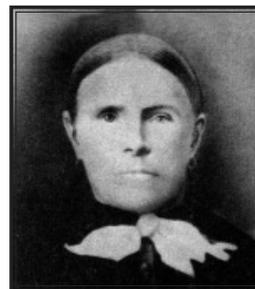


ELIZA MORTON

Age: 20

Born: Nov. 23, 1835 Staley Bridge, Lancashire, England
Martin Handcart Company

Eliza and her sister, Mary, were born to Joshua and Harriet Schofield Morton, a well-to-do family in England. Their father died at age 32 and their mother later remarried. The two girls then lived with their grandmother and worked in the factories. After listening to “Mormon” missionaries, they were baptized by Cyrus H. Wheelock, who would later become one of the first rescuers they would meet in their stranded condition on the plains at the end of October 1856.

The Martin handcart company had been stranded for nine days near the last crossing of the North Platte River at Red Buttes. The early winter storms had come upon them as they had crossed this frigid, swift and wide river on October 19. John Jaques recorded the following of meeting the first main rescue party: “Cyrus Wheelock could scarcely refrain from shedding tears, and he declared that he would willingly give his own life if that would save the lives of the emigrants.”

Eliza was traveling with her sister and her sister’s new husband, Thomas Durham, probably sharing a handcart with one or two other people. Years later Eliza’s daughter, Harriet Yardley, and Harriet’s children, recorded the experiences that Eliza had shared with them about her trek to Utah: “Worn out with the wearisome journey, half starved, footsore and heartsick, Eliza Morton told in after years how she often sat on a bank as a stop was made along the dreary journey, surrounded by deep and glistening snow, and thought of the home she had forsaken. Eliza also related how when the weather was below zero, she carried water from a river for camp purposes when the handles of the buckets would freeze to her hands. So desperate was their situation when almost without food, snowbound in the Black Hill [Red Buttes], their Captain, Edward Martin, stood before them as they sat huddled about the embers of a dying campfire and asked whether if it should be the will of the Lord that they may perish there, they were willing to submit to his will. Each man and woman raised his or her hand as a signal of their submission. Characteristic of her faith, Eliza Morton remarked, ‘I held up my hand but I didn’t believe we were going to die.’ None of those imbued with the true spirit of the pioneers, and supported by a mightier power than man’s, could have sung the songs of Zion as did those staunch emigrants as they gathered about the campfire.” (See pages 155-156, Martin Company section, *Tell My Story, Too*, for more information and timeline about this event.)

Eliza first settled in Parowan with the Durhams. Here she attended a dance one evening and danced with James Pace Anderson. He was 31 years old and it is said that his parents had given up on him getting married. To the surprise of his family, James announced the next morning that he had met the girl he was going to marry at the dance. His family laughed, but James and Eliza were married six weeks later on March 10, 1857. They became the parents of five children, three of whom lived to maturity. In 1954 the family recorded 104 living descendants.

The Andersons moved to Beaver where Eliza became the town’s first school teacher. She taught in a 20’ by 20’ log building on the town square where the Beaver City Library now stands. Her home on Main Street was always a gathering place for the young people of the community. Everyone was made welcome at her table. James died 10 years after their marriage and Eliza remained a widow for 52 years. Her children wrote:

“Every known hardship of those early trying days were passed through. Her faith and courage and her testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ never faltered.”

Before Eliza died in 1917, she divided up her belongings between her three living children, a son and two daughters. So that neither girl felt bad, she took the shawl that she had worn crossing the plains in the Martin handcart company and cut it up the middle so both girls would have a half.



Sources: “History of Eliza Morton Anderson,” compiled by Sara & Melba Yardley, with Harriet Anderson Yardley; email from Alison Webb, January 30, 2007; “ ‘Aunt’ Eliza M. Anderson, Handcart Pioneer, Dies” (Special Correspondence, Beaver, Dec. 16, 1917, newspaper article reporting Eliza’s death and funeral on December 14. Obituary reports the “high esteem held in the community for the deceased.”)