

ELLA (HELLIE or LOLLIE) NEILSON (or ANDERSON)

Born: 11 June 1834 Denmark (Died October 23/24, 1856, buried at Rock Creek)

Age: 22

Willie Handcart Company

Ella was from Jutland, Denmark. She was called “Hellie” or “Lollie.” She may have begun the first part of her trip from Denmark with one or both of her grandparents. According to one family history, these grandparents died, perhaps on the journey from Denmark to Liverpool. Lollie traveled in the Willie handcart company with the Wicklund family. She had her 22nd birthday on the outfitting campgrounds near Iowa City. After traveling nearly 300 miles on the first leg of their journey, Lollie felt the need to be baptized to renew her health. (This was a fairly common practice in the Church at that time.) Peter Madsen, who was the clerk for the Danish Saints in the Willie company, recorded:

Tuesday, August 12, 1856. [Florence, Nebraska] Weather: beautiful. The saints were happy, busy with washing, repairing, and daily provisioning which is now given regularly. A cow was slaughtered and distributed. Fresh meat soup was eaten. We bathed and visited the beautiful neighborhood and the Mormon ruins [Winter Quarters]. In the evening five brothers and sisters were baptized, the sick were washed, namely Peder Jacobsen, Anne K. Jacobsen, Petrea Madsen, Marie Andersen, and Ellen [Helle] Nielsen. They were baptized (for their health) by [Olof] Wicklund.

The mother in the Wicklund family was also named Ella. She gave birth to a baby boy on October 16, just three days before the company became stranded in the snow and entirely without food. As was the case with many of these noble Saints, Lollie Neilson may have been sharing her meager rations with Sister Wicklund to give her added strength for childbirth. She had no doubt been awake countless hours assisting with the baby as well as the other children.

On October 23, after crossing the Rocky Ridge in a blizzard, Lollie had spent her last ounce of strength. She was wrapped in a buffalo robe and left along the trail to rest and await help. Brother Wicklund returned and carried her back to their camp at Rock Creek. He had his 8-year-old daughter, Christina, sleep next to Lollie to keep her warm. Ella’s biography states: “In spite of this precaution Lollie did not survive, and the next morning Christina awoke to find Lollie frozen to death at her side. Her hair was frozen solid and an ax was used to free it from the ice.”¹

Lollie is buried in a common grave at Rock Creek Hollow, with 12 or 13 others. Brother and Sister Wicklund and their five children all survived and arrived safely in the Valley. Lollie’s biography summarizes:

“Because of the lack of space, families of the deceased were not allowed to take the belongings of their dead loved ones with them. Among the things which Lollie’s family were preparing to throw away were a quilt and a pair of scissors. These were both in better condition than those owned by the Wicklunds, so it was decided that they could be exchanged. The old quilt and scissors of Christina’s family were thrown away and replaced by the better ones. The quilt eventually became worn out but the scissors remained in use through the years. Christina later married Martin Sorenson and she used them during the time she was rearing her family in Monroe, Utah. When Christina’s son, Lionel [Alexander Sorenson], married Clara Larsen, a descendant of the family to which Lollie Anderson belonged, the scissors were given to this young couple who continued to use them. At the present time they still belong to the Sorenson family. They now occupy a place of honor among the family pioneer relics and are brought out only upon the occasion of the retelling of the story of the death on the plains to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Christina Wicklund and the descendants of the family of Lollie Anderson.—*Dona Sorenson Hansen*”



Hellie’s friend,
Christina Wicklund (Sorenson)

Sources: “Lollie Anderson,” *Treasures of Pioneer History*, “They Came in 1856,” p. 51-52; biography of Christina Wicklund; Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files, Diary of Peter Madsen, available in Church archives.

¹It is unclear from the various sources if Christina and Lollie both had their frozen in the ice, and whether an ax or pair of scissors or both was used to cut it.