

Mary Agnes Winn (Johnson) Family stories, as posted on FamilySearch:

All Is Well

By Jaelynnne Harding Hathaway – May 2007

Contributed to FamilySearch by Jaelynnne Harding Hathaway, October 2014

(This story is compiled from facts and documents that can prove the following events. Dennis George Winn, the brother of Mary Ann, used to say "her life had been just one heartbreak, after another." She did recover from her ordeal with the Martin Handcart Company in the home of Brigham Young. However, even her married life was not easy and several of her children preceded her in death. Continued research will hopefully reveal more. Dennis George Winn is my great, great grandfather.)

“Heartbreak, after heartbreak,” that was the way eleven year old Mary Ann Winn decided to describe her life. Her parents John and Jane Broughton Winn, had been baptized into the Mormon faith while she was a toddler. She, herself, had listened to the American missionaries and had prayed about their message before she had been baptized. Her friends believed God was punishing her for joining the Mormonites and that was why she had so much sadness in her life. Although, Mary Ann knew that wasn’t true, she had sure had a lot of sadness in her short life.

Mary Ann’s family was very poor. They had almost starved to death during the potato famine while living near Newry, Ireland. That was where her father had been baptized in 1845. In 1847, her older brother, Dennis George, and her mother had been baptized in Derrylacka, County Down, Ireland also. Mary Ann and her sister, Elizabeth, had been baptized in Liverpool, England after the family left Ireland.

When just six, Mary Ann had to join her sister at work in a textile factory. She hardly ever saw her family. Then in 1853, Dennis George had gone to America. Her parents had promised they would follow the next year, but now three years had passed. Death had visited her family leaving just Mary Ann and her mother to immigrate to the valley of the Great Salt Lake.

It was 1856 when Church authorities in England invited Mary Ann and her mother to immigrate with the help of the Perpetual Emigration Fund. They would be among the first to pull their belongings in handcarts to The Valley.

They gathered with the Saints in Liverpool and were assigned to share a berth on the packet ship “Horizon.” At first, the rolling and rocking of the ship caused seasickness. Her mother could not leave her berth for several days. The smell in the hold was horrendous. Mary Ann definitely liked being up on deck. The adults worried that a child would fall off the ship as it rolled on the waves, but the children seemed oblivious to the danger as they raced and played on deck. After a few days, Jane regained her health and was able to take her turn sewing nankeen, a heavy canvas type fabric, into tents and fixing the meals. Mary Ann helped tend the youngsters. She watched sadly as five families buried loved ones in a watery grave during their six weeks at sea.

Finally, their packet named “Horizon” pulled up to Constitution Wharf in Massachusetts Bay and Mary Ann stepped on land. Ten more were buried along the way as they traveled in railroad baggage cars to Iowa City, Iowa. After a three mile trek they reached the Mormon pioneer camp just west of Iowa City.

They had hoped for an immediate departure for The Valley, but found three other handcart companies had already left and since the authorities had only planned for three companies that year, there were no handcarts, nor supplies awaiting their arrival. For three weeks, the women sewed tents and cooked the meals as the men built the handcarts. The delay was unexpected and worrisome as they would be leaving for the Valley so late in the season. Daytime temperatures of over 100* were normal.

Finally, Mary Ann and her mother were assigned to share a handcart with others in the Edward Martin Company. Travel was slow as they learned to push and pull the handcarts and walk long distances. But spirits were high. Mary Ann could hardly wait to see Dennis again, and meet the Prophet Brigham Young, and have lots of friends who believed as she did, and who would not ridicule her for her beliefs.

Walking wasn't hard, but the handcarts began to break down and delays were frequent. Pushing and pulling the carts through the deep sand across the Indian Territory was difficult. Then it rained. Mary Ann was soaked. The roads became muddy, a thick mud that stuck to the wheels, and feet, and clothes.

