



AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ELIZABETH WHITE STEWART

(Written by herself at the age of seventy-six)

I was born February 22, 1838, in Bloomsbury Square, London, England.

I am the daughter of William and Mary Anne Syer White. My father died when I was about five years old. I was taught to pray when very young, also to be honest, truthful, and kind.

In 1854 we heard the gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I was then sixteen years old. My brother Barnard and myself were baptized on the 22nd day of May 1854; my mother, sister Eliza and brother a short time before. We were anxious to emigrate to where we could enjoy our religion more freely. As soon as our circumstances would permit my dear mother made all arrangements for the journey.

We left London on the 22nd of May 1856. Arriving in Liverpool that night and on the 24th day of May sailed on the good ship Horizon, bound for Boston Harbor under the Presidency of Edward Martin and Jesse Haven. We had a pleasant voyage with the exception of one storm. We had three deaths and three weddings. We had 856 passengers on board, all of the Mormon faith. We had our meetings on Sundays and sometimes through the week also singing and dancing. Each passenger was allowed so much rations which consisted of hard sailor's biscuits made of very coarse flour, so hard we could scarcely break them, salt pork and beef, rice and split peas. We had a large cook house on deck and cooks. We had so much water allowed each person, but it was very poor.

When the sea was calm we could occupy our time in reading, sewing, and taking our walk on deck. Also listening to the sailors singing while they were pumping the water out from the bottom of the ship. They never worked without singing, so they could all pull together. Then it was a grand sight to see the sun go down. We were all thankful when the captain told us we would soon see land. We arrived in Boston Harbor June 20, being just five weeks on the sea. Some of the passengers had to stay to earn means to go the rest of the journey. We then had to travel by train 1500 miles from Boston to Iowa City which was a very unpleasant journey. We were put in cars that had no seats and we had to sit on our trunks and baggage with no room to lie down at night.

When we completed our journey to Iowa City, we were informed that we would have to walk four miles to our camping ground. All felt delighted to have the privilege of a pleasant walk. We all started, about 500 of us, with our bedding. We had not gone far before it began to thunder and lighten and the rain poured. The roads became very muddy and slippery. The day was far advanced and it was late in the evening before we arrived at the camp. We all got very wet. The boys soon got our tent up so we were fixed for the night, although very wet. We camped there until September.

The handcart company started ahead of us. We started on our journey across the plains on the 3rd of September with two yoke of oxen, two cows, a tent covered wagon, our trunks, bedding and provisions and seven of us in family so we had to walk except when we went through the water. I think we would travel from fifteen to twenty-five miles per day, when the weather was fair.

We had about forty wagons in our company led by Captain John Hunt. We got along real well, had no trouble with Indians but-when we were near Fort Laramie a herd of buffalos came along as we were traveling and caused our cattle to stampede resulting in the death of Mrs. Walters. She was driving the team in front of ours and was knocked down and tramped upon by the oxen. She never spoke but died in a few minutes leaving a young baby. This sad affair cast a gloom over our camp. She was sewed in a blanket and buried by the wayside.

The weather was fair and we got along real well until we were near the Platte River.

It was getting very cold. We finally reached the last crossing of the Platte River about 500 miles from Salt Lake City. Our company camped on the east side and the handcart company passed over that night. All of our able bodied men turned out to help them carry women and children over the river. Some of our men went through the river seventy-five times. During the night six inches of snow fell and thirteen deaths occurred. It was a terrible night for them. This was on the 20th of October. The snow continued falling for three days and from this time we had no food for our cattle, and when it stopped snowing and we could see to travel, our cattle were so weak they would drop in the yoke.

They would kill them for us to eat as our provisions were getting very low and we were then living on one-fourth pound of flour per day and we used nothing but the poor meat for our noon day meal. We were in this condition until we reached Devil's Gate. We could then go no farther. Our two yoke of oxen and one cow had died and the rest of the company were in about the same condition. We had nothing to burn only the wet sage brush from under the snow and melt the snow off the sage for our water to make our tea. We made our bread with soda and sage water what little we had. The snow was then from three to ten inches deep. The ground was frozen so hard they could not drive the tent pins so they had to raise the tent poles and stretch out the flaps and bank them down with snow.

