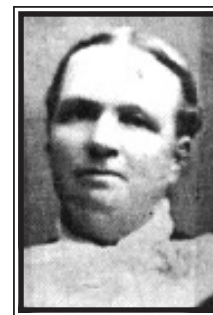


MARY HURREN

Born: 1848 England

Age: 7

Willie Handcart Company



Mary came to Utah with her parents, James (age 29) and Eliza Reeder Hurren (26); sisters, Emma (4) and Sarah (2); grandfather, David Reeder (54), and his children, Caroline (17) and Robert (19). Mary also had a baby sister, Selena, who was born on July 14 at Iowa City. Selena only lived for two weeks. Grandfather Reeder died on October 1, near Ft. Laramie, and Aunt Caroline died October 15, near Independence Rock and Devil's Gate. Family histories recollect that David Reeder was giving his rations to his grandchildren before he died.

With all these trials, Mary's parents endured to the end and were known in the Willie company for their strength. James tried to see the humor in the situations that arose. He tried to make others smile and laugh. He encouraged them to think of the opportunities and blessings ahead in Zion. Mary's mother worried that James would ruin his health by taking on too much extra work, but Captain Willie said that if only one man reached the Valley, it would be James. Mary's valiant parents gave this testimony: "With all our trials, our weary traveling, burying our dear ones, ... we have never once felt to murmur or complain or regret the steps we have taken."

Mary gave an account of her immigration in several interviews. The following is from an interview with Vernal Willie:

I was eight years old when I crossed the plains with my parents in the James G. Willie Handcart Company. We left England on the 2nd of May, 1856, and Captain Willie was in charge of our company. He had been in England on a mission and was returning to his family in Utah. We all loved Captain Willie. He was kind and considerate, and did all that he could for the comfort of those in his company. Many times he has laid his hands upon my head and administered to me. I remember my father lived at Hyde Park at the time of the death of Bro. Willie. He had not heard of his sickness and he cried when he heard of his death. He said that if he had known that he had been sick he would willingly have walked from Hyde Park to Mendon to see him if need be.

The first part of the journey was fun for Mary and her sisters. They saw new sights, played around the handcarts with the other children, and they especially loved playing with their Aunt Caroline. One day, Mary and her friend, Agnes Caldwell, came to an area inhabited by rattlesnakes. They held hands and jumped over the snakes, thinking it great fun. Agnes later wrote: "It seemed to me we were jumping for more than a mile. Due to the protecting hand of the Lord, we were not harmed." (See Agnes Caldwell story in Willie section, *Tell My Story, Too*. See also *Follow Me To Zion*, Andrew D. Olsen and Jolene S. Allphin, Deseret Book, 2013.)

I walked practically all the distance across the plains until we were snowed in. We had to be on the constant lookout for indians. We saw where members of other companies had been killed by the indians. ... During the last few days before relief came our small allowance of flour was cooked as a gruel and eaten that way. Pieces of rawhide on the handcarts were also cooked to secure what food value there was in them. I remember one morning my father went out, and with a stick uncovered from the snow a piece of rawhide about a foot square. After washing it in snow water and scraping the hair off, he cut it into small strips and boiled it. Those pieces were then given to us to eat. We were very thankful to receive them, and chewed them as we would gum until we secured what nourishment there was in it.

The snow was about eighteen inches deep and it was bitter cold in the wind. We lacked sufficient clothing and bedding, as we were limited in the amount we could bring. My shoes were worn out, and my feet and legs were badly frozen. I remember being lifted up on the shoulder of one of the men, where I could see a grave which had been dug to bury those that had died during the day. I counted 14 bodies in this one grave. The grave was dug shallow, as no one had strength to dig it very deep, and the soil was frozen and hard. They were buried in the clothes in which they died. Two more members of our company died while these fourteen were being buried. [Rock Creek hollow, October 24.]

Captain Willie went ahead through the snow to meet the relief wagons and urge them to hurry as the people were freezing and starving to death. If help had not come when it did there would have been no one left to tell the tale. As a small girl I could hear the squeaking of the wagons as they came through the snow before I was able to see them. Tears streamed down the cheeks of the men and the children danced for joy. As soon as the people could control their feelings they all knelt down in the snow and gave thanks to God for his kindness and goodness unto them. The last

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supply of food in the camp had been given out two days before the relief wagons came. They came just in time to save our lives. I was placed in a wagon with two sick boys. The snow came down so fast and the wind blew so hard, that it drifted in the tracks of the wagon ahead, so that the driver of our wagon lost his way, and it was eleven o'clock at night before we were finally located by the rest of the company. During this time we had nothing but a few cracker crumbs to eat.

