
History of William Morton Harris and Jane Carter

A sketch of the life of William Morton Harris and Jane Carter Harris,
dictated by Jane Carter in 1918, and written by Mary Jane Harris, granddaughter.

Jane Carter was born February 16, 1840 at Prince Rock, near Devonshire, England the fourth child of a family of five children. For many years, Jane's father had worked at a 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 immediately undertook the responsibilities of raising her small family alone and had to work very hard to provide even the necessities of life. At one time not knowing how to yet bread for her children, she cut off her beautiful hair and sold it.

It was at this time that the Carter family embraced the gospel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Jane was fourteen years of age. After their baptism, the family wished to go to Utah and for two years they were busy making preparations for their long journey. When Jane was sixteen years of age. May 4, 1856, they set sail for America on the ship Thornton.

During the voyage they had many new and exciting experiences. At one time a fire broke out in the ship's kitchen, threatening the lives of all on board. The passengers, all LDS converts were thanked by the Captain for their complete cooperation and their prayers. It was with tears in his eyes that the Captain told them that it was through their faith and complete trust that the ship had been saved.

After many weeks of seasickness and anxious waiting, the ship landed at Castle Gardens, New York. Jane went with her family to live in New York City. We'll leave Jane in New York with her family while our story takes us to grandfather's parents.

My grandfather is William Morton Harris, born October 29, 1839 in Woolhope, England; he was the second child in his family of five children. His parents are William Thomas Harris and Rebecca Morton. We do not know when William's family migrated from England to America, but we do know that his family was members of the LDS branch of the church in New York City in 1856. This is where Jane and William first met and became engaged to be married. They were a very striking couple, Jane a slim, attractive, five foot, two inches tall, brown eyes, light hair, and William, a tall, handsome man six feet two inches tall, brown eyes and black, wavy hair. The two years they stayed in New York, Jane and William spent many happy hours together.

One evening as the young couple sat in the front parlor chatting and making plans for the wedding, some mention was made about age, Jane thinking William older than herself was astonished to learn he was just eighteen years of age, as she was, her birthday being in February, an early month of the year, she thought he must be younger, and stamping her foot she said, "I won't marry a man younger than I." William jumped up, grabbed his hat and left, returning some time later bearing his birth certificate. His birthday was October 29, 1839; he was three months the oldest. They often chuckled at this incident in their courtship.

The young couple started working and saving for their journey to Utah. William worked in a printing shop, and Jane sewed with her sister Mary in a tailor shop. Jane did the buttonholes on the garments, but one day the proprietor of the shop brought in a suit of the finest material, white in color with small red roses embroidered to form the pattern. Jane, impressed with it's beauty, refused to work the many buttonholes needed to finish it, but her boss insisted saying, "Jane, if anyone can do it you can." Jane was so impressed and thrilled by this incident she saved a sample of the material and it was with the souvenirs packed when she came to Utah. The young couples of the Branch had been counseled to wait until their arrival in Utah before getting married. But after fourteen couples had disobeyed the counsel and were married. President Stenhouse of the Eastern States Mission counseled those who were intending to be married to do so before leaving Mew

York. So on the fourth of July 1858, Jane Carter and William Morton Harris were married by Elder Curby at Williamsburg, New York. The saints had been counseled to go as soon as they could to Florence, Nebraska, which was a distance of 2,000 miles away from New York. Here they were to work and obtain the much needed money and provisions to take with them to Zion. William and Jane accepted the council and were soon on their way. They were very disappointed when they got to Florence to find there was no work to be had. Florence was a very small town with only one store and few people.

They remained at Florence about six weeks, making handcarts and oilier last minute preparations, while waiting for orders to continue their long 1,000-mile trek across the plains by walking. It seemed the orders would never come for the impatient saints to start their journey. Suddenly, on June 9, 1859, the call came to all who desired to go with the Handcart Company to be ready to leave within two and one half hours. Jane and William joined the company immediately. They came in the 8th Handcart Company. There were 235 members in the group, men, women and children. The captain was George Rawleigh. There were 60 handcarts and six wagons. The Company was organized into groups of ten carts with a captain over each ten and three persons to pull each cart. There were six wagons with two yoke of cattle and one driver to each wagon. Captain George Rawleigh was captain over the whole company and Jane's husband, William Harris was chosen Captain over the wagons and cattle. It was also his duty to ride ahead to choose roads, camping grounds and river crossings to be used by the Company. William's parents, Thomas Harris and his wife, Rebecca, and his sister Adeline, and brother, James, were also in this Company.

