

ELIZA ROSANNA PEARS

*You have left us a mighty heritage
In this peaceful happy land.¹*

Age: 19
Born: 5 February 1837 Bedford, England
Martin handcart company



Eliza was the youngest of six children. At least one sister had passed away at age 21, about a year prior to Eliza's departure from England in 1856. Another sister, Margaret Jane Pears (Denton), had previously traveled to Utah with her husband George Denton in the Robert Lang Campbell wagon company in 1854. It does not appear that the other children in the family ever joined Eliza in Utah.

Eliza sailed to America on the ship *Horizon* with her parents, John Burton Pears (age 57) and Rose Hannah Whitehead Pears (age 55). When the Pears family left Liverpool, they paid an extra \$3.80 for freight.² Family records state that this extra expense was for bolts of silk and woolen goods from mills where Eliza worked and which her family may have owned.³ While working in the mill, Eliza lost her fourth finger on one hand in an accident.

Two diarists aboard the *Horizon* included brief mention of the Pears family during the voyage: Joseph Beecroft wrote on May 31, 1856: *During the morning Sister Eliza Pears was confined, gave birth to a daughter, which makes the 3rd birth on ship board.*⁴ On this same day, John Jaques wrote: *Sister Eliza Pears, of Bradford, confined at 11 a.m. of a girl, premature. The child lived a few minutes.*⁵ There is no more information about this sad event. Two weeks later, Joseph Beecroft wrote of Eliza's mother bearing testimony in a meeting: *Sunday 15th [June] Sister Rosehannah Pears bore testimony and spoke in tongues which was interpreted by Elder Tipton.*⁶

When Eliza and her parents reached the campground near Iowa City, Iowa, they organized for overland travel with the Edward Martin handcart company. It was very late in the season to be traveling across the wilderness, but with Zion in their hearts, and a family member already in Utah, the Pears family was ready to travel at the end of July 1856. The first 300 miles brought them through a number of settlements across Iowa before they crossed the Missouri River into Nebraska Territory the last week of August. With 1,000 miles of wilderness remaining to travel, members of the Martin handcart company had an important decision to make. The company regrouped at

¹ Essie Summers Clifford, granddaughter of Eliza Pears, from poem "Our Pioneers," in *Summers Family Heritage*.

² See Perpetual Emigration Fund Ledger B at <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/31c209cf-6767-4a0d-be09-3d29472c9bf5/0/295> (digital images 296-297).

³ Family histories state that the Pears family owned large silk and woolen mills in England. Eliza's family may have been associated previously with the Pear Spinning Company, registered 1907 Lower Bredbury, Stockport, England. The Pear Company built the large Pear Mill on the River Goyt and commenced cotton spinning production in 1913. It was one of the last cotton spinning mills built in England. (see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pear_New_Mill)

⁴ Joseph Beecroft, journal, May 31, 1856, see <https://saintsbysea.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/537?netherlands=on&mii=on&sweden=on&keywords=Joseph+Beecroft&scandinavia=on&europa=on>. Beecroft was from the same branch in England as the Pears family.

⁵ John Jaques, journal, May 31, 1856, in Stella Jaques Bell, *Life History and Writings of John Jaques*, 95. (See <https://saintsbysea.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/548?netherlands=on&mii=on&sweden=on&keywords=John+Jaques&scandinavia=on&europa=on>)

⁶ Beecroft, journal, June 15, 1856.

the new outfitting point of Florence, Nebraska Territory, where nine years previous, the vanguard company of Utah pioneers under Brigham Young had departed for Utah.⁷

Apostle and President of the European Mission, Franklin D. Richards, and other returning missionaries, caught up with the Martin company at Florence. Elder Richards held several meetings during the few days they were there. The topic of discussion at these meetings was the advisability of the Martin handcart company, and the Hodgetts and Hunt wagon companies, continuing their journey so late in the season. On the evening of August 24, 1856, a final meeting was held in which all members of these three companies were requested to be present. Josiah Rogerson, a teenage boy in the Martin handcart company, later wrote about this meeting:

