

Alice Walsh Strong was born as England's Industrial Revolution was in full swing, spending the early years of her life as a hard-working mill girl in the cotton mills in a small town in the county of Lancashire. As a teenager, she converted to the LDS church, being the only member of her family who joined. She married William Walsh and had three children, Robert, John and Sarah. When the call came from the Prophet Brigham Young for the Saints to gather to Zion, the young family saved what they could, sold most everything they owned, and crossed the stormy Atlantic to join the Martin Handcart Company of 1856. The suffering of that "frozen company" is well-chronicled in Mormon history. Alice suffered the devastating loss of her husband and oldest child, leaving both buried in shallow graves on the Great American Plains. Her story is not one of suffering, but one of faith, obedience, hard work, and endurance.

She was an eyewitness to many of the events of early Utah. Shortly after she arrived in Utah territory with frozen feet, her children weak and ill, and with no belongings at all, she moved south when Johnston's army threatened residents of the territory. She became a plural wife to Jacob Strong and bore him three children, Lucinda, William Jacob and Alma Ether. She lived through lean years when there were no crops and Utah was plunged into famine. Her son went to work on the Transcontinental Railroad and the family celebrated the joining of west and east coasts. She watched firsthand the struggle for statehood, seeing her marriage end when polygamy was outlawed by Wilford Woodruff's *Manifesto*. She taught all her children skills of gardening, gathering wild berries, and foraging to find food wherever they could. They learned to raise sheep, produce wool and yarn to make their own clothes. She made a good life for her family and her faith in the Lord and obedience to Him never wavered. She spent many hours in service of neighbors and friends in her work in the Relief Society organization.

Her children grew up self-sufficient, thrifty, and faithful. Her testimony was strong all her life. She was comforted by the knowledge she had of the truth of the gospel and she was willing to bear anything to be true to the principles she had so willingly embraced. Nothing seemed too difficult for her. Her testimony was that she believed the Refiner's fire she had gone through had given her courage and strength beyond what she naturally possessed. She did everything for her love of the Lord. Her most ardent wish was that her children, grandchildren and generations to come would recognize her sacrifices, be strong in their faith, and work for the gospel's sake.

Alice Walsh Strong

Huddled together on a snow-covered Wyoming prairie were a young mother and her two children; John, age three and Sarah, almost a year. Out of food, too tired and weak to put up their tent, they drew close together under the handcart, using it as shelter for the night. The mother, Alice, knew how dire their situation was. Her husband, William, was standing guard that night, protecting the company from Indians and wolves. Temperatures were freezing¹. As the children began to fall asleep, Alice thought back to easier times—the warmer times when their stomachs were almost full—and tried to remember how they had come to this place.

Perhaps she had been born for hard work and sacrifice. As a young girl in Over Darwen, England during the Industrial Revolution, Alice worked from the age of nine till she was twenty in the local cotton factory as a mill girl, rising to the position of overseer of four of the steam looms². When she was sixteen, one of her girlfriends mentioned that she had been listening to several young men, missionaries from America, talking about a new religion. Alice decided she wanted to hear what they had to say, so she joined her friend for a few evenings. She was interested. They talked about a god of love rather than one who retaliated when you did something bad, and about a prophet living on the earth in the 19th century in America! She learned she could receive answers to her prayers. She had never heard these things before. Alice felt the Spirit of the Lord and one evening told the Mormon missionaries she wanted to be baptized³.

It was the beginning of a new life for her. She had a new group of friends, the members of her congregation. Life suddenly seemed more than waking up before dawn six days a week,

¹ Alice Strong, (Dictated to her daughter), interview by Lucinda Strong, North Ogden, Utah, "My Life Story," Handwritten notes.

² Aurelia Rogers, "Alice Walsh Strong," *History in Possession of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Museum*, p. 1.

³ Ibid.

walking to the factory, toiling all day at back-breaking work, waiting for the end of her shift so she could head home in the darkness and drop into bed only to get up and start all over again. Her new religion gave her hope and she experienced faith for the first time in her life. She met a young man, William Walsh, and they married in a local parish church, and soon had three children, Robert, John and Sarah⁴.

