



Born: January 8, 1837 in England

Age: 19

Martin Handcart Company

Annie wrote of her early life and conversion in her autobiography:

I was born in Barking, Essex, England, on the 8th of January 1837, the younger daughter of Daniel Hicks, a sailor, and Hannah Wenlock Hicks. I knew very little of my father's family. My mother was born of Scotch and English parents. Father being a confirmed invalid, I had, as it were, to keep and care for myself, assuming the responsibilities of a woman when I was a mere girl. As a child, I was very devout, praying and asking God for guidance and firmly believing that he would protect me from all wrong. And surely, I have been saved many times from most certain evil.

I was alone, or rather away from my own people at the time I first heard the Gospel and I think I loved it the first time I heard it; it seemd so quiet and pleasant to me. I embraced the Gospel and was baptized on the 17th of January, 1855, in the White Chapel Branch in London. Shortly after my baptism, before I had been confirmed, my relatives sent me a terrible book against the Mormons, marking it in places for me to read. The tales were so wicked, I was afraid I had done wrong and decided to ask the Lord to direct me aright. I fervently pleaded with our Father to answer my prayer that night as my confirmation was to take place the following morning.

I immediately was comforted by a wonderful dream. A book (The Book of Life) was opened to me and the leaves were turned in rapid succession until the page with my record was found. On the page was my name without a mar or blemish against it. A loud clear voice spoke to me saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." I was overjoyed at this revelation and have never doubted the gospel from that time on. You may be assured I was confirmed the next day feeling perfectly happy and satisfied.¹ From then on my relatives were unkind and cruel to me. I worked very hard to obtain enough money to come to America. I would knit from early morning until evening in the London workshop.

On the 25th of May, 1856, I sailed for America on the ship *Horizon*, beginning our journey to Zion. I crossed the plains with the belated Handcart Company of Edward Martin. We underwent numerous hardships and lost many of our good and faithful band on the road. I reached the valley on the last day of November 1856, with not a friend to meet me--but I am still here with the saints and many friends in the valley of the mountains. [Annie worked for the Ellerbeck family doing housework and needlecraft.] I was married to Absolom Pennington Free, a Patriarch of the Church on March 5, 1857, and am the mother of seven children, all of whom are living. I am also proud of my thirty-four grandchildren and the thirty great grandchildren.

Annie left a legacy of courage and compassion to her children and grandchildren, as well as to her companions in the Martin handcart company. Annie wrote many lovely poems. Some were published in the Church periodical *Women's Exponent*. Every Sunday evening, her grandchildren were welcomed into her home for "a sacred hour." Wearing her best gown and a white apron, she played the organ, sang, told stories and read scriptures with her grandchildren.

One story Annie told her children was that she shared a handcart with Jemima Nightingale (age 21), Jemima's widowed mother, and two of Jemima's siblings, making the typical five people to a handcart. One day, "Annie and Jemima Nightingale saw Brother Blake [Bleak], whose feet were frozen, crawl off to die.

In the evening Brother Blake was missing, so Annie and Jemima went back, cutting across the trail and found him. They pulled him to where they were met by wagons."² Annie had been in the White Chapel Branch in London where James G. Bleak was the presiding Elder.

Another incident in the handcart trek where Annie rescued another was at the traumatic crossing of the North Platte River on October 19, 1856. Annie wrote:

I have been asked to relate an incident or two that might be of interest to you. One which I recall very clearly, occured as we crossed the Platte River. The stream was very strong and the water bitter cold, making it very hard to cross. In the company was a widow with her family. Her oldest boy, a fine young chap, had started across the river with his handcart but the current was so strong that he was borne down stream. Seeing the boy's condition I ran down the bank of the river and went out into it in time to catch the boy and his handcart. I helped the boy to shore but he was almost frozen. In the evening when the company made camp, the boy's mother was going out to gather chips of wood but the boy insisted upon going himself. When he had been gone a long time, a search was made for him and he was found frozen to death with his sticks in his arms.³

Annie lived to be 89 years old. She died August 27, 1926, and was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery.



Jemima Nightingale

¹ Annie also wrote this account of her dream and her testimony with a little more detail when she was 61 years old. See http://thefrees.com/histories/annie_hicks_free.html.

² From "Annie Hicks Free and the handcart" LaRae Free Kerr, 2012. (See <http://lafaenddoliawadsworth.blogspot.com/2012/12/annie-hicks-free-and-handcart.html>.) It is the opinion of Jolene Allphin that this event took place in the late afternoon of November 9, the day the Martin company left Martin's Cove. See James Bleak and Maria Normington stories in *Tell My Story, Too*, for more information about James Bleak's rescue.

³ Careful analysis by Jolene Allphin shows that this young man was James Hawkey, age 14. He must have felt very protective of his widowed step-mother, Hannah Middleton Hawkey (Sinfield), age 33 (1822-1903), and his two little half-sisters, Margaret Ann Hawkey (Mills), age 5 (1851-1880), and Hannah Hawkey (Welch), age 3. They made it to Salt Lake safely, but with frozen feet. James's father, Foster Hawkey, drowned at sea in 1852. James's mother had also died previously.