

## ELLEN WILLIAMSON

Born: January 17, 1833 in England

Age: 23

Martin Handcart Company



Ellen Williamson



Ann P. A. Williamson



Betsy Williamson



Mary Williamson

Ellen attended school when she could, but not for long. She went to work in the factories in England to learn the weavers trade and to help make a living for herself and her family. She was baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on May 1, 1852. The Williamson family, including Ellen (age 23), her mother Ann (48), sisters, Elizabeth Ann (19), Mary (17) and Betsy (3), and brothers, William (14) and John (11) left Liverpool, England, on the ship *Horizon* in May 1856. William had previously tried to hide from his mother, hoping she would leave him, but he finally relented and came to the ship. The father, James Williamson, had gone to Utah two years earlier: Josiah Rogerson wrote of James: “An old English farm hand, coming to Utah in the early 50’s went down to Iron county, Utah, and as he worded it, ‘wrought’ for two or three years in the building of the works of and the experimenting in treating iron ores in that county. The wife of his youth, four daughters and two sons, [were] still back in Lancashire, England. ... The father walked, with his sack of provisions on his back, nearly every mile of the 275 miles [from Paragonah] to Salt Lake City, and striding into President Brigham Young’s office and showing his iron work scrip for his labor performed, entreated that he would receive that as pay and send for his family to come out that season. They were sent for, sailed, and the six came through safe and sound, the stalwart sire meeting them the Sunday morning of our arrival [November 30, 1856]. ... The majority of our company were taken in and cared for in Salt Lake, Davis, Weber and Utah counties that winter, and when I think of all this and the mountain of service rendered by the rescuing and relief party without one dime of remuneration, in what class of humanity do you place the Mormon people?”



William Williamson

Ellen helped pull the family handcart. Betsy was either carried or rode in the cart. A bell was also hung around Betsy’s neck to help keep track of her. During the journey Ellen’s shoes became very worn and it was necessary to cut strips of rawhide and tie them around her feet so she could continue to travel. Ellen’s sister, Mary, had brought along a toy that had been precious to her. It was a little lion made of solid iron. When the loads on the carts had to be further lightened, the inspecting captain found Mary’s toy and discarded it. Mary crept to the discard pile after the rest of the camp was asleep that night and found her treasure. She secretly tied it around her neck. It dangled down her back underneath her clothing the rest of the trek. The weight of the little lion left a lifelong scar on Mary’s neck.

Ellen and her family endured much suffering with the cold and hunger, but the entire family, led by their courageous mother, had survived their journey to Zion. Ellen’s father, James, was preparing to travel to meet his family in Salt Lake City when he jokingly said to his neighbor, Benjamin Watts, “If you will let me take your team and outfit to Salt Lake City to get my family you can have one of my daughters for a wife, if you and one of them are agreeable to each other.” Brother Watts had a much better team of horses than did James. Benjamin agreed to let James take his team and after meeting his family in Salt Lake City, they all returned to Paragonah on December 27, 1856. On January 1, 1857, three days after Ellen arrived in Paragonah, she married Benjamin Watts. Ellen became the mother of eleven children. She lived in Paragonah all her life and died at the age of seventy-four.

Ellen’s descendants have written of her: “Industry was the keynote of their family. To clothe themselves, wool was taken from the backs of sheep, washed, carded into rolls by hand, spun into yarn and woven into cloth, blankets, shawls, and other articles of clothing. Ellen had learned the trade of a weaver but here in Utah a crude loom had to be made of rough materials which handicapped her considerably. Ellen was able to secure cards for making rolls and batts; a spinning wheel for making rolls into yarn; and a loom for weaving. Her kitchen contained a loom until her children were all grown. She was a good seamstress and made most of her clothes by hand. She also made hats for men.”

Sources: “Ann Allred Williamson,” by unknown author; Rogerson, Josiah, “Martin’s Handcart Company, 1856 [No. 10],” *Salt Lake Herald*, 8 Dec. 1907, Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; familysearch.org.