

MARY BARTON

Born: 13 Jan 1842 in Southport, Lancashire, England

Age: 14

Martin Handcart Company



Mary was the daughter of William and Jeannette Carr Barton, the youngest of seven children. Mary's mother died shortly after her birth. William Barton was a plasterer and paperhanger by trade and made a fairly good living. Mary's older sisters helped to raise her until her father remarried. Mary later wrote: "At the age of six I went to school but had to stop when I reached my tenth birthday. At twelve I went out to work for my living, and when fourteen years old I left England to come to Utah for the Gospel sake."

Mary sailed from England in May of 1856 aboard the *Horizon* with her father, William (age 47), step-mother, Mary Ann (33), and step-sisters, Francis (3), and Elizabeth (1). Her older siblings apparently did not join the Church as they are reported to have persecuted the rest of the family for so doing. Even after coming to America, Mary was saddened many times by the unkind things said to her in letters from her relatives in England. Mary recorded many interesting things about her journey:

One day while on the ship, I was up in the cooking room cooking dinner. It was so crowded there was hardly standing room. The people were all cooking their dinner, one man was boiling soup in a milk can. When he took the soup from the stove, he lifted it over my head in order to carry it through the crowd. While doing so somebody knocked him and it fell out of his hand on my back. My father stood outside waiting for me to come with the dinner. I ran out to him and he said, 'Come downstairs and let's get some oil.' So we ran down the steps and got one of the Elders to administer to me. It was better in a few minutes, the pain had entirely gone and I never felt any more of it. Some of the soup went on the hands of the man who had spilled it on me. He ran and put his hands in a bucket of cold water and wasn't administered to. He, not being a convert, wouldn't hear to having the Elders pray for him. His hands were blistered and they didn't get better until two weeks.

On July 4, the Martin company arrived by train in Cleveland, Ohio, amidst parades and fireworks. They stayed in a large warehouse overnight, during which time there was a great rainstorm. They were also pestered by a mob with stones and bats all night. Although Mary did not write about it, her baby sister, Elizabeth, died July 6. Mary wrote:

We had been five weeks on the sea when we landed in Boston. We were very glad to walk on land again. We left Boston for Iowa and were eight days on the train. When we arrived in Iowa, we had three miles to walk to the camp grounds. It rained all the way, and we were soaking wet when we reached camp that night at twelve o'clock.

We had to stay on the camp grounds five weeks waiting for the handcarts to be made. When everything was ready we started. Traveling through Ohio and Council Bluffs (Nebraska), we had to cross the Missouri River which was about a mile from Florence. ... So many of our company took sick that we had to camp at Florence for two weeks. Then we started on a journey of [one thousand] miles across the plains. The people began to get sick and died from drinking muddy water. We had to drink pools of rain water most of the time. While traveling, one of the wagons split and let flour out. The Indians who were nearly starved to death came along behind picking it up and eating it, dirt and all. One day while we were camped an Indian came to me and asked me to give him my shawl which I had on my shoulders. I told him it was all I had to keep me from freezing to death. He turned and walked away.

Some of us had to stand guard every night to keep the Indians from stealing our cattle. One day as we were going along we came across three Indians buried in the ground with just their heads sticking out. Upon reaching the Platt River we found Indians wrapped in blankets and laid across the boughs of trees. This was another form of burial the Indians had for their dead. The soldiers came and guarded us past Chimney Rock. They stayed with us until we reached Fort [Laramie]. There they stopped and we had to go on alone. When we got on one side of Devils Gate, we had to rest about a week, and our cattle died. We roasted the feet and the hides. Then we ate them. Joseph Young came on a donkey to meet us. He told us to come on about three miles [days] further. Then we would meet the Mormons who were coming to meet us with wagons of provisions. They could only carry a small amount because the snow was so deep, and they had to carry grain for their horses.

