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Biographical Sketch

of

James Cunningham

and

Elizabeth Nicholson Cunningham

by Mary Adams Andersen, granddaughter

Pioneer Year 1856

Sailed on the Thornton

Willie Handcart Company

He was born 1801 in Boreland, Scotland

She was born 180 in Fifeshire, Scotland

He died 29 May 1879 in American Fork, Utah

She died 1890 in American Fork, Utah

James Cunningham was born 1801, in Boreland, Scotland and died at American Fork, Utah May 29, 1879. His wife, Elizabeth Nicholson Cunningham, was born 1805 at Fifeshire, Scotland and died at American Fork, Utah in 1890. She was the daughter of Alexander Nicholson. James Cunningham's ancestors came from the North Highlands of Scotland and his wife's parents came from the middle or south of Scotland.

James Cunningham was a miner by trade and he being a man of weak constitution badly adapted for such a laborious occupation. Consequently that threw the management and the raising of the family entirely upon grandmother and to speak of her in common phrase, I cannot do it better than by saying she was a rustler in the greatest sense of the word.

They both joined the church in their native land, being the first to join in that locality. As far back as some of the children can remember the Elders came to their house, generally making it their home. Grandmother was known to borrow money to help them along and at time having no way of paying it back, but she was so full of faith she would say the Lord would open up the way and invariably did so.

After they were baptized nearly half of the citizens of their village joined the church. The gifts and the blessings following them that believe. She raised her family in the strictest sense of the word Mormon, and the faith which she implanted in her children always stayed with them.

Owing to the frail body of grandfather the children had to obtain work as quickly as they were old enough. Some of the boys went to work in the coal pits at seven years of age, working twelve to fourteen hours a day. The girls worked in the factories.

The chance to emigrate to this country came, for which they were very thankful. They sold their small effects and bade their friends farewell, also one son, Robert, and a daughter, Agnes. They came soon with their families.

The family started, the mother, with her sick husband, one son George and three daughters - Catherine, Betsy, and Margrate. They

took the train for Glasgow, from there by steamboat to Liverpool. The passage over the channel was very rough. The details of their journey is given in the diary of the son, George, and is recorded here in part.

We landed in Liverpool about the first of May. Then, I think, they embarked about the sixth of the same month on board the American ship Thornton, bound for New York. There were seven hundred souls on board, nearly all of which were Latter Day Saints, five hundred of which were bound for Salt Lake. We had a very long trip, being six weeks on the ocean and for several days the cold was very intense. A few more days of sailing brought us to the mouth of the Hudson River. A steam tug met us there to tow us up the river. On the tug was a custom house officer, and inspector. A subscription was drawn up among the passengers to give them and that was all that was wanted. All the passengers were allowed to enter New York without being asked a single question. We unshipped at Castle Gardens, a very pleasant place, with every accommodation for emigrants. The first step we made on American soil brought us great pleasure for we had been taught to believe it was a land of promise, blessed above all other lands, so we were very thankful.

We stayed a few days in New York City, then started up the river on a steamboat. Then took the railroad for Iowa City, arriving about the end of June. We went about two miles out of the city to the Mormon camp ground, where six or seven hundred emigrants were encamped in a beautiful country. We had not been there long before night came on and lightning streak after streak followed in rapid succession until the sky seemed ablaze. The rain commenced to fall in torrents, the wind blew and we were there without the least particle of shelter. Everything in an uproar, water running everywhere, children crying, mothers sighing. The storm continued several days and some were fretting about the good homes they had left.

After a few days tents were provided and we got along much better. We camped in this place five or six days, at last we were told we were to go in Brother Wilhis [Willie] hand-cart company. The company consisted of six hundred persons, men, women, and children. There were one hundred Scotch, two hundred Danes, and three hundred English. A captain was appointed over each hundred.

He being chosen from the returning missionaries. One team was appointed to have provisions for each hundred. The cattle were wild and the teamsters were green but we got along the best we could.

We had three hundred miles to travel through the state of Iowa before reaching the permanent starting place, Winter Quarters or Florence. While traveling along people would mock, sneer, and deride us for leaving our homes and being such fools, and would often throw out inducements to get us to stop, but we told them we were going to Zion and would not stop on any account.

When we went thru' a town pulling our hand-carts as we had to do, people would turn out in crowds to laugh at us and saying "gee" and "haw" as if we were oxen; it did not discourage us in the least. After several weeks pulling, hauling, and praying we arrived at Florence but we were detained again, for several weeks. Some stayed here and would not go any farther, in fact we were told if any wanted to stop they might do so, but the counsel was to go on to the valley. At a meeting, one night, when Brother Levi Savage, a returning missionary arose and spoke, he counseled the old, weak, and sickly to stop until another spring. The tears commenced to flow down his cheeks and he prophesied that if such undertook the journey at that late season of the year their bones would strew the way.

When we started our number was greatly reduced about one hundred staying. There was not one in our hundred stayed for which we got a lot of praise. The ox teams were loaded down and we were delayed much by having to wait on them. When we got to Woodriver we came across a large camp of Omaha Indians who were very friendly. They invited us to camp with them for the night and we did so.