I can hear, even now, the voice of President Richards, as he stood there and reasoned with us in his fatherly and gentlemanly manner, as to the lateness of the season, as to the possibility of the storms coming on earlier than usual, that no doubt many of the infants and aged might fall by the way, and some others through disease and from the impurities of the water in the streams, fatigue and exhaustion; and that it was left for us now to decide, whether we would go on and take the risks and chances of these possible and probable fatalities; or remain there and around Florence, Council Bluffs[,] and other villages in the vicinity till an earlier date for starting the next year; that if we chose and decided to stay, we could have what provisions and supplies were in the store or warehouse there and ready for loading into our wagons for the journey; that he would purchase for us what more he could with means still in his hands, and assist us in every other way for our remaining there till next spring, and about the only encouraging words we remember as to our not staying and going ahead were when he said that as it had been one of the largest season's emigrations that had ever been shipped from the British Isles, since he had presided at Liverpool, that it contained hundreds of the first converts to Mormonism from 1837 to 1850, and that the majority of the latter had never been able to emigrate themselves, after their eighteen years in the faith, and doubtless never would have been able, that they were thus far on their way to Zion, he would be gratified by the help and favor of god to see all reach there in safety that season. . . .

Elder John D.T. McAllister, the author of the handcart song, spoke afterward at that meeting for going on, and Cyrus H. Wheelock, General George D. Grant and others; but Brother [Chauncey Griswold] Webb urged that we should not start, but stay there for the winter. His remarks were Webb's alone. Some others spoke and then President Franklin D. Richards, arising at last, advised all to vote with their free agency and responsibility. The vote was called, and with uncovered heads and uplifted hands to heaven and an almost unanimous vote, it was decided to go on. If Webb or any others voted to the contrary I do not remember it, nor the number. Now who was responsible or to blame for the fatalities and the results of the journey—President Franklin D. Richards or the members of the companies and the missionaries? This has been in question for fifty-one years.⁸

⁷ The Florence, Nebraska Territory area, was the old Winter Quarters (Indian Territory) where exiled Saints had suffered so much sickness and death in the winter of 1846. Today, it is in the area of Omaha, Nebraska.

⁸ Josiah Rogerson, "Martin's Handcart Company, 1856," *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, 27 October, 1907, 21 [No. 3]. In a biographical sketch by one of Eliza's descendants, there is a critical statement about a "Mr. Richardson" purposely being at fault for the Martin handcart company's late travels and tragedies, and the Pears family's loss of their silk and woolen goods. This criticism appears to be directed at Apostle Franklin D. Richards. For a summary assessment of Richards, see excerpt from the book *The Price We Paid* by Andrew D. Olsen, included here: http://www.tellmystorytoo.com/member_pdfs/franklin-d.-richards_2046_794.pdf. Within days of arriving in Salt

It appears that at least 30 people dropped out of the Martin company before proceeding from Florence. Eliza and her parents made up three of the 576 company members who continued their journey. This company was large in numbers and was disproportionately made up of invalids, sick, and elderly people. Captain Martin was praised for his leadership by many members of the company, including Eliza. She spoke “in the highest terms [of Edward Martin] as a man of God.”⁹

When the Martin company reached their last crossing of the North Platte River on October 19, Eliza’s father was not well. To make things worse, a fast moving winter storm blasted them with hail, rain, and snow at this river crossing. Chunks of ice battered their legs as they struggled with their handcarts across this wide, deep and cold river. They were able to travel only a short distance after the crossing before setting up camp. About midnight that night, the winter’s first real snowstorm began, blanketing the ground with several inches of snow. Just two days prior to this, they had lightened their loads in order to make better progress. John Jaques of the company wrote:

Traveled about 5 miles and camped on Deer Creek. Washing done. Luggage reduced. . . . Owing to the growing weakness of emigrants and teams, the baggage including bedding and cooking utensils, was reduced to 10 pounds per head, children under 8 years, 5 pounds. Good blankets and other bedding and clothing were burned as they could not be carried further, though needed more badly than ever, for there was yet 400 miles of winter to go through.¹⁰

Regardless of these challenges, men were still required to guard the cattle, and the night of October 19-20 was no exception. It is not known if John Pears was scheduled on guard duty that night, or if previous guarding had contributed to his weak state, but he died the following day, on October 21.¹¹ Family records state that he was buried in a grave with 5 others.¹² The company had traveled only a few miles that day because of the weather.

The first rescuers (express riders sent ahead to find the Martin company) reached the struggling Saints a week later, on October 28. The company was camped in deep snow and nearly out of food at this time. They had traveled less than 10 miles since the passing of John Pears. Eliza and her mother finally had a glimmer of hope.

