

SARAH CROSSLEY

Born: 1843 England

Age: 13

Martin Handcart Company



When Sarah was only three years old, the missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came to her home in Radcliff, Manchester, England, and her mother, Mary Jarvis Smith Crossley, was baptized that year. Many of the Elders stayed in the Crossley home at various times, including Elder Perrigrine Sessions, President of the Manchester Mission. Sarah's father, James Crossley, teased her mother about her new-found religion, but Mary prophesied, "James, you shall yet see as I do and be baptized and shall go first to the new Zion established in the tops of the mountains." In fulfillment of her prophecy, James was baptized in 1847 and in 1854 he emigrated to Utah, leaving his wife and young children to follow as soon as he could prepare a home for them.

Two years later, the way was opened up for Sarah's family to emigrate. Sarah's mother sold all their possessions except for a chosen few that could easily be carried on a handcart. She boarded the ship *Horizon* with her children, Joseph Smith (age 20) (a son from a previous marriage);¹ Hannah (16), Sarah (13), and Ephraim (6) Crossley. Joseph was noted for his intelligence, and was a school teacher. He was crippled from a hip disease, and required extra help from the family.

Sarah later wrote a narrative of her experience, some of which is quoted here:

The handcart Plan was introduced into England, and it seemed so cheap and easy, only nine pounds or forty-five dollars in United States money, for each of us. We were so anxious to join our father and many friends who had gone before, that we decided to go. Mother was a frail woman and Joseph, our crippled brother could never walk across that 1300 miles of plains; but Hannah and I were very healthy and strong girls. Ephraim was a lad and very willing, so we gathered together what clothing and bedding we were able to take and sold our little home and all else we had. We bade farewell to our many friends and merry old England, sailing from Liverpool early in the spring of 1856. We landed in New York City [Boston] and went to Iowa city, the gathering place for the hand cart companies. There we were detained several weeks for lack of carts and provisions. It was the last of July before we started on this long terrible journey; but we knew not the hardships that lay before us, and started off happy, ... singing as we went, a merrier company could not have been found. ... We were making fourteen and fifteen miles daily over the Plains covered with green grass and dotted with wild flowers. It seemed so easy to us then, but as soon as the grass turned brown and the flowers disappeared then the plains rose up into the Great Rocky Mountains. . . .

Many of the carts gave out and had to wait for repair and we had to double up our loads as some had to be discarded and left. It was hard work. We always had to pull Joseph along but what was that to a girl ... robust and strong? All went well until our supplies ran low, and we were put on rations and our bodies began to weaken, making travel slower every day.

September came and the first frost was upon us. Out in the open with few clothes and little shelter, then we began our real suffering. But we tried to be brave and not complain more than necessary to each other. We children felt we should help dear Mother all we could. Poor little Joseph, it was so hard on him jolting over the uneven road. He suffered greatly and became thin and pale. I would do my best, almost anything, to keep his spirits up. We had always cared so tenderly for him, and he missed the good nourishing food and the comforts he had always had, but he seldom complained. He seemed only to dwindle in body and spirit. . . .

¹ Also signed up to travel on the *Horizon* was Mary Jarvis Smith Crossley's daughter, Mary Ann Smith (age 22) and her 1-year-old son, William. They are listed on the British Mission Record for the *Horizon* as Mary Ann Crossley and William Crossley, on the same PEF Bond as Mary Jarvis Crossley. James Crossley paid the balance of this bond in 1858. It does not appear that Mary Ann and William ever boarded the ship, but they may have. Family lore states that they traveled as far as Iowa City, then Mary Ann chose to return to England, and left her son William to go to the valley with the rest of the family. There doesn't seem to be any documentation of William in Utah, and Sarah does not mention this in her autobiography. The Find A Grave website indicates that Mary Ann was adopted by James Crossley; she married Thomas Broad in 1854; they had 4 children—William Broad, John Edward Broad, Sarah Broad, and Alfred Broad; and Mary Ann died in England in July 1887.

