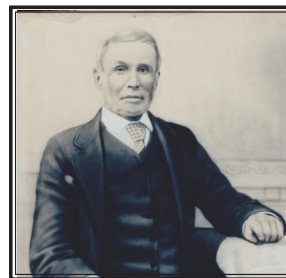


JAMES OLIVER

Born: 11 March 1823 in Bowood, Dorsetshire, England

Age: 33

Willie Handcart Company



James was the son of a farmer, the fifth of eight children born to Mathew and Ester Seal Oliver. He was over six feet tall and very strong. He could pick up a sack of wheat containing four bushels and carry it up a flight of stairs. He attended night school to learn reading and writing. He enjoyed music and played the violin and organ. He also sang in a church choir.

James joined the Church in January 1850 and married Elizabeth Wheller that same year. In 1854 they named their first child Moroni. They began to save money for their emigration. James sold his lunches to others who had none, and he worked late hours. He deposited all of his extra money in the Perpetual Emigrating Fund. When Elizabeth changed her mind about gathering with the Saints in Utah, James drew out half the money from the fund and gave it to her. He paid the rest for his passage and worked as a carpenter for his meals.

On board the *Thornton*, James became friends with Andrew Watson. Later they built their handcarts together and shared a tent. James played his violin on board the ship as well as on the trail around the campfire. Often there was dancing before bedtime. At the beginning of the journey, a captain asked if anyone had any experience in handling horses. James answered that he had, so he was chosen to drive the four-mule team that the leaders called “little devils.” The mules kicked and struck and bit and had to be thrown down when they were unharnessed, but James conquered them with kindness and lump sugar. When James spoke to the animals, they obeyed. On August 16, William Woodward wrote: “I had much difficulty in driving the mule team, assisted by others. Bros. James Oliver & Alexander Burt, were to take charge of the mule team under my charge.”

Later in the journey there were many whose strength began to fail them. Some would beg for rides in the provision wagons, but the animals had to be spared. Many were referred to “Oliver” to see if they could ride in his mule-drawn supply wagon. Some died in James Oliver’s wagon. One man who died had a good pair of boots and a coat. James was given the articles of clothing, without which he said he would have frozen to death. Two days after arriving in the valley, Andrew Watson and James were sent to Provo, where they lived for over two years. James developed a serious illness with skin eruptions all over his body. He was kindly nursed by a Brother John Turner and his wife, and he felt they had saved his life.

In 1859, James married Maria Dalley, a former acquaintance from England. They lived in the Jordan River bottoms, first in a wagon, then in a dugout in the bank of the river. It was one good-sized room, with walls of sun-dried adobes. Large logs were laid across the top to form the roof. Cane from the marshes made a thatch, which was then covered with mud and dirt. If the roof leaked, more dirt was put on it. A huge log of wood burned in the spacious chimney. Sometimes cattle and other animals would walk down the hill slope and stop on the roof until they were driven off. The animals would also take shelter from storms in front of this humble home, knocking their horns on the door. James worked hard and finally built his growing family a nice home. He later donated part of his property for a cemetery. He passed away on March 10, 1891, and was buried in that South Jordan cemetery.

James’s son, Moroni, emigrated with his wife and four children aboard the ship *Wyoming* in 1882. They crossed the plains in railroad cars instead of walking.

Sources: “A Teamster” by Amy Oliver Warner; *Treasures of Pioneer History*, 1956, vol. 5; letter from Harold Oliver, 2008; “Biography of James Oliver,” unknown author; familysearch.org; *History of William Woodward*, 1980 & 2005.