

# History of Mary Elizabeth Fretwell Davis



Mary Elizabeth Fretwell Davis  
Born April 14, 1843

**The following Poem was written on the occasion of her birth  
by her parents**

*Sweet babe we cannot hope that thou be freed,  
From woes to all, since earliest time decreed,  
But mayest thou be, with resignation blessed.  
To bear each evil, howsoever distressed.*

*Nay hope her anchor land amid the storm,  
And ere the tempest rear her angel form,  
May sweet benevolence, whose words are peace,  
To the rude whirlwind, softly whisper cease.*

*And may religion, Heavens own darling child,  
Teach thee at human care and grief's to smile,  
Teach thee to look beyond this world of woe,  
To heavens high fount where mercies ever flow.*

*And when this vale of fear is safely passed,  
When deaths dark curtain shut the scene at last,  
May thy freed spirit, leave this earthly sod,  
And fly to seek the bosom of thy God.*

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Mary Elizabeth Fretwell was born in the city of London, England, the oldest child of a family of five children. Her parents were what were called, well-to-do people.

Her earliest recollections were of a beautiful home and the luxuries of life. But while still a very small girl reverses came, which she was too young to understand. She only remembered her mother crying and her father trying to comfort her. Then she remembered 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 ones, until she was fifteen years old. At that time the Angel of Death entered their home and she was deprived of her mother. Her father grieved very much and refused to be comforted.

For years Mary struggled to help provide and care for the family.

She learned to make baby shoes, then men's clothing. She would work as a tailoress all day, then do her homework in the evening. 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 sum toward her emigration. On June 4th 1863 she bade old England farewell. Oh! Her sisters, and brother. And the dear old grandparents that had meant so much to her.

She sailed on the ship "Amazon." How sad and lonely she felt when she saw her beloved country fade from sight.

Before starting, as the ship lay in the London docks, Charles Dickens came on board. His eyes seemed to be on every one, and as he walked about the ship he was writing. The material he gathered went into his book "Uncommercial Traveler".

Many of her best friends were on board the ship. Among them were Brother

James Athays family. They had some perilous times on account of very bad storms at sea but also had some happy ones.

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 for three days shut in a cattle car, with no place to lie down and very little to eat. They then rode on a flat boat down the Missouri river, for three days and nights, it was very uncomfortable and crowded. It was at the time of the Civil War and the boat was often showered with bullets.

When they landed, the men from Utah with teams met them. They were then taken to Florence. On August 6th they started their long Journey across the plains. For five hundred miles they traveled by the Platt River, crossing it on foot many times. At times the water was to their waists. Then they must build fires and dry their clothing, the journey was not all trials however, for they had many happy evenings singing and dancing.

At last the mountains came in sight, and how, beautiful they looked. It was as they came down into Salt Lake Valley that she felt her loneliness most and shed bitter tears for her loved ones at home and wondered if she would ever see them again.

As she was wondering where to go and what to do, a lady she had known in London came to her and offered her a home until she could obtain work. This she gladly accepted.

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*James Davis*

On the 23rd of April 186h she was married to James Davis in the "Endowment House" and went by ox team to Cedar City, Utah to make her home. They prospered financially and soon had a comfortable home and some luxuries.

About this time she received word of the death of her father and shortly afterward of her two sisters. This left only her two brothers and they came to live with her. But it wasn't for long because on the 28th of December 1878 Brother James Davis and Mary his wife, who by now had become the mother of a number of children, among whom was the writer of this article, were called by Brother Erastus Snow, on a mission to help settle the Arizona Country. It was thought at first that that there was some misunderstanding as Mary's health was very poor and out of her eight children, four had died. Bishop Arthur blessed her and told her that if she would be faithful and go with her husband and to fulfill this mission her health would be restored and she would never be called upon to part with another child. He also promised that they would be protected in all their undertakings.

They sold all their earthly possessions at a great sacrifice. Then loaded a few necessities into their two wagons and on April 13th bade goodbye to their many friends in Cedar City. The party consisted of twenty-six men, two women and eight children.

They traveled for many long dreary weeks. They crossed over the same region that the Spanish did in 1540, (The first whites to visit Utah). The Indians said this little colony of missionaries were the first whites to pass over since that time.

The Spanish like the Indians carried water containers, but the missionaries were unprepared for this emergency. Numerous wells were dug with great effort under the rocks and in the sinks. Some of these yielded water and some did not. They suffered a great deal and one third of their cattle died.

Every morning Mary would arrange the children safely in the bottom of the wagon, then climb to her high spring seat and drive a team all day. There were only Indian trails to mark the way; so driving was a hard task. At night they would fortify with their wagons as a protection against the Indians.

In crossing the Buckskin Mountains they cut notches in the sandstone for a footing for their horses, then they would take all the teams off, tie a rope to the rear axel of the wagon and with all, men holding the rope they would let it down the mountain in safety.

