

## ELLEN "NELLIE" PUCELL

Born: 1856 England

Age: 9 or 10

Martin Handcart Company

Ellen's mother, Margaret Perren Pucell, rejoiced to hear the glad tidings of the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as preached by Apostles Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde. Ten days later, she was among those baptized at the River Ribble. She held the distinction of being the second woman baptized into the Church in England and she and Ellen's father, Samuel, gave the first sixpence to the Mormon Elders there.

Margaret kept her baptism a secret from Samuel for three months until he surprised her and confessed that he had also been baptized the previous month. For nineteen years the couple saved for their emigration to Utah. In the meantime, they entertained the missionaries in their small home and often had to put their children to bed hungry in order to provide food for the missionaries. Surely Ellen had been blessed with a foundation for faithfulness and courage from righteous parents.

On May 25, 1856, Ellen and her parents, Samuel and Margaret, and two sisters, Maggie (14) and Ann (25), joined the group of emigrants leaving Liverpool for America on the ship Horizon. Also traveling with them was her brother, William, his wife, Eliza, and their 3-month-old son, Robert. When the company landed in Boston, William found that he didn't have enough money to continue the journey west, so he decided that he should outfit his wife and son as best he could and send them on with his parents and sisters, while he remained behind to work for additional means so that he could join them in Utah.

When the group reached Iowa City, they found no way had been provided for them to journey to Utah, so they waited some time while handcarts were being built. It was a difficult trip for even the most sturdy. By the time they reached Fort Laramie, they had to sell clothing and even bedding to buy food.

Ellen's mother became ill, so she had to ride in the handcart part of the way. Her father grew so weary and weakened from the lack of food that this additional burden caused him to slip and fall one day as he crossed a river. Having to travel in the cold, wintry weather with wet clothing, he, too, became ill and died from hunger and exposure. His wife died five days later, leaving Ellen, Ann, and Maggie orphans.

Ellen's sister-in-law, Eliza, had a very difficult time. Eliza's son was still very young. She had to pull the handcart and carry her baby on her back. When the cold became unbearable, she put the baby inside her clothing that he might absorb some of her body heat. It did help, but his body was so frostbitten that his skin was cracked and chafed all his life. Ellen hiked on through the snow. Many died and many others suffered badly from frozen limbs, among them the Pucell girls, all having badly frozen feet and legs. Eventually, the rescue wagons came and took them to Salt Lake where they were cared for. Nothing could be done to save Ellen's feet.

Even though Ellen's legs were amputated at the knees, she still bore and raised six children. Ellen remained faithful throughout her life. In Cedar City, Utah, there is a beautiful bronze monument on the campus of Southern Utah University, dedicated to Ellen by Church President Gordon B. Hinckley. A member of British Parliament, Baroness Caroline Anne Cox, was the featured speaker at the dedication, along with then Governor Bangerter.

The following is taken from a biography written by William Palmer entitled "She Stood Tall on Her Knees" about Ellen "Nellie" Pucell (Unthank):

"Nellie's parents were among those who died and were laid to rest in snow banks. Poor little Nellie, nothing could be done to save her feet. When they took off her shoes and stockings the skin with pieces of flesh came off too. The doctor said her feet must be taken off to save her life. They strapped her to a board and without an anesthetic the surgery was performed. With a butcher knife and a carpenter's saw they cut the blackened limbs off. It was poor surgery, too, for the flesh was not brought over to cushion the ends. The bones stuck out through the ends of the stumps and in pain she waddled through the rest of her life on her knees.

In poverty and pain she reared a family of six children but never asked for favors of pity or charity because of her tragic handicap. William was a poor man and unable to provide fully for his family; so Nellie did all she could for herself. She took in washings. Kneeling by a tub on the floor she scrubbed the clothes to whiteness on the washboard. She knit stockings to sell, carded wool and crocheted table pieces. She seldom accepted gifts or charity from friends or neighbors unless she could do a bundle of darning or mending to repay the kindness.

"The bishop and the Relief Society sometimes gave a little assistance which Nellie gratefully accepted, but once a year, to even the score, she took her children and cleaned the meeting house. The boy carried water, the girls washed the windows and Nellie, on her knees, scrubbed the floor.

This heroic woman gave to William Unthank a posterity to perpetuate his name in the earth and he gave her a home and a family to give comfort and care in her old age.

In memory I recall her wrinkled forehead, her soft dark eyes that told of toil and pain and suffering, and the deep grooves that encircled the corners of her strong mouth. But in that face there was no trace of bitterness or railings at her fate. There was patience and serenity for in spite of her handicap she had earned her keep and justified her existence. She had given more to family, friends and to the world than she had received."

[NOTE: It should be mentioned that several of Nellie's descendants have visited Martin's Cove and they mentioned that it is still a family tradition to take the family once a year and clean one (or more?) of the chapels in Cedar City.]