(Sarah Crossley - Page 2)

So we struggled on day by day. Soon we came upon the Platte River's icy waters and this time we had to ford and wade. Some of the stronger men carried the women and children across on their backs. ... A terrible disease crept into our little fold and death became a frequent visitor to our little train. ... Was it no wonder that our dear brother Joseph was stricken with this terrible disease? Each morning we gave him our clothing to keep warm. His suffering was over one morning as we found him frozen in his bed. We were so numbed with our suffering and the sight of death that I think we were almost glad he had gone. We felt that he had gone only a little ahead of us, that we would soon be with him. I did pray though that the commissioner of provisions would not know of it until I had received Joseph's portion of flour. I cannot tell you the pang that smote my heart as he counted out the spoons full and when he came to Joseph's he said, "Oh, Joseph died last night didn't he?" I had lost my brother's portion and it hurt me worse than it did to first look upon his still white face.

We left him by the side of the road. ... The ground was so frozen that we could not dig a grave. We wrapped him in a large blanket and left him by the side of the trail; before we had got out of sight, we heard the wolves had reached it. This was a terrible trial for my Mother to bear, but she did not complain to the Lord and did not lose faith in him. I think she felt it had been a merciful hand rather than a hard one that had taken her son.

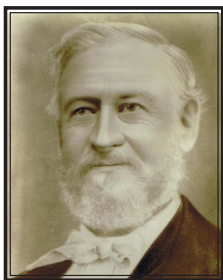
We had not reached Sweet Water River and our provisions were gone. We found a small ravine since named Martin's Ravine. Here we made our camp in a clump of willows that grew close together. We settled down as we could not go on farther. We must wait for help or death must come to us. Few of us cared which. In the morning to add to our suffering a heavy snow had fallen upon us. We had camped in a circle so we did not know which way to go or from which we had come. Here we were lost, starving, and buried in two feet of snow. Three days we lived through this and then at the sunset from over the rim of the ravine came a covered wagon with men breaking a road for the horses. Such cries of joy were never heard before. We laughed and all shouted together, here was help and food coming, but we were careful, we could not eat but a small portion or we would have all died. In the morning there were thirteen dead and two more died during the day. While we were preparing to go on, the dead were gathered and placed in one large grave.

We started on with new hope and courage. As we came to South Pass, the weather moderated and we did not suffer so much. On the thirtieth day of November, we arrived in Salt Lake City, what was left of us. There was five hundred and eighty-four members in the company in Iowa City, and one hundred and forty-six of this little band were left along the plains and in the mountains to tell the tale of our experience.

We were met by dear Father and many of our friends. In fact most of the city came to look upon the suffering of this company. They gave us aid by taking us into their homes to nurse us back to life—from the very jaws of death through which we had passed. [Perrigrine] Sessions came and begged to be permitted to take one of us to care for. As I felt very near to him for his kindness to us while on his mission in England, I was allowed to go and live with his sister [Sylvia]. She cared for me very kindly and brought me back to health. I never did recover fully to my former strength. As long as I lived, I have been a weakling.

I lived most of the time with Mr. Session's family and at the age of eighteen I was married to him. I think I had loved him from my childhood; and although I was his fourth (plural) wife and many years younger, I was the happiest woman in the world. I went to live with his other wives in a large house until some years later Ester, his youngest wife and I lived together in a log house of six rooms. Here I had my family of eleven children and Ester had ten. We loved each other dearer than sister[s]. She cared for me most tenderly doing all the hard work, allowing me to do only the lighter things about the home. For seventeen years we lived together in perfect happiness. Then we were given a nice new home of our own, but we parted with many regrets and we have always remained the dearest of companions. I was a widow at the age of fifty with my family in comfortable circumstances and loving companionship of all the other wives. There were six of us at this time and we have always been a great blessing to each other."

Sources: "Sarah Crossley Sessions Member Martin Handcart Company," submitted by Olive Sessions Howells, <http://thefurtrapper.com/home/sarah-crossley/>; PEF Financial Accounts 1849-1886, Ledger B, 240-241; British Mission Record for ship *Horizon*, 1856, pg. 162; Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website; <http://acruger.blogspot.com/2010/05/mary-jarvis-crossley-and-james-crossley.html>; <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/5416254>.



James and Mary Jarvis Smith Crossley

Hannah Crossley (Winn)

Ephraim Crossley family