage waves and then were safe from the dangers of the mighty deep. How little we knew of the fatal dangers ahead! Much less did we know of the sorrows and heart aches that awaited us. Some of the passengers being curious one night ventured into the city of New Orleans, not knowing that the dreadful cholera was raging there. As soon as the officers could locate them they were hurried back to the ship. Despite the precautions taken, some passengers were seized by the disease. Our ship was immediately placed under quarantine and they located us on a small island up the river not far from St. Louis. The disease spread rapidly through the company. Many were stricken and died.

Our camp was made hideous and sorrowful by groaning and agony. . . When we believed the cholera was about over; we went up the Mississippi River near Kansas. We camped there on the bank of the Mississippi above Kansas City, although it was not much of a city then. We then were preparing for our long journey on the wilderness; cattle and wagons and tents and supplies were unloaded on the bank; and men were very busy in breaking the oxen, and yoking them up ready to work. In a few days the cholera broke out again, even worse than before. A family of nine children and their father died within a few hours. People were dying about as fast as they could be buried, fifteen and twenty each day. . .

One day a German lady was suddenly attacked. My sister and I worked with her with all our strength, but she died within a few hours. She thanked us with all her heart for all we had done for her. Having no relatives she requested that we accept what few affects she possessed

as a token of respect for our kindness. . . She asked that we lay her away in a certain dressing suit which she had in a small trunk and to keep the remainder of her possessions; That was naught to do but to comply with her dying request. After she died we washed and dressed her as she desired and followed her remains to the grave. When we returned from the funeral we divided her few belongings between us. In the pocket of one of the skirts was a pocket knife which I was to have. I make mention of this because of events which followed. . .

I remember one morning when we were nearly all ready to start, Elder Pons was at breakfast with his family and ours together. He was a fine, portly man, and jolly. He was keeping us all laughing with his jokes when he was instantly seized with the cholera and died. Some of his family live in Ogden yet. Mrs. Joseph Harris (Mary Ann Pons) who died about ten months ago, was one of his daughters. Another is Mrs. Lydia Pons Farley and her daughter Olive Eugenia, is the wife of Jacob Rhine, a conductor on the U.P.R.W. Passenger train.

I knew Mr. and Mrs. Pons' family when they first joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Italy. They were very good people, charitable, and kind to all that were in need of assistance. My father and a few others started on their journey as soon as their oxen were so that they could drive them. They would go about fifteen miles from the Mississippi River and camp there, and wait there until all the rest would come so they would form a large company of 75 or 80 wagons, but some of the cattle were very wild and unmanageable so that it took a few days, or over a week before all were ready to leave the bank of the river.

The young men, of course, had the very wildest of the cattle for the older men had the more tamed ones. My three older brothers each had a wagon and from three to four yokes of oxen to pull them. The wagons were very heavy loaded and the roads were very rough in those days. The cholera had apparently ceased by then. The saints felt full of hope and courage again, and when all were ready to start for the desert plains, our leader instructed us the night before to try and make as early start as possible in the morning so that all would be able to reach our first camp before dark, as some of the cattle were pretty wild and unmanageable, an early start would be very necessary, in order to allow for emergencies so the next morning we had our breakfast at daybreak and made as an early start as possible.

My oldest brother, John, took the lead as he was the first one to start. Then followed our next two brothers. Then came John and David Pons, the two sons of Elder Pons who had died a few days previous from the cholera. All were rolling along well (about July 18, 1854) for a short time until they got to the foot of a steep hill where trouble began. My brother John had gone up the hill OK and had reached a small burg called Westport which stood on the top of a high hill about 12 miles from the Mississippi River. But soon one of my brothers got into trouble. His oxen would not pull up hill. They preferred to go any way but up hill and certainly refused to go on. Finally one of the yokes broke down. The Pons brothers broke one of their yokes and a wagon tongue. They had to stop and let others pass. These poor boys had no chance to get either yokes or a new wagon tongue unless they could get them from our camp which was a long distance from where they had broken down. There was no other way but to ask us girls to go on to our camp and have some of the brethren who had gentle and tamed

oxen to bring new ones.