The wagons were loaded with food staples such as black tea, bacon, flour, rice, and brown sugar. Each handcart was allowed no more than 80 pounds of luggage, clothes, etc. On occasions when the provisions were low, the children and the sick were allowed to ride in the handcarts.

They started their journey about noon on June 9th. Everyone was in happy spirits for they knew the Lord would guide them to the place where they would find peace and rest. The roads were dusty and the days hot and dry, making the journey a tedious one. At night the pioneers were always ready to stop when Captain Harris would give orders to make camp. He was very conscientious in performing his duty and the Company rested in well-chosen campsites. At camping time the wagons and handcarts were placed in a circle, forming a corral for the animals. Sticks and wood was gathered and a large community fire was built outside the circle. The majority of their suppers consisted of fried pancakes and bacon and on occasions rice was boiled and served with brown sugar. Nothing could be wasted because rations were so scarce. The money saved had been used during the 2,000-mile trek from New York to Florence and the six-week stay there.

The Company was not molested by Indians, as had the earlier wagons and Handcart Companies.

It was heart rending to see the sick; Jane remembered one little old white haired lady, especially because she was so courageous and showed such great faith in spite of her illness. Her two sons and their wives were with the Company and in the evenings they would lift her from the wagon and the dear old soul would creep around by herself never showing discouragement nor lack of faith. She died soon after. There was nothing to make the casket from so she was wrapped in the best cloth they had and laid in her grave.

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 traveled without sufficient food. What faith the Saints must have had

to keep their spirits up under such conditions. After supper in the evenings, plans for the following day were made and prayers were said. On some evenings there was singing and dancing. A guard was always posted to warn the camp of Indians and wild animals.

The month of July was a very sorrowful and bitter month for the weary and tired Saints. The scorching sun, the dry winds and the dust made travel very distressing. On the evening of July 9th, there was a band of Indians marching past camp. They were large men that wore very few clothes; their faces were painted black and white to signify they were on the warpath. Above their heads on long slim poles were tied many human scalps, illustrating their day of hideous activities. In front of them they drove an Indian woman and two young Indian boys between the ages of 12 and 14 who must have known their doom was death for they looked so helpless and frightened among those vicious bands of braves. The camp watched anxiously till they had passed out of sight.

Early the next morning Captain Harris and one of the men went back about a mile to find oxen which had been left to rest, because it had been sore footed. On their way they passed a group of trees and there they saw the horrid sight, the work the Indians had done the night before. The women and boys had been hung by their feet to the trees, cut from feet to head and left hanging in halves. As they neared the place where the oxen had been, they saw six prairie wolves coming in their direction over the low foothills. They quickly cut across a narrow stream to hide their scent and climbed a large tree where they remained all day until evening, so the wolves could not find them. They failed to get the oxen but they arrived safe in camp that night. They found that everyone had been very worried about them. Captain 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 over their safe return. They indeed had a very narrow escape. Next morning after an early breakfast, the weary Company took to their handcarts and wheels once more went rolling, slowly on.

The next stop was at Chimney Rock. As they were ready to resume their journey after dinner, they were detained because of the illness of Jane Harris. There was no doctor, but the kind wife of Captain Rawleigh and others, all helped and at three o'clock that afternoon, 21 July 1859, Jane Harris gave birth to a baby boy, this was the only baby born during the journey. For eight hours after this, there was much concern felt for the life of Sister Jane Harris. Captain Rawleigh's wife became very ill from fear for Sister Harris and over worked taking care of her.

The Company was led by a very proud and Captain Harris for all was well with mother and baby, but when the baby was ten days old, Jane was taken very ill with Rheumatic Fever. She kept getting worse until all hope of recovery was gone. Her husband would go away by himself and with a humble heart pray for her recovery. The camp could not stop for the recovery of Sister Harris but had to push on as time was of utmost importance. Jane and her baby had to endure the jolting of the wagon over the bumps.

When they reached the North Platte River, the driver of the lead wagon, the Great Western, in which Mrs. Harris and her young baby lay, would not follow the crossing previously marked out by Captain Harris, but started straight across the river instead of going with the current and directing their course to the opposite bank. When the driver was half way across. Captain Harris looked back and saw that they were not following him, and the lead yoke of oxen were 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. Captain Harris raced back to their rescue getting on the wagon tongue, unhitched the chain of the first oxen, for the other men to turn the cattle around and hitch them to

the back of the wagon and draw it backwards, while he stayed on the end of the wagon tongue and batted the eyes of the second yoke of oxen to keep them from going forward.

