

MARY JANE BARNES

Born: July 24, 1856 Iowa City, Iowa

Age: Infant

Martin Handcart Company



Mary Jane Barnes



Jane Howard Barnes



Elizabeth Barnes

Mary Jane was born in Iowa City on Utah's "pioneer day." Her mother was assisted in this birth by a friend and possible relative, Margaret Howard McBride. Returning missionaries, Elder William Dunbar and J.D.T. McAllister,¹ stood outside the tent and sang during the baby's birth. Afterward, they came into the tent and blessed the mother and the baby. Mary Jane was blessed to "live and become a mother in Israel." The Martin company began their trek four days later.

At the last crossing of the North Platte River on October 19, 1856, the emigrants encountered their first cold winter storm. Mary Jane's father, George Barnes (age 41), like many others, was sharing his meager rations with his family to save their lives. George helped his family across the icy river. The company was then stranded in deep snow before rescuers from the Salt Lake Valley found them on October 28. George died during this time, possibly on October 24, 1856.² Family records also indicate that George had stood guard duty for several consecutive nights, contributing to his illness and eventual death. Benjamin Platt of the Martin Company later wrote, "We had to herd at nights and pull handcarts all day and many times I have been kept up until midnight and then stood guard until morning and then started again [on the trail], and it was this everlasting guarding that killed the people."

Jane Howard (age 41), was left alone to bring her family of six children into Salt Lake. Margaret (15), Betsy (12), Esther (10)³, Deborah (8), William L. (5), and Mary Jane all survived. They lived with William Barnes, the brother of Mary Jane's father. He had come to Utah previously and had a home ready

for them. In the spring, Jane and William were married. William wrote:



Esther Barnes

In the year 1855 I sent for my Brother and family but they did not leave England until the eighteen hundred and fifty six. They left Liverpool in the spring and landed at Boston, United States. They then traveled to Omaha and lay over in camp until they got ready to start on their journey across the plains. They traveled with hand Carts across the plains and over the Rocky Mountains. My Brother George died on the way, ... and left a wife and six Children, the youngest only two month old, having been born on the journey. They arrived in Salt Lake about the last of November in perilous condition, suffering great hardship in their travels across the plains. They were mere skeletons when they arrived in Salt Lake City. One of the daughters, [Esther], had her toes [frozen] off both feet. I had got a home ready for their arrival and every thing comfortable for them on their arrival. By the Blessing of God I employed a doctor to attend to the girl whose toes were froze. [He had] to [cut] the toes all off. In time she [got] well [so] that you could scarcely notice her lameness.

When Mary Jane was sixteen years old, she married Fred Parkin. They became the parents of ten children. Mary Jane was a pioneer in the Salt Lake Valley; St. George and Nephi, Utah; and in Willow Creek, Idaho. Her courageous mother was a nurse and mid-wife in St. George, "aiding the distressed in the early days of Dixie." Her mother lived to be 90 years old.

Sources: "The George and Jane Howard Barnes Family," by Leon S. Pitman, great-grandson, 1998; St. George and Salt Lake Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; "Autobiographical sketch" of William Barnes, on Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; "Brief Sketch of the Barnes Family," by Margaret Mudd Calkins, granddaughter.

¹John D.T. McAllister wrote the handcart song and taught it to all five handcart companies at Iowa City that summer. He reached Salt Lake on October 4 and returned on the rescue November 23. See his story in rescuer section of this book.

²Family histories indicate varying dates for George's death, with one as early as July 28 at Iowa City. However, George's name appears in "Immigration to Utah," *Deseret News Weekly*, 15 Oct. 1856, 254, indicating that he was present in Florence (270 miles west of Iowa City) when this list of names was forwarded to Salt Lake City. Circumstances described in various family histories suggest that October 24 was the most likely death date for George Barnes. The Martin company was stranded at Red Buttes on that date. Many members of the Martin company died between October 19 and 28.

³"The morning before they arrived in [the] Salt Lake Valley ... Esther was thought to be dead, but they were so near the Valley that Sister Barnes [sent word to] the captain that everything in their wagon was all right. ... Just as they were on top of Emigration Hill, she put her husband's watch to the child's mouth, and the watch showed breath in the child's body." (Calkins) When the family arrived in the Valley, Esther was in such a bad condition that Dr. Anderson was called. He had to amputate Esther's toes to save her frozen feet.