

Ellen Sheffield

29 June 1826 – 15 May 1854



There was once a young dressmaker in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England by the name of Ellen Sheffield. Ellen was born in Wellingborough on June 26, 1826. She was the second of four children in the family of Peter and Charollett MUNDIN Sheffield of Wellingborough.

At the age of fifteen she joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, being baptized in September of 1841. Her older brother, John, had been baptized over a year earlier. In her association with other members of the Church she became acquainted with another young convert from Wellingborough, a shoemaker by the name of Samule Barson who was baptized in 1844. Samuel, the of Samuel Barson Sr. and Jane Rixon, was born in Wellingborough on July 15, 1825. In time, Ellen and Peter were married on December 26, 1846 and made their home in Wellingborough.

Their first child, Orson Pratt was born on October 15, 1847. Peter was born on February 12, 1849 in Wellingborough. Sadly, Orson died four months after Peter was born. John was born in 1850, Sarah Ellen on February 18, 1851, and Mary Ann on February 9, 1852. Sarah died on June 3, 1852.

Being a Mormon in England during those days was not a very popular thing to be. Persecution was very severe and Samuel and Ellen longed to immigrate to Utah and unite themselves with the main body of the Church. They worked and saved everything they could to prepare for the long journey.

With hearts full of faith, they embarked on what would prove to be a long and arduous journey. On Wednesday, February 22, 1854, the ship Windermere sailed from Liverpool with 460 passengers, all Latter-day Saints; including Samuel age 28; Ellen age 27, Peter age 5, John age four, and Mary Ann age 2. As the vessel started in motion, the songs of Zion,

blending in soul-inspiring harmony, thrilled the souls of the passengers and their many friends and families standing on the shore gazing at the departed vessel, shouting farewell, goodbye with eyes streaming with tears.

As England disappeared in the distance the sweet singing ceased and many began to feel seasick. All that night the wind howled fiercely; the sea was rough; the ship was driven from its course. The next morning the sea was still rough and the wind was blowing. During this day the Windermere sailed by the remains of a wrecked vessel. Masts, sails and other fragments were floating around. Likely, a few hours previous many despairing souls had tenaciously clung to these same objects for relief that never came. All had been consigned to a watery grave for no signs of life remained and the rolling waves swept over the bodies while the wind howled its tribute for the dead.



Life on the Windermere was growing monotonous for its accommodations were inadequate for so many passengers. Some began to recover from seasickness, but many were still ill and some were confined to their berths.

On the 12th day of March, at about seven or eight o'clock in the morning, an exceedingly fierce storm arose. The masts cracked and the sails were torn in pieces. The captain of the Windermere expressed fears that the ship could not stand so heavy a sea, and in speaking with Daniel Garn, the president of the Saints on board, said, "I am afraid the ship cannot stand this storm, Mr. Garn, if there be a God, as your people say there is, you had better talk to Him if He will hear you. I have done all that I can for the ship and I am afraid with all that can be done she will go down."

Elder Garn went to the Elders, who presided over the nine wards in the ship, and

requested them to get all the saints on board and to fast, and call a prayer meeting to be held in each ward at 10 a.m. and pray that they might be delivered from the danger. The waves were lashed with white foam, the storm continued in all its fury, but precisely at 10 a.m. the prayer meeting commenced and such a prayer meeting few have ever seen.

The ship rolled from side to side. The large boxes which were tied with ropes under the berths broke loose with pots, pans and kettles and rolled with terrible force on each side of the vessel. Although the prayers were fervent and earnest, as the pleadings of poor souls brought face to face with danger and death, they ceased their prayers to watch and dodge the untied boxes, and great confusion prevailed for some time.

The wind roared like a hurricane. Sail after sail was torn to shreds and lost. The waves were very large and as far as the eye could see, seemed to be one angry mass of rolling white foam. The hatches were fastened down. This awful storm lasted about eighteen hours, then abated a little, but it was stormy from the 8th of March until the 18th.

