

MARGARET DALGLISH

Born: 1825 Scotland

Age: 31

Willie Handcart Company

“My grandmother, Margaret Dalglish Cowan, was born May 2, 1825, in Belfast, Antrim County, Ireland, the daughter of Alexander Dalglish and Elizabeth McNee. She was of Scotch parentage, her parents having been born in Scotland and having lived in both Glasgow and Campsie, Scotland. At the time of [her] birth, however, her parents had gone to Belfast, Ireland, where her father had obtained work. Sometime later they returned to Scotland.

“My grandmother heeded the warning voice of the “Gospel Message” as it reached her home in Glasgow. She evidently had prepared her heart for this wonderful event through study and prayer, and when only a young girl of seventeen, she was baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She was baptized July 18, 1842. For the next fourteen years [she] remained in Scotland. ... Her heart grew more restless! She ... longed for the day when she could lift her voice ‘mid the Everlasting Hills and sing her praises to the all-wise Father who had prepared a place for his faithful saints! Many times in her life, grandmother said to her children, ‘I saw the valley before I ever left Scotland.’” (Louise Cowan, granddaughter)

In 1856, Margaret finally had the opportunity to emigrate. She traveled to Liverpool, England, where on April 28, 1856, she affixed her name to the Perpetual Emigration Fund Papers. She left Liverpool with other Saints on board the *Thornton* with James G. Willie at their head. Margaret was in the sub-division of 100 in the Willie handcart company under the leadership of William Woodward, in tent #3 of that division, with 18 other people, including the Kirkwood family, the Caldwell family, Elizabeth Kirkpatrick and son, Andrew Smith, Barbara Kelley, Anna Tait, Joseph McKay, John McCullough, and Christina McNeil.

Margaret suffered the privations and hardships of the trek with the other members of the Willie company, but perhaps she was able to demonstrate the feelings of all in her actions as quoted in *Ordeal by Handcart*, Collier’s for July 6, 1956 (In *Remember*, Riverton Wyoming Stake, 1997, 139): “The first of the rescued reached Salt Lake on November 9, a day of tears and thanksgiving. For many days afterward, the others came straggling in, some riding the wagons, some still grimly hauling their battered carts, still defiantly on their own legs. Margaret Dalglish, that gaunt image of Scotch fortitude, dragged her pitiful handful of possessions to the very rim of the valley, but when she looked down and saw the end of it, with safety in the City of the Saints, she did something extraordinary. She tugged the cart to the edge of the road and gave it a push and watched it roll and crash, tumble and burst apart, scattering down the ravine the last things she owned on earth. Then she went on into Salt Lake to start a new life with nothing but her gaunt bones, her empty hands, and her stout heart.”

Although most of the Willie handcarts were left at Ft. Bridger, some were tied to the backs of wagons and brought along.¹ It may have been near Ft. Bridger where Margaret dramatically disposed of her handcart as there is a geographical feature just west of there known as “the rim of the valley.” The day after leaving Ft. Bridger, the Willie Company Journal records: “Crossed the “Basin Rim,” forded Muddy Creek & camped on its banks.” This area was part of Utah Territory in 1856.

Louise Cowan summarized her grandmother’s life as follows: “When grandmother [was] tired of the long push, she gathered the few little things remaining in her cart, and let it slide down the ravine into the canyon, glad to see the last of it. ... [She] was a student of Scripture and had the Gift of Tongues. She also was a lover of the soil and spent much of her time in her flower garden. She passed on to her reward September 23, 1905, at Salt Lake City, Utah, and was buried in the City Cemetery.”

Margaret married Andrew Cowan Sr. on April 12, 1857. They had at least two sons.

¹ Bringing a handcart to the Salt Lake Valley is noted for at least the following three families: Alfred Gadd (diary), Peder Mortensen (family records), Margaret Kirkwood (family artifacts).

Sources: *History of William Woodward*, 2nd edition, 2005; *Heart Throbs of the West*, compiled by Kate Carter, 1947; “Bleeding Feet, Humble Hearts: Danish Mormon Migration 1850-1860,” by Jens Patrick Wilde, in *The Bridge Journal of the American Heritage Society*; “A Sketch of the Life of Margaret Dalglish Cowan,” by Louise Cowan, Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; familysearch.org; *Remember*, Riverton Wyoming Stake, 1997.