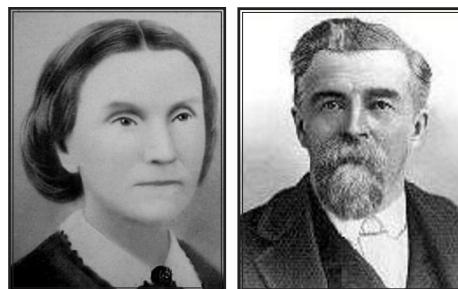


FRANCIS WEBSTER

Born: 1831 England

Age: 25

Martin Handcart Company



Ann Elizabeth Parsons and Francis Webster

When Francis Webster and his wife, Ann Elizabeth (called “Betsy”), prepared to leave London, they had sixteen hundred dollars in cash. With this money they would be able to outfit themselves in luxury for a trip from London to Salt Lake City. Francis placed five hundred dollars with a Church agent to purchase for him a good wagon with full camp equipment and two yoke of good cattle. He planned to pick it up at the point in America where the Mormons started across the plains. Soon after this order was placed, advice came from Brigham Young to the Saints of England, for the well-to-do to share with and give assistance to the poor members of the Church so that they also might come to Zion. Francis Webster heard that advice and obeyed the counsel. Even with the knowledge that a baby would be born to them on the plains, the Websters canceled the wagon order and elected to travel by handcart so the money could be used for the emigration fund. Betsy’s mother and step-father, William and Amy Parsons Middleton, and their son, John, also emigrated with them. Francis wrote:



Amy Webster

“I was married on the 5 day of December to Miss. Ann.Elizabeth Parsons. On the 23 of Dec. I was ordained a Priest. On the 23 of May 18.56, I left Liverpool on board the ship Horizon paying the fare for 9 persons besides myself and Wife to Salt Lake City. Landed at Boston on the 30 of June. Traveled through the States to Ioway city by railroad. I started from Ioway for Salt Lake city with hand Carts on the 27 of July. I had the diarrhea all the way from Ioway city to Florence

so bad that I have sat down on the road and been administered to by the Elders and got up and pulled my hand cart with renewed vigor. I started from Florence on the 3rd of September. At Wolf Creek on the Platt my Daughter Amy Elizabeth was born on the 27 of September. I arrived in Salt Lake City on the 30th day of November 18.56. On the second day of Dec I started with the brethren for Cedar City. I paid my Tithing on the little clothing I brought with me. ... My own feet where badly frozen on the journey.”

Amy survived with her parents and grandparents, and later wrote in a letter to her cousin: “Grandfather Middleton drove one of the provisions wagons. I think Grandmother could have rode some of the time, but that she walked to keep Mother company, and to help carry me, the latter part of the journey, I have no doubt. They were living on a quarter of a lb. of flour a day each, Father had lived for 5 days on ... Buffalo meat without salt, when they were met by the relief train. Father had done that so grandmother and mother could have his quarter lb. of flour.”

Francis Webster became a leader in the Church and community in southern Utah. He served as mayor of Cedar City from 1872-1876. He was revered as a spiritual advisor and counselor to many. One woman said she turned to him “at any and all times,” and he encouraged her “when she was weary and discouraged.”

William R. Palmer wrote about an incident in Francis Webster’s life when Francis was much older. The setting was a Church meeting in Cedar City. Over fifty men and women were in attendance: “[The] discussion was the ill-fated handcart company that suffered so terribly in the snow of 1856. Some sharp criticism of the Church and its leaders was being indulged in for permitting any company of converts to venture across the plains with no more supplies or protection than a handcart caravan afforded. One old man in the corner sat silent and listened as long as he could stand it, then he arose and said things that no person who heard him will ever forget. His face was white with emotion, yet he spoke calmly, deliberately, but with great earnestness and sincerity.

“He said in substance, ‘I ask you to stop this criticism. You are discussing a matter you know nothing about. Cold historic facts mean nothing here, for they give no proper interpretation of the questions involved. Mistake to send the Handcart Company out so late in the season? Yes! But I was in that company and my wife was in it, and Sister Nellie Unthank whom you have cited here was there, too. We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation, but did you ever hear a survivor of that company utter a word of criticism? [Francis was referring to the survivors he knew in southern Utah, particularly Ellen Pucell Unthank and Jens and Elsie Nielson.] Every one of us came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives for we became acquainted with Him in our extremities!

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I have pulled my handcart when I was so weak and weary from illness and lack of food that I could hardly put one foot ahead of the other. I have looked ahead and seen a patch of sand or a hill slope and I have said, I can go only that far and there I must give up for I cannot pull the load through it. I have gone to that sand and when I reached it, the cart began pushing me! I have looked back many times to see who was pushing my cart, but my eyes saw no one. I knew then that the Angels of God were there.