Captain Harris' mother and his sister Adeline sat in the back of the wagon with their feet out ready to jump if the wagon went into a hole, while his wife and baby lay helpless on the floor of the wagon. The men were successful in pulling the wagon back to safety. After having all groups safely across the river, Captain Harris went back with all the chains and ropes in the camp and tried to reach the bottom of the hole, but he could not. It was too deep and around it was quicksand. With thankful and humble hearts they continued their journey.

In spite of hardships there was much singing and all made a valiant effort to be cheerful. At Devils Gate, the animals were so sore footed that the wagons were forced to stop. A dispatch was then sent to Great Salt Lake by horsemen for someone to come with provisions to meet the half-starved, weary Saints. It was while at Devils Gate that the baby boy, now two weeks old was blessed by his grandfather, William Thomas Harris, and was given the name of Charles Edwin Harris.

The Saints next stopped at Ft. Badger and many of the young women of the Handcart Company married non-Mormons who were hired to build the fort. They left Ft. Badger and traveled on for several days when they were met by Bro. Joseph Dobbins, leading several wagons loaded with flour and provisions, which were welcome received and enjoyed.

When Emigration Canyon was reached, the roads were very steep and rocky and were very hard for them to ride over because of the jolting and jarring of the wagons. Going over the rocky roads was more than Sister Harris could stand, so with the help of her sister-in-law Adeline, she walked and some other ladies took her baby with them in the wagons ahead. Weak from her illness and unable to walk very fast the wagons were soon lost from their view. The two women walked nearly all-afternoon trying to catch up with the wagons. By afternoon, Mrs. Harris fell on the ground weak from hunger and weary from the tiresome walk. Adeline would help her up and almost drag her bodily. Finally they came to a junction of roads and not knowing which road to take, it was decided that Mrs. Harris should stop and rest while Adeline ran on ahead to see if she could catch the wagons. Mrs. 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 tall shrubbery would block the way between us. Then suddenly I heard the screaming of a woman echoing through the canyon." So I stood there praying for help to come and suddenly I heard the sound of horses coming towards me. I thought it was Indians, but as they came near I saw, to my surprise and joy, that it was my husband and his brother James.

Next morning after a good nights rest they continued on their journey, many friends from Salt Lake came to meet them, and all were happy to learn that one more day would bring them to the end of their journey. It was September 4, 1859. Six weeks of walking when they came out of the canyon and saw with joy and yet with great disappointment, the scattered houses and ranches of the Great Salt Lake Valley. Jane had always heard Zion spoken of as the "Great Salt Lake Valley, so she must have built up in her mind a more flourishing town. Jane said, "I thought of my home in England and New York and how the people would throng in the streets on holidays and I felt completely lost in this lonely valley. Then I thought of all I had gone through on the way to get to this 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 Salt Lake Valley. After all, I would not be alone for I held my wonderful husband and sweet young son."

They were welcomed into the home of a kind friend in Salt Lake City. Later they went to the canyon where William worked for Edmond and Libby Ellsworth, President Brigham Young's son-in-law.

They bought a home in Hill Creek and lived there about five years, where three of their children were born.

Then they sold their home in Mill Creek and moved back to Sale Lake City and lived in the Brookbank Building where another little girl was born. At this time William worked at the Public Square.

Many children, including their son Charlie, played on the foundation of that great Temple while the tons of rock were being hauled to build it.

Mrs. Harris, with her husband and three children saw the first train come into the Salt Lake Valley. Brigham Young was there also.

William had been a printer most of his life, but it was his great desire to raise his children on a farm, where they might have plenty of milk, eggs, and butter and other necessities of life so essential to the happiness and growth of a child.

In 1869 William and his brother-in-law, Thomas Showell each took up a homestead entry. So they homesteaded a farm in Curlew Valley. This must have taken great courage; nothing but sagebrush and a few homes were in the Valley in 1869.

William had preceded Jane to get the home ready for his family. So five months later Jane left Salt Lake City and came to the country. She took five children with her on the train to Kelton where her husband met her with a wagon and horses. They traveled all day 'until night when they readied their new home.

