

MARY TAYLOR UPTON

Born: November 6, 1835 at Coton-in-the-Elms, England

Age: 20

Martin Handcart Company



Mary was traveling with her husband of six months, William Upton (age 22), and her parents, Joseph and Harriet Sidwell Taylor, ages 44 and 49 respectively. They sailed from Liverpool, England, aboard the *Horizon*, then joined the Martin handcart company at Iowa City, Iowa. Mary's parents and husband died on the trail, leaving Mary the only survivor of this family. There is also indication from family records that Mary lost a baby along the way: "William cared for Mary in the loss of their child."

Mary's father died on October 8 near Ft. Laramie, before the winter storms began at the last crossing of the North Platte River on October 19. Mary and her mother and William were stranded at Red Buttes after this ordeal, when an advance team of rescuers found them on the 28th of October. They still had about 50 miles to trek to reach the relief wagons at Devil's Gate. After reaching Devil's Gate and being somewhat recruited, another severe storm swept down and sent the Martin company into a nearby cove for shelter. They were also waiting for more relief wagons to arrive with food and supplies as they were short of provisions again. The extra wagons would also help carry the sick and freezing. They stayed in the cove from November 4 - 9. On November 10, the day after leaving the cove, William Upton and his mother-in-law, Harriet Taylor, both succumbed to their privations. They were buried in the same grave. Mary's beloved husband died just two days before their first anniversary, and just four days after Mary turned twenty-one.

William's death was not entirely unexpected. Mary knew that for some time, William had secretly been placing some of his daily ration of food with that of Mary's and her mother. He could not bear to see them go hungry. He shared his coat and bedding with Mary and others when he himself was freezing, saying he wasn't cold, or he wasn't hungry when in reality his stomach ached with hunger. Many times he carried Mary and others across icy streams.

Mary's feet were black and her legs frozen. One of the rescuers, William Bert Simmons,¹ took her in his wagon and to his home in Salt Lake City, arriving November 30, 1856. She was nursed back to health so skillfully there in his home that she did not even lose a toe. She married her rescuer about four months later and they were blessed with five children. She was widowed again in 1866. Five months later she married Joseph Lee Robinson. They were blessed with four children. Mary later became a pioneer in several places and finally in the Snake River Valley of Idaho. It was a desolate area at that time.

Mary had a beautiful singing voice. She was the lead soprano in the Ogden choir at one time. She was a faithful Latter-day Saint and served in many callings throughout her life. Mary's granddaughter, Dora Simmons Rasmussen, told of Mary holding her in her arms, telling her stories from her handcart days, and singing the handcart song. Dora wrote: "She cried as she talked of her loved ones and the hardships, and then she sang again, 'Hard Times, Come Again No More,' and I wanted to ask why she cried, for her folks were in a beautiful place called Heaven, and her hard times were over. ... [When she died] I caught a glimpse of her quiet form lying in the board coffin, but she couldn't sing to me or call me her little girl; but I remembered, 'One foot after the other, until God calls.'"

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; "My Grandmother Robinson," by Dora S. Rasmussen; "A Sketch of the life of Mary Taylor," by great-granddaughter, Cleo Jones Johnson; transcript of notes from an interview with "Bro. Fretwell (Elaine Lewis's Father) March? 1994, Monday night." These histories contain much good information about Mary's life in England, on the trail, and during her life in Utah and Idaho. They will be transcribed and posted in their entirety at www.tellmystorytoo.com.

¹See story of William B. Simmons in rescuer section of *Tell My Story, Too*.