

ELIZA CROOK¹

Born: May 7, 1837 England

Age: 19

Willie Handcart Company

Eliza was the youngest child in a family of eleven children born to James and Sophia Mason Crook. Of the eleven children, only three daughters and one son grew to adulthood and were married. Much sorrow came to Eliza and her family with the deaths of these children.

Eliza's father, James, was a talented weaver and was known for his fine weaving and tapestries of both religious and historical scenes. In 1842, the Crook family joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Eliza's brother, Joseph, and his family, emigrated to Utah to be with fellow Saints in 1855. Eliza and her parents also made plans to emigrate, but James died in March 1856, just a few weeks before Eliza and her mother sailed on the ship *Thornton*.

From Iowa City they traveled with the Willie handcart company and had many trials along the way. When they reached Fort Laramie, the expected provisions were not available, and they had to continue on with reduced food rations. Eliza and her aged mother (age 65) had to cross over frozen rivers and there were times when icicles and frozen snow hung from the hems of their skirts. It was very difficult to push the handcart because of the snow-packed wheels.

The company was forced to camp and wait for help because of the snowstorm. On October 21, the rescuers found them in a very sad condition, lacking food and stranded. After a tremendous struggle to cross Rocky Ridge to Rock Creek on October 23, they finally met more rescue wagons and were able to make it to the Valley in the next two weeks. They reached the Salt Lake Valley on November 9, and went to Farmington to be with their other family members who had come to Utah earlier. Eliza's mother had been blessed to live to see her children in the Valley. Sophia had her feet and legs frozen. They were amputated to the knees after arriving in Salt Lake. Sophia died a few weeks later on November 26, 1856.²

Eliza regained her strength and married Samuel Madden in 1857. They were blessed with one daughter, Eliza Jane, born in 1858. Samuel "decided to go to California to seek his fortune in the gold fields [and] was never heard from again." He was presumed dead in 1861. In order to support herself and her daughter, Eliza worked washing and ironing clothing for the military officers at Camp Floyd. Eliza later married Captain Asriah Willis who was there. Eliza died in childbirth, January 19, 1863, at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, where she had gone with her military husband. Eliza was only 25 years old and Eliza Jane was not yet 5 years old when she and her new baby brother were left motherless. Eliza's baby boy was adopted by the mid-wife who had attended his birth. Eliza Jane remembers being cared for in several different homes before she was eventually taken into the family of Anna Davis Young, who brought her back to Utah.

Eliza Jane married Joseph Burns in 1878. Of their five children, three lived to adulthood. Eliza Jane died in 1914 and is buried in Bountiful, Utah.

¹The story of a man miraculously providing dried meat to the Willie Company has been wrongfully attributed to Eliza Crook in many sources, including an early edition of *Tell My Story, Too*. The meat was actually given to Elizabeth Crook Panting. (See her story also in the Willie company section of this book.)

²In 2010, descendants of James and Sophia Mason Crook gathered at the gravesite of Joseph Crook in Payson, Utah. Here they dedicated a monument to her memory. It is said there were more than 1200 descendants of Sophia in the United States at that time.

Sources: "Eliza Crook Madden Willis," Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; familysearch.org.