



ANN WOOD WHEELER

Born: 5 Apr 1801 Marley, Worcestershire, England

Age: 55

Willie Handcart Company

Ann Wood was married to Edward Wheeler the day after Christmas in 1826. Ann and Edward were both from Herefordshire, England, where Edward worked as an agricultural laborer. Ann and Edward had at least three children: Maria, Joseph, and Mary Ann.

In 1841, Ann heard the gospel message and was baptized by Elder John Meeks on July 20 of that year. She was one of the earliest English converts to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was a big change for Ann to make in her life at the age of forty; however, Ann was not alone. Hundreds of others were joining the Church in the towns in and near Herefordshire at this time. Many of these people had been affiliated with the United Brethren, a religious group seeking a Church that had prophets and apostles, the way Jesus Christ had organized it when he was on the earth. John Meeks had been a United Brethren minister before his own conversion to the Church.

At first, Edward was not pleased with his wife's decision to be baptized, but Ann "attended meetings faithfully, praying earnestly and constantly to her Father in Heaven that he would see the light. Eventually, her prayers were answered and Edward joined the church."¹ Their three children were also eventually baptized. The family began making plans to join their fellow Saints in Utah.

Joseph Wheeler was the first to emigrate from England in 1853. He traveled on the ship *Ellen Maria* in company with Samuel and Margaret Phillips.² Edward and Ann Wheeler, and their daughter, Mary Ann, left England on the ship *Thornton* in 1856. Their daughter, Maria, and her husband, Frederick Wall,³ were with them. With most of the other Saints aboard the *Thornton*, the Wheeler and Wall families joined with the James G. Willie handcart company in Iowa City, Iowa, to continue their journey to Utah.⁴

¹ *Wheeler Pioneers: A History of the Edward and Ann Wheeler Family*, Washington, Utah: The Wheeler Family Organization, 2015. Edited by Wesley R. Burr, Norman Eatough, Jared Farish, and Ruth J. Burr. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes and other family information are taken from this wonderfully documented and sourced family history book (courtesy Wesley R. Burr and Sister Trudy Thurgood, a missionary with her husband in the Wyoming Mormon Trail Mission, Sixth Crossing site, May 2015).

² British Mission Record for *Ellen Maria*; and *Wheeler Pioneers*, p. 4. Family records also indicate that Joseph traveled to Utah overland with the Moses Clawson wagon company. Joseph's name does not currently appear on that list of passengers on the Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website (May 2015).

³ One of the Frederick and Maria Wheeler Wall family histories indicates that Joseph Wall, age 17, and Sarah Emily Wall, age 16, of the Willie handcart company, were siblings to Frederick Wall. It appears that this is an assumption and is not substantiated by documentation.

⁴ The British Mission Record for the *Thornton*, pg. 134, and the PEF record in Book B, pgs. 214-215, show that Edward Wheeler deposited at least 12 English pounds toward his family's transportation before leaving England. He made payments on his PEF Bond 1301 for the balance of

While the Wheeler family was at Iowa City, Ann and her daughters would have helped to sew the tents they needed for their journey. Edward and his son-in-law, Frederick Wall, would have helped to build more handcarts than what had already been provided when they arrived.

Edward Wheeler wrote a short synopsis of the family's conversion and subsequent immigration to Utah:

When the gospel was brought to the 764 souls that boarded the Thornton⁵ that fateful day in 1856 they were people from all walks of life, the greater part of them skilled in some trade or other, yet most had to work in the factories or on farms at a low salary. We had had very poor housing. Such conditions as these seemed to be about all that life in England could offer. What they were able to acquire in wages took all for their livelihood. Few of us were able to save for a rainy day.

After we joined the Church conditions grew worse. Our former friends turned against us. Our Clergy, which actually was the governing power in our lives and parishes in which we lived, became our bitterest enemies. We became outcasts in our own native land. When the hand of fellowship was extended to us from "America," that land of opportunity, we gladly accepted with thankful hearts. Little did we realize that an unfortunate chain of events were to follow which would be the cause of many deaths before we reached our destination.⁶

This "unfortunate chain of events" experienced by the Willie handcart company included delays brought on by lost cattle, shortened rations, and cold weather. On October 23, the Wheeler family traveled about 15 miles, crossing Rocky Ridge with snow and cold wind in their faces throughout the day. Most of the company reached the camp at Rock Creek Hollow after dark, and the last members of the company did not arrive until the next morning at 5:00 a.m. The story of the Wheelers' experience on Rocky Ridge was handed down through the generations and recorded by one of their descendants:

