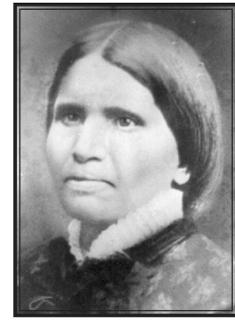


ELIZABETH XAVIER TAIT

Born: December 23, 1832 in Bombay, India

Age: 24

Willie Handcart Company



Elizabeth was born in India where she met her husband, William Tait. He was a widower from Ireland, and a regimental drill master in Queen Victoria's Army. Elizabeth's father had also been in the service of the Queen. He died when Elizabeth was 10 years old. Elizabeth and William were married January 21, 1850, in India. William had been a member of the Church for nine years. He was baptized in Scotland. Elizabeth was baptized a member of the Church by her husband in October of 1852. This was in Poona where they lived, and where a branch of the Church had just been organized the previous month. Elizabeth and William were a great help to the missionaries and members there. Elder Hugh Findlay's journal tells of the Tait's opening their home to the missionaries and members; inviting others to hear the gospel and attend church services; William's baptism of Elizabeth and others; and William bearing testimony, speaking in tongues, and healing the sick. During this time there was strong opposition to the Church and lies were printed in papers from England. The following entry from Elder Findlay's journal tells how this affected the Tait's:

"Here every soldier receives pay for each member of his family, the Chaplain's certificate for the sprinkling of the new member being the requisite to have it enrolled for pay. Elder Tait of Poona, however, handed in for his son a certificate of Blessing with my name attached, which no one could (or would) receive, till it should go to government. It did go to Government, and the reply received was that all Mormon children are to receive pay the same as any others."

In a letter from William to Elder Findlay in April of 1852, William indicated the difficulty in not receiving information "from any of the Brethren this last 10 years, only what I see in the Papers. The Brethren in Scotland whom I knew, are all gone to America so that I know no one that I could write to. Dear Brother, let me know as soon as possible how the Church is getting on and if it is true that Brother Joseph Smith was Shot, and where Brother Parley P. Pratt is, he covenanted to pray for me and I for him. I should like to know how you are getting on yourself, and when you arrived in Bombay, and if there are any Saints there. Dear Brother, I know no one I may say in Bombay that I could introduce you to, but come to Poona and with the blessing of God you will find a home with me, humble though it is. Dear Brother my soul has often been grieved with the many lies that I hear from day to day about the Saints of the Most High God, and likewise the mysteries and babblings of the Priests of the present day. I as a soldier must go to some place of worship, and I am sick and tired of them. Now my dear Bro., I must conclude this letter, and in doing so I bear my testimony to the work of the living God commenced in these last days; I know that it is of God, and I rejoice in many of the gifts of his Spirit. I have no more to say at present, but remain your Brother in the new and everlasting Covenant. \S\William Tait, 22 April 1852."

At this time Elizabeth and William had been blessed with two sons. The oldest, William James, died suddenly of cholera in 1854. Elizabeth was expecting another baby when William completed his military service in India. They made plans for their emigration to Utah. William and their second son, John, sailed for America ahead of Elizabeth. They left in March of 1855 on the ship *Mary Spencer* for China, obtained passage to California, then traveled to Utah and settled in Cedar City. Elizabeth waited in India to have her baby. This baby girl, Mary Ann, was born a few weeks later on April 22, 1855. Elizabeth and her baby soon left India, ignoring the pleadings and opposition of family. William had sought help for his son's care from Caroline Crosby. She recorded: "Brother Tait wished me to take care of his little son in his absence, while he searched for work. Said he would reward me for the same. He seemed very much afflicted at the idea of parting from the child, as he had taken the sole care of him for several months. The thoughts of his having brought him away from his mother was distressing to him, and he wept so that he could scarcely speak. I told him I would do as well as I could by him and he said I was the only one he knew that could take him. He expressed many thanks for my kindness, and said he would never forget us, in time nor eternity. The little fellow's situation excited much sympathy, from us all. To be turned upon the world in a land of strangers without a mother, at his tender age was truly a pitiable condition. But I believe the lord will protect and defend him.