The Martin company continued their journey the next day, and reached Devil’s Gate on November 2. At this place a decision was made to empty the freight and other items that could be left behind from the wagons of the Hunt and Hodgetts wagon companies that had been traveling

Lake City, J.D.T. McAllister, Cyrus H. Wheelock, George D. Grant, and Chauncey G. Webb, returned on the trail to rescue the late companies. The first rescue party was led by George D. Grant.

⁹ “Handcart Heroine Honored,” *Deseret Evening News*, 12 February 1902.

¹⁰ John Jaques, diary, October 17, 1856, in Bell, 144.

¹¹ Martin company member Benjamin Platt recorded: “Our captains were hard on us and we had to herd at nights and pull handcarts all days and many times I have been kept up until midnight and then stood guard until morning and then started again and it was this everlasting guarding that killed the people.” (*Diary of Benjamin Platt*, typescript, 4. Copied by Brigham Young University Library 1947. See online transcription at <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/12160888735581071512-eng/platt-benjamin-reminisces-1899-1905-2-5?firstName=Benjamin&surname=Platt>)

¹² Two males in the Martin company died on unknown dates between October 19-28. These were Thomas Dodd and John Griffiths, Jr. Thomas Normington family histories suggest Thomas also died during this time period. George Lawley reportedly died October 21. Samuel Pucell and Robert Furner died on October 22. These men may be among those buried with John Pears. Edward Martin’s company journal, which would have contained more accurate information, has never been located.

near the Martin handcart company. By freeing up space, more people who were sick and unable to walk could ride in these wagons. On November 4, while this unloading and storing of goods was taking place at Devil's Gate, members of the Martin company were moved to a nearby cove in the mountains for shelter and feed for their animals. They stayed in this cove for five days, then continued their journey on November 9.

The goods left behind for the winter at Devil's Gate were guarded through the winter by seventeen men from the Hodgetts and Hunt wagon companies and three men from the first rescue party. These men nearly starved to death through that winter. It is assumed that the textiles brought by the Pears family were part of the freight left behind at Devil's Gate.¹³ Although inventory was taken, and receipts issued to owners of the goods, Eliza was never able to reclaim the bolts of fabric.¹⁴

It may have been that the fabric was among some things that were ruined during the winter. Prior to reaching Devil's Gate, some of the boxes being transported by the Hodgetts wagon company had been emptied, due to the heavy weight. Daniel W. Jones, president of the group remaining at Devil's Gate, wrote:

The goods were stuffed into sacks and the boxes broken up for firewood. The owners of course looked in vain for their boxes. Many sacks of goods remained at the Tithing Office for a long time before being identified by the owners of the goods. ... Most of these articles finally got where they belonged.¹⁵

Jones also recorded how some of the bales or sacks may have become ruined while at Devil's Gate:

After thoroughly repairing the houses, chinking and daubing them, we overhauled the goods stored away. While storing the bales and boxes the snow had drifted in among them. There was nothing but dirt floors and the goods had been tumbled in without any regard to order. Having cleaned out everything, we took ox yokes, of which there were a great many and made floors of them and then piled the goods on them.¹⁶

Eliza's mother may have been one who was able to ride from Martin's Cove in one of the wagons, although they would not meet enough rescue wagons for everyone to ride for more than

¹³ Some freight of the handcart companies was also being transported that year by William Holmes Walker, a returning missionary from South Africa. He struggled unsuccessfully to find enough animals and teamsters for his train. He finally had to make the difficult decision to remain on the Missouri River until the next season. He finally arrived in Utah in September 1857. See <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/19315/walker-william-holmes-reminiscences-15-20-trail-excerpt-transcribed-from-pioneer-history-collection-available-at-pioneer-memorial-museum-daughters-of-utah-pioneers-museum-salt-lake-city-utah-some-restrictions-apply>.

¹⁴ Apparently Eliza believed the fabric was stolen by a missionary who cannot be identified. Her granddaughter, Essie Eliza Summers Clifford wrote: "Mr. Richardson had converted them to the Gospel and started them out too late in the fall to complete the trip before winter came. He had painted the picture so beautiful that they lost faith in the missionaries, and Eliza always felt that he had misrepresented the United States of America to them as they could have come in the summer when the weather was warm. On this account she always felt that Mr. Richardson had brought them at that time of year so he would get their belongings and that he was a swindler because when they arrived in Salt Lake the bolts of silk and wool were never found. Mr. Richardson had taken them for his own use." (See footnote 8.)

