

History of the life of James Davis
Written by himself

Given by his daughter
For the Cedar City Camp Oct. 21, 1936.

At the request of my family I here write a history of the principal events of my life so when I pass away it may, I hope, strengthen their faith in the Gospel of Christ.

I was born in the city of London England, on the 9th. of Aug. 1840. My parents, George and Mary Timson Davis did not join any sect, but would read the bible to us children on Sunday evenings, and would always go to church. I remember Uncle David calling and told father about mormonism and bore testimony of its truth. Father was soon converted, and sometime in 1851, he with my brother Edward and I was baptised into the Church of Latter Day Saints. Boy as I was I was very sincere and had a great desire to go to Zion.

At the age of twelve years I made the acquaintance of a mormon boy by the name of John Middleton and we became very dear friends.

In 1856, the Middleton family were going to America, and John and I felt that we could not part, so my parents partly consented for me to go with them. But when the time came found they could not part with me., and the disappointment nearly broke my heart. Soon after another of my companions left for Zion. I thot why does the Lord favor them and not me. I think some of the zeal went from me, but in later years, when I came to America and met my friends and was told of the suffering of the Martins Hand Cart Company (and that was the company I would have crossed the Plains with), and of the sad death of one of my friends, how he grew weak from the want of food then frose to death, I was thankful I had not been permitted to come at that time. How often I have thought of the hymn --

Judge not the Lord by feble sense
But trust Him for His Grace
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

I had a position as coachman. I would fast and pray and would have left all for the goapel, but it seemed that I could not save money for my emigration. One Sunday evening I went to hear Apostle F. M. Lyman preach. At the close of the meeting the Branch President told the people that Brother Lyman was very much in need of help, and wished that all that could help him would do so. There were only a few to meeting and they were financially unable. I only had the money for my expences next day, but I was prompted to give it to him which I did. Brother Lyman blessed me and said I would soon have the greatest desire of my heart., which was to gather to Zion. I will never forget the joyous feeling I had. After money seemed to come my way and I was blessed with the spirit of saving. so much so that I sailed on the next ship, called the John J. Boyd. I bade a sad fairwell to my dear mother, who was then a widow., My father being killed the year before. I gave her what money I had left, and left England without a penny.

I got a job as teamster and cook while crossing the plains, so had some money when I arrived in Salt Lake City. I felt truly grateful to the Lord for I could see how He had blessed me. I thot the least I could do was to write

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I could do was to show my gratitude by turning what money I had to the Bishop as a thank offering. I made my intentions known to my friend and was ridiculed, so did not do so, but I never felt good about it. Things did not seem to go my way. I did not have any more promptings. I seemed to be left to myself on arriving in Salt Lake.

I had met my friend in John Middleton who was located in Cedar City and at once decided to go with him to make a home. On April the 23rd. 1864, I was married in the Endowment House to Mary Elizabeth Fretwell, who was born in the city of London April 16th. 1843. She was the daughter of William Killingley Fretwell and Mary Ann Raby. She was the oldest of a family of five, and her parents were what were called well-to-do people. Her first recollections was of a beautiful home and the luxuries of life. While still a very small girl reverses came which she was too small to understand. She only remembers her mother crying and her father trying to comfort her. Then she remembers moving to a less comfortable home.

At the age of ten years she was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Her childhood days were very happy until she was fifteen years old, at that time the Angel of death entered their home and she was deprived of a mother. Her father grieved very much and refused to be comforted. For years she struggled to help provide and care for the family. She first learned to make the cloth tops for shoes, then mens suits. She worked as a tailoress all day, and would do her home work in the evenings, and no matter how tired or at what hour her work was finished she always read one hour before retiring. Each week she saved a small amount toward her emigration. On the 4th. of June 1863 she bade old England farewell. How her heart ached at leaving her father, brothers and sisters and the dear old grandmother that had meant so much to her.

She sailed on the ship "Amazon", Before sailing as the ship lay in the London docks, Charles Dickens came on board the ship his eyes seemed to be on every one, and as he walked about the ship he was writing. The material he gathered he put in the book called the Uncommercial Traveler.

