
Biography of Jane Carter Harris Robbins

Written by her granddaughter, Mary Jane Harris

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Jane Carter was born 18 February 1840 at Prince Rock, Plymouth, Devonshire, England. She was the fifth child of a family of six. Her father Edwin Carter, born 1810 at White Church, Devonshire. He worked for many years in a stone quarry and was killed when a blast of dynamite accidentally went off without warning. He died 10 June 1842. Her mother was Mary Ann Stockdale born 5 March 1805 at Penryn, Cornwall, England. She died 11 May 1898 at Stone, Idaho. She was the daughter of William Stockdale and Avis Francis. Jane's mother remarried to James Martin and had two more sons.

At the age of fourteen, Jane Carter embraced the gospel and wanted to go to Zion. At the age of sixteen on 4 May 1856, she along with her two sisters, Ellen and Mary Ann, her half brother and her mother left England and sailed across the ocean on the ship "Thorton." They landed at Castle Gardens, New York. Shortly after arriving she went to New York City where she later met William Morton Harris. For two years she stayed in New York with her family. During this time she spent a good deal of time with William. Many of the Saints in New York were making plans to go to Utah. The young people had been counseled to wait until they arrived in Utah before getting married, but after fourteen couples had disobeyed and were married. President Stenhouse of the Eastern States Mission counseled those who were intending to get married, to do so before starting on the journey. On 4 July 1858, Jane Carter and William Morton Harris were married by Elder Curby at Williamsburg, New York. Jane was 18 and 3 months and William was 18 and 6 months.

Since the Saints had been counseled to go to Florence, which was a distance of 2000 miles, Jane had to bid her mother, sisters and brother good by, as they were forced to stay in New York and earn money to purchase supplies.

When Jane and William arrived in Florence, they and other Saints were expected to get work and help purchase provisions, which would take them on to Zion. However, they were greatly disappointed when they could not get work. Florence was only a small town with one store.

They remained in Florence about 6 weeks and were busy making handcarts waiting for orders and preparing for their long 1,000 mile journey across the plains by walking. On 9 June 1859, the call came to all those who desired to go on with the handcart company, to be on the grounds within two hours. Jane and William were desirous to go so they soon joined the company. The handcart company was organized into groups of ten carts, with a captain over each ten, with three persons to pull each cart. In this company there were 8 wagons with a yoke of cattle and a driver to each wagon. This was the #8 handcart company. Captain Rowley was captain over the whole company; William Morton Harris was chosen as captain over the wagons, cattle and also would ride ahead to choose the road, camping grounds and river crossings. The wagons were loaded with food such as flour, bacon, rice, brown sugar and black tea. Each handcart was allowed no more than 80 pounds of luggage, clothing, etc. Altogether with provisions dealt out to each cart every four days. Occasionally, there would be one or two children ride in the carts, when the provisions were low enough. There was room in the wagon for the sick. Capt. Harris and his wife had 180 pounds of luggage, but had to dispose of 100 pounds the best way they could. Capt. Harris was undecided whether to go or not because he did not have enough money to take them, so he said to his young wife, "what shall we do?" and she said, "Go to Zion."

So preparations were made and the journey began about the middle of the day on June 9th. Everyone was happy and in good spirits on the starting for they knew the Lord would guide them to where they could find peace and rest. Shortly after starting, Jane Harris was taken sick and rode in

the wagon called the "Great Western" most all the way. The roads were very dusty, sometimes very sand and the journey a tedious one. They were always tired and ready to stop when Capt. Harris would give the orders to make camp. He would always choose a place where there was grass and water close. At camping times wagons, handcarts were placed in a circle forming a corral for the animals. Wood and sticks were gathered and fires build outside of the circle. The woman prepared supper consisting of fried pancakes and bacon. Nothing could be wasted because food was too scarce. All their money had been spent during the 2,000 miles and the six weeks stay in Florence.

Jane said their money was scarce as hen's teeth. After supper and prayers were over, being tired from the long day's journey, they all retired for the night.

There were some left on guard to watch for Indians and wild animals. Sometimes there was singing and dancing before retiring. As they were camped for noon one day they saw an object coming along the foot hills at high speed/ as it came nearer they could see it was an Indian hanging by the side of a horse, clinging with one hand to the horses mane and to his tail with the other hand, his steps looked like they were about five yards long with each jump the horse carried him. They passed about one mile from camp and were soon out of sight. This happened in the Nebraska Territory. After dinner was over on the same day and all were ready to start on their journey again, Capt Harris warned all the camp to stay close together as there was danger of Indians and wild animals.

