

# BIOGRAPHY OF ELIZABETH “BETSY” ROBERTS OWENS

Source: [http://welshmormon.byu.edu/Resource\\_Info.aspx?id=1160](http://welshmormon.byu.edu/Resource_Info.aspx?id=1160)

Elizabeth was the third child in a family of nine. She was of good parentage though they were not blessed with much of the goods of this world; consequently, while she was reared to lead an honorable God-fearing life, she was not given much training in school and was required to begin working early in her career. Circumstances necessitated her continuing in hard work throughout her life until old age prevented her. She was ambitious and was trained in taking the lead in affairs because she had been required through much of her life to rely wholly upon her own resources for the sustenance of herself and her family and for their well-being.

She was of medium size and well proportioned, and had blue eyes and medium light hair. She was of a strong and vigorous constitution. She had a good singing voice and liked to sing and manifested much talent. The same has been transmitted to many of her descendants. She was a good neighbor and learned to mind her own business. She was firm in her convictions and reared her family in the fear of the true and living God, whom she worshipped.

Elizabeth accepted the restored gospel message delivered by Robert Evans, a friend of the family and Able Evans. She was baptized into the Church July 14, 1849, by Elder Abel Evans. At Eglwysbach she bore her share of the contempt, derision and persecution of those who belonged to that unpopular faith, being willing to forsake all that was dear to her for it.

In her early years after attaining an age to be of aid in the family duties, she delivered shoes to the farmers and others who had the work done at her father's shop in Eglwysbach, as well as other errands. As she grew older she went to work for families who needed her help. Among other places where she was employed at this time was a tavern at a summer resort called Abergella, operated by Mr. Lloyd. She was a good singer and sang while Mr. Lloyd played the accordion to entertain the guests. She also served the guests and assisted in the work about the place. Mr. Lloyd was her “Godfather.” A Mr. Jones on one occasion visited the tavern and desiring her services took her to Liverpool to assist his wife and family where she remained three months. She later went to live with the Thomas Jones family. He was a butcher and a member of the Mormon Church. Then Mr. Jones secured a place for her with a Scotch family as a nurse, where she remained a year. She then went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Henson, assisting in the home. Mrs. Henson was Irish (Alice Dawdle before her marriage) and a very excellent woman who treated her very well. When she went to Liverpool she could not speak English. She met an Elder Peter Evans, also of her faith, who directed her to a branch of the Church. While here she learned the English language very rapidly and soon became able to understand and converse in the English language. She spent five years in Liverpool.

The time was at hand now for a great change in her life. She desired to go to America where the body of the Church was located. She obtained her parents consent and with the money paid by Robert, her brother, into the emigration fund for his fare, which could not be returned upon his refusal to go, she prepared for the journey to Zion in his stead. She bade adieu to home, family and friends, and alone joined a company of 431 Saints gathered in Liverpool. On April 17, 1855, they boarded the sailing ship “Chimborazo” at Liverpool docks and under the leadership of Thomas Jeremy and Edward Stephenson, set sail for America. The ship landed in Philadelphia, PA, on 21 May 1855, after an ordinary voyage.

At Philadelphia they took the railroad train to Pittsburgh, PA, and from there by boat down the Ohio River and up the Mississippi to St. Louis, Missouri. From there they went by boat to Hutchinson, Kansas. The Missouri River was shallow in places. The boat grounded and they had to walk at times. From Hutchinson to Mormon Grove the company went by ox teams, which journey she walked all the way. At Mormon Grove they met a large wagon train under the leadership of Col. Seth M. Blair. He had joined the Church and had migrated to the Valley some time before. He had gone back to Texas on a mission and was now returning with a company of Texas Saints whom he had been the means of converting.

At this juncture it was claimed by those in charge of Elizabeth's company that on account of the unusually heavy charges on the way all of her fare was used up and that she would have to pay more to continue her journey across the plains. Mormon Grove was the outfitting place of the great plains journey at this time. This was a serious predicament for a young woman who was without money and a long way from home and family, in a strange land among a strange people. But the Lord was with her and opened the way.

