

JAMES STEELE

Born: 1827 Scotland, Died Nov 10, 1856

Age: 29

Martin Handcart Company



Elizabeth Wylie Steele and James Steele

James was introduced to the Church by Elizabeth Wylie, whom he later married. After his baptism, James served as a missionary in both England and Scotland. One of his Scottish converts was a 67-year-old widow, Mary Murray Murdoch. James's sister, Ann, was married to Mary's son, John Murdoch. The Murdoch family was baptized in December 1851 and one year later, John and Ann Steele Murdoch were on their way to gather in "Zion." Four years later, James Steele was prepared to emigrate to Utah with his own family: Elizabeth (28), James Ephraim (3), William George (1), and mother-in-law, Mary Ann George Wylie (66). His sister's mother-in-law, Mary Murdoch (now 73 years old) also came with them. Left behind was the grave of a little daughter.

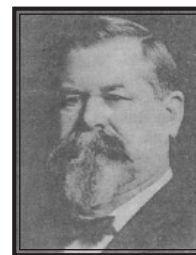
James and Elizabeth had a tremendous responsibility to get this family across the ocean and the plains. The little boys needed to be carried most of the way and the aged women gave what assistance they could. Mary was only 4 feet 7 inches tall and was known as "Wee Granny." She made it across more than 700 miles. Mary died on October 3, just west of Chimney Rock, Nebraska Territory. Nights had begun to be cold, but the days were still recorded as being very warm. Mary did not have to endure the intense weather and hunger that was soon to come to the emigrants. Her last request was that her son, John, be informed that she died with her "face toward Zion."

James continued on for 5½ more weeks. He shared his rations and helped his family through the treacherous last crossing of the North Platte River, the extreme cold and deep snow at Devil's Gate, and the camp at Martin's Cove. James finally succumbed to exhaustion and was buried near Split Rock by the kind rescuers who had been with them for the last two weeks. Rescuer, Ephraim Hanks, arrived in camp that evening, bringing fresh buffalo meat to James's grieving family. His burial is represented in a painting done by one of James's and Ephraim's descendants, Clark Kelly Price. The rest of the family made it to the Valley where they first lived in American Fork in a dugout. Elizabeth married David Wood who had participated in the rescue. They had three children: a boy and twin girls.

James Ephraim and William grew to manhood in the Zion of their parents' dreams. They married, had large families, and pioneered in Idaho. In March 1885, James became interested in Idaho and traveled to Eagle Rock where he remained until June and filed on 160 acres of land located near Sand Creek (Iona). James tells of an experience he had when he returned to the spot later that year:

When I got back to Sand Creek, where I had located my ranch, everything had dried up; the water was all gone. Everything looked desolate and unproductive. A man named John F. Shelley was with me. ... We looked way out in the sagebrush and could see no trees, no houses; nothing but sagebrush was in sight. We sat around for several days and one day while sitting on the ground with my back leaning up against the wagon tongue, I went to sleep, and during my sleep I saw this country in a most beautiful flourishing condition everywhere. The sagebrush disappeared, and in its stead, I saw farms everywhere, and I woke up and said, "Now I am ready to unload." I had not unloaded up to that time, and I never felt from then to the present time that I ever wanted to go back [to Utah].

James Ephraim Steele was a leader in the community and the Church in Idaho. With his own money he purchased land, had it surveyed and laid out for the townsite of Iona, then sold it to the citizens of the community for the actual cost with no financial gain. He was the Bishop of the Iona Ward, counselor in the Bannock Stake to Thomas Ricks (one of the rescuers of the Martin company in 1856), then President of the Bingham Stake for about 15 years. His life brought honor to the mission his parents had begun and which his father was unable to complete on this earth.



James Ephraim Steele

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneer history files; "The Martin Handcart Co., Bitter Creek, Wyoming," oil painting by Clark Kelley Price, 1980; "Settlement of Idaho by Utah Pioneers," Daughters of Utah Pioneers lesson booklet for March 2005, 326-328, compiled by Lou Jean S. Wiggins from *Pioneer Pathways*; letters and family records from Jenny Larsen, Kaye Wittwer, Cleone B. Arrington.