

MARY ANN FENN BIRD

Born: 1811 in Billington, Bedfordshire, England

Age: 45

Willie Handcart Company



Sarah Bird



Martha Ann Bird

Mary Ann Fenn and her husband, Fredrick Otto Bird, were married in November 1832 and went to live in the small village of Eaton Brae at Bedfordshire, England. Here they began their family, which eventually included eight children. All but one lived to adulthood.

Mary Ann and Fredrick were baptized members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on 8 April 1847. The Bird family planned to gather to Zion, but Fredrick died in 1854. Mary Ann and her seven children continued to work toward their goal and were finally able to emigrate in 1856, leaving England aboard the ship *Thornton*. Her children were Ann (age 19), Sabina (17), Ezra (15), Martha Ann (12), Sarah (10), Susannah (8), and William Fredrick (5).

After reaching Iowa City, the family worked hard while the handcarts were being readied for their trip. Ann and Sabina hired out to work for a nearby family. During this time the girls became acquainted with some young men they took a liking to. These young men tried to talk Mary Ann out of her decision to continue on to Utah, but she was determined, saying she “had left all and made the sacrifice to go to Zion.”

Four days after leaving Iowa City, the two young men who had tried to dissuade Mary Ann followed the Willie company in a buggy and tried one more time. Mary Ann stayed firm in her faith to continue her journey but did consent to allow Ann and Sabina to go for a buggy ride with the boys on the promise they would be brought back that evening. Ann and Sabina never returned and Mary Ann was faced with one of the most critical decisions of her life. She put her trust in God and moved forward with faith. This also meant a great deal of extra work for Mary Ann in pulling the handcart and looking after her small children.

Mary Ann often lagged in the rear of the company and was late to camp. She surely spent many a night in mourning, wondering how her daughters in Iowa were faring. Nevertheless, Mary Ann’s strong faith and determination sustained her family, and they all arrived safely in Zion. Putting the hardships of the journey behind them, the family made their home in Provo and went to work again. Mary Ann was experienced in making straw hats, so she began that occupation again when she was well enough. She and her daughters gathered their straw from a farm near the Provo River owned by Ezekial Kellogg, whom Mary Ann married one year later.

Mary Ann suffered the rest of her life from the injuries sustained on her legs and feet while crossing the plains. Her descendants report that she still had sores on her legs when she died and her feet never did fully recover from the frostbite. Nevertheless, this brave widow was grateful to have seen five of her children safely to Zion. She was a quiet and reserved woman, but had a wonderful singing voice and sang at many parties along with her daughters. She remained faithful to the gospel to the end of her life in 1865. She is an ancestor of Elder John Fenn who has served as a missionary with his wife at the Mormon Handcart Historic Sites in Wyoming. At the conclusion of their missionary service, they also served for two years as directors at what is now the Wyoming Mormon Trail Mission that includes the Historic Sites.

In 1875, Ann and Sabina came to Utah to visit their siblings. Ann had married Milo Mitchell, and Sabina had married Edward D. Smith – the two young men with whom they went riding. The girls both reportedly had large families of 10 children each.

Sources: History of Mary Ann Fenn Bird by William Clayton (her granddaughter’s husband), and other family records in files of Jolene Allphin.