
Biography of Jane Carter Harris

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Jane Carter Harris was born February 16, 1840, at Prince Rock near Devonshire, England, the fourth child of Mary Ann Stockdale and Edwin Carter. For many years Edwin had worked at the stone quarry, but when Jane was two years old her father was killed when a blast of dynamite was set off without warning. Her mother though ill with grief immediately undertook the responsibilities of raising her small family alone. She had to work hard to provide the necessities of life; at one time she had her beautiful long hair cut and sold it to buy food.

Jane was fourteen years of age when the family embraced the gospel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Two years later on May 4th, 1856 the family set sail for America on the ship Thornton. After arriving in Castle Gardens, New York, Jane went with her family to New York City. Here they remained until 1859, where she went to work in a tailor's shop. While living here she met William Martin Harris, and on July 4, 1858, they were married by Elder Kirby; both were eighteen years of age. As the Saints were counseled to go to Florence, Nebraska, the young couple was soon on their way. They expected to find some kind of work to obtain needed money and provisions that would take them on to Zion. But there was no work to be had, so they set about making handcars while waiting for orders to continue the long journey. On June 9th, 1859 the call came for all who desired to go with the handcart company to be ready in two and one half hours. Jane and William joined the company. George Rowley was captain over the whole company and William was chosen captain over the wagons and cattle.

The wagons were loaded with food staples such as tea, bacon, flour, rice and brown sugar. Each handcart was allowed eighty pounds of luggage, clothes, etc., counting the provisions, which were given out every four days. Children and the sick were allowed to ride in the handcarts. Jane and William had a difficult time choosing which of their belongings, which consisted of 180 lbs., they should take. They disposed of the excess 100 lbs. as best they could. Everyone was in happy spirits for they knew the Lord would guide them to the place where they would find security. Shortly after starting Jane was taken ill and rode the greater part of the time in the wagon, called the "Great Western." The roads were dusty and the days hot and dry, making the journey an exhausting one. At night, the pioneers were always ready to stop when the captain called halt. At camping time the wagons and handcarts were placed in a circle forming a corral for the animals. Wood and sticks were gathered and a large community fire built outside the circle. The majority of their suppers consisted of fried pancakes and bacon; on occasions rice was boiled and served with a little brown sugar. Nothing could be wasted—food was too scarce.

Jane especially remembered one little old white haired lady, because she was so courageous and showed such faith in spite of her illness. Enroute she passed away. They wrapped her in the best cloth they had and laid her remains in a shallow grave. During the evenings, plans for the following day were made and prayers were said. Sometimes there was singing and dancing. Always a guard was posted to warn the camp of Indians and wild animals. On the evening of July 9th they saw a band of Indians marching past the camp. Their faces were painted black and red to signify they were on the war path. Above their heads on long slim poles were tied many human scalps, illustrating the day's hideous activities. In front of them, they drove an Indian woman and two young Indian boys who must have known their doom for they looked so helpless and frightened. The camp watched anxiously till they had passed out of sight. Early the next morning Mr. Harris and one of the men went back about a mile to find an oxen which had been left to rest because it was sore footed. On their way they passed a grove of trees and there they found the bodies of the woman and the boys.

The company camped at Chimney Rock and when they were ready to resume their journey they were detained because of the illness of Jane Harris. There was no doctor but the kind wife of Captain Rowley helped, and at three o'clock that afternoon, July 21, 1859, Jane gave birth to a baby boy. When the baby was ten days old, Jane was taken ill with rheumatic fever. Her husband would go away by himself and with a humble heart pray for her recovery. His prayers were heard and answered and Jane began the slow road to recovery. Time was of utmost importance and the company had to push on. When they reached the North Platte River, the driver of the lead wagon, in which Mrs. Harris and her young baby lay, refused to follow the crossing previously marked out by Captain Harris, and started straight across the river instead of going with the current and directing his course to the opposite bank. Mr. Harris looked back in midstream and saw that the man was not following him and the lead yoke of oxen was apparently drowning in a deep hole. The driver, seeing his folly, quickly stopped the second yoke of oxen. Sensing the danger to his wife and baby, Mr. Harris raced back to their rescue. Getting on the wagon tongue he unhitched the chain of the first oxen for the other men to ³Haw² the cattle around and hitch them to the back of the wagon and draw it backwards, while he stayed on the end of the tongue and batted the eyes of the second yoke of oxen to keep them from going forward. Mr. Harris's mother and sister, Adeline, sat in the back ready to jump if the wagon went into a hole, while his wife and baby lay helpless on the wagon floor. The men were successful in pulling it back to safety.

