

MARY PRISCILLA GRIFFITHS

Born: 1831 England

Age: 25

Willie Handcart Company

Mary Priscilla was born in Dorset, England. Her mother was English and her father Welsh. Mary was given a good education and became a milliner and dressmaker. She worked with a friend who sewed for Queen Victoria.

Mary was the only one of her family to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She had great courage and faith to start for Zion alone.

Her ship landed at Castle Garden, New York. The group then journeyed to Iowa City, Iowa, where they were organized into the Willie handcart company. When Mary finally arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, her feet were frozen. Her youngest son, George Taylor Farnsworth, related the following story, which was told him by his mother:

“My mother, Mary Priscilla, was twenty-one years old when she crossed the plains. She walked all the way, pulling her own handcart. Their provisions were scarce and rationed. They had to kill their oxen, which had pulled the provisions on wagons thus far. The oxen were very poor, but they were forced to eat them to keep alive.”

Mary lived in Salt Lake City for some time and there married a writer by the name of Jesse Willis. She had one son named Jesse Willis, Jr., but her marriage was not a happy one, and they separated. Mary Priscilla was then called to move to Beaver, Utah, to teach school, where she became a very successful teacher and writer.

On June 15, 1860, she married Bishop Philo T. Farnsworth in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City.¹ They were the parents of four children. Some years later she moved to Elsinore, Utah.

Mary was true to her faith and her posterity is said to be numerous.

Mary Priscilla lived to be seventy-nine years old. She passed away in Elsinore, Utah, February 27, 1914.

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneer history files; Griffiths family history in files of Jolene Allphin.

¹Mary's husband has sometimes been confused with his grandson by the same name (from a different wife). The younger Philo T. Farnsworth is known for his role in developing television and is considered the “father” of modern communications.