

## ELIZABETH CUNNINGHAM

Born: 1844 Scotland

Age: 12

Willie Handcart Company



Elizabeth Cunningham was born to Elizabeth Nicholson and James Cunningham. Her father was a miner, and had poor health. Her mother's resourcefulness carried the family through. Elizabeth's brother, George, speaking of his mother, said, "I can not do it better than by saying she was a rustler in the greatest sense of the word." Elizabeth's mother had already been widowed once, and had a daughter from that marriage.



Catherine Cunningham

The Cunningham family joined the Church in 1841 and had the chance to immigrate in 1856. Elizabeth's parents, James (age 54), and Elizabeth Nicholson (47), left their native Scotland with their children, Catherine (17), George (15), Elizabeth (12), and Margaret (9). Another brother who was newly married emigrated with his wife and four children in 1861.

Elizabeth was very bright, and good at crocheting and needlework. She and her family were made fun of as they crossed through Iowa. They faced many difficult situations because of leaving late in the season. The most serious problems were the lack of food and the extreme cold of the winter weather. After leaving Fort Laramie, Wyoming, the rations of the Willie company were cut even further. Many people were dying. Elizabeth was saved from death in a miraculous way. Several biographies of various members of the Cunningham family tell of this miracle. They contain minor variations, but all recount essentially the same story. It appears that the first published account of this miracle was in 1947 in *Heart Throbs of the West*, by Kate B. Carter:

At one time Elizabeth ... was left for dead on the plains, as she was thought to be frozen to death. The ground was frozen so hard that they could not dig a grave so they just wrapped her in a blanket and laid the body on the ground and hurried on to make camp for the night, as darkness was fast overtaking them. After they had reached camp, the mother of Elizabeth felt impressed to go back to the child. Her friends ridiculed the idea, but the mother was determined, for she maintained that the child was not dead. She had been promised in Scotland that if she was faithful, that she and all her family would reach Zion in safety. She went back to the child and found her undisturbed by the wolves. She carried the child back to camp and worked over her. Some hot water was spilt on her foot and it caused a quiver to go through the limb. Convinced that she was still alive, they kept up their efforts until they brought her back to life. This is the Elizabeth who lived to be the mother of thirteen children, and the foster mother of three others.

With the help of the rescue party, the Cunningham family arrived in Salt Lake on November 9, 1856. They settled in American Fork, Utah. When Elizabeth was 14 years old, she married William Edward Kelly, and they had 13 children. The last two were twins, born and lost prematurely. Elizabeth raised 16 children. Elizabeth died in 1922 at the age of 79. Her mother died in 1907 at the age of 100 years. Elizabeth's mother always said that the Lord would open up the way for her, and He invariably did.

Sources: *Heart Throbs of the West*, compiled by Kate B. Carter, 1947; *True Grit: The Elizabeth Cunningham Story*, by Dale W. Adams, 2006; [manxmormons.com/williamkelly.pdf](http://manxmormons.com/williamkelly.pdf); "Biographical Sketch of the Life of Elizabeth Cunningham Kelly," by Olive Dunn Binnall, 1930, MSS SC 3312, L. Tom Perry Special Collections. (Olive Binnall was 36 years old when her grandmother, Elizabeth Cunningham Kelly, died, and Olive wrote this history 6 years later. Olive and her grandmother both lived in American Fork, Utah, which adds a further degree of reliability to this account.) The story of Elizabeth Cunningham's revival is portrayed in T.C. Christensen's movie *17 Miracles*. See also *More Than Miracles: Extraordinary Stories from 17 Miracles*, by T.C. Christensen and Jolene Allphin, Deseret Book, 2012. See more complete Cunningham family stories and artwork in *Follow Me To Zion* by Andrew Olsen and Jolene Allphin, Deseret Book, 2013.



Margaret Cunningham