The Texas company had previously sold their Negro slaves according to council. The money was loaned to buy merchandise to supply the needs of the West. The opportunity now came for Elizabeth to enter the service of a Sister Johnson, a lady of some means who had sold her slaves and who had a carriage to ride in. Elizabeth engaged to help Sister Johnson on the journey for her fare across the plains and she therefore joined the Texas company.

The Seth M. Blair Ox Train started on its eventful journey and had gone about five or six days journey westward from Mormon Grove when one evening at the usual evening meeting after camping Col. Seth M. Blair, who was the leader, because of difficulties that had arisen charge that they had spoken "evil against the Lord's anointed" and said, "They should die like rotten sheep and their bones should bleach in the sun upon the plains." He said that he would take the stage next day and go on to the mountains, which he did, leaving Elder Richard Stevens, an Elder returning from Nova Scotia, in charge of the company. When the meeting was dismissed, there was a woman who screamed with cramps. She had the cholera. Next morning she was dead and her daughter was sick with the dreaded disease.

That day they were met by six Elders with pack horses on their way East on missions. She went to them and explained to them what had happened and pleaded with them to take her back to her former company at Mormon Grove. The Elder in charge of the missionaries heard her story, paused a moment, then looking at her he said, placing his hand on her head, "Sister, do not fear. Go on with the company and you will arrive safe and well." She was satisfied. All fear left her and she went on. Cholera was spreading throughout the company and several were dying. Sister Sandel was in the grip of the disease crying with agony when Elizabeth returned from her conference with the missionaries. Sister Sandel, her husband and the oldest daughter of the family of eight children died. The five smallest children were left helpless orphans and were taken by kind friends to the valleys and cared for.

A Sister Jones lost her husband and five children, leaving her alone with a babe in her arms. Over thirty persons died of the scourge and were buried in shallow graves as the train went on its westward journey from day to day. Elizabeth attended the sick and prepared for burial every woman who died of the disease and never had an hour of illness but was "well through the journey."

The graves of the dead were made shallow because the men were tired from walking all day and standing guard half of the night and there was not time to linger on the way. Later companies coming on told them that the graves were opened by the wolves and the bones of the dead were scattered over the ground. Thus was the curse of Col. Seth M. Blair fulfilled to the letter. One day as they came to a good camping place, Captain Richard Stevens ordered a stay of two days. The first day was for the sisters to clean up and for a wash day of the clothing that was needed. The second day was to be a day of fasting and prayer and all were rebaptized to rid themselves of the plague. This was done and not one of the company died afterwards.

Sister Johnson, whom Elizabeth rode with, was a widow. She had three sons and three daughters. The youngest son, Alf, had been sick several days with the mountain fever and was getting well. They always cooked their bread at night and in the morning so that they did not have to cook it at dinner time. All they had to do at noon was to take their baskets out and place their food on a cloth on the grass. One day the captain told them not to unyoke their oxen because there was neither grass nor water for the cattle. So they just stood and ate their lunch. Alfred Johnson was in the wagon lying in bed that day, and Sister Johnson put his lunch on a plate just as quickly as she could after stopping and sent Elizabeth with it to the wagon. Alfred was hungry and said, "You'd let a fellow starve to death. You have been three hours getting this lunch." Elizabeth said, "What a lie." "Well," he said, "Do you call me a liar?" and he pulled his pistol from under his pillow and shot at her. Elizabeth relates, "It surprised me so that I stood and I felt something taking hold of my head and moving it back as quick as thought and the bullet went by my head. I felt the air move as the bullet passed my face. He aimed at me alright but I felt gentle hands as real as my own move my head. I didn't think he would shoot but just trying to scare me. I looked around to see who had moved my head and there was nobody near. Of course the camp was excited and Alfred's uncle promised if he ever said or did anything to me again he (the uncle) would 'fix him'." Thus was she saved and made a "safe" journey notwithstanding her peril and she was very grateful.

She saw only two or three Indian braves during the journey. They came on ponies when the company was camped, dismounted, laid on the ground on their stomachs with their hands under their chins and watched the "Whites" curiously. Soon they mounted their ponies and rode away without molestation. She saw a herd of buffalo at one time on the plains a little distance away.

While on the plains word came to them to be very careful with their food and flour as the crops in the valleys were failing on account of the drought and the crickets. On Tuesday, September 11, 1855, Elizabeth landed with the Texas Company in Salt Lake City. The eventual journey was ended and she was "Safe and well". She had no home, no place to go. No friends, no family, all were strangers and she went with strangers wherever she could, working here and there for her board. Food was very scarce.