Many of her friends were on board the ship. They had some perilous times on account of the very bad storms at sea. But they also had some happy times.

On the 4th. of July the captain raised the stars and stripes and they celebrated their first American holiday. They arrived in New York harbor on the 18th. of July. From there they rode three days in a cattle car with no place to lie down and very little to eat. They then rode on a flat bottom boat down the Missouri river for three days and nights. It was at the time of the civil war and the boat was often showered with bullets.

When they landed they were met by men from Utah with teams and taken to Florence. On the 6th. of Aug. they started their long journey across the plains. For five hundred miles they traveled by the Platt river crossing it many times. On foot at times the water was to their waists. They would stop and build fires and dry their clothing. The journey was not all trials however they had many happy evenings singing and dancing. At last the mountains came in view and how beautiful they looked. It was when they came down into the Salt Lake Valley that she felt her loneliness most keenly and shed bitter tears for her loved ones at home. As she was wondering what to do or where to go a lady she had known in London came to her and offered her a home, which she gladly accepted.

After our marriage we went by ox team to Cedar City to make our home. We first lived in a dug out in William Shirts lot, the first street west of the main road. Two children were born to us

Mary and Edward. We then bought the lot where aunt Sarah Ann Fretwell home stands, and built a log house on it, in which we lived for a number of years. About this time Bro. Dan Jones stoped in Cedar City on his way to preach to the Navajos Indians. Being called on to preach to the people in Cedar City, he told them that he could go no farther unless he could get a pack animal. The spirit told me to get the animal for Bro. Jones. I was overcome with joy and could scarcely stay until the meeting was over. Next day I brought a nice young mule and gave it to Bro. Jones. He turned to Bishop C. J. Arthur and said, Those are the kind of men the Lord will not part with. I had a feeling within me that the Lord had forgiven me for not paying due attention years before when the spirit prompted me to pay my surplus money to the Bishop as a thank offering.

From this time we were blessed financially. We built a very fine brick house for those days. I was very proud of my home surroundings, and we were very happy, except for the poor health of my wife. She was seldom ever well. So it came as a great surprise, when on Dec. 29, 1878 we were called on a mission to Arizona to help build a settlement there. Erastus Snow Pres. of the Pioneering committee ask that all who was called be ready by the first part of April. I told him I would be ready by the first part of April.

My wife and I felt very bad at leaving a comfortable home and our friends. Never the less we had been called by the servants of the Lord and we were determined to magnify the call. We disposed of our store, land and a good deal of other property at a great sacrifice. On the 13th. day of April 1879, we left Cedar City in company with several young men. Brother H. H. Herriman and family joined us at Parowan. The company consisted of 26 men two women and eight children, the rest not being ready until fall.

Bishop C. J. Arthur Blessed my wife and told her if she would go and do her part her health would be restored, and that she would never be called on to part with another child., for out of our eight children we had buried four. He also told her that the Lord would protect us and our lives would be spared. We traveled many long dreary weeks we crossed over the same region the Spanish had crossed in 1540. The Indians said we were the first whites to pass that way since that time. Every morning my wife would arrange the children in the bottom of the wagon, then climb to a high spring seat, and drive a team all day. There were only Indian trails to mark the way. so driving was a difficult task. We crossed the Colorado at Lees Ferry, and stoped at a small village called Moencopi settled by some Moquech Oriba. Hopi and Navajos Indians, and a few white people. Among them was Pres. Willford Woodruff and John W. Young son of Pres. Brigham Young, who was building a woolen Mill to take care of the vast amount of wool the Indians produced.