I could not refuse to go; and the Pons brothers also asked for their sister, Mary Ann, to go along with me. So we started, believing that we would reach our camp in the afternoon in time to get someone to bring the necessary assistance so as to enable our brothers to reach camp by evening. We walked about as fast as we could walk, but most of the way was uphill. We reached Westport about 3:00 p.m. We knew not how far our camp was from there, so we continued on our journey in hopes of finding our camp soon. We walked down on the other side of Westport until we came to a creek. We managed to cross it as best we could and then we followed the wagon road. We overtook my eldest brother, John, who was unable to get up the long dug way. He had been there between two and three hours and he could not get his cattle up. When we girls came up to him and told him of our errand he seemed to be very glad and asked for our help. He was heavily loaded and his cattle had not been used to work at all as they had just been brought from the range.

While I was talking to my brother, two men came from Westport. They were finely dressed and seemingly well-to-do. They stopped a few minutes and my brother wanted me to ask these gentlemen how far it was to the first Mormon camp which I did. They said it was not very far and that they were going directly to camp as their family was there. They said they were Mormons and were willing to assist us to reach camp if we would allow them. My brother said that we had better accept their offer, as it would be more safe for us girls to go with them. Besides, it was getting late in the afternoon. I asked the men if they thought that we would arrive at camp before night. They said, "Certainly we can be there easily by sundown."

We started walking quite fast but I felt as though something was not quite right. I decided to ask some different questions concerning arrangements pertaining to our journey and found out that the man I was speaking to was not at all acquainted with anything about our journey. He did not even know the name of the captain or the names of any of our elders. We were walking side by side while Miss Pons was about one yard ahead walking alongside the other man. As neither of these men could speak French or understand it, I spoke to Miss Pons and told her that I thought it best for us to go right back and stay with her brother until some of our people came to help.

But she only laughed and said, "What on earth has come into your head?" I told her that I feared these men were not honest. I felt horrid and wished that we had never agreed to come with them. "Well," she said, "I never saw such a girl as you. You always borrow trouble half way or want to meet it half way. Why don't you just wait until it comes before you start to worry?"

She asked if the man at my side had said anything improper? I said, "No, he dare not." "Well then, what makes you think that these men mean to harm us?" I said that I felt our lives were in great danger and began to despair. Miss Pons said that as long as they behaved themselves we might as well keep on going as it was a very long way back to our brothers.

I said, "Do you have a pocket knife with you to defend yourself?" She replied that she did not. Of course we talked and pretended that we were joking with each other for fear we should arouse their suspicion although we were quite sure they did not understand our language. I told Miss Pons that I had a good knife which I would use in the event anything improper happened. For we came to America pure and with the help of God we would remain so.

I asked the man by my side how soon he thought we would reach our camp. He answered that it would not be very long now but I replied that they had told us that we would arrive before sun down. He answered that he hardly thought it was as far as it now appeared. Perhaps we had not walked as fast as we might have but that it would not be long before we arrived. Well the sun went down and soon the stars began to appear. As Miss Pons had been laughing at me for meeting trouble half way, I did not wish to mention the subject again but my mind was hard at work planning a defense in the event we were attacked by the men. I remembered the promise that the elders had made concerning our trials on our long journey and that God would be with us and keep us from harm if we would be faithful to our covenants; that no one could harm us in we had faith in our Redeemer. Still I knew that faith without work is dead. . . So I took my knife out of my pocket so I would have it ready in an instant should I need to use it.

We walked along among the woods and pines. It was so dark that we could not see one yard ahead of us. All we saw was the glitter of the stars through the branches of the trees. All at once Miss Pons spoke to me in a trembling voice, "Oh, I wish that I had taken your advice when you warned me that we should go back, but now it is too late . We are lost girls for the man by my side just said we will have to stay the night with them. I said, "No."

I had my knife ready and planned to kill them both if they attempted to lay hands on us. . . My knife was long and very sharp. One of the blades was long enough to accomplish it. Although we understood how serious our position was we remained calm and walked even though we expected to be carried off at any moment. When the man walking beside Miss Pons said he did not intend to take us to our camp, I called upon our Heavenly Father to look down on us with mercy and to protect us. I asked him in the name of his son Jesus to deliver us from these villains.

I had my knife in my right hand when they stopped and said, "Well dear young ladies we are sorry to disappoint you but we are now a long way from your camp and we wish to have you stay the night with us. If you want to go to your camp in the morning we will take you." Before they could say another word I boldly told them that I would take their lives unless they let us go uninjured. Otherwise I would kill them both. They seemed to be paralyzed just then. If they had made any attempt to lay evil hands upon us I was ready to cut their throats, for I had a plan of action. But the villains could not even speak one word. Us girls started to run for our lives holding each other's hand. We followed the path before us in the woods for we did not know where else to go for protection. I clutched my open knife in my right hand as we ran. When our strength was gone I said to Miss Pons, "I cannot run any further. Let us sit down for a

minute or two." But before we sank to the ground we heard footsteps in the path not far off. So we started to run again as fast as we could through the woods and wild prairie. We were running still when we passed a small log cabin with two men laying in the front yard. I suppose they heard us coming. We were about a yard away from them when they rose and spoke at us saying, "Good evening young ladies." In our fright we did not answer but just kept running.

