

ELIZABETH SMITH

Born: 1843 Scotland

Age: 13

Willie Handcart Company



Elizabeth, known as Betsy, came to Utah with her mother, Marjorie McEwan Bain Smith (age 51); sisters, May Bain (22), Jane Smith (17), Mary Smith (15); and brother, Alexander Smith (6). Also traveling with the family was Euphemia Mitchell who married Betsy's brother, Robert Bain, one month after their arrival in the Valley. Robert had emigrated about two years previously. Betsy's mother was divorced from Mr. Bain. She was the widow of Mr. Smith who died in 1850.

In July of 1919, the Church magazine *Improvement Era* published an article by Betsy entitled: "The Tired Mother: Pioneer Recollections" by Mrs. Betsey Smith Goodwin:

How well I remember when my mother ... said: "Girls, let us try to go to the Valley next season with the handcarts. I have a letter from your brother, Robert A. Bain." Robert, by the way, was the eldest son of my mother. We lived in Scotland, but he had been a traveling elder in England and had worked his passage as cook over the sea. He drove a team across the plains and had arrived safely at Salt Lake City, so my mother told us. Furthermore, she said: "He is located thirty miles south of Salt Lake City at a place named Lehi, and has taken a farm to work on shares, whose owner has gone on a mission to Europe. He says he is trying to raise as much as he can for our comfort. He bids us exert ourselves to emigrate next season, and says he will pray while we work."

We girls laughed at what mother said, as girls would, and exclaimed that he had "the easiest job." But the spirit of gathering to Zion was strong upon us, and we worked at our looms by day, our fancy work by night, and saved the proceeds. By this means we gathered enough in six months to pay our passage across the sea and in many ways we realized that God helps those who help themselves.

In view of all this, we finally took a last farewell of the sacred graves of our dead, the Govan braes and the heather hills of Scotland, and on the third day of the beautiful month of May, in 1856, we embarked on the ship *Thornton* from Liverpool, England, leaving the steam loom mills, the shores of Great Britain, our beloved native land, and dear old Scotland for the Gospel's sake. After six or seven weeks' sailing, seasickness, and stormy weather, we landed in New York City, registered at the Castle Garden, and in a few days we reached Iowa by rail.

There we camped for weeks waiting for the handcarts to be completed for the journey. While there, I was so sick with scarlet fever that I could not open my eyes. I heard Sisters Henderson and McPhail say, "I am sorry she is dying; another death in camp soon." One baby had just died. I seemed to know they were speaking of me, and when Mother came in from the campfire with warm broth she saw the tears in my eyes.

"Are you worse?" she asked me.

"Mother, they think I am dying. I want to live and go to the Valley."

My dear mother, at that time time in her fifty-second year, then sent and brought the Elders who administered to me and rebuked the disease, commanding it to leave both me and the camp. My recovery was rapid. I was able to travel, and on the 15th day of July, 1856, we rolled out of the Iowa City camp, on our way to cross the plains with handcarts. Our captain was James Gray Willie, and his counselors were Millen Atwood and Levi Savage. There were 120 handcarts and six wagons, and about five hundred people, sixty-six of whom died on the journey.

We soon became accustomed to traveling twenty and twenty-four miles a day. My little brother, six years of age, used to travel the distance by me taking his hand to encourage him and by telling him stories of the future and the good things in store for us.

Around the campfire we had very good times. There was Brother [Alexander] Burt [19], Brother David Anderson [17] and others, and our girls, who sang the old songs and hymns that warmed our hearts. While fair weather and full rations lasted, we were all right. We traveled five weeks, never stopping for a Sunday. Then we were in the buffalo country. Our cattle, that had hauled the provision wagons, and some cows, were then stampeded by the Indians, it was supposed. At the stampeding place we camped five days. The men went in all directions seeking for the lost cattle. Only a few were found. Our captain then thought we had done wrong in not stopping to worship on the Sabbath day, for we had lost more than we had gained.

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Following this experience we kept sacred the Sabbath day for worship and rest, and felt better for it. Owing to the loss of the cattle, there was added to the load of each cart one hundred pounds of flour.

September came, and we were on half rations and had cold weather but we never forgot to pray, and we sang "Come, Come Ye Saints," with great zeal and fervor. We realized that we needed the help of God to see us through. Many were dying from the hardships of the journey.