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Elizabeth sailed first to Liverpool, England. The journal of Elder Asa Starkweather Calkin records, “February 11 ... Sister Tate and child from East India arrived on her way to the valley, where her husband has gone before her.” Little Mary Ann became very ill while crossing the ocean and died, apparently on July 1 in Iowa City. Edith Huntsman Tait’s history says, “The President of the Mission at Liverpool was very kind to her in her hour of sorrow, and she braced up for her journey to go on.” This may have reference to Elder Franklin D. Richards, as he met with the Willie company while crossing the plains in August and September. Family sources list Mary Ann’s death as July 1, 1856, at Iowa City. The Willie Company journal records the death of an unnamed child on July 1 at Iowa City, with these words: “A child died today.” This child is possibly Mary Ann Tait.

Elizabeth sailed on the ship *Enoch Train*. It left Liverpool earlier in 1856 (March 22) than the majority of the Willie company on board the *Thornton*, which did not leave until May. Elizabeth may have waited at New York or Iowa to go with the Willie company because that company included Allen Findlay, a friend and missionary returning from the Bombay Mission. (Brother Findlay married Jessie Ireland, of Scotland, a few days after leaving Liverpool, on board the *Thornton*.) Elizabeth probably traveled with Brother and Sister Findlay and Sister Findlay’s mother, making the typical four or five people to each handcart.

Elizabeth suffered greatly with the rest of the Willie company when they were delayed and then stranded in the winter storms. She told her descendants many stories of crossing the plains. One personal story she related was as follows: “One day when the company had stopped for dinner, she and another lady companion, strolled out a little way from camp, was so very tired, and foot sore, and weary they lay down thinking to have a little rest, and fell off to sleep. When the company was ready for going on, they couldn’t be found ... couldn’t be woke by their shouts. ... The company went on, while they slept behind a large brush. When they awoke, and finding themselves left, and alone, they were very frightened and horrified at seeing that night was coming on and they were alone, in the wilderness. What should they do? They screamed ... decided to follow the tracks ... ran and they hollered, but to no avail, when dark came on they had not found their company. ... They prayed and they traveled ... wolves and coyotes barking and howling all around them frightened them terribly, but they kept on going, silently praying ... finally coming to a stream of water. Feeling sure that [their] Company had crossed this stream, they stood on the bank and shouted several times, and [finally] heard voices on the other side. It was two men ... that had heard them hollering, and was coming to rescue them. Again they offered up a prayer of thanks and gratitude to God, for his kindness and holy hand in guiding them to their Company. Soon they were safely in camp.”

“Grandmother” Tait also told her descendants about how hungry they became, about leaving many of her possessions behind, and finally about meeting the relief company, among whom was a rescuer she was most happy to see—her husband, William. She said they were only allowed to “have but a few spoons of potatoes” at first, and later “allowing a small piece of bread to be given along with the potatoes. [We] were gradually fed.” Elizabeth and William spent a short time in Salt Lake City, and then traveled by ox team and wagon to Cedar City where William had settled previously. The journey took three weeks.

Elizabeth became a school teacher, assisting her husband who was already teaching when she arrived. She had seven more children. A son died as an infant in 1867. She was an excellent seamstress and a busy homemaker. She died in 1914 at the age of 82. Besides teaching school, William Tait also taught the sword drill to soldiers, served on the committee to plan the building of the Old Tabernacle in Cedar City, Utah, and served as a temple worker in the St. George Temple. He died in 1896 at the age of 78.

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; “A Letter to William and Elizabeth Xavier Tait From Your Great Granddaughter Elaine Tait Rogers,” letter written for Deanna Pearl Tait Glover for Relief Society lesson, 2007, recounts history of Elizabeth and William Tait; “Elizabeth Xavier Tait,” and “William Tait,” by Kim S. Whitehead; “James Xavier and Julianne Bell,” pgs. 5-8 of unknown “booklet” by unknown author; “William and Elizabeth Xavier Tait,” by Hattie Mulliner Hunter; *The Willie Handcart Company*, by Paul D. Lyman, 2006; “No Place to Call Home,” by Caroline Barnes Crosby, in “Letter” from Elaine Tait Rogers.