While crossing the Rocky Ridge many of the Saints froze their feet, hands, and faces. Here Anne's husband [Edward Wheeler] had his feet and legs frozen, making him helpless and impossible for him to walk, and had it not been for his son-in-law, Frederick Wall, he never would have reached the valley. He would pull the handcart a little way and then return and carry my great grandfather.⁷

Ann and her daughters and son-in-law placed Edward on the handcart when they left Rock Creek on October 25. They would transport him this way until November 2, when they reached Fort Bridger. Although the Willie company had a few rescuers with them from October 21, it wasn't until they reached Bridger that they met enough more rescue wagons that Edward and the others could ride the rest of the way when needed. Most of the handcarts were abandoned at Fort Bridger. Edward Wheeler suffered the rest of his life from the effects of these trials.

his emigration costs until it was paid in full in 1870. Two of the payments on the PEF Bond, totaling \$35, were made by his son-in-law, Ozias Kilburn. Frederick and Mary Ann Wheeler Wall also used the PEF for their transportation (Bond 1302). Their account was paid in full by 1861.

⁵ <http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu> shows 792 passengers aboard the Thornton. (Accessed 5/25/2015.) There were about 500 members of the Willie handcart company that started from Iowa City in 1856. Approximately 100 of these emigrants dropped out in Florence, and did not continue to Utah that year.

⁶ The editors of *Wheeler Pioneers* indicate that they have been unable to find a copy of Edward Wheeler's journal and that "this quotation from Edward's journal is in the history written by Eva Paine Beaushore." A copy of a history of Edward and Ann Wood Wheeler written by Eva Paine Braushers (presumably the same person as "Eva Paine Beaushore") is in possession of the author of this sketch, Jolene Allphin. This history states that Eva is a great-granddaughter of Edward and Ann Wheeler. It does not quote from Edward's journal. The history is courtesy of a Wheeler great-granddaughter, Diana J. Spear Larson, submitted to the Wyoming Mormon Trail Mission (formerly Mormon Handcart Historic Sites) and forwarded to Jolene Allphin in 2004.

⁷ History, Eva Paine Braushers, 2.

Ann had given her all in assisting her family in this journey. She did not like to talk about it later in life, feeling that the memories were too painful. One thing Ann did share was “how she gathered prickly pears in her apron as she walked along, later boiling them for food when they made camp.”⁸

When the Wheelers finally reached the valley of their hopes, they were met by their son Joseph with a wagon and ox team to take them to Ogden. They made their home in Ogden and had a farm just south of the historic Sperry flour mill.

Ann continued to serve others throughout her life. She was skilled in the use of plants and herbs in administering to the sick, and she used these skills to bless her neighbors at all times—day or night—when they were in need.

Ann also had an unusual skill: she was a very strong boxer. A granddaughter, Adeltha Bingham Wheeler, wrote of her:

She was a big, strong woman, and grandfather was a small man. Whenever trouble came along she would always say: “Stand aside Ed, I will take care of this.” And she always did. She was among the best boxers of her time.⁹

Ann was left a widow only six years after arriving in Utah. Edward died in October 1862, apparently from appendicitis. Ann died almost 15 years later in August 1877. Her obituary in the *Deseret News* honored her by stating:

Sister Wheeler was an honest, upright, industrious woman, a faithful wife, affectionate mother, and a true Latter-day Saint. She died in the sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life; was well beloved by all who knew her, and leaves a large family and many friends to mourn her loss.¹⁰

The posterity of Ann and Edward Wheeler have expressed gratitude for the “long-lasting and far-reaching impact their trek to Zion would have” on them. “They paved the way for us to enjoy the blessings of living in the midst of Zion and enjoying the spiritual benefits of the gospel, and the freedom of living in this country. The ultimate good resulting from their ordeal and sacrifice in our behalf will continue long after we are gone.”¹¹

One great-granddaughter summarized this “far-reaching impact” of the Wheeler family’s immigration this way:

I feel grateful that my ancestors accepted the Gospel and had the courage to come to this country. When I think of them trudging along singing the handcart song . . . in the face of the hardships they endured, my greatest desire is that I might appreciate the heritage they left me and ever prove true to the gospel for which they suffered so much.¹²

Pictured: Ann Wood Wheeler
(Photos courtesy Wesley R. Burr and Trudy Thurgood)



⁸ *Wheeler Pioneers*, 27

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28-29

¹² *History*, Eva Paine Braushers, 2