Was I sorry that I chose to come by handcart? No! Neither then nor any minute of my life since. The price we paid to become acquainted with God was a privilege to pay and I am thankful that I was privileged to come in the Martin Handcart Company.”

The speaker was Francis Webster. And when he sat down there was not a dry eye in the room. We were a subdued and chastened lot. Charles Mabey, who later became Governor of Utah, arose and voiced the sentiment of all when he said, “I would gladly pay the same price to personally know God that Brother Webster has.”

Betsy was just as determined, stalwart and independent as her husband. Amy wrote of her mother: “A few days after they reached Cedar, representatives of the Benevolent Society called to see if they could not help them, but mother’s independence prompted her to say, ‘No’, unless they had some soap they would lend her. They sent the soap and mother paid them back, the first time that she made soap. It was not charity, but work that she wanted.

“Father had an old overcoat that was very shabby. By examining the inside, mother decided it could be made over. She picked it to pieces, taking notice how it was put together. She made the coat over, and people wondered where the new coat came from. When told the story, there was others who had clothes that could be made over. Mother was employed to do this work and she started the business of tailoring that she carried on for more than 20 years. [One of Betsy’s dresses she had made in England, had many yards of blue and gold taffeta. She modified it many times to meet the changing styles. At one time she made a small fur cape and bonnet with ribbons to wear with it. As it was modified over the years, scraps of material were left over and she made these into baby bonnets.] The school board wanted her to teach school, but if she had done that she would have had to have someone take care of her children; but if she sewed she could care for them herself.”

Betsy served as a Relief Society President for many years, during which time their “Ward Hall” was being built. Betsy directed the Relief Society donations of clothing, eggs, butter, potatoes, and other products for distribution to the families of the workmen. They also gave food to other people who were suffering from hunger.

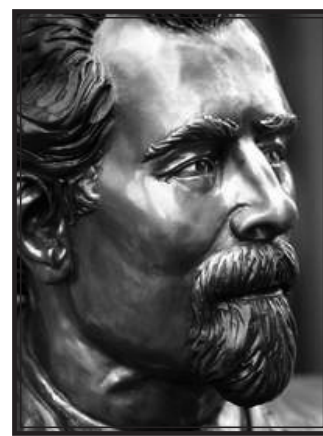
A tribute to Betsy from Dr. George W. Middleton, is a fitting conclusion to her story: “Aunt Betsy Webster was to me one of the most adorable women I ever knew. She it was who first recognized my struggles as a boy, and came to my aid with a full measure of sympathy. ... [she had] an education unusual for the times. Her handwriting was superb, and her language was that of the upper class of English. ... My more mature judgement of her confirms the estimate of my boyhood days that she was the embodiment of all that was dignified, and noble and true in womankind. God bless her sacred memory.”

The image on page 3 is from Francis Webster’s own journal.

Sources: *Generations of Websters* (n.p., 1960), by Amy Van Cott; “Pioneer Women,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Jan. 1948, by David O. McKay; diary image on page 330 courtesy Amy Phister; Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; artwork at tellmystorytoo.com. See also: “Francis Webster-The Unique Story of One Handcart Pioneer’s Faith and Sacrifice,” by Chad Orton, in *BYU Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006), byustudies.byu.edu. See also www.webster-family.org.



Look to God and Live
© Julie Rogers
(Ann Elizabeth Webster)
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from Francis Webster statue
Historic Main Street,
Cedar City, Utah

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<p> My father in law John & Amy Middleton died May 26. 1861 I and my wife received our endowments on the 6th of July 1861 My son John James Gordon was born November 24 1861 December 5. 1861. I had a great party in honor of my wedding day January 12. 1863 I was blessed by Bishop Lunt and set apart to teach in the first ward in Cedar City On the 11 day February 1863 I was elected a member of the city council for Cedar City April 17 1863. I was ordained a Seventy in the Society of the Lord's Anointed under the hands of Elders Wm. G. Brigham May 15 1863 I was introduced to the Prophet Brigham Young by Bishop Lunt [11] </p>	<p> My daughter Amy Elizabeth was born on the 24 of September I arrived in Salt Lake City on the 30th day of November 1858 on the 2nd day of Dec I started with brethren for Cedar City I paid my tithing on the little clothing I brought with me and signed the articles of con- secration 5 days after my arrival in Cedar City My own feet were badly frozen on the journey On the 4 of April 1858 my son Francis was born I was ordained an Elder by Isaac C. Haight Feb 7 19. 1860 Feb 20 I was ordained one of the Bishops Teachers My son Thomas Joseph was born March [10] 18. 1850 </p>
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