About the middle of May they crossed the Colorado River at Lee's Ferry and stopped at Meoncopy a small village settled by some Moquech, Tribe, and Navaho Indians, and a few white people.

John W. Young, (son of Pres. Brigham Young) was there building a woolen mill to take care of the great amount of wool the Indians produced. Brother Wilford Woodruff was also there, on a

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vacation. They thought it best that Mary on account of her health, remain there with her family, while the rest go and find a home. This they did, and notwithstanding the wind blew the sand continually, they enjoyed their stay in Moencopy very much.

On the first day of July the scouts returned and on the second day they started again on their Journey. They traveled peacefully until they camped the third day. Then they were in the territory of some very hostile Indians. The Indians came in camp and caused a great deal of trouble, They drew their knives across their throats, to show Mary how they would do with her and her children when they returned with more help. These Indians were sun worshipers and believed that the sun could see and tell the great Spirit, all they do. But if the sun doesn't see the Great Spirit doesn't know. So when daylight came, the sun came up and the Indians had not returned the little company began to feel much better.

They had about decided to cook breakfast when an old Indian came and told them to hitch their horses up quickly as possible and travel. They did so but were a little doubtful as to the Indian's plans; they feared he might be leading them into a trap. The roads were bad and the sand deep, and the horses had to stop often. When they stopped the Indian would stand on the spring seat and look far and near. Then he would ask them to hurry. This continued for a number of miles. Then he told them they could stop and rest as long as they wished and afterward could travel as slowly as they wished. He then asked them if they did not know him, and when they told him they didn't he seemed very hurt. He knew their names and where they had come from. He told them he had been to their place many times and they had treated him kindly and always gave him food to eat. He had watched them ever since they had left home. He said the Indians were planning to kill them and rob them as soon as they could get enough volunteers and that is why he wanted them to hurry into another tribes territory.

In two more weeks travel they arrived at the San Juan River. They were Just over the Utah line in the extreme southeast corner of the state. It was a very beautiful place but Mary felt very lonesome and downhearted.

The scouts built houses for them and then returned to their homes. Only two small families remained. In two weeks after their arrival Mary gave birth to a baby girl. The first white child to be born on the San Juan. Through all these hardships Mary's health was steadily regaining.

Some weeks after they had been left alone a friendly Navaho came to Tell them that the White River Ute's were on the warpath, had just killed the Weeks family Just off the Arizona line and would be there to kill them about nightfall. The Navaho want them to go with him to his tribe where they would be safe, but they had been promised that no harm would come to them if they would fulfill their mission faithfully. They fortified themselves as best they could in one room. The children were put to bed with many a tear and kiss. The two mothers took their watch by the beds of their children. The two men and one small boy stood with their guns loaded, They first made holes in the walls through which to shoot,.

About midnight the dogs began to bark and run up the river. Who knows the suffering of these mothers as they tried to quiet the fears and cries of their little ones. After some time the dogs came back, but were very restless for a long time. Their keen ears could still hear the Indians.

Next morning it was found that they had crossed the river a mile above and were making for the strong holds of the Renegade Indians. Once more the promises made to this little colony of missionaries through the servants of God were fulfilled.

A short time afterward word was received in Salt Lake City that the Indians had killed them. Bro. Erastus Snow sent Thales Haskell s missionary-interpreter and also a great friend of Mary to see if it was true and if it was to bury them and if it was not to stay with them until another

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company, which had been sent to join them, arrived.

When Bro. Haskell came in sight of the two small cabins, and saw smoke coming from the chimneys he felt very thankful.

He found them alive and well, but they had very little food. They ground wheat in a coffee mill to make their bread and when it became necessary they would kill a milk cow and because they became so tired of meat they roasted it over an open fire until it had lost the flavor of meat.

Months passed Out the company did not come. Their wheat was gone and they were living on bran cakes. At this time Lewellyn Harris another missionary-interpreter came and asked if he might stay a few days. He was very tired and hungry. Mary told him he was welcome but she was at a loss to know what to give him to eat. He told her to be of good cheer for her worst days were over. They suffered a great deal of anxiety over the company of old friends that had been to join them months before. Where were they and what had been their fate?

It was not until April 6th 1880 that the company arrived. They had spent six months on the road, and four months of it were spent in a hole in the rocks. No lives were lost but they had suffered many hardships and were without food.

Most of the company settled twenty miles down the river at a place they called Bluff, because of the high bluffs of rocks near their little city. A few people came to make their homes at Montezuma. Mary was overjoyed at this as they were mostly old friends of hers. They organized a ward and at times enjoyed themselves very much.

Mary would put her small children on a donkey and walk miles to visit a neighbor.

Mrs. Thales Haskell made an American flag and they celebrated the National holidays and had many enjoyable times.

About this time Mary and her husband built a small home about a quarter of a mile from the river in a perfect "Garden of eden" so to speak. The trees were beautiful and the flowers grew in abundance.

