

ELIZABETH ROBINSON

Born: 28 June 1838 in Darlington, Durham, England

Age: 18

Martin Handcart Company



The Robinson family included the parents, George (53) and Margaret Angus (52), and children, Dorothy (27), Elizabeth (18), and George Jr. (13). An older son, William, was already in Utah. After their ship arrived in Boston, they traveled to Iowa City, Iowa, by steamer and rail. In Iowa City they made preparations for their 1,300-mile handcart trek.

The first 300 miles took them through small towns of Iowa. Emily Hill, a 20-year-old woman in the Willie handcart company, wrote about passing through Iowa: “Surely if we had been natural or unnatural curiosities we could not have been commented on or stared at any more by the people surrounding us. ‘Mormons, men, women, and children, and worse, a lot of young girls, bound for Salt Lake and going to pull ‘hand carts!’ Shocking!’ . . . Anonymous letters, and warnings from sympathizing outsiders were mysteriously conveyed to us, setting forth the hardships and impossibilities of such a journey, and offering us inducements to stay. Many who started out with us backed out in a few days; my sister [Julia] broke down and was unable to walk and I remember asking myself (footsore and weary with the first week of walking and working) if it was possible for me, faith or no faith, to walk twelve hundred miles further.”

The Martin company was the last handcart company to leave Iowa City that 1856 season, making a very late start at the end of July. After only two weeks of travel (about 150 miles), the Robinson family made a decision that had serious consequences. The diary of Gibson Condie, a rescuer who would later marry Elizabeth, explains what happened:

“When they came [through] Iowa, pulling their handcarts, little George ran away from camp. His father went in search for him [and] he did succeed[,] in where he was it appears a man induce[d] him not to go to Salt Lake. [The man] made great promises if he would live with him. [He said] he would give him horse money, etc. and [George] would soon be rich. Father tried hard for George to go with him to camp, but George would not go. The man then induced the Father to stay and not go. It was late in the season to cross the plains. [There] would be work for him to make furniture. He would do well and have money enough to buy an outfit for next spring to go to the vallies and not pull a handcart across the plains. Father then persuaded his wife and his daughters, Elizabeth & Dorothy to stay in Iowa [and] wait until next spring. Mother [was] willing to stay, but Elizabeth would not stay. She had great inducements. They would give big wages to live with respectable families. But she would not stay. She was determined to go to the vallies. There then the family were separated. Father would not leave little George. He stayed. The mother then, with her two daughters went on. Elizabeth and Dorthy had a cart to pull. It was very distressing, scarcity of food, winter set in, passed thru severe trials and hardships, hundreds died, starvation and cold. It was a hard relating scene to explain. I do think the ones who passed thru this trial will have a great reward. God will bless them. . . . [Elizabeth’s] folks were comfortable in England. Her father made furniture and sold them. He was a good mechanic and made a comfortable living. . . . Shortly after we were married, sister Dorthy, got married to Solomon Rossiter in the twenty ward. Dorothy was the oldest of the family. She had a good home.”

After much trial, Elizabeth made it to Utah with her mother and sister. Her father died in Panora, Iowa, in 1857. George Jr. also died in Panora in 1909, having married and raised a family there. Elizabeth married Gibson Condie three months after arriving in the Valley. She had 12 children before she died at age 50 from appendicitis. Her descendants said she was always busy serving this large family. “At night she would gather her children around her while she was knitting and tell them of her childhood days, crossing the Atlantic Ocean and the Plains, or teaching them Gospel Principles.” These children were aunts and uncles to President Thomas S. Monson.

Sources: Daughters of Utah Pioneers history files; family histories in files of Jolene Allphin; diary of Gibson Condie, on film at Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, transcribed excerpts here with light editing by Jolene Allphin (see Gibson Condie in rescuer section of *Tell My Story, Too*); Autobiography of Emily Hill, in Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archives, Utah State University, Special Collections; familysearch.org.