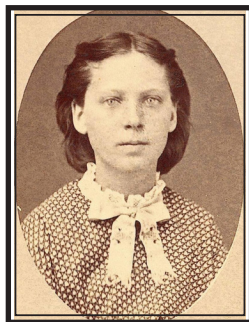


ELLEN PUCELL

Born: 1856 England

Age: 9

Martin Handcart Company



Samuel and Margaret Perren Pucell

Ellen's mother, Margaret Perren Pucell, rejoiced to hear the glad tidings of the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as preached by Apostles Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde. Ten days later, she was among those baptized at the River Ribble. She held the distinction of being the second woman baptized into the Church in England and she and Ellen's father, Samuel, gave the first sixpence to the Mormon Elders there.

Margaret kept her baptism a secret from Samuel for three months until he surprised her and confessed that he had also been baptized the previous month. For nineteen years the couple saved for their emigration to Utah. In the meantime, they entertained the missionaries in their small home and often had to put their children to bed hungry in order to provide food for the missionaries. Surely Ellen had been blessed with a foundation for faithfulness and courage from righteous parents.

On May 25, 1856, Ellen and her parents, Samuel and Margaret, and two sisters, Maggie (age 14) and Ann (age 25), joined the group of emigrants leaving Liverpool for America on the ship *Horizon*. Also traveling with them was her brother, William, his wife, Eliza, and their 3-month-old son, Robert. When the company landed in Boston, William reportedly found that he didn't have enough money to continue the journey west, so he decided that he should outfit his wife and son as best he could and send them on with his parents and sisters, while he remained behind to work for additional means so that he could join them in Utah. Ann Pucell also stayed in Massachusetts.



Margaret Augusta Pucell (Walker)

The rest of the Pucell family continued their journey to Utah by handcart from Iowa City. Ellen's mother became ill and had to ride in the handcart part of the way. Her father grew so weary and weakened from the lack of food that this additional burden caused him to slip and fall as he crossed the North Platte River on October 19. Having to travel that night in the cold, wintry weather with wet clothing to the next campground, Samuel Pucell became ill and died from hunger and exposure on October 22. Ellen's mother died five days later, on October 27, leaving Ellen and Maggie orphans. Rescuers first arrived on October 28. For a time Maggie walked and was pulled along by a rope behind one of the rescue wagons. The walking for Maggie saved her legs from freezing, but nothing could be done to save Ellen's. They were later amputated at the knees.

The Pucell girls were first taken to Parowan with the Rogerson family. Margaret married John Smith Walker and they had 11 children. Ellen married William Unthank, and even with her handicap she still bore and raised six children. Ellen remained faithful throughout her life. In Cedar City, Utah, there is a beautiful bronze monument on the campus of Southern Utah University, dedicated to Ellen by LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley. A member of British Parliament, Baroness Caroline Anne Cox, was the featured speaker at the dedication, along with then Utah Governor Bangerter.

Ellen's leg stumps were raw the rest of her life. She first crawled on a piece of leather. Her husband then made her some cupped covers for her leg stubs from quakingasp poles, a lightweight wood. He hollowed out the wood to fit her legs and filled up the hollows part way with wool. She also used crutches to help out. The Cedar City Ward Relief Society and other friends paid for artificial legs to be made from plaster of paris for Ellen. She wore these to parties and to church, but could never wear them for long periods of time as it was too painful. Each prosthetic weighed ten pounds.)

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The following is taken from a biography written by William Palmer entitled “She Stood Tall on Her Knees” about Ellen “Nellie” Pucell (Unthank):

“Nellie’s parents were among those who died and were laid to rest in snow banks. Poor little Nellie, nothing could be done to save her feet. When they took off her shoes and stockings the skin with pieces of flesh came off too. The doctor said her feet must be taken off to save her life. They strapped her to a board and without an anesthetic the surgery was performed. With a butcher knife and a carpenter’s saw they cut the blackened limbs off. It was poor surgery, too, for the flesh was not brought over to cushion the ends. The bones stuck out through the ends of the stumps and in pain she waddled through the rest of her life on her knees.