Lucy, the youngest child, was sixteen months old when on a Friday morning, her father, William, became ill. It was the same morning that he wrote the alphabet in three different forms for the children to learn. He was only sick three days when he passed away, only 31 years old. His illness was caused by getting white lead in his body while working in a printing office in New York.

Jane felt a grief more than she could bear. Her relatives came from Salt Lake City to comfort her. Her mother stayed with the children. Jane stayed two weeks in Salt Lake City while all of the relatives went to Salt Lake for the burial. It was her great desire to be sealed to her husband. This was done in the endowment house. Early in the morning after she had been sealed to her husband as she lay in her bed she thought she heard her husband's voice speaking to her. She felt his hands on her head, as he said, "Jane, never do I reflect, but I think of the heart that I loved and the lips that I kissed." This was a great comfort to her through her later life. Her mother stayed with her and helped her for a year.

In those trying days the wolves and coyotes would often come around the house as close as ten feet from the door and would take the chickens from the yard.

Indians began to come into the valley in the year 1872 and would worry the new settlers.

One morning a Mr. Forbs (a neighbor) came to Mrs. Harris and said that the man in charge of the station had gone to Kelton and the Indians were sure to come tonight. Mrs. Harris, not trusting him replied, "Mr. Forbs, if God can take care of us at your place, he can take care and protect us here." She said she knew if she had gone that night that her home would have been robbed by "white" Indians so when night came she had the children take only their shoes off and go to bed. Then she put boxes and anything she could find against the locked doors and windows so the Indians could not get in without warning. There were two large rooms and she paced the floor until dawn. At daybreak all was safe. The Indians did not come.

On July 14, 1872, two years after the death of her husband, Jane was married to William Horan Robbins. He was a fine man and worked hard to support the young family.

Because there was no school in the valley, the three oldest children went away to school. William went to Uncle James Martin. Sarah went to Salt Lake City with her Aunt Mary Showell, and Mary went to Salt Lake City and lived with her Grandfather, he owned a clothing store in the city and she stayed with him for five years until she married. They lived on their farm in Curlew Sinks for about five years. During this time, four children were born to them, Hilda, Rozell, Hulbert Bross, and Arthur William. When Arthur was one year old, Mr. and Mrs. Robbins moved from their farm in Curlew Sinks to a farm just three and one half miles from Snowville. It was here that Walter James was born in 1878. In 1880, twin girls, Avis and Rebecca were born, but they died shortly after birth. In October 1881 another little girl was born, they named her Pearl.

While they were on the farm, Mrs. Robbins joined the Relief Society in Snowville. She was determined to attend her meetings, and on one occasion she took her baby, Walter, in her arms and rode a horse, while Sarah, her daughter, led the horse and walked the three and one half miles to Snowville.

In 1881, they bought a home in Snowville and moved into it just in time to eat Christmas dinner. What a joyous occasion for the big family.

It was in Snowville that the rest of the family received their schooling.

After their move to Snowville, Mrs. Robbins went regularly to her Relief Society meetings. She was set apart as a Relief Society teacher and was very faithful in this position.

Four years later she was chosen as President of the Snowville Primary. She was very happy when she was attending her meetings, for she loved the children and was happy when she was with them. She was a very humble and an extremely faithful worker and the children all loved her. During the ten years at Snowville she only missed three meetings. She was President of the Stone Primary for one and one half years, making eleven and one half years as Primary President.

Mr. And Mrs. Robbins attended the dedication of the Logan Temple, May 17, 1884. Then she and her husband and son, Hulbert, and daughter, Pearl, attended the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple, April 6, 1893.

Soon after this she was taken ill and was never well the remaining years of her life. Her children took turns in taking care of her. Her daughter, Sarah took care of her for six years, and her son, Hulbert and his wife, Nellie, took her to their home, where she lived the remainder of her days.

With her five Harris children and eight Robbing children, making thirteen in all, she was an extremely remarkable woman.

She lived to be 93 years and 6 months. She died August 7, 1933 at Snowville, Box Elder County, Utah.

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KITH AND KIN

If you could see your ancestors all
standing in a row,

Would you be proud of them, or not,
or don't you really know?

Some strange discoveries are made
in climbing family trees,

And some of that you know
do not exactly please.

If you could see your ancestors all
standing in a row,

There might be some of them, perhaps
you wouldn't care to know.

But there's another question which
requires a different view

If you could meet your ancestors,
would they be proud of you?