At Devil's Gate the animals were so sore footed the company was forced to stop. Captain Rowley then divided the small amount of the food they had left. A dispatch was sent to Great Salt Lake by horsemen for aid. The Saints next stopped at Fort Bridger where some of the young women of the handcart company married non-Mormons who were hired to build the fort. The Rowley Company left Fort Bridger and traveled on for several days when they were met by Joseph Robbins leading several wagons loaded with flour and provisions, which were gratefully received. Going over the rocky roads down Emigration Canyon was more than Jane could endure so with the help of her sister-in-law, Adeline, she walked while others took her baby with them in the wagons ahead. The two women walked nearly all morning trying to catch up but by afternoon Jane fell on the ground exhausted. Finally, they came to a junction of roads and not knowing which road to take, it was decided that Jane should stop and rest while Adeline ran on ahead to see if she could reach the wagons. Mrs. Harris said, "After I had rested I got up and tried to follow her, I would go a few steps thinking that I would see her but always a turn in the road or tall shrubbery would block the way between us. Then suddenly I heard the screaming of a woman echoing through the canyon. It cried, "Oh! Murder!" My first thoughts were that something had happened to Adeline. I got to my feet as quickly as I could and went in the direction of the cries. It sounded as though she was calling for help and I thought the Indians or wolves had overtaken her. I suddenly became more frightened for if I went on I thought the Indians would capture me and if I left the road the wolves would surely devour me. So I stood there praying for help to come, and suddenly I heard the sound of horses coming toward me. I thought it was Indians and that surely they would kill me. But as they came near I saw to my surprise and joy that it was my husband and his brother Edwin. I fainted. They gave me water to revive me and tried to help me on a horse, but I was too weak so they had to carry me into camp. My husband told me that he had gone to our wagon and saw that Adeline and I were missing. Adeline had screamed when she arrived at the crossroads with William and Edwin, whom she had met on the road. Finding me gone, she thought as I, that the Indians had taken me. The next morning after a good night's rest we continued on our journey."

Many friends came from Salt Lake to meet the weary travelers and all were happy to learn that one more day's journey would bring them to their destination. It was September 4, 1859, when they

came out of the canyon and saw with joy and yet with great disappointment, the scattered houses and ranches of "The Salt Lake Valley." The streets were wide and dusty with straggling trees growing along the sides. There were very few people in sight. Thinking of this town as a future home, one which they had so long planned and suffered for, a town with only a few stores and the bare necessities of life, Jane wept for she realized many hardships and trials were yet to come. She said, "I thought of my home in England and New York and how the people would throng the streets on holidays and felt completely lost in this lonely valley. Then I thought of all I had gone through on the way to get to this and how I had longed to come to Zion to live with the Saints of God and I knew in my heart that in spite of my disappointment, I would be glad to make my humble home in Salt Lake Valley. After all, I would not be alone for I had my wonderful husband." (Many times she longed to see her dear mother, who was in New York. Two years later her wish was granted, for her mother came to Zion, and they met in Kaysville.)

It was September 4th, 1859, just after the return of the move South when this company entered the valley. The company arrived too late to secure supplies and establish homes before winter. The first home William and Jane lived in was that of a kind friend, Mr. Callaway, where they stayed for three days. The Harris family moved to the canyon to work for Mr. Edmund and Libby Ellsworth, President Brigham Young's son-in-law. After working there three months, they returned to the city and spent the rest of the winter at the home of Mr. Russell. At one time, while living in Mill Creek, provisions were so short that Jane had only one quart of flour and a large onion for three days. With these she made a thin gruel, using a small amount of flour and the onion as seasoning. After living in Mill Creek for about a year, the family moved to Kaysville, where their daughter Mary was born; a year later they returned to Mill Creek where Adeline, Sarah and William were born. Adeline died in infancy.

When Thomas Showell, Jane's brother-in-law, and William Harris arrived in Curlew Sinks there was sagebrush as far as the eye could see, broken only by the little house which was the stage station. There was one inhabitant in the valley, a Mr. Robbins, whose acquaintance they formed. He had come to the valley June 1, 1869. Mr. Robbins had planted the first garden and had taken water to the valley from Deep Creek for irrigation. Six months later Jane and her five children arrived from Salt Lake City. It was a constant struggle against the elements and there were many things to threaten crop failures, and the loss of animals. Other settlers came to the valley but soon became discouraged and Jane could see them passing her cabin on their way back to a more prosperous community. Jane, William and their small family were happy, in spite of their lack of facilities, neighbors and entertainments.

One Friday morning, when Lucy was 16 months old, William became ill, by Sunday he was bedfast, early Monday morning he could only speak in a whisper. He asked his wife to bless and pray for him. She knelt tearfully by him and prayed as she had never prayed before. At the close of her prayer, he said "Amen" as clearly as a well man. Then feeling easier he asked for the children to be called in. He kissed them all fondly and bade them good-bye. His last words were to his oldest son, Charlie, "Be a good boy!" and while still supported in a sitting position he bowed his head and breathed his last, leaving his little family grief-stricken. His illness had been caused by white lead, which he had inhaled while working at the printing office in New York. He died April 11, 1870, thirty-one years of age.

July 14, 1872, Mrs. Harris was married to William Robbins. They remained at Curlew Sinks for about five years during which time three children were born, Rosella, who died shortly after birth; Bert Bross, born June 29, 1874 and Arthur William born September 18, 1876. In 1880 twin girls were born, but died shortly after birth. October 19, 1881 another daughter was born whom they named Pearl.

Jane, with her husband, son. Bert and daughter Pearl attended the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple. Later Jane was taken ill and for nineteen years suffered intensely; On August 7, 1933 she died at Stone, Oneida County, Idaho, and was buried August 11th at Snowville, Box Elder County, Utah.