

ESTHER BROWN

Born: England 1832

Age: 24

Hunt Wagon Company



At the age of 11, Esther Brown was baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the Isle of Man where she was born. As she grew she worked as a seamstress and milliner and earned enough money to pay her passage to America. With her two sisters, Jane (25) and Elizabeth Eleanor (35), Esther sailed in May 1856 from Liverpool on the ship *Horizon*. Most of this group continued on from Iowa with the Martin handcart company, which lists Esther's two sisters as members.

Esther left for Utah with the Hunt wagon company, the last company of the 1856 season, walking most of the way. The company was caught in early snowstorms and suffered much because of it. One of the rescuers who finally arrived near the end of October, found Esther and her friend, Elizabeth White, walking ahead of the rest of the company. His name was (Joseph) Gurnsey Brown. With the help of the rescuers, Esther finally made it to the Valley by the end of November. Both Esther and Elizabeth were taken to Draper to stay with Gurnsey and his wife, Harriett, who nursed Esther back to health. On January 18, 1857, about six weeks after her arrival, Esther became the second wife of Joseph Gurnsey Brown, thereby not changing her surname.

The following account is from the writings of Esther's friend, Elizabeth White: "The loaded wagon that came to our camp was from Draper, Utah. George Clawson and Gurnsey Brown were the teamsters. When we got to the foot of the big mountain, the snow was so deep I had to put men's boots on. The teamsters were tall, and so was Esther Brown, 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. 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."

Esther's trade as a dressmaker and milliner came to her aid in providing a living for herself and the children when her husband was called first on a mission to England and later to the "Muddy Mission" in Nevada. During the winter of 1875, she moved from Draper to Kanab, Utah, where she first lived in a wagon box. Esther missed living in Draper. She moved back to her little house where she could continue working at her trade. Esther had eight children, five of whom survived her. As the children became older, the sons hunted and fished to provide meat and all the children helped tend the farm. A special grain was planted which provided the straw Esther needed for hat making. She had wooden molds in different sizes. She would gather the straw, tie it in bundles and hang it to dry. When she was ready to make a hat, the straw was soaked in water, then braided. After the braids were wound around the wooden head mold, she would sew the strands together. When the hat was completed, it was trimmed with bits of satin, silk, or feathers.

They lived the lives of pioneers, but never complained. It is said of Esther that she had a good word for everyone. She died in April 1881 at the age of 49.

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneer history files; *I Walked to Zion*, by Susan Arrington Madsen, 1994; *Journal of the Trail*, by Stewart E. Glazier and Robert S. Clark (editors), 2007.