

## MARY MURRAY MURDOCH

Born: October 13, 1782 in Scotland (died Oct. 3 on the trail)

Age: 73

Martin Handcart Company



James Steel brought Mary to America

Mary was born to John and Margaret McCall Murray. On January 10, 1811, at the age of 28, she married James Murdoch, son of James Murdoch and Janet Osborne. They became the parents of eight children. Two of the children died in childhood. Her husband was employed at the Lime Works in Gaswater, Scotland, and lost his life on October 20, 1831, while trying to rescue a man who had become a victim of poisonous air in a mine shaft. (James was reportedly a second cousin of William Murdoch, the inventor of gas lighting.) Mary and her children were already accustomed to hard work. Mary's energy and thrifty disposition were a great help to her in raising and providing for her fatherless children. A few years after her husband's death, Mary was able, with the help of her sons, to build a little thatched-roof stone cottage.<sup>1</sup>

Mary's son, John, married Ann Steele. Ann's brother, James Steele, visited from England and shared his message about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. After he returned to England, he sent missionaries to Mary's home. The family was baptized on December 22, 1851. Mary was 67 years old. John and Ann emigrated to Utah in 1852. It was a difficult journey for them and their two young children both died. In 1856, John sent money for his mother's fare to join him in Zion. She was 73 years old, but she bravely sailed on the ship *Horizon* in May 1856. She traveled with James Steele, his wife, Elizabeth, their two young children, and Elizabeth's mother, Mary Ann Wylie.

Mary had a great deal of "Scottish" determination to undertake such an adventure at her age. She was known as "Wee Granny" as she was only 4 feet and 7 inches tall, and weighed only about 90 pounds. The anticipation of seeing her son, John, and his family after four years must have surely helped to motivate her. On the morning of October 3, 1856, word was sent through the camp that sister Mary Murray Murdoch had passed away during the night. The company was near Chimney Rock, Nebraska. Mary's spirit was strong, but her body was not able to finish the journey to Zion to join her son, John. Mary would have been 74 years old in ten more days. She died just a couple of weeks short of the first debilitating winter storm of 1856 and was thus taken home by a kind Heavenly Father who spared her the further trauma that was just ahead for the Martin handcart company. Mary's death was attended to by James Steele and his family. The last words spoken by Mary were a plea that her faithfulness and love would be made known to her son. She said, "Tell John I died with my face toward Zion."

James Steele, who had been such a faithful friend to the Murdoch family, also succumbed to death a few weeks later. He died on November 10 just east of the landmark Split Rock, about 20 miles west of Devil's Gate. Upon arriving in the Valley, John and Ann Murdoch took James's widow and her children into their home and cared for them until she remarried in July 1857. Mary Murdoch's children who immigrated to Utah are John, William, Mary (Mair) (McMillan), and Veronica (Caldow) (Giles). They all settled in Heber City. Janet Murdoch (Smith) joined the Church and has descendants who came to Utah, but she died in Scotland in 1866. (A photo of Janet was erroneously published as being her mother in some previous editions of *Tell My Story, Too*, and in a *Church News* article.)

One of James Steele's descendants, LDS artist Clark Kelley Price, honored Mary in a painting that depicts her death. The title of the painting is Mary's last words. Joanne Doxey, one of Mary's descendants, also honored Mary by composing two songs, "Wee Granny, Our Granny" and "Face Toward Zion." Mary was blessed with 72 grandchildren. In 2001, more than 450 of her descendants held a memorial service and dedication of a monument in her honor in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. Dallas Murdoch spoke at this service and said, "I am sure that the Lord wants us to be bonded to our ancestors in order to withstand the temptations of an ever darkening world. That may be one reason it is so important we honor and revere their memory." Mary's legacy is truly a sweet reminder of the joys and blessings of those who labor for Zion and endure to the end.

<sup>1</sup>In 1907, William Lindsay visited Ayrshire, Scotland, and saw the ruins of Wee Granny's cottage. He also saw the spot where James Murdoch lost his life. The shaft in which he died was a new one, about 25 feet deep. After the tragedy it was never sunk any deeper, but was allowed to cave in and fill up. The depression Lindsay saw was about 5 feet deep and had wild daisies growing in it.