They advised us with families to stay there on account of the dangers ahead of us. And let the young men go and find a suitable country to locate. We did so and in two months five of the boys returned and reported finding a place. We started again on our journey. We traveled peacefully until we nooned the third day, then we were in some very bad Indian country. One by the name of Peascon, came to our camp and caused a great deal of trouble. (He was the one that caused the killing of Apostle George A. Smith Sr., the first L. D. S. to be killed by the Indians, and we were close to the place he was killed. This Indian would kick the dirt on our food, and stuck our knife blades in the rocks. He would draw his knife across his throat to show my wife and children what he would do to them when he got help. Our boys acted like the time had come for them to kill or be

killed .I begged of them not to fire the first shot. The Indians left for help and did not return by night-fall. We expected them to return before sunrise as those Indians were sun worshipers and believed that the sun can see and tell the great spirit all they do ,but but if the sun fidn't see the spirit doesn't know. So when daylight came and the sun came up and they had not returned we felt very much relieved, and had decided to cook our breakfast. I saw at a distance an old Indian coming towards us . He came and told us to hitch up our horses as quickly as possible and travel fast. We did so but was a little doubtful as to the Indians plans. We feared he might be leading us into a trap. The roades were thru deep sand so the horses had to stop often. This seemed to anoy the Indian . He would stand upon the spring seat and look far and wide , then he would erge us to hurry faster. After a time he told us we could stop as long as we liked then travel as slow as we wished. He asked me if I did not know him . He told me my name and where I had come from ,and said he had been to my place many times, and we had always given him something to eat, and was good to him.He knew I was there with my family he had watched us on our journey and we did not know it.

He said the Indians were planing to kill and rob us soon as they could find enough volunteers and he had come to save us by hurrying us out of their territory. In two weeks time we arrived at the San Jaun river at a point called Montizuma Ford.I very much liked the look of the country, but my wife felt that we were isolated from all civilization and was very down hearted.

The boys helped us build two small log rooms, one for Bro Harri-man and family and one for us, they then left us. An old man by the name of Harvey Danton was with us, so our companyconsisted of three men ,two women and eight children.We were nearly a hundred miles t thru almost impassable country to the nearest settlement , which consisted of eight familys On the 2nd. of August two weeks after we arrived my wife gave birth to a baby girl. The first white child

to be born on the San Jaun . One beautiful afternoon just as I was trying to build a fire place which would complete the walls of our room , a friendly Navajo came to tell us that the White River Utes were on the war path and had killed one family up the river.and would be there to kill us about nightfall He wanted us to go with him and we would be safe. But we remember ed that we had been promised that if we did our part no harm would come to us , we fortified the best we could in one room. We made holes in the wall to shoot thru. About midnight the dogs barked and run up the river bank , but after a while they came back. ,but was very restless for some time. When daylight came we found they had crossed the river a short distance up and were making for the strongholds of the renegade Indians. We felt once more that the Lord was mindful of us.

My wifes health steadily improved. We passed the winter in peace but was very lonesome. In the Spring we had the pleasure of seeing our old friend Bro. Thales Haskell, he being an Indian Missionary and interperter. Pres. Snow hearing that we had been killed by the Indians had sent Bro. Haskell to see if it was true and if it was to give our bones as deasent a burialas possible., and if not to stay until the next company came. When he saw at a distance the smoke coming from our chimney he offered up a prayer of thanksgiving.

We were living on wheat ground in a coffee mill. We had looked all winter for the company that left Cedar City in the Fall to bring us food, but they had never arrived . We were very anxious for their safety. They were our old friends and neighbors. Our wheat gave out and Bro. Harvey Dunton said he would leave and on cleaning out his wagon found a little wheat in a sack which he gave to us saying ,

he had a good gun and would live on wild game. Just after he had left another Indian missionary by the name of Lewellyn Harris called and told us that the company would be there in about ten days. My wife told him we did not have bread to last two days. He was hungry and ragged and said he wanted to stay ~~three~~ days. My wife told him he was welcome but that she was at a loss to know what to give him to eat. He told her to be of good cheer she had seen her worst time. He stayed his time and after he had gone I asked my wife where she was getting the wheat to make the bread, she said from the sack Bro. Dunton had left. I hefted the sack and there seemed to be as much as when he had left it. And again we knew there was an unseen hand controlling our wellfare. It was not until April the 6th. 1880, that the second company arrived. Six months after they had left Cedar City.

