

## CAROLINE REEDER

Born: 1839 England (died on October 15, 1856, one mile past Independence Rock)

Age: 17

Willie Handcart Company

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Caroline was traveling with her father, David (age 54), her brother, Robert (19), her sister, Eliza, and Eliza's husband, James Hurren, and their 4 children. Caroline's mother had died when she was a newborn, leaving five children motherless. She grew up on the farm of a Mr. Read, where her father was a laborer. It was here that her sister, Eliza, met and married James Hurren. James and Eliza lived with the Reeder family and helped to take care of them.

Caroline walked along the trail with her family. She was a great friend to her nieces. They remembered with fondness how she encouraged and helped and sang with them along the way.

As the nights began to turn cold and food became scarce, their clothing and bedding became altogether insufficient for their comfort. Nearly all suffered at night from the cold. Instead of getting up in the morning strong and refreshed many were seen crawling out of their tents looking haggard and showing a lack of the vitality that they would need to complete the journey. Death was not confined to the old and sick, but also struck the young and strong. Caroline's father died October 1, just past Fort Laramie. The Willie Company Journal recorded that day: "The Handcart Company rolled out of Camp about noon and the 4 wagons then turned back to an elevated spot of ground commanding a full view of the Fort. ... Early this morning Bro David Reeder died, aged 54. ... Some missionaries from Salt Lake passed by our camp & informed us that Brother P.P. Pratt & other missionaries were camped about 4 miles from us up the river."

Levi Savage also wrote of this day: "Platte River. This morning Brother David Reader was found dead in his bed. He has been ill for some time. He had no particular disease, but of debility. He was a good man and a worthy member of the Church."

Two weeks later, on October 15, Levi Savage also wrote of Caroline's death: "Sweet Water. Today we travelled fifteen and a half miles. Last night Caroline Reeder, aged seventeen years, died and was buried this morning.<sup>1</sup> The people are getting weak and failing very fast. A great many are sick. Our teams are also failing fast, and it requires great exertion to make any progress. Our rations were reduced last night."

Caroline and her father had suffered greatly, but were spared the severe storms and complete depletion of rations that were yet to come. The Willie company became stranded in deep snow near the Sweetwater River just four days after Caroline's death. Three days later, they were helped by rescuers across Rocky Ridge in freezing cold and on to Rock Creek, where 13 people were buried in a common grave.

Caroline's brother, Robert, wrote: "Nights were getting colder and some would sit down by the roadside and die. My younger sister, Caroline, 17 years old, after traveling all day and seeing the camp being made for the night took off her apron to tie some sage brush in to bring into the camp. She sat down to rest, leaning on her bundle, exhausted. They found her chilled and dying and carried her into camp. She died without gaining consciousness. She, too, was placed in an unmarked grave."

Also from Reeder family records, this entry is found, possibly written by James Hurren, Caroline's brother-in-law: "On October [14th], your sister, Caroline, left the camp one evening to hunt for wood—she was chilled through and through. As she did not return, I went in search and found her crouched down behind a bush. But I was too late. She was departed. All we could do was to lay her tenderly away as best we could."

<sup>1</sup> "Last night" could have meant Oct. 14 or 15. The company journal for Oct. 15 states: "Early this morning, Caroline Reeder, from Linstead, Suffolk, England, aged 17 years, died. The campground where Caroline is buried is one mile west of Independence Rock."