On the 14th of March, which was two days after this terrible storm, smallpox broke out. Forty in all, came down with it. Three days later the ship caught fire in the galley. At this time they had not seen land for three weeks; when the cry of "Fire! The ship is on fire," rang throughout the vessel, wild excitement and consternation prevailed everywhere. The sailors plied water freely, all the water buckets on board were brought into use and soon the fire was under control.

As the smallpox epidemic spread, ten people died from it. The funeral services were very impressive; a funeral at sea is the most melancholy and solemn scene perhaps ever witnessed, especially when the sea is calm. A stillness like that of death prevailed with us while an old sailor, at intervals, would imitate the doleful tolling of the bell of some old church, such as heard in some parts of England. Funerals were becoming frequent.

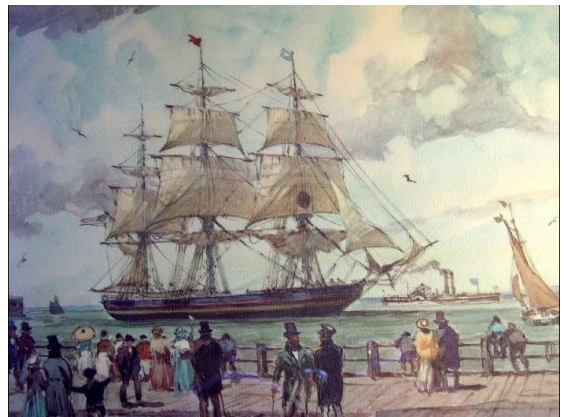
About the time the *Windermere* was six weeks out of Liverpool the passengers had not seen land from the time they had entered the Atlantic. The days were generally mild and the weather very pleasant. The sun set and the bright, pale moon seemed to be directly overhead. On the 8th day of April they came in sight of the Island of Cuba.

After facing a terrible storm, a smallpox epidemic, and a fire aboard the ship, another

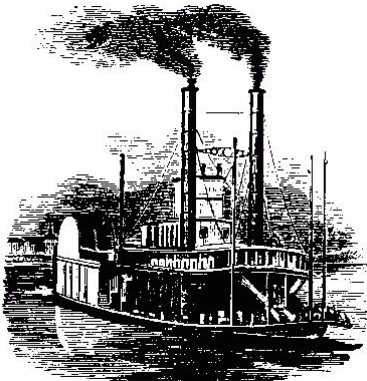
fearful calamity threatened them. The sea and wind became very still. Without wind, the ship had no means of propulsion, only to drift with the current. The fresh water supply was getting short, and the store of provisions was falling. The passengers were limited to one hard, small biscuit for a day's rations.

The Captain sent some sailors in a small boat to intercept a ship that was passing in the hopes of getting more provisions, but they failed. The Windermere now passed the western points of the Island of Cuba. The passengers had a good view of the lighthouse located on the most western point. The Gulf of Mexico was before them. But at the end of five weeks favorable winds set in and the ship made 1,000 miles in four days.

On the morning of the 20th of April the ship entered the mouth of the Mississippi River. The passengers were glad to look upon the plantations along the banks of the river than the great strong surging waves of the Atlantic which they had been through. The Windermere arrived at New Orleans 23 April, 1954. Samuel, Ellen, Peter, John, and Mary Ann had survived the perilous voyage, but there was still a long ways to go.



After a few days in New Orleans, the Barson family continued their journey and traveled up the Mississippi River by steamboat. While sailing up the river, cholera broke out. Ellen Sheffield Barson was stricken with the disease and died on May 15, 1854 at the age of 27. At the next stopping place, her body was taken ashore and she was buried on the banks of the Mississippi River. With saddened hearts, Samuel and his three little children journeyed on.



The main sources of this story are The Life Story of Peter Sheffield Barson by Ann Godfrey Hansen. The voyage of the Windermere is from the British Mission records of 1854 by Evelyn A. Sessions found on the Craner Family website, www.craner.org.