

MARY THEACH<sup>1</sup> HARPER

Born: 1792 England (Died along the trail)

Age: 64

Martin Handcart Company

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Mary was known as “Aunt Mary” on the trail. She actually was an Aunt to Henry Arnold, who had come to Utah previously. Henry had sent her money to emigrate to Utah. When she got to Iowa and found out that five people could come if she walked instead of rode, she cashed in her ticket, in spite of being in her sixties.

Mary was assigned to pull a handcart with 23-year-old Elizabeth Green, who was also traveling by herself. Elizabeth had been orphaned as a young child and sent to live with an aunt in Liverpool. She joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when she was eighteen and was turned out of her aunt’s home. While Elizabeth was in Liverpool she helped to care for a friend afflicted with tuberculosis and contracted the disease. She asked for a blessing and was promised that if she went to Zion, the consumption should be cast from her. Therefore, she boarded the ship *Horizon* and ended up pulling a handcart with Mary Harper.

The journey was exceedingly hard for Mary and she soon became too weak to walk. Elizabeth put her on the cart and pulled her for several days. As she pulled the old woman along in the extreme heat, Elizabeth had a craving for salt. She knelt down and told the Lord that without salt she just could not go on. There was a wagon train camped nearby. She was impressed to go to the wagonmaster and ask for some salt. He refused to give her any. Then, as an afterthought, he told her that one of the wagons in the train had, on a previous trip, carried salt. He told her it was loaded with 100 pound sacks of wheat, but, if she would care to unload and reload it she might find some salt on the floor. In the cracks of the floor of the wagon box she was able to find almost a cupful of salt which she carefully rationed. To her dying day, she could never waste, nor see anyone waste salt. She said, “If you had ever been as hungry for salt as I have, you would never waste even a grain of it.” Mary was no doubt grateful to share in the carefully rationed salt.

The relief trains finally came to the rescue of Mary and Elizabeth and took the Martin company to the Salt Lake Valley, arriving November 30, 1856. Henry Arnold came to meet his Aunt Mary, but instead, Elizabeth had to tell him the sad news that she had died on the plains. Henry took Elizabeth to his home. They were married a short time later.

Aunt Mary did not make it to the Salt Lake Valley, but perhaps five other people did because she chose to push a handcart. Through her need of help with her handcart, Elizabeth Green was blessed with a husband. Elizabeth received the promised blessing of health, and she and Henry had nine children.

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<sup>1</sup> Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website lists her name as “Mary Monk Harper,” birthdate 20 November 1791.

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; “Elizabeth Green Arnold biographical sketch,” by Emma Rich Bingham, in history files of JoAnn Mellor Felix (“Historical Department Call # MS 12571”); *Remember*, Riverton Wyoming Stake publication (personal letter to R. Scott Lorimer from Eldon Bingham); family history from Gaylene Burbidge, Farmington, Utah.