She was working for her board at the house of Richard Morris whose wife was confined. At that time she was courted by William J. Owens to whom she was married on January 2, 1856, by Ezra T. Benson, at his home. After the marriage in company with Richard Morris and his wife, they went to the home of Daniel Daniels, where William J. Owens had been living and had a wedding supper consisting of bread, butter and cold bacon which was rather sumptuous, considering the conditions of those days. They rented a room of a Grandma David and went to housekeeping.

In the spring of 1856 they moved to Willard, Box Elder County, because William Owens had some wheat due him there for working on a threshing machine and as foodstuff was very scarce, they had to go there to take care of it. They obtained the use of a cow from a friend for the loan of wheat for the summer because many people were without flour or wheat. Everyone was on rations. Food conditions were serious. Bishop Hubbard of Willard gave his team twice a week for the women who had no teams to go to dig Segos by the Hot Springs because bread was so scarce. Emigrants and the poor were offering all they had: jewelry, watches, everything, even to their articles of personal clothing, to get bread. President Brigham Young condemned those who were taking advantage of the poor.

Elizabeth and her husband went to the Endowment House, Salt Lake City, with ox teams arriving in June and on June 3, 1856, they received their endowments and were sealed together for eternity. They made their stay while there with Brother Joseph Evans of the 19<sup>th</sup> Ward. Sister Evans said to Sister Elizabeth, "Now you can get your supper, the table is empty." Elizabeth placed her bread on the table. There was a strange lady there and as Elizabeth placed her food on the table this lady ran out of the house. Sister Evans went after her and asked what was the matter with her. The lady said she had not had white bread for two months and when she saw it on the table she either had to run out or take a loaf. William Owens said, "Can't we spare her some?" and Elizabeth said, "We will whether we can or not." They returned to Willard and remained there until the move south. During the interval they had all of their wheat ground into flour expecting to go to the White Mountains and Wm. Owens worked for a yoke of steers and a wagon to move them to Salt Lake City. When they left, there was some bran in one corner of the house, some potatoes in the cellar and a stack of hay, also some papers and books. They had no shoes and no money to buy any while living in Willard so they traded some butter to a Danish man living in Brigham City for two pair of wooden clogs. Wm. Owens was employed building a dry rock well near the settlement and dropped a rock on one of his wooden clogs and split it and Elizabeth gave him hers to wear. There was a shoemaker living there and he gave Elizabeth a change to bind shoes (the kind of work she had in her father's shop in Wales) for him, and in this way she got shoes for herself, but upon her husband being called to go to Echo Canyon to stand guard there, the shoes were ordered made for him.

Wm. Owens was called with others to guard in Echo Canyon on account of the coming of Johnson's Army during all of the winter of 1856 and 57, which was a severe ordeal for them all as supplies were meager and the winter was severe. While he was in Echo Canyon their only cow was lost so Elizabeth took Jeanette, her babe, in her arms and went out for two days to hunt the cow. On the second day she found the cow in a slough where she had been killed by wolves and partly eaten. Some neighbors went out and saved the hide and what meat they could that was clean. Later Wm. Owens skinned the head and made mocassins for her, turning the hairy side of the hide inward. They were quite comfortable.

During the spring and summer of 1858, William Owens was appointed to watch the fields, to irrigate and to stand guard. But not being assigned any work he returned to Salt Lake City. There was a complaint made to President Brigham Young because of his leaving his post, but he was exonerated by Pres. Young and released because he said "A poor man could not be expected to be idle." Wm. Owens then hired a team and they moved on southward, being instructed not to stop north of the north Utah County line or the point of the mountain. They went to Lehi, then to American Fork and, not finding a suitable place to stay, continued on southward to Provo. Finding no place to live in Provo and having no wagon nor tent, they camped on the banks of the Provo River in the willows. They made a tent of brush and wove willows into mats to keep themselves and their flour off the ground. This was all well enough except when it rained, and then they got it all. Here they remained during the summer and until cold autumn weather came.

