

MARIA WATSON KIRBY
(pronounced Ma ri'a or Mariah)



Born: 1843 England

Age: 13

Willie Handcart Company

“The following is an experience in the life of my great Grandmother Maria Watson Kirby [written by Janet Campbell April 2007, and published here with Janet’s permission].

“Maria Watson Kirby was born in Jan 1843 in Norwich, England. She and her mother (Honour Watson Kirby) were converted to the church and came to America. They were part of the Willie Handcart company in 1856. With many others, they were caught up in the early snow storm and blizzard in crossing the plains in Wyoming.

“Maria’s shoes wore out completely and her feet were unprotected much of the time. When food became scarce it became difficult to make much progress through the snow. Maria often became exhausted.

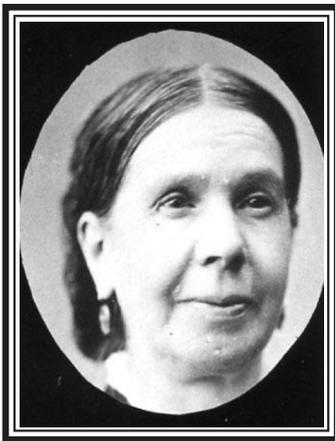
“As they were slowly walking, Maria would often say to her mother, “Mother, I’m so tired I can’t go any further. Please let me sit down just for a little while.” Her mother would say, “No, Maria, you must keep walking. You cannot sit down!” This conversation was repeated time after time on their trek across the plains.

“In order to keep from starving to death they scraped the hair off the leather wheel tongs and boiled it for whatever nourishment they could obtain from the broth. Eventually Maria and her mother were rescued with other members of the Willie Company and made it to Salt Lake City.

“Maria met and married John L. Bench Sr. in Manti Utah. They were the parents of my grandfather John L. Bench, Jr. Maria’s husband often said that he truly had married a ‘Handcart Maiden.’ Maria died like many others at the young age of 36 years. She died of complications related to the extreme exposure from the Handcart experience.

“Her mother, Honour Watson Kirby, survived and lived a long time in Salt Lake City, Utah, witnessing the growth of the Church in the Mountain West. She attended the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple in April 1893.”

Pictured is the candlestick owned by Honour Watson Kirby that she carried across plains. (Courtesy Janet Campbell)



Honor Watson Kirby

