

## MARTINE LARSEN

Born: 27 May 1850, Halsted, Maribo, Denmark

Age: 5

Willie Handcart Company



Martine celebrated her 6th birthday aboard the ship *Thornton* with about 100 Danish Saints and about 400 others, mostly English Saints, all emigrating to Utah. They were going to be with people of their own faith and answer the call of their prophet, Brigham Young, to gather to Zion. Martine's family consisted of her parents, Peder (44) and Ane Kirstine Nielsen Larsen (37), brother, Niels Peder (13), and sister, Anna Sophie (10). Martine's father was a cabinet maker by trade, and her mother was a skilled tailoress. Together, they provided cabinets and suits for Danish royalty, and they were well-off financially when they left Denmark. Martine had learned tap dancing in Denmark and was kept quite busy entertaining the Saints on their journey.

The Larsen family began their handcart trek in Iowa City, Iowa, where the railroad then terminated. It was at this camp, while the Willie Company was making their final preparations, that Martine's mother gave birth to a son, Lars Julius, on July 5. Martine was happy to have this baby brother to help tend and care for while the rest of her family worked on their handcart and sewed tents.

The Willie Company first walked 270 miles to Florence, Nebraska, where they resupplied and reconsidered whether to continue that year. It was not really an option for that many people to stay in Florence without sufficient work or supplies to get through the winter. With great faith, they voted to continue. When the company reached Ft. Laramie on October 1, they were disappointed to find a lack of sufficient supplies there. They traded for what little they could and continued on. Daytime temperatures were recorded as "hot" during this time, but nights were getting cold. Hunger and weakness increased as rations were cut so the people didn't run out of food before meeting supply wagons from Salt Lake City. Bedding and other items were left by the wayside to lighten the loads.

On October 2, the Willie Company met Elder Parley P. Pratt and some other east-bound missionaries and visited with them. The next day, the company was about 21 miles west of Ft. Laramie near some steep bluffs when Martine's father died. Peder had asked his wife to hand him his boot to use for a pillow. When she found him lifeless, the imprint of the boot was deeply embedded on his cheek. Now Martine's mother, Niels and Anna would shoulder the burden. Martine and her baby brother probably would have ridden in the handcart from time to time, as she was too small to walk all the way.

Two weeks after her father's death, on October 16, Martine's 3 1/2-month-old baby brother also died. The company had just passed Independence Rock and Devil's Gate (where the Martin's Cove visitors center is now located). The weather was "splendid" but "cold" and rations had just been reduced again. Three days after Lars' death, the first snow fell and the Willie Company also met their first signs of rescue—an express team of four men sent out from the main rescue party to locate the Willie, Martin, Hodgett and Hunt Companies. The next day, October 20, the company was completely without food and suffering from a terrible storm and severe cold. Captain Willie and Joseph Elder left to search for the rescue party. The following day, on October 21, Anna Larsen joined her father and brother in death. That evening, this bereaved family rejoiced at the return of their Captain and the first company of rescuers.

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Martine, her mother, and Niels left Anne's shallow grave and crossed Rocky Ridge to Rock Creek Hollow, a distance of about 15 miles, on October 23. Fifteen people died before leaving this camp, but Martine and her mother and brother continued on. Niels became very weak and ill and died at the end of their journey, some time in November or the first part of December. Later in life, Martine would tell her children that when her brother died, she cried and cried and wanted to die also. Niels had probably carried Martine at times and helped her a great deal.

Martine and her mother settled in Manti, where her mother remarried. Martine continued to grow, working at herding cows and in the fields. She also learned to spin, although she had been born with only one hand and little nubs for fingers on the other hand. At age 11 she was sent to live with the Isaac Voorhies family. At age 19, Martine went to live with the William Bench family. William was going away to school for 6 months and needed someone to stay with his wife, Francis Ann, who was expecting a child. Francis and Martine became very close friends and were devoted to one another. Martine raised Francis' children after she died. Martine also married William, and they became the parents of 10 children. They named one of their daughters Francis after William's first wife.

Martine worked hard, taking in wash and selling fruit and vegetables from the family garden to help support the family in times of need, such as when William served a mission to England for two years. In 1877 there was an epidemic of diphtheria which claimed the lives of three of Martine's sons. She and William had to prepare the bodies for burial, build their coffins and bury them with the help of their bishop. Everyone else was too frightened to come near for fear of catching the disease.

Martine was very compassionate and became skilled in nursing. One day when she went out to care for a sick family, she accidentally got some poison in her eyes, which caused her to lose her sight. For the next 24 years, she lived with her daughter, Francis. She continued to attend her meetings and work in the temple. She passed away on August 10, 1933, at the age of 83.

Sources: Family histories, photographs, and genealogy records of Janet Jones, Plain City, Utah; "Peter Larsen and Ane Kirstine Nielsen Borre: History," by Hanna Lititia Bench Crane, daughter of Martine Larsen; "Another sketch of the Life of Martine Larsen Bench," author unknown; "A Sketch of the Life of Francis Ann Bench Westenskow," by Marjorie W. Gardner (Martine's granddaughter); "William Bench Jr.," by Joseph Lionel Bench and Clyde E. Bench; familysearch.org.