The soldiers came through and moved to Camp Floyd. Wm. Owens and another neighbor man went to that camp to work for the soldiers, helping to build barracks for them. In this way he earned some money. The weather, now getting cold, he was sent for by Elizabeth to move them and to find shelter for them. He came and moved back to Salt Lake City being among the last to go. He returned to Willard and everything they had left was destroyed and gone, including Welsh magazines, Millennial stars, and some records of the dead.

The soldiers came when the people were destitute for clothing and other necessities and they (the soldiers) brought these necessities in abundance including money to buy bread, bacon and clothing, wagons, mules, blankets, arms and ammunition. So what appeared to be destruction in the coming of Johnson's Army proved to be a blessing.

Finally Elizabeth and husband moved from Salt Lake City over on the Weber River in the Weber Canyon on a ranch at Henefer. It was a little valley or opening in the canyon. They were, after being there some time, milking as many as forty cows.

Elizabeth now became very desirous of having her father's family come to Zion and began saving what she could to assist them. About this time she dreamed that there was a ship on the ocean with her father and his family on board and that someone told her to come and pull them to America. There was a rope attached to the boat reaching to the shore, and she could walk on the shore. She did so and took hold of the rope and pulled and tugged until the sweat poured off her but could not "budge it." Her brother, Robert, laid on the sand laughing and making fun of her saying, "How foolish it is of you to try to pull them to America. You

can never do it.” She said, “I’ve got to do it. I must do it.” She turned and saw her sister, Margaret, coming to help her. Margaret said, “Wait a minute and I’ll help you.” So they pulled together and accomplished it.

The year 1861 came around and Margaret came to Zion. Shortly after her arrival she married Evan S. Morgan and moved to Rush Valley, Tooele County, to live. In a few months Evan S. Morgan wrote a letter to William Owens reminding him that he had promised to help the old folks out to America and that he (Morgan) was ready to do his part. Wm. Owens replied that he would not help as he had something else to do with his money. About this time he went away and left Elizabeth to milk the cows, which she did, and saved the butter. Soon she had a solid forty gallon barrel of butter salted down. This she turned over to the Perpetual Emigration Fund to assist her folks to migrate. Wm. Owens rather reluctantly hauled the butter to Salt Lake City and delivered it to the proper authorities. This, with what Margaret did and what the folks could do, created a fund sufficient to bring them to the frontiers of Wyoming on the banks of the Missouri River in 1864. From there the Church brought them through by a missionary train of ox teams that was sent from the valleys for them and others.

Elizabeth went about six miles up Echo Canyon and met her father and family who were behind their company on account of the breaking of their wagon after leaving Bridger and their having to wait over and repair it. What a happy meeting after having been separated over nine years and after passing through such vicissitudes and experiences. God had, after all, been good to them. All of the family who could come were now here in the land of their choice, where the “House of the Lord” was being reared in the tops of the mountains. She took them to her home in Henefer and made them welcome and as comfortable as she could where they, expecting Mary, remained a short time. Finally the newcomers moved to Salt Lake City in November 1864, where they remained during the winter of 1864 and 1865 and in the spring of 1865 they moved to Smithfield, Cache Valley and secured a home for themselves.

Wm. Owens spent most of his time in Salt Lake City until he almost deserted Elizabeth and her children, leaving them to provide for themselves as best they could. Finally tiring of the conditions, and upon the invitation of her father and mother, Elizabeth left Henefer and took her family to Smithfield, where she secured a home of her own within one block of her parents. There she reared her family of two boys and five girls. She had a hard struggle always and learned of necessity to be self-reliant and industrious. Two of her daughters, Charlotte and Hannah, died in their youth through diphtheria. The others, living to man and womanhood, except for her son, John, married and raised large and splendid families.

John, a splendid man loved by all, died at Liberty, Idaho, of blood poison on the eve of his marriage and was mourned by all. Through all, Elizabeth has been faithful and true to her family, her God and His work in the earth, and now at the age of 92 is living with her daughter Mary Owens Thompson Pratt at Preston, Idaho, with a full assurance of a glorious reward.