On August 15th 1881 another baby girl came to bless their home. When it was only a few days old the river overflowed its banks and the water crept almost to their doors. The men watched night and day thinking they may have to carry Mary to safety, but the water gradually went down and no harm came to them at this time. However, they could see the need of building on higher ground.

The following year they built a home close to the Mesa, so they felt the danger of high water was passed. But always day and night their lives were in danger of hostile Indians. One morning they got up to find that their milk cows had been taken. Their fourteen-year-old boy begged permission to go after them. Mary tried to dissuade him telling him of the danger but he had no fear and still begged to go. Finally he was allowed to go. Night came but not her boy. Night passed and another day and still he had not come. All these dreary hours Mary had walked the floor in agony. At ten o'clock of the second night he came. He did not have the cows, but imagine their Joy at having their boy again.

On the second day of July 1883 they were blessed once more with a baby girl and one day at dinnertime before the baby was a month old it was noticed that the little two-year-old child was missing. There was always that terrible fear of the Indians. She was not found until sundown that night. She was unharmed, but words fail to express a mothers suffering under these conditions.

The U. S. soldiers were sent down to protect the settlers, but were more afraid of the Indians than were the settlers.

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One evening an Indian came to say that one of their number had been killed by some whites and his tribe was on the warpath. He said they would kill some whites to make up for it. He also told them that the Indians were then six miles up the river and would be there that night.

That night the family sat around the open fireplace. About nine o'clock Mary heard the approach of the Indians. No one else heard so Mother quietly opened the door and walked through a long dark bowery and welcomed them in. Although the family was expecting them, they were surprised when Mary reentered the room with fifteen or twenty Indian warriors. The Indians asked them why they were not afraid of them. They were told that as yet the Indians had not harmed them and they didn't think they would be.

This remark pleased the Indians very much and they told the family to keep inside of their own fence and they would not be hurt. Mary fed them well and they left good friends, to seek revenge elsewhere.

In June 1884 the river began to rise, creeping surely and deadly toward their homes. Soon the banks gave way and the homes of this colony of missionaries went too, all but two homes, Mary's, and the Haskell's, who had built on high ground. In the midst of the flood could be seen, small houses, furniture, and almost anything that goes to make a home. Even dogs and cats were trying to cling to their homes.

In one week's time all their beautiful crops and gardens were reduced to sand bars. In the distance, almost covered with sand was their faithful old waterwheel, which had done so much toward feeding them and beautifying their homes and farms.

They never set foot on their land again and after receiving an honorable release in August 1884 they with a few neighbors turned their backs on the heart sickening sight.

The Davis family owned a store and this along with their homes must be abandoned for whoever might come and take possession.

They were able to dispose of most of their store goods, but they could only take from their homes what they could load in a wagon and a buggy.

Again they took their journey over some very rough country notwithstanding they had lost their all, Mary was happier than she had been for some time. She had regained her health and strength through faithfulness and was now leaving all the horrors of the past five or six years.

They left through Recapture wash up over the present site of Blanding and Monticello. They traveled upon the Blue Mountains, and then were compelled to lower their wagons down with ropes to the little settlement of Moab. They next came to the Grand River. There was only a rowboat to take six or eight wagons over. The river was wide and swift, so the task, as not only tedious but very dangerous. It required one week crossing, as the wagons had to be taken apart and taken across a few pieces at a time.

They then crossed a fifty-mile desert and came onto Emery Co. where the company left them. They continued their Journey alone. They came up Salt Lake and Cache Valley up through Logan Canyon. When they reached the summit they found themselves looking down on the beautiful Bear Lake. But Mary was filled with fear. She had learned to have a great dread of water, however on coming down into the valley she felt better for she could see that the water was perfectly calm and safe.

It was sometime in October 1884 that they reached Paris. Their first home was a hundred and sixty acre farm two and one half miles north of Paris. After the required time of the law to

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prove up on the land they left the farm and bought a three acre Lot on the hill in Paris. After several years of hard work they established a comfortable home.

Mary took an active part in the Relief Society and was called to act as councilor to Sister James Athay in the Primary. Sister Athay was the same dear friend she had come from England with.

The remainder of her life was very happy and peaceful. She had the satisfaction of knowing that she had answered the calls made upon her. She had been promised by Patriarch Levi W. Hancock that if she would do these things she would live until she was satisfied with life.

She lived to see the fulfilling of all the promises that had been made unto her. She was loved and respected by her family.

On November 20, 1928 She spent a very pleasant afternoon with Sister Chrisie Price talking of the many happy times they had had together and on November 21, 1928 she passed gracefully on her way to still more beautiful home and the glory that awaits the faithful.

## Mary Elizabeth Fretwell Davis

*Mother of Stella Davis Hays*

*Mother of Edward Davis Hays*

*Father of Jean Hays Cornwall*

*Mother of Tori, Chauntelle, Amorette, Ben, Brandi and Joseph (JD)*



Mary Elizabeth Fretwell Davis with Husband James Davis and children 1889 or 1900  
Grandmother Stella Davis Hays is on the front row next to her father.