

**Transcript of Elder M. Russell Ballard's Remarks
at Groundbreaking for
Mormon Battalion Visitors Center
Monument Plazas
Saturday, 9 June 2007**

Well, it's a delight to be here this morning with you again in this beautiful park. In 1996, that was the centennial year of the statehood for the state of Utah. At that occasion, I was a member of that statehood commission. Stephen Studdard was the chairman of it. As that commission sat together and we tried to determine what kind of legacy could we leave that would go on long after 1996. And the conclusion was that we could do some improvements here at This Is the Place Heritage Park. And so that began the efforts to create more buildings, more indication and representation of the history that this great valley enjoys.

I think it's very, very important for all of us to never lose sight – and I worry, and I think I can say that all of those who have pioneer forefathers, those whose forefathers paid such a tremendous price to cross the plains and to make their way to this valley, regardless of whether they were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or they were Catholic or Presbyterian or Methodist or Jewish or whoever they were in those days, it was a tremendously challenging and difficult problem to conquer the desert and to come into this valley and help it blossom and become the beautiful, marvelous city and center that we now have – and I worry that the youth as they are coming up with all of this technology that's gobbling up their minds, when you see them with the ipods and their cell phones and their text messaging and all of this technology that most of us sitting here don't know how to do, I worry that in the process of that, they are going to lose who they are. And we must not let that happen. We cannot let the youth of the state of Utah and the youth of this church and the youth of all other churches, we must not let them lose sight of who they are. And they are here and enjoying all of these marvelous privileges and blessings that are theirs because they had forefathers who were absolutely courageous and had deep conviction in what they believed in, so much so that they had the courage, many of them, to walk every step of the way and to pull handcarts, and many of them lost their lives as you know trying to get from Nauvoo to this wonderful place here in Salt Lake City.

I guess one of the things that has driven me to want to be as helpful as I possibly can in building this legacy park, this heritage park, is because I have great grandparents who walked every step of the way, who pulled handcarts. One little great grandmother from Scotland who was yet 13 years of age who had to carry her little brother on her back a good portion of the way, and a great grandfather who arrived here and hid himself, hid himself in the bushes until night time, and when he saw a cabin, he went to that door and knocked on it and prayed in his heart that a man would answer the door because he had lost almost all of his clothing being torn away from him as he went across the trail herding a herd of sheep, and not yet 19 years of age. And he begged clothing, and the good people that answered the door gave him some clothing, and he writes in his journal that the next morning, he walked into this valley, and said it was the greatest day of his life. I have a great grandmother, the same little Scotch lass, that married Henry Ballard, who when they came into the mouth of the Weber Canyon there, they were so famished and so starved from the handcart that my great-great grandmother saw a little home that had some squash that was growing in the garden, and she sent

little Margaret over there to beg for a squash that they might have something to eat. And she records in her journal that a wonderful, white haired grandmother came to the door and gave her the squash and said that she would come over in a little while – later came to where they were camped with food that they had not seen, and then told them, “I knew you were coming. I've been told to take care of you.”

Now when we have those kinds of backgrounds that go into our history, and those who were part of the Mormon Battalion, when you think and study the history of that battalion, what they went through, what they would do for a drink of water, what they went through to fulfill the charge that was given to them by Brigham Young, and to fulfill their responsibility to the United States Army – the longest military walk that we have any history of – we cannot lose that! We MUST not lose that! And I think that this great work of Dr. Neal, and the generosity of Larry Miller to finance these pieces, and the great work that Bob is doing, this has got to be the happiest, jovial... I don't know, Bob, where you keep that smile on your face all of the time... [Bob: Please don't cry, Elder Ballard.] Don't cry. You're supposed to laugh. [Bob: I'm so grateful.] But he's doing such a great work.

I would like to, in conclusion, to say this to you this morning: We must herald what the efforts are here. We need to get our people here.

I want to express appreciation to Ellis Ivory. He has volunteered his time, his energies, his resources. I guess nobody would know – maybe only I know – how much the Ivory family has put into improving the Park to the degree it is. You go over to the Brigham Young home. The Brigham Young home was in terrible condition. You go look at it now, the sparkles, and there's rest rooms there, and the parking lots are paved, and the trails have been cleaned up, and we've got trains now to move people so the older folks like me – who has two artificial knees – don't have to hike the hills, we can get on the train. Soon the train will make a noise and blow up a little smoke, they tell me. That's the vision of Ellis and his committee and the Board here. And there's been some criticism that has been lashed out by those who just haven't been here, and come over here to try to understand what the purpose is and why everyone is working toward this objective. It's to maintain and to build a place where all faiths, all cultures, can come and appreciate their heritage, and to leave a legacy – long after we're gone – in the hearts and the lives of our youngsters, our young people, and our young fathers and mothers that is far more important than anything they will learn on the ipod or anything that they will learn anywhere else in my judgement, because there is nothing more important for a person to know than who he is, and where he came from, and the heritage and the strength of his pioneer forefathers.

So it's a wonderful thing that we are going to honor the Battalion here. I commend this work and am grateful for it, and trust that the Lord will bless us in another great enterprise, another fund raising effort, another stepping into the light, and not seeing the end from the beginning yet, but we know that there will be an end, because all of us will work together to see that it happens. So I commend all of you, and thank the Board, thank Ellis, thank Bob, all of you that are here this morning. I trust that the Lord will bless this effort. We surely need His blessing. And we need to speak positively out in our community, and have people come here, not by the hundreds, but by the thousands. Because all they'll do when they come here will be to gain a better understanding of the wonderful legacy and heritage that this valley gives to us. What a great thing that the State of Utah

was willing to allow a private foundation to be formed up here that could go ahead and do things and beautify the Park as we're striving to do. And so, have a wonderful time here today, and let us enjoy and hold in high esteem the memory of the Mormon Battalion, which I ask God to bless us with.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.