

Eliza Cusworth Burton Staker

Written by Eliza Jane Staker Day – a daughter

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Eliza Cusworth Burton Staker was born January 19, 1824, in Lockwood, near Huddersfield, Yorkshire, England. Her parents were John and Martha Brook Cusworth. They were well-to-do farmers. Eliza was one of four children, two boys and two girls, one brother and one sister having died. She attended the schools of England getting a common education for that time.

At the coronation of Queen Victoria, Eliza was a flower girl. There were a large number of small girls who acted in this capacity, carrying flowers and singing "God save the Queen".

She married Joseph Burton June 8, 1846. They lived very happily for a few years during which time two children, a son Frennd Burton (known as Joseph Friend) and a daughter, Martha Ann were born to them.

About this time Mormon Elders, Joseph E. Young and Cyrus H. Wheelock, came to that part of England. Joseph attended their meetings, heard them explain the Gospel, believed it, and purchased a Book of Mormon, which he started reading. Soon there were bad stories going round about these Mormon Elders. Eliza hearing them worried a great deal. She coaxed her husband not to read the Book or have anything to do with these Elders. He told her not to worry and kept on. She felt very badly about it.

After retiring to her bed one night. She could no sleep. It was very dark and as she lay there thinking and praying about her trouble the room suddenly began to get light and the light increased until the room was as light as noon day. The the light disappeared as it had come until all was dark. After seeing this she could never say a word against the Mormons and it was testimony to her that their Gospel was true. Soon after this she and her husband were baptized and then began saving money and making preparations to emigrate to Utah. Joseph Burton joined the church and traveled around as a local Elder during the time they were preparing to come to Zion.

Joseph was what they called in England, a carrier, he delivered goods from the depot to the stores, and while working he lifted too heavily and broke a blood vessel. In a short time this caused his death. His dying request was that Eliza gather with the Saints and do their work in the temple, and raise the children among the Latter-day Saints in Zion. She promised him she would do this.

Sometime before this her father had died, and her mother and brother, who did not believe in Mormonism were very much opposed to her going and tried every way possible to persuade her not to go. They promised to take care of her and the children and that they would never want for anything as long as they lived, if they would only stay with them. Her husbands people, who were in the mercantile business, were also very much opposed to her leaving and tried hard to get her to give up her foolish journey, as they called it. They promised to care for her and the children and give her any amount she would name, to live on with them, but not one cent to help her leave England.

There were trying times for Eliza, but she knew the gospel was true. She had made promises to her dying husband and was determined to fulfill them. So in the spring of 1856 she packed her trunks and left her home, relatives and friends, and started on a journey of six thousand miles with her two little children. The only one of her relatives who would go and see her off was Benjamin Burton, her husband's brother, who carried her little girl Martha, to the depot and bid them good-bye. This was the last she saw or heard of her relatives for twelve long years, during which time her mother died.

The first part of the journey was accomplished by train to Liverpool and here they took passage on the good ship Horizon, a sailing vessel, and were seven weeks on the ocean. This was considered a good trip at that time. She suffered a good deal from sea sickness. For about ten days she was unable to even care for her children. They went by train and boat from New York to Council Bluffs, Iowa. When they arrived there they found they were too late, the last wagon train had gone and there was no other way, but to wait for hand carts to be made and go that way.

I do not think they realized the great distance it was, nor the time it would take them to get there, it being 1300 miles from Council Bluffs to Salt Lake City, and it was late in the season to undertake such a long journey.

On July 15, 1856, Captain James C. Willie and a large company of hand cart immigrants left Iowa City for the Salt Lake Valley. About two weeks later Captain Edward Martin led a similar group out toward the west, despite the fact that both had been warned that the season was too far advanced for such a lengthy journey. With hearts filled with high faith, eager to reach Zion the promised land, the Saints could not be dissuaded from the journey. In the middle of July with the sun scorching hot, who could picture severe winter weather three months away? Besides, was not the Lord with them, their vanguard and their rear guard? With eyes set upon the western horizon the hand-carters began their journey in joy. In the most part they were converts from Europe who had pictured for weeks this great adventure.