Mary does not give the date that she was in the "lost" wagon with two sick boys. It may have been the night of October 23, as that fits the description of travel that day, especially with the snowstorm. During that night, one of Mary's playmates died and was buried in a common grave at Rock Creek the next morning. Mary's father or another man lifted her up so she could see the body of her friend lying among the dead. The four children buried there were Samuel Gadd, James Kirkwood, Bodil Mortensen and Niels Nielsen.

When we arrived in Salt Lake City we camped in the old tithing office lot, which was located where the Hotel Utah now stands. We were met by Uncle George Reeder. When he saw what a pitiful condition we were in he went for medical aid. Two doctors came back with him. In the meantime my mother had warmed some water and was engaged in soaking the rags from off my frozen legs and feet. One of the doctors remarked, "She'll never get over this. There's nothing we can do here." He did not expect that I would live more than a day or two at the most. They came back however in the morning and informed my father that the only way to save my life would be to have my legs amputated. The doctors informed father that it would be necessary to amputate one leg just above the knee, and the other one directly below the knee. My father objected to this and said that his little girl had not walked for a thousand miles across the plains to have her legs cut off. [Mary's mother said to the doctor, "If she dies, she dies with her feet on."] The flesh fell away from the calves of my legs, so that it was necessary to grow new flesh. My mother put sweet oil on my legs. I remember that on several occasions after coming to Brigham City that father walked to Ogden to secure fresh beef to bind on my legs. It was three long years before I was able to walk.

The family moved to Brigham City—living first with Mary's uncle, George Reeder. In other reminiscences, Mary gives a slightly different version of how her legs began to heal. She tells of an elderly lady in Brigham City—Mrs. Snider—who advised applying fresh beefsteak to her legs. Fresh meat was not available where they lived, so Mary's father walked 20 miles to Ogden, got a steak, and walked back. When the beef was removed after three days, homemade ointment was applied to Mary's legs and feet. Within a few days the rotten flesh dropped off. Mary was able to walk again in three years, but her feet hurt her all her life.

Mary married Joseph M. Wight and became the mother of 13 children. She also took in a little orphan girl, age ten, with tuberculosis, and cared for her until she died four years later. Mary was gifted at nursing. She nursed the sick and cared for the helpless. President Heber J. Grant came to her 88th birthday party. She remarked that she had shaken the hand of every modern-day prophet to that time, except Joseph Smith. In 1953, Mary's granddaughter, LaPreal Wight, wrote about a remarkable incident she had witnessed in her grandmother's life:

Mary Hurren Wight walked into her kitchen with [a] sick child in her arms. It was not her child, for she was seventy years of age. ... It was the sick child of total strangers, people bogged down with trouble and a broken car, camped under the locust tree at the edge of the lane. ... "Mother! You might be exposing the whole family to something terrible," [her children] remonstrated. "You don't know what the child has. It could have anything!"

Mary responded with compassion and instructions: "It is not a question of what it has or could have. ... The child is sick. A little baby cannot be sick inside a wretched car—with Mormon homes about it. Every house has a door. Doors were made to let people in. And when has my door ever been shut? ... This innocent young one has no home ... and there is room at our inn. ... I think you had better put a bite to eat on the table. The child's [parents] will be here. [They are hungry and] worried, those two. ... They did not have any food. ... I asked them." ...

I never came in close contact with [my grandmother] that I did not realize that I was in the presence of a good woman. But I think I had never known until the following two days just how much strength there is in a beautiful soul. I was to learn it through the eyes of the dead child's mother, for in spite of everything one could do, there was a moment when the baby smiled up at us, gratefully, it seemed, for its warm, clean bed in Mary's kitchen; then, with a little sigh of such sweet content, it closed its eyes peacefully, and its soul winged homeward. ... [The parents,]

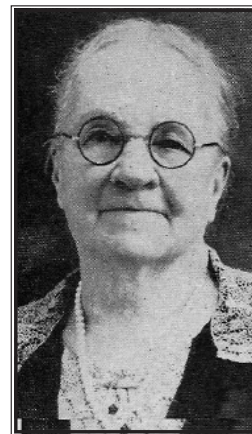
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awkward and hesitant ... [asked how much it would cost for] a little sermon [to be] preached before [they] buried him. “Not a penny,” Mary promised them. ... My church does not take money for preaching.”