We were almost out of provisions. Our dear mother said she had never seen her dear family want for bread, but said the Lord would provide. About midnight that night all had retired and we were awakened with a noise, and thought it was the yelling of Indians. We got up expecting they were upon us, but to our great surprise the noise was caused by the teamsters of a relief train and some of the camp shouted for joy. They, were loaded with all kinds of provision--flour, bread, butter, meat of all kinds but frozen very hard. Everything was so good. The bread was like cake so sweet and nice. I remember we had to cut everything with the hatchet but oh how thankful we all were that the Lord had answered our prayers and saved us all from starvation. Through the timely action of President Brigham Young in organizing this company we--were saved. The loaded wagon that came to our camp was from Draper. George Clawson and Gurnsey Brown were the teamsters.

The next evening when we had made the campfires, the boys had cleaned the snow away and several of us young folks were sitting around the fire singing. Our captain, John Hunt, and those two teamsters stood there until we got through; then the captain came to me. He said that Mr. Brown was going to take a load of sick and old folks and if I would go with them as his wife needed help he would give me a home but I told him that I would rather he would take my mother as I could not leave her but she begged me to go as they would soon follow. I bade my dear mother goodbye thinking she and the folks would soon follow, but they did not come for two long weeks. I was lonesome when I left camp and we overtook the camp ahead of us. We stayed there and got Sister Esther Brown, one of the girls who crossed the sea with us. I felt so pleased to have her with us. We had a load of sick and infirm folks under the cover and we had to sit in the front with the men folks. We had to walk considerable. When we got to the foot of the Big Mountains the snow was so deep I had to put on men's boots. The teamsters and Esther were tall and she could step in their tracks but I could not and had to make my own road up both mountains, frequently falling down the snow was so deep and drifted, but they told us when we got on the top we would see Salt Lake City. We were so thankful and delighted that it seemed to renew our strength and energy. It was the hardest part of my journey but the thought of being nearly at our journey's end after six months traveling and camping was cheering. If only my dear mother had been so near I would have felt much better. When we got to the top of the mountain the men took off their hats and we waved our handkerchiefs. They then pointed out Salt Lake City and I could not believe it was for it looked to me like a patch of sage brush covered with snow. I could not believe it until we got nearly to it. We arrived in Salt Lake City just at sundown on the 30th day of November 1856. The last handcart come in on the afternoon of that day. Bishop Hunter came to the wagon. "Well," he said, "Brother Brown, I thought you were to bring the sick and the old folks. " He said, "I have. " "Well it does not look like it when we look at those girls." He smiled and found the rest under the cover.

They took us to Ephriam Hank's home to stay all night. Next morning they took us to Draper in a sleigh the snow being about two feet deep. It was my first sleigh ride, and the longest I ever had. We arrived there all right and were welcomed by Sister Harriet Brown.

I can never forget her kindness to me, a stranger in a strange land. My happiness would have been complete is only my dear mother, brothers, and sister had been with me. It was two long weeks before they arrived; then my happiness was complete.

We did not know how to be thankful enough to our Heavenly Father for his preserving care over us during our journey, for the health and strength we enjoyed, and for every blessing he bestowed upon us. We kept behind the hand cart company so that our able bodied men could assist them. My brother Barnard, with others, would go into their camps and saw how they were suffering. He said it was terrible. Our company assisted them all they could but there does not seem to be any account of our assistance in their history.

After my folks came in, Bishop I. M. Stewart gave my brother Barnard employment. My mother made her home with us at Sister Brown's until she went to Sister Burnham's. My brother Richard, about fourteen years of age, went to Salt Lake City and William Godbe, the druggist, took him as errand boy and he was there for years. From errand boy he became clerk in the store.