After reaching Devil's Gate, the company was moved to a cove in the nearby mountain for five days. Mary wrote:

After pitching our tents we lay down on the ground to get some sleep and rest. In the night the tents all blew over. It was all ice and snow where I was laying, and when the tents blew off I didn't wake up I was so tired. One man

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came and looked at me. He called some more men over saying, “I wonder if she is dead?” He patted me on the head and just then I opened my eyes. He jumped back. I tried to raise my head but found that my hair was frozen to the ground. They chopped the ice all around my hair, and I got up and went over to the fire and melted the large pieces of ice that were clinging to my hair. The men laughed to think that I could lie there all night with my hair frozen in the ice, but were very glad that I wasn’t dead. This same night the handcarts all blew away, and some of us had to walk until we met some other wagons. Mrs. Unthanks¹ got her feet frozen and had to have them taken off, but when we met more wagons we could all ride. There were four men in our tent, and all of them died, father dying first.”

William was not well when the company started out from Iowa City, but bravely managed to help his family over 600 miles before he succumbed to death near Chimney Rock. Mary’s granddaughter, Molly Farrow Grimshaw, recorded:

The stepmother and young Mary pulled the cart while the sick father held onto the back of it, dragging his weary and swollen feet. ... He ate grass with the oxen, and wild berries he found along the way. These made him have some kind of dropsy, swelling his legs and feet and making it very difficult for him. ... After dragging on the rear of their handcart for days, one night came when he could only creep around. A captain came along and gave him a push with his foot, telling him to get up and not to give up that way, to be brave about it. That night, [September 30] ... just as the guard was calling out the twelve o’clock shift, Mary Barton’s father died. She was lying by him, as her stepmother was caring for the sick girl.

Mary reached the Valley on November 30, 1856. The family was taken first to the tithing yard to receive food and supplies. Mary first stayed with a King family and then with the Allen family in Spanish Fork. Mary married John Allen the next spring. She became the mother of twelve children, seven girls and five boys.

Mary derived a lot of pleasure from singing. She led the choir in what became her hometown of Summit for many years. Her granddaughter, Molly, remembers Mary’s later years, being confined to her sickroom, and sharing stories and singing songs to her: “She often sang to me, and one of her favorites was the ‘Handcart Song.’ She seemed proud to have lived through such harrowing experiences and that she had been strong enough to surmount so many difficulties, but in later years she would not talk of these things. She died of a sudden stroke in her seventy-first year.”

In 1907 Mary wrote a letter to Thomas Dobson and the Handcart Veterans Association:

Summit Iron Co Utah / September 19, 1907 / Brother Dobson, I take the liberty to write a few lines to you about the handcart company. I see in the Deseret News a list of all the Survivors of said Companies. I read all of the names in the news. I do every year, but I have never seen My name in it. Maybe they don’t never hear of me, but I think if you was to see me you would remember me. My name was Mary Barton. My father’s name was William Barton. We Came from Southport, Lancashire. Father died on the plains and one of my father’s old friends also died soon after. I think you can remember him. His name was Robert McBride. And other Brothers—one, Father [George P.] Waugh, [age 67] and Father [Richard] Venner [age 70] also died in our tent.¹ I was very young When We came to Utah and I don’t remember many of the Company, but I can remember your Mother and your Sister and you and a few more. I am sixty five years old and I am a very poor Writer. Dear Brother, could you tell me any thing about the McBride family, where they live? If so, Will you let me know? They were very dear friends of mine and My father’s. There is a few of the handcart folks lives in Parowan and Red Creek - Thomas Durham of Parowan and William Williamson of Red Creek. They live in the Same County as I do, but not in the same town.² Please excuse my taking the liberty of Writing to you. I will stop. From your Sister in the gospel, Address—Mrs. Mary Allen, Summit, Iron County, Utah
[Lightly edited for readability by Jolene Allphin]

¹ Mary is referring to 9-year-old Ellen (Nellie) Pucell of the Martin company. Nellie later married William Unthank and lived near Mary Barton in Southern Utah. See Nellie’s story in the Martin company section of *Tell My Story, Too*.

² See Dobson, McBride, Waugh, Durham, and Williamson stories in the Martin company section of *Tell My Story, Too*.

Sources: Handcart Veterans Association, Scrapbook 1906-1914, Fd. 3 letter 6, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; “Autobiography of Mary Ann Barton Allen,” <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jleatham/maryAnn.htm>; family histories by Molly Farrow Grimshaw.