“In poverty and pain she reared a family of six children but never asked for favors of pity or charity because of her tragic handicap. William was a poor man and unable to provide fully for his family; so Nellie did all she could for herself. She took in washings. Kneeling by a tub on the floor she scrubbed the clothes to whiteness on the washboard. She knit stockings to sell, carded wool and crocheted table pieces. She seldom accepted gifts or charity from friends or neighbors unless she could do a bundle of darning or mending to repay the kindness.

“The bishop and the Relief Society sometimes gave a little assistance which Nellie gratefully accepted, but once a year, to even the score, she took her children and cleaned the meetinghouse. The boy carried water, the girls washed the windows and Nellie, on her knees, scrubbed the floor.

“This heroic woman gave to William Unthank a posterity to perpetuate his name in the earth and he gave her a home and a family to give comfort and care in her old age.

“In memory I recall her wrinkled forehead, her soft dark eyes that told of toil and pain and suffering, and the deep grooves that encircled the corners of her strong mouth. But in that face there was no trace of bitterness or railings at her fate. There was patience and serenity for in spite of her handicap she had earned her keep and justified her existence. She had given more to family, friends and to the world than she had received.”

The writings of 15-year-old Josiah Rogerson of the Martin Handcart Company give us some personal insight into the sufferings and the faithfulness of the Pucell family:

“One morning while at the [Red] Buttes [October 22] the wife of Samuel Pucell, about 55 or 60 years of age, from the Ashton-Under-Lyne branch, Lancashire, England, came to our tent and, pushing aside the cloth door, said, calling to my mother: “Mary, our Sam’s (her husband) dead, and I’ll not be long after him. When I’m deead, do thee take care of my two lassies after thou gets to the valley, and be a good mother to ‘em. I’ll not reach there.” No words of mother could cheer her up, or dispel her conclusion. The next morning afterward, not later than the second [of November], she had gone to her Sam [October 27] . . . The two daughters, Margaret and Helen, went with my mother to Parowan, Iron county, Utah, the same winter, and have been residents of Cedar City, Utah, for the last forty-five years, and well known as Mrs. John Walker and Mrs. Unthinks. Their mother and father, just referred to, were among the first members of the Preston branch of the church. Lancashire, England, organized there in July, 1837, by President Heber C. Kimball and others, and I have it from my mother that Sister Pucell (I think her name was



William and Nellie Unthank family

Margaret) at one time, hearing that some of the six or eight associate elders of President Kimball hadn’t anything to eat one day, took one of her skirts and pawned it for enough to buy a loaf of bread, a few ounces of tea and sugar and half a pound of butter, which she took to the elders, begging them to accept the donation. The youngest daughter, Helen [Ellen], of the Pucell family, then about 12 years of age, arrived in Salt Lake with her feet so badly frozen that both were amputated soon afterward. Of such Saints and graduates in the primitive love of the gospel was Captain Edward Martin’s handcart company composed.”

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; familysearch.org; Rogerson, Josiah, “Martin’s Handcart Company, 1856 [No. 8],” *Salt Lake Herald*, 24 Nov. 1907; Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel website (Photo of young Nellie Pucell); “Biography of My Grandmother Ellen Pucell Unthank,” by Wealth Reeves Millett, copy of this and other family items, including family photo, from Pucell descendant Elder John Fenn, missionary and director with his wife, Jean Fenn, at Mormon Historic Handcart Sites in Wyoming, 2010-2012. Elder and Sister Fenn reported that what touched them the

most during their mission “is when people who aren’t related by ancestry come through and recognize that they share in that legacy. . . . [that] gives members of the Church a chance to reflect on what it is those people did to allow us to believe what we believe. We are who we are because they were who they were.” (*Church News*, 21 July 2011)



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Company