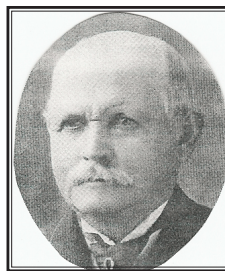


JAMES THOMAS BRIGGS

Born: January 4, 1845 in England

Age: 11

Martin Handcart Company



James T. Briggs Rachel Briggs (Crane)

John Briggs was a weaver by trade. He married Ruth Butterworth in 1835 and together they joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in August 1840. For sixteen years, the family planned and prepared to emigrate to America to be with the Saints in Utah. In May 1856, the Briggs family set sail on the *Horizon*. John (age 42) and Ruth (39) brought all seven children with them—Eliza (19), Thomas (13), James (11), Mary Hannah (7), Sarah Ann (4), Rachel (3), and baby Emma (8 months). They arrived in Boston and then traveled mostly by train to Iowa City, where they spent about three weeks preparing for their trek across the plains and mountains. It was a very difficult trip. James and his older siblings took turns pulling and pushing the handcart along with their parents. They also took turns carrying their baby sister, Emma, sometimes carrying her under their clothing so she might get some warmth.

At the last crossing of the Platte River on October 19, many of the people, particularly the men, became extremely weak and ill due to the exposure and getting their families across this river. The first severe winter storm set in soon after crossing and the company did not make much progress. Many died and were buried in common graves. Rescuers finally found James's family on October 28 and helped them as far as Devil's Gate where another storm and sub-zero temperatures stopped them again. On November 3, 1856, James's mother arose to find his father had died during the night. Another immigrant in the Martin Company, Alice Walsh, who was widowed at this time, wrote: "We arrived at Devil's Gate about the 1st of November [and] on account of the nightly fatalities of the male members of our company for 2 or 3 weeks previously, there were many widows in our camp and the women and children had to pitch and put up the tents, shoveling the snow away with tin plate[s], etc. making our beds on the ground and getting up in the morning with melted snow and lye on our clothing. ... My husband died and was buried at or near Devil's Gate and the ground was frozen so hard that the men had a difficult task in digging the grave deep enough in which to inter him and nine others that morning, and it is more than probable that several were only covered over with snow." From November 4-9, the Martin Company took shelter in a cove, and then moved on. James's brother, Thomas, died on November 11. Within a week there were enough wagons that all were allowed to ride. The Briggs family struggled forward, without father and brother. Fellow company member, John Jaques, wrote: "On the 27th [Nov.] the company camped on East Canyon Creek, on the 28th the Big Mountain was crossed and the company camped at its west base. At a spring here, Fera Little, Joseph A. Young, his brother Brigham and others, who had been busy keeping the roads broken in the vicinity, had their camp. On the 29th the company crossed over Little Mountain, or part of it, and camped at Killian's Canyon, near the head of Emigration Canyon, and on Sunday the 30th passed down the latter canyon and arrived in Salt Lake City about noon, driving into East Temple Street as the congregation was leaving the old adobie tabernacle in the southwest corner of Temple block."

Salt Lake City was so very close, but it was too late for Mary Hannah Briggs, who joined her father and brother in death on November 29, one day short of their journey's end.

The Briggs family, except Eliza, was kindly taken in by the Benjamin Thomas Clark family. On June 28, 1857, Ruth Briggs married Mr. Clark in order to secure a home for herself and her children. They had a baby girl in 1860—Lavinia Alice. She died at the age of two. Two months after Lavinia's birth, Ruth was stung on the neck by a scorpion during the night and died.

Eliza Briggs was taken to the James and Frances Stratton home. Frances was the daughter of Benjamin Clark. She nursed Eliza's badly frozen feet for months and grew very fond of her. She asked her husband to take Eliza as a second wife. Eliza's daughter later said that Eliza's feet always hurt her. She wrote, "At nite she would bath them and we children rub them so she could sleep better."

James served in the Black Hawk Indian War and held the priesthood office of Seventy.