The dew had fallen heavily and our clothes were soon dripping wet as we ran through tall grass. We had neither food nor water since we left the Mississippi River. We thought of sitting down to wait until day break but were not sure where our pursuers were. We feared that if we sat down we might fall asleep and yet be overtaken by them or wild beasts might devour us if they came upon us while we slept. So we continued on, hand in hand, while I held the pocket knife ready and open in my right hand. . . After a while we came to a hollow and as we looked up ahead we saw a light. We felt sure it was the morning star glittering through the trees when a breeze moved the branches. As we drew nearer we discovered it was a house with people there in having a dance. As they promenaded around they shaded the light passing through the windows.

When we came to the house we rang the bell and some of the dancers came to the door and invited us in. We thanked them but in our despair we dared not tell them that we were lost or what had happened for fear our pursuers might soon arrive there. Instead we told the young people we were desirous to go to the first Mormon Camp from the Mississippi River. And that our parents were following us but they had broken a wagon wheel and had been detained considerable in repairing the wheel. Also that the company had gone on ahead to form a camp in a suitable location. That we girls wished to find that camp and get something to eat ready for our parents.

"Dear ladies," they said. "You have passed the first camp long since. You are now twelve and one half miles from that camp and two and one half from the second Mormon camp. You most certainly have lost your way entirely. You had better come in and stay until daylight. Then you will be assisted to your camp."

But we could not make up our minds, for they were all dressed up gaily and we two poor lost girls must have looked horrid. We kindly thanked them for their kind hospitality; but only asked if they would kindly direct us in the direction of the Mormon camp, we would get someone there to take us back to ours. They kindly came with us a few steps and showed us as best they could describing the road to the second camp. We walked for about half a mile until we saw a small cabin on our right with the door open, it being very warm weather. There was only one small room. We noticed a man in bed apparently sick as he had a towel tied over his forehead and another man sitting near the door reading.

We felt sure that it would be all right for us to go and ask if we were on the right road to the camp but we dared not say we were lost for fear these men might want to come along. As the door was open and the cabin lighted we felt it was alright to get information from them. The man by the door was very kind. He told us that as near as he could discern we were

headed in the direction of the second camp. He said we were on the right road. We thanked him for his kindness and started off but soon made up our minds that it would be better to go back to the house where the dance was being held.

We returned and rang the bell and they came to meet us at the door. We thought it best to tell them of our adventure and that we were lost. We asked if we could stay until day light. They kindly took us in. Just then the man who had been sitting up with the sick man arrived and listened to our story. He said, "I knew these ladies were lost and that something was wrong. Which is why I watched them after they left my cabin. I discovered that they only went a short distance after they left me and soon I heard them running back. I was close to the road but they did not see me. I knew by the way they looked and spoke that they were in distress. I followed them here to discover if I could be of any more assistance. He was a good man. The ladies at the dance knew him and recommended him as an honest person. They said he would bring us safely to where we wished to go.

So we left with him. Miss Pons was telling him about our misadventure when all at once we heard a familiar voice say, "Is that you Miss Pons? What in the world brings you out here so early? What has happened?" It was a man we had crossed the sea with. We knew both him and his wife. He was out on night watch over the cattle trying to keep them together. There were three other men from the second company with him. He took us back to his wife who gave us some toast and a cup of coffee. She insisted that we should lay down a little while her husband went back to help the others bring in the cattle. He returned after some time and unloaded his wagon expecting to take us back to the first company. But the captain had already fixed up his buggy to drive us there. We arrived at the first camp between eleven and twelve o' clock noon.

There was great rejoicing for everybody thought we were dead. . . My dear mother was so worried she was unable to speak above a whisper. Our men had begun a search when my brother John arrived and told our parents that two men had promised to bring us to the camp safely, but that was many hours earlier. Fearing the worst, all the men began the search for us. They called out our names well into the night and kept a fire burning. By day break our people began to fear that these men had run away with us or killed us and left our bodies in the woods for the wild beasts to devour. But God watched over us and was true to the promise spoken through his servants who gave us blessings before we embarked on this long journey. . .