During her life at Preston, she had a dream that made a firm impression upon her and which in some features, was very comforting to her. She related, “I dreamed that my guide came to me. He was a great friend and I felt perfectly safe with him. I had never seen his face. He told me to follow him, and without hesitation or question I did so feeling it was my duty. He took me over the earth, just above it—just over the tree tops—and I could look below and see everything as we went along. We went to a forsaken country where there was only sporting and wickedness and I said, ‘What, only sporting? Let us not stay here—let’s go farther.’ I did not want to stay there so we went on and came to a gap in the sea. A horrible, dark, forbidding pass of the ocean was made. It was very dangerous but we passed over it safely, then over a great ledge of rocks or cliffs that were very rough and rocks, into a beautiful canyon where all was so pretty and such peace as was there. I said to my guide, ‘O, let me lie down here and sleep and die.’ He said that I would not be permitted to do that. He said that the eyes of the wicked had never been permitted to see that place and that the Lord would provide a way to reach it when it was needed, as it was a place of safety and that the time would come when the great wealth and rare products of that land would be used to build the New Jerusalem. It was a most beautiful land of great wealth and rare trees and plants. I noticed four different kinds of evergreens and they were so different from anything I had ever seen before. One was a very light green, another a very dark green, another was peculiarly striped and the other had something on it that sparkled like pearls. The guide said that when the time came to take people there, they will be much surprised to see it and to think that there was such a place. They will have to cross a big body of water to enable them to get into it. I awoke with a feeling of peace and joy.”

After Charlotte and Hannah had died and all the rest were married but her son, Will, she went to Fairview, Idaho, with her daughter Mary, who had recently lost her husband, Thomas W. Thompson. Here she helped make a home for them all, her daughter having at this time a baby, Mildred. It was not long, however, until Mary remarried, this time to Bishop Moroni W. Pratt, of Fairview. Elizabeth was then left on the farm to keep house for her son Will. However, Will found a wife. He married Etta Nelson so Elizabeth gave up her home to Will and went to live with Mary. She has been with Mary ever since in Preston, Idaho.

About the year 1901 or 1902 she was strongly impressed to keep the “Word of Wisdom”. She had been a habitual user of tea, having been brought up on it in the old country. She had never felt strongly enough to quit it before, and felt the Word of Wisdom was for children brought up in Zion rather than for those who had used tea since childhood in foreign lands. But at this

time she was so strongly impressed that she made up her mind to quit, with the help of the Lord, and has never touched it since. She had 39 grandchildren. She died at the age of 94 years in Preston, Idaho, and was buried in Smithfield Cemetery, Smithfield, Utah.

### **William J. Owens**

The following is a short biography of Elizabeth's husband dictated by her. William J. Owens was the son of John Owens and Charlotte Lewis Owens. He was born 1 May 1827 at Glanmorganshire, South Wales (but it may have been Swansea). Sometime before 1854 he married Jennette Lewis. She had two stillborn children. In the spring of 1854 they had joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They started on their journey to Utah from Swansea, South Wales.

When in St. Louis his wife Jennette was taken ill with cholera and after giving birth to a child, both she and the babe died. They were buried in an unmarked grave at St. Louis, MO. William continued on to Salt Lake City, arriving there sometime in the fall of 1854. In his native land of South Wales, his occupation was a collier, in the coal mines at Swansea. When he arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, he worked at whatever he could find to do and in 1855, he worked on the thresher at Willard, Utah, where he was paid in grain.

He stored this grain with a Brother David, and on January 27, 1856, he married Elizabeth Roberts. His grain being in Willard (all he possessed), they went there to make their home. He helped build the stone walls around that city, some of which are still standing. They lived in Willard until the "move south" in 1857. He was one of the guards in Echo Canyon. In the late fall of 1857 they moved to Salt Lake City. In the fall of 1861 or 1862 his wife, Elizabeth, went to the Public Square where the emigrants camped when they arrived in Salt Lake City. There had been a hand-cart company just arrived, and she with others went to see what they could do for them. There she found two women, a Mrs. Robert Dawson and daughter Elizabeth (Betsy) Dawson. She took them home with her and William Owens married the daughter, Betsy. She was very interested in the children (she never had any of her own) as she could have been if they were hers. She was a good woman and did everything she could to help the children as long as they lived together. Some time afterward William married Ann Harris, who had two sons Micah and Daniel.

William died March 17, 1874 at the boarding house he was then running in Salt Lake City and was buried there.