Let me add that I stood by a grave where sixteen people were buried at once. They were sewed up in sheets and covered with brush then with earth and ashes. This happened during a very cold spell and I think it was while we were coming through the Black Hills. I froze my fingers, but they were saved by good attention when we got to Lehi. At the same time, my mother traveled fifteen miles with little Alex on her back, as he couldn't walk in the snow.

I will not dwell upon the hardships we endured, nor the hunger and cold, but I like to tell of the goodness of God unto us. One day, especially, stands out from among the remainder. The wind blew fresh, as if its breezes came from the sea. It kept blowing harder until it became fierce. Clouds arose; the thunder and lightning were appalling. Even the ox teams ahead refused to face the storm. Our captain, who always rode a mule, dismounted and stepped into the middle of the road, bared his head to the storm, and every man, as he came up, stood by him with bared head—one hundred carts, their pullers and pushers, looking to their captain for counsel. The captain said, "Let us pray." And there was offered such a prayer. He told the Lord our circumstances. He talked to God, as one man talks to another, and as if the Lord was very near. I felt that He was and many others felt the same. Then the storm parted to the right and to the left. We hurried on to camp, got our tents pitched, and some fires built, when the storm burst in all its fury. We had camped on a sidehill and the water ran through the tents in little creeks.

Another circumstance I remember clearly. My mother was taken very sick with cramp and cholera, a very fatal trouble in our weakened condition. We all felt bad about Mother. I remember thinking, "Many are dying. Mother may die, and what a dark world it would be without our dear mother." As I gathered the sage to burn on our campfire, I couldn't keep from crying. When I met Mother, she asked me what was the matter. I told her how badly I felt. She said, "Do not feel like that. Pray for me. I have been out yonder in the snow praying to the Lord to spare our lives, that we might get through to the Valley. I will never murmur nor complain, whatever we pass through, when we get there."

God heard our prayers and she kept her word. Even when, in years following, she went blind with age, she never murmured.

One more incident I will relate. One evening we camped near a marshy meadow spring. Poison parsnips grew there in plenty. Everybody was elated. We had found something to cook and to eat! By this time, our ration was four ounces of flour a day, and neither salt nor soda. Alexander Burt brought some parsnips to our campfire. Mother said, "What have you there, Brother Burt?"

He answered, "They are parsnips, Sister Smith, a sort of white carrot. Put on the pot and let us have a mess."

"I will do that," said Mother, and we cooked and ate our fill of poison parsnips.

I confess we felt like we had been eating rocks, so heavy they lay upon our stomachs. The whole camp ate of them. Our captain arrived late at the camp that night, and when he found what we had been eating, he groaned aloud and cried, "Put them down. Every one contains enough poison to kill an ox." He said, furthermore, that it would be one of the providences of the Almighty if we were not all dead by morning. However, many were glad that they had eaten of them before they knew. We did not realize the truth of his words until the next morning when one brother died—a Scandinavian. We supposed that he had eaten them after he knew they were poison.

It was October now. The flour was gone, and we had enough crackers for only a two-days' ration. We rolled into camp.

"Come, Bessie," said Jane, "Let us gather fuel for our fire."

We went over a little hill toward the west. "Look, Jennie [Jane]. There is a team of horses and two men! See, they are stopping to speak!"

Now, Jennie was eighteen and bashful, and whispered, "You answer," as we went towards them. It was Joseph A. Young and Cyrus H. Wheelock. I learned this afterwards.

Brother Young said, "Sister, where is your camp?"

"Just over the hill yonder."

"Is there any sickness in the camp?"

"No," was the answer. "Just one woman died today while eating a cracker." [These were hard sea biscuits left over from the ocean voyage.]

"Have you any provisions?"

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“All gone but some crackers.”

“Well, cheer up,” he said. “Help is coming.”

I turned to sister and said, “What ailed that man? I saw him wiping his eyes.”¹

“It may be that he is sorry for us. Let us hurry to camp and hear him speak.”

We did so, and he told us there were many wagons with provisions coming soon, and there were. The relief was followed by great rejoicing, and we thanked the Lord in prayer.

Brothers Young and Wheelock went on next morning to carry the news to Martin and Tyler’s [handcart] company [and the Hodgett and Hunt Wagon Companies], two weeks behind us on the road.