As she continued to explain to them our beliefs, I saw the fear leave their faces. ... I felt that throughout their years no one had stopped to be kind to them before. And they were the type that needed kindness. They had probably needed it many times along their way. If someone had lent a hand, they might never have had to face the sorrow that was theirs to bear at that moment. When I heard the simple voices of neighbors ring out in song—a funeral hymn—in Mary’s front parlor, and saw the humble, grateful tears in the eyes of the still bewildered parents as they looked upon the little pine box, made by other neighbors’ hands; when I smelled the faint odor of Mary’s garden flowers adding color to the casket,¹ ... when I heard the bishop speak of life eternal, I was proud of my grandmother. ... She never faltered in her desire to live the way God wanted her to live. ...

Just before her eightieth birthday, we induced her to go to a photographer and have her picture taken. We added just a few touches: a new lace collar to her old black dress, her white hair framing her kind, wrinkled face, her glasses adding impressiveness to her slightly upturned nose. Later, when we showed her the picture, she failed at first, to recognize herself. Her comment was: “My, she’s a big woman, isn’t she? ... Do I look like that?” “You do,” we all chorused. “I did not know life was doing that to me.” And she, who had rarely looked into a mirror because she had never had time, and who had had so little in life, dropped her head and wept because she was beautiful. ...

In her last sickness, we crept into her room. She looked up and smiled, “I can see you so plain. It is lighter than it used to be, I suppose. And just think, my feet don’t hurt! I guess I have conquered those feet at last.” Later, there was a smile on her face as she rested in her casket, and I looked upon her peaceful countenance and knew that she had endured and conquered—Mary Hurren Wight had eternal life.

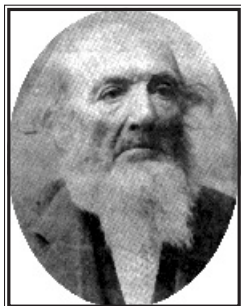


Mary said, “I have always tried to do the best that I could. If I had my life to live over again I would not want to avoid any of the hardships that I have passed through. I would not want it any different.”

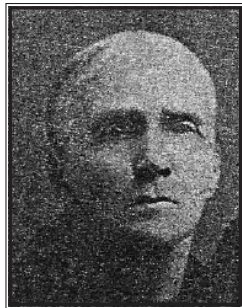
Sources: Wight, Mary Hurren, [Reminiscences], in James G. Willie History (interviews conducted by Vernal Willie); “Autobiography of Agnes Caldwell,” interview conducted by Veara Southworth Fife; “The David Reeder Family History,” book on CD, 2nd edition, 2nd printing, compiled by Adolph Reeder, updated edition by Dennis Reeder; Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; “If You Keep My Commandments,” by LaPreal Wight, *Improvement Era*, August 1953, 571, (Portions also published under title, “There Is Room in Our Inn,” pgs. 252-54, unknown book.); “A Handcart Pioneer Still Carries On,” by R. Newell Jeffs, *Utah Genealogical Magazine* (unknown date), 164-167. See *Follow Me To Zion* by Andrew Olsen and Jolene Allphin, Deseret Book, 2013, for artwork and more Hurren and Reeder family stories.

¹ The Hurren girls were proud of their beautiful orchards and their vegetable and flower gardens. To keep fruit from getting wormy, Emma hung a lantern over a tub of water. The moths would be attracted by the fire, fall into the water and die. Sarah said, “I hope I’ll never see the day I cannot see a flower. I love flowers very much. I always look for spring to come so I can dig my own flower garden and plant it all myself. When the flowers come up I keep the weeds out and take care of them. ... I eat out of my [vegetable] garden during the summer and try to help myself.”

James Hurren



Eliza Reeder Hurren



Emma Hurren (Woolf)



Sarah Hurren (Seamons)

