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Biographical Sketch

of

Elizabeth Cunningham Kelley

by Olive Dunn Binnell, a granddaughter

Pioneer Year 1856

Sailed on the Thornton

Captain Willie Hand Cart Company

Born: 24 Nov 1843, Borland, Scotland

Married: William Kelley, 1858

Died 8 Oct 1922 in Ogden, Utah

Buried in American Fork City Cemetery

Dates and historical events arranged and collected by Olive Dunn Binnall, a granddaughter on October 6, 1930.

The subject of our sketch was born in Borland, Scotland, November 24, 1843. She was the daughter of James Cunningham and Currie Katherine Cunningham. She was one of a family of five children, viz: Robert, who married Ann Wilson; Katherine, who married Arza Adams; George, who married Mary Wrigley; Elizabeth, who married Wm. Kelly; and Margaret, who married John Binnall, of Woodbine, Iowa.

Elizabeth was the mother of thirteen children and in addition mothered three orphan children. She came to the United States in the Spring of 1856 on the American ship "Thornton" in a company of seven hundred souls, most of who were bound for Salt Lake City, Utah. They were six weeks in making the journey across the Atlantic ocean. They landed in New York the same year. They took a steamboat to Albany, New York, here they mounted the Chicago Rock Island and Davenport Railway arriving at Iowa City, Iowa, the end of June 1856. Two miles out of the city were camped seven hundred Mormon emigrants which the saints of the new arrival were delighted to meet. They remained here for five or six weeks, preparing for a further journey on their way to the Rocky Mountains.

From Iowa City, they moved to Winter Quarters, now called Florence, Nebraska, approximately three hundred miles distant. It was a hazardous journey. They traveled with ox teams and it took several weeks to make the journey. They traveled with ox teams among the Indians, but thanks to them and our Heavenly Father, they did not molest them. They came across many herds of wild buffalo, which furnished meat for the trip.

At one time a great herd of stampeded buffalo came tearing into their oxen that had been turned out to feed and the oxen joined them in the stampede. After searching over the country for 40 miles around, they were unable to find the oxen. They had a number of milk cows that did not go with the buffalo. They used them for oxen and hitched them to the wagons, put the limited amount of provisions in the wagons and traveled the rest of the journey to

Winter Quarters, which was the stopping place for the Mormon emigrants, prior to making the journey to Salt Lake City, Utah.

The company at Winter Quarters was somewhat diminished, but several weeks were spent here to recuperate and prepare for the westward journey to Zion. Teams and wagons were scarce and they had no money with which to buy them, so a company of about six hundred souls obtained two-wheel carts and pulled their provisions and the sick and disabled emigrants across the plains of Kansas and Nebraska to Salt Lake City, a distance of approximately twelve hundred miles. Some members of the Company had to walk the entire distance pulling these crude hand-made carts.

The company was made up of emigrants from Scotland, Denmark, and England. James G. Willie was in charge of the company. Such companies were called and are known as the "Hand-cart Companies". A limited number of these emigrants are still living today. No one on earth will ever know the hardships and difficulties and trials that these Mormon converts had to undergo. Time nor space will not permit any lengthy stories concerning them, but the writer would like to relate a few incidents that transpired which these undaunted saints had to contend with.

At one time Elizabeth, the subject of our sketch, was left for dead on the plains as she was thought to be frozen to death. The ground was frozen so hard that they could not dig a grave, so they just wrapped her in a blanket and laid the body on the ground and hurried on to make camp for the night as darkness was fast overtaking them. After they had made camp, the mother of Elizabeth felt impressed to go back to the child. Her friends ridiculed the idea, but the mother was determined for she maintained that the child was not dead. She has been promised in Scotland that if she were faithful she and all of her family would reach Zion in safety.

She went back to the child and found her untouched by the wolves. Elizabeth was brought back to camp and worked over her. Some hot water was spilt on her foot and it caused a quiver to go through the limb. So convinced that she was still alive, they kept up their efforts until they brought her back to life.

On another occasion, their provisions became almost exhausted and they saw starvation staring them in the face. They had to kill some of their cattle to eat in order that spirit and body could exist together. These cattle themselves were poor and there was no fat upon them, but the emigrants boiled the bones, muscles, made soup, and drank that. At one time they even scorched the hair from the hide of these animals, boiled the hide and chewed this for nourishment. While undergoing this starvation period a terrible storm arose. It rained heavy; the thunder was so fearful that the earth on which they stood trembled; the vivid lightning poured forth in streaks. Finally the rain turned to snow and before it ceased, eighteen inches had fallen on the level. They were out of provisions and they all thought that the end was about to be.

One night George, the brother of Elizabeth, had a dream. He saw some men coming to their rescue. The next morning he told the company his dream. Some of them thought there was nothing to it. George's mother said she had confidence in the dream, as she had seen many of them fulfilled. The next morning the storm had ceased. George stood with the company trying to keep warm around the bonfire, for the emigrants were discouraged and heartsick. Suddenly George called their attention to two objects moving across the mountains. Soon all the members of the company saw them, and it was not long before two men rode on horseback telling them that a relief train was soon to be there with provisions and help and would assist them through the Rocky Mountains to Salt Lake City. You can imagine the joy and encouragement these poor emigrants felt about this good news.

Songs were sung on their journey to encourage each other and to keep up the moral of the saints. Original lines composed by the company were formulated to create amusement for each other. The following verses are a sample of what they sang.

*"Some will push and some will pull
As we go marching up the hill
So merrily on the way we go
Until we reach the valley O."*

*"Hurrah! for the camp of Israel
Hurrah! for the handcart team
Hurrah! Hurrah! It's better by far
Than the wagon and Ox team."*

This company of saints was known as Captain Willies' Handcart Company. It arrived in Salt Lake City, Utah, in November of 1856. They found the people in Salt Lake City were kind to them and dealt out to them some of the comforts so much needed after a strenuous and tedious journey of so many months. The saints were recommended to join in with the settlements already established, and the Cunningham family was assigned to go to American Fork where they resided until over-taken by death.

Elizabeth married William E. Kelly, a Mormon Battalion boy, in the year 1858 and from this union she became the mother of a large family. She died at Ogden on October 8, 1922, and was buried in the American Fork City Cemetery.

She lived as she died, a faithful Latter Day Saint, uncomplaining, cheerful, and optimistic. She has gone to meet the reward of the faithful, but although dead she is not forgotten, for her works and achievements do and will follow her.

Olive Dunn Binnall.