

## ELIZABETH WHITE

Born: February 22, 1838 in England

Age: 18

Hunt Wagon Company



Elizabeth's father died when she was very young. In 1854, Elizabeth and her family joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Desiring to gather with the Saints in Utah, Elizabeth came to America with her mother, Mary Ann Syer Smith White Hill (age 63), and two brothers, Barnard (16) and Richard (13). Her married sister, Eliza White Brooks (28) and husband, Edmund J. Brooks (24) were with them on the trek as well.

They joined the Hunt wagon company at Iowa City. This company travelled closely with the Martin handcart company so that they could assist them if needed. Elizabeth walked the entire way. She was known in the company as a cheerful person. Someone in the company made up this poem about her: "While some were discouraged, downhearted and sad / Kind words were spoken which made their hearts glad / By little 'Miss White,' for that was her name / 'Twill be brighter tomorrow, so do not complain.'" Elizabeth often assisted the sick and infirm in the company.

Elizabeth told how the able-bodied men helped carry the Martin handcart women and children over the Platte River in October, and what it was like when rescuers arrived: "Some of our men went through the river seventy-five times. ... Our company assisted them all they could, but there does not seem to be any account of our assistance in their history. ... Our dear mother said she had never seen her dear family want for bread, but said the Lord would provide. About midnight that night all the camp had retired, and we were awakened with a noise and thought it was the yelling of Indians ... but to our great surprise the noise was caused by the teamsters of a relief team, and some of the camp shouted for joy. They were loaded with all kinds of provisions: flour, bread, butter, meat of all kinds, but all frozen so hard. ... I remember we had to cut everything with the hatchet, but oh how thankful we all were that the Lord had answered our prayers and saved us all from starvation. ... My brother Barnard, with others, would go into [the Martin company] camps and saw how they were suffering. He said it was terrible. Our company assisted them all they could."

Elizabeth was asked by Captain Hunt to go ahead with rescuer Guernsey Brown's wagon that was taking sick and elderly people to help care for them. She did not want to leave her mother, but her mother reassured her they would be close behind. Elizabeth said: "I bade my dear mother goodby thinking she and the folks would soon follow, but they did not come for two long weeks. I was lonesome when I left camp and we overtook the camp ahead of us. ... We had to walk considerable. When we got to the foot of the big mountain, the snow was so deep I had to put on men's boots. The teamsters were tall, and so was Esther Brown, [a friend], and she could step in their tracks, but I could not in hers, and I had to make my own road up both mountains, frequently falling down. The snow was so deep and drifted, but they told us when we got to the top we would see Salt Lake City. We were so thankful and delighted that it seemed to renew our strength and energy. It was the hardest part of my journey, but the thought of being nearly at our journey's end after six months traveling and camping was cheering. ... If only my dear mother had been so near I would have felt much better."

"When we got to the top of the big mountains, the men folks took off their hats, and we waved our handkerchiefs. They then pointed out Salt Lake City, and I could not believe it was, for it looked to me like a patch of sagebrush covered with snow. I could not believe it until we got nearly to it. We arrived in Salt Lake City just at sundown on the thirtieth day of November 1856. ... They took us to Ephraim Hanks home to stay all night. Next morning they took us to Draper in a sleigh, the snow being about two feet deep. It was my first sleigh ride, and the longest I ever had. We . . . were welcomed by Sister Harriet Brown [Guernsey's wife]. I can never forget her kindness to me, a stranger in a strange land. ... We did not know how to be thankful enough to our Heavenly Father for his preserving care over us during our journey, for the health and strength we enjoyed, and for every blessing he bestowed upon us. ... After my folks came in, Bishop I.M. Stewart gave my brother Barnard employment. My mother made her home with us at Sister Brown's until she went to Sister Burnham's. My brother Richard ... went to Salt Lake City and William Godbe, the druggist, took him as errand boy ... My sister Eliza stayed in Cottonwood with her husband's sister ... Barnard was soon able to get a home so our dear mother could live with him. I remained with Sister Brown two months, then went to live at Bishop Stewart's home. I lived with them about five weeks and was married to Isaac M. Stewart on the 8th of March 1857."

Elizabeth and Isaac had 11 children who remained very close to one another as they grew up and left home. Elizabeth was one of the first Sunday School teachers in Draper. She cooked and waited on the missionaries and visiting elders. A neighbor told of living near Elizabeth in her later years. She said she regularly watched the Stewart brothers alight from the street car for their weekly luncheon with their mother. They were an imposing sight, "the little one in his frock coat and the tall ones in their cut-aways." Elizabeth worked diligently to see that her children were well educated. They were recognized leaders in Utah in fields of education, law, music, literature, and religion. William M. Stewart was nationally recognized for his contributions to learning and teaching techniques. The Stewart Experimental Training School at the U of Utah campus was named for him. William said, "The school must be made a life-laboratory wherein childhood can be given the fullest, freest expression. Nothing is too good for the child."

Elizabeth died in 1917. It is said that her descendants "have carried her influence throughout the intermountain states and along both seaboard."

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; "Autobiography of Elizabeth White Stewart," written by herself at age 76, familysearch.org; *I Walked to Zion: True Stories of Young Pioneers on the Mormon Trail*, by Susan Arrington Madsen, 1994; <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/18645/STEWART-SCHOOL-IS-HAVING-A-REUNION.html>.