

JOHN GRIFFITHS

Born: 1811 England

Age: 45

Martin Handcart Company

Martin
Company

John Griffiths and his family were baptized in 1840 by Elder John Taylor. In 1856, John Griffiths brought his wife, Mary Elizabeth (age 30), two daughters, Margaret Ann (16) and Jane E. (8), and two sons, John (11) and Herbert (5), to America. They joined the ill-fated Martin handcart company. John Jr. and Herbert died on the plains, and John Sr. died the day after they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. John's daughter, Margaret, recorded some of the experiences of this trek:

We left Florence, Nebraska [Territory], on the first day of September 1856, as happy a lot of people as ever crossed the plains. Little did we realize on that bright September morning the hardships through which we were destined to pass or the suffering, sickness and death awaiting us. It never occurred to my young mind, being but sixteen years of age, that we should experience anything but joy and happiness on our long pilgrimage to that promised land. I shall never forget the last time we crossed the Platte River [October 19]. I was the only female that drew a handcart through the icy waters of the river at the last crossing. Captain Jesse Haven's Company of wagons that traveled with us most of the way, brought their teams and took most of the women and children across and also the feeble men, my father among them; for he was so affected with rheumatism that he could not walk. The next morning when we awoke the mountains were clad almost to their base with a white mantle of snow and the storms of winter were gathering and very cold.

John became ill and had to ride in the provision wagon. He felt better one day and tried to walk. He was not able to keep up so he took hold of the rod of the endgate of the last wagon. When the teamster saw John, he tried to rouse him by using his whip, but the sick man fell to the ground and could not get up. The handcarts were ahead and Margaret did not know what had happened to her father until they reached camp that night. Although her poor feet were aching, she went back three miles but could not find him. There was another camp in another direction. John had seen their tracks and crawled on his hands and knees in the deep snow to their camp. That night at 11:00 p.m., two men took him back to his own family and company. Margaret wrote:

It almost seemed that we would perish. In fact, many of our company froze to death, my twelve-year-old brother among them, and we buried him there in the desolate wilderness fifty miles the other side of Devil's Gate. We camped there for two weeks, our rations being four ounces of flour a day to each person. Some teams from Salt Lake came to our rescue bringing with them flour, salt and other things; then we moved on from there to Devil's Gate. After a few days of rest we came on to Independence Rock on the Sweetwater where we met more teams from Salt Lake. There we left our handcarts and all of the other things that were not actually needed and came on. All those that could, walked, and those who could not walk rode in wagons. At Independence Rock my other brother, six years old, died from cold and exposure and my only sister had her feet so badly frozen that she lost the two first joints of her big toes. We reached the valley of Salt Lake on the 30th day of November, 1856, after two months of the most indescribable suffering and hardships, the worst, we thought, any company of men, women and children was ever called upon to endure. My father, John Griffiths, was ill most of the way with rheumatism and died the next morning after reaching Salt Lake City, from the cold, exposure and privations of that terrible journey.

Sources: *We Remember: The Griffiths Story*, by Matthew A. Misbach; Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; photo of Margaret with two granddaughters courtesy of Rett Ashby; "Autobiography of Margaret Ann Griffiths Clegg, written by Margaret in 1910 in her own handwriting. ... She only had six weeks schooling in her life. At the age of 85 years she had the privilege of riding in an airplane which she greatly enjoyed. She had a wonderful mind and was very progressive and had a great desire to not be a burden upon anyone and remained very active until the last year and a half of her life. She never recovered from an automobile accident." (available at www.clegghistory.org)