My sister Eliza stayed in Cottonwood with her husband's sister. So we were all blessed with good homes for the winter and all enjoyed good health which is one of the greatest blessings which can be bestowed upon us. Barnard was soon able to get a home so our dear mother could live with him. I remained with Sister Brown two months, then went to live at Bishop Stewart's home. I lived with them about five weeks and was married to Isaac M. Stewart on the 8th of March 1857.

In July we received an invitation from the Presidency of the Church to celebrate the 24th of July up Big Cottonwood. It was while celebrating that the news came that Johnston's Army was coming to wipe us out. But they did not. The Lord was on our side and they did not have power to destroy us. They came and everything was prepared for them.

It was in the year 1864 that John R. Park came to Draper and to our home. I was then living in a small house with four little children. My husband, Isaac Stewart, being greatly interested in education, learned he was a school teacher and got him employed to teach. He also baptized him a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1869, John R. Park became the first formal President of the two-year old University of Deseret which later became the University of Utah.

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In the forty years that Isaac M. Stewart was bishop of Draper, his wife Elizabeth was mistress of the huge stone farmhouse which is still a landmark there. In it were

lodged all the visiting church authorities; besides preparing their food and quarters, she sometimes, like the women of the Bible, bathed the feet of the weary travelers . But not all the visitors were pious; to the abject terror of the youngersters, Porter Rockwell frequently stayed overnight. The roving bands of Indians camped regularly in the field beyond the back door. The "Biscup's wife" was obligated to feed them; then at night the little boys were expected to wrestle with the Indian children, always being sure to acquit themselves with honor in the fight but be defeated at the end.

Elizabeth's primary interest, however., was her family. In spite of her tiny stature and frail body, she was the mother of eleven children. According to Elizabeth's own entry in the family Bible, they were Mary Ann, born March 4, 1858 (married Richard Ballantyne); William Milton, born September 5, 1859 (married Sarah Vincent); Alice Caroline, born February 16, 1862 (married Henry Stringfellow); Elizabeth, born September 3, 1863 (married William Fife); Eliza Jane, born August 27, 1865 (married John Fife); Samuel White, born May 21, 1867 (married Ella Nebeker); Charles Biekley, born July 20, 1870 (married Katherine Romney); Joseph Barnard, born January 13, 1873 (married Leonora M. Cannon); Luella Eveline, born December 5, 1876 (married Marion Lindsay, then James B. Porter); Nettie Priscilla, born September 11, 1879 (married Dr. Alfred Taylor, then Jay Anderson, then John Edison); and Orson Richard, born May 22, 1881 (died in infancy).

In accordance with the custom of the time, Elizabeth trained her daughters in all the skills, arts, and graces of housewifery and motherhood. But she was determined that her sons should receive the professional education which would qualify them for leadership in the young state. To help finance their schooling, she churned butter; this, along with fresh eggs, the boys delivered to the homes of the affluent in Salt Lake City. In the Pioneer Memorial Theatre on the University of Utah campus there is a plaque which reads: "Elizabeth White Stewart - She gave her sons integrity, ambition, education. William M., the eldest, became professor of education at the University of Utah; the experimental training school there bears his name. The other three brothers were attorneys. "S.W." became a judge; "C.B. " used a legal approach to business ventures in both Utah and California; Barnard was a prominent practicing attorney, specializing in irrigation law. In 1900 the four brothers founded the Stewart Ranch on the Upper Provo River where, in the summer, members of their families still congregate.

Elizabeth White Stewart participated in these first reunions. After her husband died, she had moved to Salt Lake City where, with her daughter I Nettie and her family, she shared a beautiful two-family dwelling on the corner of 11th East and 3rd South Streets. There she died on May 7, 1917; with her husband and their infant son, she is buried in the Draper Cemetery.

In the fields of education, law, music, literature, and religion, Elizabeth White Stewart's children were recognized leaders in the state of Utah. Having the same talents and inclinations, their descendants have carried her influence throughout the intermountain states and along both seaboards.

(additional information by Ruth Stewart Romney and Leonora Stewart Snow)