The boys from Utah came the next day. How glad we were and how good they were! They gathered the wood and made the fires, and let the weary ride in the wagons. On the side, I might state, also, that many lasting friendships were made between the boys and the young women.

About three miles on this side of Green River, as I was walking ahead of the train, leading my little brother of six, and encouraging him along by telling him stories of what he would get when we arrived at the Valley, he said, “When we get to that creek, I wish we could see our brother, Rob.”

I said, “Come along, maybe we will, when we get to the top of the bank.”

When we arrived at the top of the bank and looked down we saw a wagon with just one yoke of oxen on. We had never seen the like before, so we waited on the summit until they should pass. The man stared at us, and as his team came beside us, he yelled, “Whoa,” to the oxen. It was then we knew him. He jumped off the wagon and caught his sisters in his arms as they came up with the cart. How we all wept with joy!

The cart was then tied behind the wagon. Little Alex climbed into the wagon as happy as a prince instead of a poor tired child. The next question from Rob was, “Where is Mother and sister Mary?”

“They are behind somewhere, Robby. You will find them by the road.”

Mother was still sick, and when she stopped to rest she had to lie down. She could not sit up. Some had died that way. They would go to sleep and never awaken. Mary was afraid that Mother would do likewise, and tried to arouse her by telling her about a team coming with only one yoke of cattle on.

Mother replied, “Well, never mind, Mary. Don’t bother me. I am so tired.”

“Well, Mother, the man is running this way. It surely is Robert.”

“Oh, no, Mary. That would be too good to be true!”

Well, she was soon convinced, as Robert took her in his arms and helped her into the wagon. As he did so, mother exclaimed, “I couldn’t be more thankful to get into the Kingdom of Heaven than I am to see you, and lie here and rest.”

Explanations followed. Robert stated that he had suffered from a mountain fever, and was just recovering when he received a letter that we were coming. He then borrowed and hired an outfit to come and meet us. None too soon!

We arrived at Lehi in due time, and Bishop Evans welcomed us to his Ward. [They were first taken to Captain Willie’s home.] My sister, Jane, married his stepson, George Coleman, that winter. My sister, Mary, married Andrew A. Anderson, and sister, May, married John R. Murdock. An adopted daughter, Euphemia Mitchell, married [my] brother, Robert. I married Isaac H. Goodwin on December 1, 1859. My little brother, Alex, lived to be twenty-four, and died unmarried. All have gone beyond the veil except Robert’s wife [Euphemia], who is eighty-two, [she lived to be 98] and sister, Jane, an ordinance worker in the Manti Temple, and myself. I am almost seventy-three.

Brother Editor of the Era, you said you would like my story. I have therefore written these few recollections. For the benefit of the youth of Zion who may read this, I bear testimony that I know God hears and answers prayers, and the Lord will help those who help themselves.

Sources: “The Tired Mother,” *Improvement Era*, July 1919, by Betsy Smith Goodwin; Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; “A History of Euphemia Mitchell Bain,” by Helen Joyce Bean Chappell; Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; interview by Jolene Allphin with Alene Christensen, August 16, 2007; biography of Robert Bain. (See Robert’s story in rescuer section and Euphemia Mitchell’s story in Willie section, *Tell My Story, Too*.) See “Margery Smith Family,” Chapter 3, in *Follow Me To Zion* by Andrew Olsen and Jolene Allphin, *Deseret Book*, 2013, for artwork and more family stories.

Note: The Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum in Salt Lake City has a shawl on display that was “worn across the plains by Marjory Smith of Willie Company.” It is in the last display cabinet on the left, 1st floor exhibit room. The donors are Jan Wilson Madsen and Mary Wilson Anderson. An image of the shawl is in the book *Follow Me To Zion*. One of Betsy Smith’s descendants related that Betsy had long auburn hair and that every night before she went to bed she sang “Come, Come Ye Saints.”

¹Cyrus Wheelock tells of weeping when he saw the beleaguered condition of the Willie company. Others reports also tell of Joseph Young crying. Susannah Stone of the Willie company later reported that she hadn’t known how terrible she looked until she saw herself in a mirror after arriving in Salt Lake City. Even her friends did not recognize her.