¹⁵ Daniel W. Jones, *Forty Years Among the Indians*, (Kindle book p. 1520).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 970-71

a week. However, when the company arrived in Salt Lake City on November 30, Rose Hannah Pears's feet and legs had been so badly frozen that she was unable to walk. About five weeks later, Eliza married Nicholas Summers. Rose Hannah lived with Eliza and Nicholas until her death in 1863. Eliza's trials continued as her husband passed away only two years later, leaving her a young widow with four small children.

Eliza worked to provide for herself and her children. It is said she was very ambitious and a hard worker. Also known for her generosity, Eliza never sent anyone away from her door hungry.

In 1870 Eliza married Timothy O'Neil, a railroad worker, in Uintah, Utah. Eliza worked as a cook for the railroad workers. She also owned a large farm in Uintah, raising fruit, berries, and hay. Eliza also helped raise two of her grandchildren—Charles Summers and Adaline Morrison.

Eliza was honored on her 65th birthday by the community. It was reported as “one of the largest and best social gatherings ever held here [in Uintah].” Eliza's travels in the Martin handcart company were recounted at the celebration, including the sad event of her father's death. A news article reported on the birthday party:

Many were the stories told and the songs sung, each of which referred to the trials of the pioneers of Utah. Sister Eliza sang the handcart song, ‘Some Must Push, Some Must Pull, While We Go Merrily Up the Hill’ etc. She has been a resident of Uintah during 30 years, and her kindness of heart is known far and near for her silent charities have been many. ... A handsome rocking chair was presented to her by her neighbors.¹⁷

Some time in the early 1900s, Eliza was injured when a crate of fruit she was loading on a wagon fell on her chest. She later developed cancer, which was treated unsuccessfully with surgery and radiation. Eliza passed away on August 5, 1909, and was buried in the Uintah Cemetery. Two of her daughters, Sarah Ann (Morrison) and Rosanna (Bair), preceded her in death.

Sources: Perpetual Emigrating Fund, Ledger B, 250-251; “Eliza Rosannah Pears Summers” biography by granddaughter Essie Eliza Summers Clifford¹⁸; journal of Joseph Beecroft; journal of John Jaques; descendants of John Charles Summers and Mary Elizabeth Jones Summers, *Summers Family Heritage*, (after 1961), courtesy Bill Clark; “Handcart Heroine “Handcart Heroine Honored,” *Deseret Evening News*, 12 February 1902 (see <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2426917> (page 8); Josiah Rogerson, “Martin's Handcart Company, 1856,” *Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, 27 October, 1907, 21 [No. 3]; Stella Jaques Bell, *Life History and Writings of John Jaques*, copyright Lamont D. Bell, 2nd edition, 1978; Pioneer Overland Travel database at <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel>.

¹⁷ “Handcart Heroine Honored,” *Deseret Evening News*, 12 February 1902 (see <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2426917> (page 8).

¹⁸ (See sources.) The biography written by Eliza's granddaughter, Essie, gives much good information, but some is less reliable. One paragraph indicates that a young man in the Martin company killed an Indian squaw. Upon Indian threat of killing the entire company, Captain Martin turned the man over to the Indians. They then tied the young man to a wagon wheel and scalped him. Although the Martin company passed by three Indian massacre sites, it is doubtful that this story concerning the Martin company involvement is true. These same three sites had been passed by the Willie handcart company earlier, and the details are well-documented in Willie company records, as well as military records from Ft. Kearney and Ft. Laramie. No Martin company journals speak of a young man in their company committing such a crime, or receiving such a punishment. By the time the Martin company passed the scenes of these three massacres, stories may have been mixed up, and also later mixed up by Eliza's granddaughter, who would have heard them from Eliza.



Pictured is Uintah home on 17 acres purchased in 1876 by Eliza and Timothy O'Neil.
(Image and information from Eliza Pears familysearch memories page.)

(This biographical sketch of Eliza Rosanna Pears (Summers) (O'Neil) was written by Jolene S. Allphin for the *Tell My Story, Too* collection, March 17, 2020. Corrections or suggestions are welcome.)