But there was one middle-aged lady who would not heed the warning; she said she was going on ahead so she could have plenty of time to rest. When camp was made that night a search was made for her, but only one of her shoes could be found. The Indians or wolves must have got her. It was a pitiful sight to see the sick in the company; one dear old white hair lady was very ill, she had to ride in the wagon. Her two sons, their wives and children were with the handcarts. When they camped her sons would come and help her out of the wagon. The dear old soul would creep around, her faith was strong and she wouldn't give up to her sickness. It was a pitiful sight to see her. What faith the Saints must have had to keep up their spirits under such conditions. It was necessary for all who were old enough to walk to do so and many suffered from sore and bleeding feet, and often they did not have enough to eat.

About three wagons back from the "Great Western" where Jane Harris lay sick, a young girl lay sick with Rheumatic Fever, there were no doctors or medicines so it was awful hard on those who were sick. Shortly after this incident the white haired lady died. There was nothing to make a casket, so she was wrapped in the best clothes they had and lay in the grave. This was the only death in the company while crossing the plains. The month of July was very sorrowful and bitter month to the weary and tired Saints. The scorching sun and dry winds, mingles with dust and sand was very distressing to travel through, but their faith was strong and they knew they would be guided to the shinning goal they had started for. On the evening of July 19th, they saw a band of Indians not far from camp, they were large men with but few clothes on, their faces were painted black and red to show they were on the warpath. They were carrying long slim poles with scalps on them. Demonstrating their hideous work by holding the poles high in the air and they were driving an Indian woman and her two sons before them.

The Indians looked fierce indeed. The mother and her two boys must have known their doom was to die, for they looked so helpless among that vicious band of Indians as they passed the camp, who watched them anxiously till they were out of sight. Early the next morning Capt Harris and one of the other men went back about a mile or two after sore-footed oxen that had been left behind the

evening before. While on their way to the oxen they passed a bunch of trees where they saw the horrid sight of the work the Indians had done the night before. The woman and the two boys (between the age of 12 and 14 years) had been hung up by the feet to the trees and cut from feet to head and left hanging in halves. As they neared the place where the oxen were, is where they saw on the foot hills 6 large prairie wolves coming toward them, they quickly crossed a stream of water and climbed a tree where they remained all day until evening so the wolves could not find them. They failed to get the oxen, but arrived safe in camp that night. They found that everyone had been very worried about them. Capt Harris sat on the tongue of his wagon and related the day's experiences, his companion told the same story. Their loved ones cried for joy their safe return. They had a very narrow escape.

The next morning after an early breakfast the people tried or not, took hold of their handcarts and wheels once more went rolling slowly on. The next stop was at Chimney Rock, opposite Court House Rock. After dinner was over and they were ready to start they were detained on account of sickness in camp. There was no doctor, but the kind wife of Capt Rowley and others were willing to do all they could. About three o'clock that afternoon July 21, 1859, Capt Harris was presented with a little baby boy. This was the only baby born on the plains in this company, and for eight long wearily hours after this there was much concern felt for Sister Jane Harris. Capt Rowley's wife became very sick from fear of Sister Harris and over worked taking care of her. Food was getting low and there was not the right kind for the sick, it was hard to get food that the sick could eat and when it was obtained the sick could not relish it. As there were many sore-footed animals in camp so they camped for about three days. They would have camped longer, but food was getting low and starvation was staring them in the face, so they had to travel on to where they could get more food.

When the baby was ten days old its mother was taken very ill with Rheumatic Fever, she keep getting worse until nearly all hope for her was gone. Her husband would go away by himself and earnestly pray for her recovery. The camp would not stop for the recovery of Sister Harris so she had to endure the jolting of the wagon. When they reached the North Platt River, the driver of the lead wagon (the Great Western) in which lay sister Harris and her young baby would not follow the crossing previously marked by Capt Harris, but started straight across the river instead of going with the current and directing their course to the opposite land. When the driver was about half way across, Capt Harris looked back and saw they were not following him and the lead yoke of oxen were swimming in a deep hole, the driver seeing his folly quickly stopped the second yoke of oxen. Capt Harris quickly came back and getting on the wagon tongue, unhitched the chain of the first yoke of oxen and told the driver to "haw" the cattle around the hitch them to the back of the wagon and draw it backwards. While Capt Harris stayed on the end of the wagon tongue and batted the eyes of the second yoke of oxen to keep them from going forward. Capt Harris's mother and sister Adeline sat in the back with their feet hanging out ready to jump if the wagon went into the hole while his wife and baby lay helpless in the bottom of the wagon, but the men were successful in pulling the wagon back and the driver through his disobedience was taken back to the last wagon and another teamster was chosen for the "Great Western". After having all safely crossed the river the Captain came back with ropes and chains in camp and tried to find the bottom of the hole, but it could not be found, nothing but quick sand. Then with thankful hearts for being saved they resumed their journey,

The sick people and sore-footed stock were compelled to travel very slowly, consequently they were left in the rear to follow as best they could, but in spite of all their hardships they sang songs of joy and cheer. At Devil's Gate they were so sore footed that those with the wagons were forced to stop.