We traveled up the Platte and saw immense herds of buffalo and in some places the prairie was black with them. There were so many we could not keep them out of the train. While we traveled along the road we killed some of them. We had plenty of meat and some of it wasted. They would cut the choice places out of the carcass and let the rest go to waste. When the Captain saw this he was very angry. We had made a long drive, turned out the oxen and the cows

to feed and a large herd of buffalo came running toward them and the oxen and the cows ran away with the buffalo and none of the cows were left.

There was a terrible storm came up which are only known in a prairie country. When the storm subsided all the able bodied men and boys turned out after the cattle, but they were beyond our reach.

We scoured the country, everything we would hear or see we would think it was Brin and Nig or Buck, and Bright but it would only be the ugly old buffalo. At length we were compelled to give up the hunt.

It was evident to all that our provisions were getting low. We had between six and seven hundred miles to travel yet to accomplish our journey which we would be compelled to do or perish in the mountain snows. We took the provisions out of the wagons and put them on the handcarts, we have about thirty milk cows. We hitched on the wagons to haul the sick and the children and those who were able had to haul them here. We plowed along through the mud with all the courage we could muster. Our bright young sisters helping us, would do all they could to encourage us. They would try to cheer us with their beautiful strains of vocal music. They seemed to have songs appropriate for every occasion.

After a few weeks more we arrived at Fort Laramie, as our provisions were nearly exhausted. Our Captain went to the Fort and bought a ton or two of flour for which we had to pay twenty dollars for one hundred pounds.

After leaving we were met by a company of missionaries going to the States. Elder Parley P. Pratt came and talked a while to us and tried to encourage us.

The nights were beginning to be very cold and the feed was very poor, our provision were running out, and starvation looked us in the face. We were put on rations of six ounces of flour a day. The old and the weak began to die and a great many of the young and strong soon followed. We were several weeks on this small ration then it was reduced to half of the amount. At last we were caught in a heavy snow storm on the Sweet Water and the last of our flour was

gone, all except a few crackers, which had been reserved for the sick and the small children. The Captain called us together and said every one would be treated alike. He said he would kill every critter in the train before any of us should die of starvation.

The weather turned to be bitterly cold, many died of cold and hunger, as many as ten to twenty were buried in one day. Our captain kept his word. He commenced to kill off the cattle but they were as poor as we were. We boiled the bones and would drink the soup and eat what little meat there was. Our captain did all he could and performed his duty. He was badly frozen and came very near dying. Some would share all they had with others, while some would take more than their share.

At this time the son, George, had a dream. It seemed that morning had come and the storm had subsided and they had started on the road. He thought he saw two men coming toward them on horseback riding very fast and soon came up to them. They said they had volunteered to come to the company's assistance, and they would go on farther east to meet another company that was still farther back. They said that the next day the company would meet a number of wagons loaded with provisions. These men were soldiers wearing blue overcoats. George said that he could discern every expression of their faces. They seemed to be glad to have come to the relief of the stricken company.

The morning came and it had cleared during the night. The snow was about eighteen inches deep on the level and the weather was very cold. They made some very large fires and everyone stood about with gloomy faces. George told the group of his dream; his mother told him she knew his dream would come to pass for in his blessing he should dream dreams and see things to come. To their great joy every work was literally fulfilled. They were keenly on the look-out and they saw the two persons riding toward them. Someone sighted them and cried, "Here they come," and the next day they met the wagons with the provisions and they knelt to thank God.

Now the great difficulty was eating too heavily. The senses of our people were benumbed, everyone seemed indifferent, no one

feared death. He states, "Our captain showed us all a noble example." They gave him a mule to ride but he said, "I will never get on its back but I will set the example; you follow it." He would be the first to enter the streams and to help the old, weak and the children.

At last we arrived in Salt Lake City November 9 and the last company three weeks later. We were kindly cared for in Salt Lake and were sent to various settlements. We were sent to American Fork, Utah. The family made their home in a little log house where Bert Wotton's home now stands. The father, James Cunningham, because of poor health, had little to do with the keeping and caring for the family.

Elizabeth Cunningham was a midwife, no doubt bringing into this world some who are now present. She was also a tailoress, making men clothing and other fine needlework. She was of large stature, large blue eyes and a woman of great faith and courage. All of her grandchildren can remember her sweet smile and pleasant ways. They all went to her home for bread and molasses or cookies with caraway seeds in them. Her children always visited her every Sunday afternoon; this would be a real old Scotch gathering.

She had two nephews that came here. They are Peter and Alex Adamson and they visited her often.

Alex visited her every Sunday while she lived and she looked forward to his visits each Sunday. When he came he would wind her clock, and no other must touch it. This kept going from one visit to another.

She did a great deal of nursing, thinking nothing of walking almost to our neighboring towns each morning to care for some mother and her new baby or to do the sewing for some family. When she became infirm because of her age she made her home with her daughter, Catherine, until the time of her death.