The Martin Company, which Eliza and her friends were in, started from Iowa City July 30, 1856. The hand carts were hurriedly made and had wooden axles lined with leather. For this reason they had to stop very often for repairs and did not reach Salt Lake until November 30, 1856.

When the hand carts were ready, the people were told they would have to leave most of their belongings, as they could only bring necessities on the hand carts. Her trunks containing silverware, linens, bed sheets, and lots of her valuable clothing had to be left behind and she never received a cent for it. Eliza pulled the cart and her little boy, Frend (Joseph) aged seven walked all the way, and helped his mother pull the cart part of the time. The little girl Martha, four years old, rode.

The company was composed of five hundred men, women, and children, one fourth of whom died on the way. The first part of the journey they got along quite well, but after awhile their food began to give out. The women stood it better than the men. Thus they plodded on day after day, and month after month, trying to encourage one another and at night they would gather around the camp fires after supper and sing songs. Come, Come Ye Saints, was one of the favorite songs.

Eliza waded the Sweetwater River three times in one evening. First she took her boy across on her back, when she reached the other shore she put him down, but he was frightened and tried to follow her back. She was forced to tie him to a nearby tree while she went back to get his sister. She then had to make a trip to get her hand cart. She spent part of the night drying her clothing and it was freezing weather.

The were advised not to travel on Sunday, but on account of it being late in the season they did not heed this advice. But when they traveled on Sunday they nearly always had some trouble and many of them felt that they were doing wrong by not obeying counsel. Towards the latter part of their journey they were told their food was almost gone and were put on very short rations, one fourth of a pound of flour for each person a day. Mother had gold in her pocket, and she and her children were starving. At one time there were nine persons who died in one night of Cholera, caused by drinking alkali water.

When Wyoming was reached they ran entirely out of food. They would still have to travel one month to reach Salt Lake City. The ranchers would sell them no food, but sold them some pelts of deer and mountain sheep that were dry and old. These were soaked, scraped of hair and cleaned the best they could be and cooked. The soup was thickened with their last remaining flour. Eliza and her children suffered greatly. Her little son Joseph carried the marks of their perilous journey to his grave, as his foot was frozen and he lost two of his toes.

President Brigham Young heard of these poor hand cart people marooned in the snow at Martin's Cove and immediately sent teams and food to assist them to Salt Lake City. Martin's Cove was a small valley between the mountains and a small rolling hill in front. There was a stream running through the cove and it was somewhat protected from the bad weather. But they did not have sufficient food and many of them died here in the cove.

When Eliza reached Salt Lake she made inquiry for William Cusworth, a cousin who had gone there earlier in the season with an ox team train, and with whom she intended to make her home for a while. She found he had become

discouraged and apostatized, and had taken his family back as far as Iowa where he located. She was taken to the home of Isaac Laney where she was taken care of and stayed for a few weeks.

The she and her children were taken to Pleasant Grove, Utah. Here she met Nathan Staker, a widower with several children. The bishop had introduced them and advised Nathan to take her as a wife. The bishop had said that the marriage would mean a home for Eliza and her children and a mother for Nathan's children. So they were married February 18, 1857. Nathan was considerably older than Eliza, a difference of twenty-three years. But they got along well together and were happy and she was a good mother to his small children and he a real father to hers.

Their first child, James Benjamin Staker was born February 7, 1858. In 1859 they came to Mt. Pleasant where they helped pioneer Sanpete County. They went through the Indian wars, grasshopper war, and passed through many hardships incident to pioneer life. Later four girls were born to them, Cornelia, Eliza Jane, Josephine, and Elizabeth Ellis. Eliza was stepmother to Nathan's children.

Nathan Staker died May 29, 1883 at 83 years of age. He was buried in Mt Pleasant, Utah June 2, 1883.

Eliza lived until 1914. She was visiting her daughter, Eliza Jane Day, in Fairview when she took very ill and died three weeks later, April 9, 1914. She was buried in Mt. Pleasant beside her husband. She was ninety years old and had been a widow for thirty-one years.

Eliza was a faithful Latter-day Saint. She always attended her meetings, paid her tithing, was a good Relief Society worker. She taught her children to be honest Latter-day Saints. Her living descendents at the time of her death numbered ninety-six: two sons, four daughters, forty-five grandchildren, and forty-five great grandchildren.