Capt Rowley then divided the small amount of food that they had among the wagons and handcarts and were instructed to go on regardless of their sore and bleeding feet. A dispatch was then sent to Great Salt Lake by way of horseman for someone to come with provisions to meet the half starved Saints. Those with handcarts traveled day and night until they met those with flour and provisions. It was at Devil's Gate that the little baby boy, now two weeks old was blessed by his grandfather, William Thomas Harris, and given the name of Charles Edwin Harris. After leaving Devil's Gate the oxen yoked to the Great Western in which was (Jane Harris, her little boy, her mother-in-law Rebecca and daughter Adaline were riding) stampeded and ran a long way; two men from the company riding on horses saw the cattle running and rushed to their rescue just in time to turn the course of the cattle and prevent them from being dashed over a large precipices, which would no doubt have cost them their lives. When the Saints reached Fort Bridger, the young women of the handcart company stopped and were married to non-Mormons (who were hired to build the fort) to relieve their hardships. A little later on brother Joseph Robbins met the half starved company with flour and provisions, which were so, welcome received and so much enjoyed. When emigration canyon was reached the roads were very steep and rocky and it was very hard for the sick to ride over the jolting and jarring of the wagons going over the rocky roads were too hard to stand for one so sick as Jane Harris, so with the help of her sister-in-law Adaline, she walked leaving her baby with other ladies who could walk faster and keep up with the wagons. Weak from her illness and unable to walk fast, the wagons were soon lost from their view.

The two women walked nearly all the afternoon trying to catch up with the wagons, but late in the afternoon found it impossible to do so. Weak, hungry and tired from wearisome walk, Jane Harris fell on the ground and Adaline would help her up and almost drag her along. Finally they came to a junction of the roads, and not knowing which road to take, Jane Harris consented to stop and rest while Adaline ran on one of the roads to see if she could catch sight of the wagons. Jane Harris said after I had rested, I got up and tried to follow her, I would go a few steps thinking I would see her but always a turn in the road or shrubbery would block the way between us. Then suddenly I heard the screaming of a women echoing through the canyon crying out "O my murder, O my murder," my first thoughts were that something had happened to Adaline. I got up to my feet as quickly as I could and started in the direction of the cries. It sounded as through she was calling for help. I thought that the Indians or wolves had overtaken her. I became frightened for if I went on.

I thought the Indians would capture me and if I left the road the wolves would 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 felt sure they would kill me. But I decided to stay on the road so that my body would be found by other Saints. As they came nearer I saw to my surprise and joy that it was my husband and his brother Edmond. I fell exhausted and fainting to the ground. They gave me water to revive me and tried to help me on a horse, but I was too weak, as they had to almost carry me into camp. My husband told me that he came to our wagon and found that Adaline and I were missing so he and his brother came back to find us. When we arrived in camp we found that the two roads came together and Adaline was safe in camp, but she was crying because she thought I would be dead. The next morning after a good night rest we started on our journey. Many of the Saints friends from Salt Lake Valley came out to meet them and all were glad to learn that one more day would bring them to the end of their journey.

It was September 4, 1859 that they came out of the canyon and saw with joy and yet with disappointment the scattered houses and ranches of the Great Salt Lake Valley. The streets were long and wide with trees along them. There were only a few people on the streets. Thinking of this

town as a future home, a town with only one store and scarcely the necessities of life. Jane Harris wept for she recalled that many trials and hardships were yet to be overcome. She says I thought of my old home in England, New York and how the people would throng the streets on holidays and felt lost in this lonely valley. Then I thought of all I had gone through on the way to get to the Valley 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 the Salt Lake Valley. Many times throughout her sickness and trials 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. The first home William and Jane Harris had in Salt Lake Valley was at Galloway's home. Mr. Galloway was a kind friend and welcomed them into his home. They lived in the 11th Ward. They stayed there about three days, and then they went to the canyon to work for a Mr. Edmond and Libby Ellsworth (Brigham Young son-in-law).

After working there about three months, they returned to the city and lived with a man named Russell the rest of the winter. Shortly after they arrived in Salt Lake, William and Jane attended a meeting at the Tabernacle and there they met some of their friends, among them was Sister Crow who had come from New York to Florence with them, they had parted at Florence. The Harris came with the handcart company and their friend came later with the wagons.