Flour was rationed 16 ounces daily per adult, then less. At first this was supplemented with meat, but that was soon gone. Mary Ann was always hungry. Flour mixed in water and warmed over the fire was not very filling, nor did it taste very good. As days passed, many grew sick, feeble, and died. Mary Ann watched as her mother became ill, but trudged on. She watched as others buried their dead in shallow graves. She heard the wolves howl. It was said that they would dig up the graves and eat the bodies buried in shallow graves. Silently, she pushed a little harder to ease her mother's load. She gathered dung for the campfires. She heard talk of supplies waiting for them at Fort Laramie and hoped they could hang on until then.

Finally, after making camp a short distance from Fort Laramie a few of the brethren went for supplies. Anticipation was high. But the news they brought back shattered the spirits of many. No food was waiting. The fort had supplies for their own needs during the approaching winter – but very little to spare and no one in the handcart company had any money to purchase what surplus they did have.

Mary Ann's mother was exhausted. Her strength was gone. She was weak, discouraged, hungry, and worried. The trail from Fort Laramie was uphill and hard. That evening, Mary Ann helped her tired mother to their tent. When she brought her a cup of the evening gruel, Jane was dead. Mary Ann Winn, barely 12 years of age, was an orphan. Mary Ann watched as the sisters sewed her mother's body into her blanket and the brethren laid her in a shallow grave. She pushed some rocks over the grave, hoping to discourage the wolves she had heard during the night. Then, she slowly walked away watching until her mother's final resting place was no longer visible.

Mindlessly, Mary Ann trudged on unaware of her surroundings. She was hungry and cold, her mind numb. Her heart was broken. She had no thoughts of what might happen next.

Snow fell at the last crossing of the Platte River. Mary Ann moved on with the rest. The water was cold, deep, and swift, but she trudged across holding to the handcart, seemingly heedless of the perils around her. As she climbed out of the river, it began to snow. Her clothes froze quickly, but her body plodded along with the others.

She was barely aware of the arrival of the rescuers. They were too late. Her mother was dead. One day, as she trudged along she heard her name being called. Slowly she looked up into a familiar face. Her beloved brother, Dennis George Winn had come to rescue her. Sobbing she told him of the death of their father and mother. Together, they hugged each other and cried, mourning for their loved ones. Dennis bundled her into a quilt and held her tightly. Finally warm, she rode in a wagon into The Valley of the Great Salt Lake.

My Grandmother

Poem by Mae Johnson Williams

Contributed May 2016 to FamilySearch by David Monroe Noble

You were just a little girl, only ten years old, When you left England with your mother on a journey brave and bold.

With courage and faith and dreams of better things to be, You sailed on the ship Horizon far across the sea.

Then you began a journey across a vast new land, Trudging over prairie, sagebrush plains, and sand,

Braving the frontier a new home to make, Pulling your handcart at day's early break.

What suffering you met in the mountainous land. When you camped in the snow with so little food at hand,

And in this winter's cold your mother passed away; For such a little girl, what a sad and lonesome day.

But your prayers were answered and friends helped you, too; Then the saints came to rescue and guided you through.

Your story has become part of our Nation's history, And your courage and faith will always be an inspiration to me.

The Mystery of Mary Ann

by Bruce W. Walker, Contributed to FamilySearch September 2014

This is the fascinating story of Mary Ann Winn, the sister of my great grandfather, Dennis George Winn, and beloved aunt of my grandpa, Ernest Winn. It is the story of a young girl who possessed extraordinary faith and courage.

Mary Ann was born the 8th of May, 1844 in Liverpool, England, the daughter of John Winn and Jane Broughton Winn. The family joined the church in England and eagerly planned to come to America and join the saints in Zion. In 1853, Mary Ann's older brother, Dennis George, age twenty-one, left England for America sailing with a group of 345 saints aboard the ship Elvira Owen. They traveled from Liverpool to Boston, then up the Mississippi river to Keokuk, Iowa, and from there by wagon train to Salt Lake City, where Dennis began making preparations for his family to join him. However, his plan suddenly changed when in 1854 his father, John, died, leaving nine year old Mary Ann fatherless, and her mother, Jane, a widow.