They had spent most of their time in a hole-in-the-rock. No lives were lost, but they had suffered many hardships., and were without food. They settled twenty miles down the river at a place they called Bluff. A few came to live by us. A ward was organized with Bro. John Allen as Bishop. I was superintendent of the Sunday School. We had many very enjoyable times. Sister Haskell made an American flag and on the 4th. of July we celebrated our first national holiday. I took up a quarter section of land and built a house on it., wasnt long before we could see the treacherous condition of the river, and was compelled to build on higher ground.

I built a water wheel and was the first to get water on the land. By this time we were granted a Post Office. I acted as Postmaster. I always had a great symphy for the Indians., and treated them as I would a white person. One day when I had asked an Indian in to dinner, Brother Haskell said, Brother Davis you will never be harmed by an Indian.

I built a store and bought their wool and buckskins. One cold night three young Indians came to our place, they told us they had a long way to go, and being afoot we told them they could stay all night. Our guns, which were heavily loaded were in the only room we could give them to sleep in. We slept but very little that night, but all went well. Next morning they seemed very grateful and told us we were very good friends to them. The San Jaun is a very interesting country, some call it the Egypt of Utah.

On the tops of the high cliffs is the ruins of the cliff dwellers. and on the Masa, were evidence of another long lost people. The Indians told us there were Indians living there many many thousands of months ago, but had fought until the cliff dwellers were all killed.

One day an Indian came to tell us that one of their tribe had been killed by the whites, and they were going to kill a white man for revenge. He said they were then six miles up the river. He had slipped away to warn us and was afraid of being discovered. I closed up my store, but strange to say was prompted to unload and hide my gun. When the Indians came and found the store closed it made them more angry. One raised his gun to shoot my boy, I jumped before his gun, and my boy went for my gun, then I knew why I had been prompted to unload it. I talked to them and asked them to come into the house and we would give them something to eat. They did so and left good friends.

The U. S. Soldiers were sent down to protect the settlers, but they were more afraid of the Indians than the settlers were. The Indians had not as yetⁿ had their revenge so were still on the war path.

One evening after dark my wife hearing the Indians outside walked quietly out and thru a long dark bowery and welcomed fifteen or twenty of them in. They were heavily armed, and wanted to know why we were not afraid of them. I told them we had always treated them well, and believed they would treat us good in return. This seemed to please them. They shook hands and told us to stay within our own fence, and we would be safe. The soldiers decided to go and try to make peace with them. The Indians seeing them coming made fresh tracks that led into box canyon. The Indian ponies can climb like goats, so they went on top of the mountain, and could look down on the soldiers. They told them to come up and they would talk peace. But when two started to climb the mountain afoot they were shot down, one killed and the other badly wounded. This frightened the soldiers and they made ready to go. The wounded man begged them to kill him before they left, and not leave him to the mercy of the Indians. They were too excited to pay heed to him, so the Indians let their dogs finish killing him. They had had their revenge and we were safe for a time at least.

In the Spring of 1884, the river overflowed its banks. Higher and higher it came until all but Brother Haskell and our home had gone with the rushing water. In the midst of the flood could be seen houses, furniture and every thing that goes to make a home, both inside and out even dogs and cats trying to cling to their old home.

All we had gained in our five years of hard labor and suffering was swept away in one weeks time. Our beautiful crops were reduced to sand bars. We never set foot on our land again, and after receiving our release we were compelled to leave our home and store just as it stood.

Again we traveled thru some very rough country. When we came up the blue mountains we had to lower our wagons with ropes down into the little town of Moab. We then camped on the banks of the Grand river for one week. There being only a small row boat to take eight wagons across. The wagons were taken apart and a wheel at a time was taken. It was not only tedious but very dangerous.

As we came up Logan canyon and looked down on beautiful Bear Lake my wife was filled with fear. Experience had taught her to have a great dread of water. However on coming down into the valley we found it to be perfectly calm and safe. Very much unlike the water we had left.

Our first home was north of Paris on a farm. We afterwards moved in town. My wife took an active part in the Relief Society and was counselor in the Primary I was called as assistant superintendent of the Sunday School.

James Davis died at Paris, Bear Lake, Idaho, Feb. 17, 1920