Two years later, on May 25, 1856, Mary Ann (now twelve) and her mother (age fifty-eight) set sail on the ship Horizon from Liverpool to Boston. They were two of 635 Perpetual Emigration

Saints presided over by Elder Edward Martin. (Did you catch that name?) After arriving safely in Boston, this company of saints traveled by rail to Iowa City, arriving there July 8th, 1856. It then took three weeks to outfit this large company with handcarts and supplies.

The Martin Handcart Company finally left Iowa the end of July, with Mary Ann and Jane eager to hurry to Salt Lake City and surprise Dennis. There are many records which detail the extreme sufferings of these valiant handcart pioneers, particularly the members of the Martin and Willie Companies, who became stranded in the snows of Wyoming. According to Martin Handcart Company records, Jane Broughton Winn died on the plains of Wyoming. How terrifying this ordeal must have been for the now orphaned twelve-year old Mary Ann. The record states that Mary Ann survived the trek, but what extreme suffering she must have endured!

It should be noted here that when Brigham Young asked for volunteers to go and bring in the handcart pioneers who were starving and dying in Wyoming, Dennis George, now twenty-three years of age, was one of the first to volunteer, and one of the first to arrive with team and wagon to assist the stranded saints. What a bitter-sweet experience this must have been for Dennis, to find that his mother, Jane, had already died, but that his little sister, Mary Ann, was still alive. And how exciting it must have been for Mary Ann to see her big brother, Dennis. (See the painting, "Reunion," by Utah artist Linda Curley Christensen, wherein she depicts the reunion of Dennis and Mary Ann.)

But, after this reunion experience, what became of young Mary Ann? Three and a half years after the rescue, we find Mary Ann, now age fifteen, living with the Richard and Elizabeth Bentley family in the 18th Ward in Salt Lake City. The Bentleys had come to Salt Lake in 1852. Established in the valley and with seven children of their own, they graciously took in the orphaned Mary Ann. She is listed on the 1860 census as a "domestic helper." We can picture her cleaning, cooking, and helping to care for the younger children of the family. It is interesting to note that Richard Bentley, in later years, became Mayor of St. George, Utah. The Bentleys must have been wonderful people!

In May of 1865, at age twenty-one, Mary Ann married Charles W. Johnson, Jr. Born in Pennsylvania, Charles had joined the church and come in 1862 to Salt Lake City, a member of the James S. Brown Pioneer Company. We find Mary Ann and Charles on the 1870 Federal Census, now with their first three children: Richard, Mary, and Charles. Mary Ann is listed on the census as a "house keeper", Charles as a "carriage trimmer". We find them again on the 1880 census, still in the same location in Salt Lake City. Mary Ann is now thirty-four years of age and has given birth to eight children: Richard, Mary, Charles, Susan, Catherine (Katie), Edwin, Sarah, and George. There is no 1890 Utah census as it was burned, so we leap 20 years from the 1880 to the 1900 census. Sure enough, there they are. Mary Ann and Charles are still living in the same place, and four of their children (in their twenties and thirties) are still living with them. Mary Ann is now age fifty-two, Charles, age sixty-two. Just four years later, in 1904, Charles passed away at age sixty-six.

Mary Ann did not pass away until the 24th of April, 1929, at the age of eighty-five. She is buried in City Cemetery in Salt Lake City. How heart-warming it is to finally know that my great, great aunt, Mary Ann, joined the church in England as a young child, sailed to America at age twelve, miraculously survived the handcart trek to Utah, married in the church, and raised a wonderful family of eight children. What great fun it will be to meet her one day and listen as she tells of her experiences crossing the ocean, surviving the Wyoming blizzard, living in Salt Lake City when the Salt Lake Temple was built and dedicated, and--how about this one--raising her large family in the same ward as President Brigham Young! How I admire her, and how much my Grandpa, Ernest Winn, must have loved his Aunt Mary Ann!