When the Mormon prophet sent out the call for all Saints to gather to Zion, Alice and William knew they must go and started saving a small amount of money each month. When they heard of a new and less expensive way the Saints were emigrating to Zion using handcarts to cross the Great American Plains, they decided it was their time; they could now afford to go. William gave up his job, they sold what they owned, and they purchased passage on the packet ship “Horizon”, sailing from Liverpool along with 800 other English converts.⁵ Alice was only twenty-seven when they began their journey. The six-week trip across the Atlantic was stormy and uncomfortable and she spent most of her time aboard ship in her berth due to terrible sea sickness. An epidemic of measles broke out on board ship and the three small children were all stricken. Robert, age 5, was hit particularly hard and never regained his strength fully. John and baby Sarah both were ill, but fully recovered⁶.

The ship landed in Boston and the little family traveled to Iowa City and then on to Winter Quarters by train in flat boxcars so crowded they couldn’t lie down. When they arrived in Winter Quarters where they were to acquire handcarts, there were so many immigrants preparing for the journey and not enough materials that some families had to use green wood and materials of inferior quality. Because materials were so scarce, their handcart had no cover. It was August and

⁴Arlie Campbell. *The Descendants of Jacob Strong*. Salt Lake City: The Jacob Strong Family Organization, 1980, p. 301.

⁵ Andrew D. Olsen, “Gather to Zion: This I Have Done for Him,” *LDS Church News*, 30 December 2006.

⁶ Arlie Campbell, “The Life of Alice Fish Walsh,” p. 302.

considered too late in the season to start for the Salt Lake Valley. But their quandary was they couldn't change their minds and stay because they had spent their money on the ship's passage, train fare, and the handcart, and had none to carry them through the winter if they stayed in Winter Quarters. They joined the handcart company led by Captain Edward Martin and started west⁷.

Alice and William were city dwellers, and like much of the company, unprepared for life on the prairie. It was a difficult trek, both pushing and pulling their handcart with the children and their possessions inside. They didn't have much to begin with, but they were limited to 10 pounds of supplies per person. This necessitated throwing away blankets, food, and clothing that were really needed for their comfort. Winter set in early that year. Heavy snow came in mid-October. Eventually their shoes gave out and they were forced to walk in the snow barefooted. But they were headed to Zion to meet the prophet and live where they would be surrounded by the Saints who believed and lived as they did, so the difficulty of the journey was taken in stride. Conditions in the handcart company grew colder and more strenuous. Their food was rationed. Men in their company broke down and wept like children⁸.

Alice's oldest son, 5 year-old Robert, still weak from his bout with the measles and unable to eat the rations they were given, died and was buried along the trail. Alice was so distraught she couldn't remember where he died or was buried. In her words, "[Robert] died somewhere between Winter Quarters and Devil's Gate, my suffering being so great I can't remember just where."⁹ With heavy hearts, Alice and William left Robert in a shallow grave on the plains and continued west to Zion.¹⁰

⁷Arlie Campbell, "The Life of Alice Fish Walsh," p. 302.

⁸Aurelia Rogers, "Alice Walsh Strong", p. 2.

⁹Alice Strong, "My Life Story", p. 3.

¹⁰Arlie Campbell, "Alice Fish Walsh," p. 302.

At Devil's Gate in Wyoming where the Sweetwater River cuts through the mountains and leaves a gateway there, they were snowed in and eventually found protection a short ways away in what today is known as Martin's Cove. One morning, looking for William to return from guard duty, she received the news that he and several other men had frozen during the night. The ground was so hard and frozen that they were laid to rest in a shallow common grave, covered with snow.

"My husband died at Devil's Gate. The ground was frozen so hard the morning he died that they could not dig a grave. I think they must have put him under the snow. Nine others died the same night. This left me alone to care for my two children. The boy [John, age 3] became so weak that he could not stand alone. I had to sit and hold both of the children nearly all the time. When we came to a place where we could go no further and I had no exercise, my shoes froze to my feet. Later when I was able to remove them, the skin and flesh came off too, leaving only the bones. My hands were severely frozen. I can remember seeing some of the people eat singed rawhide but I could not do so. There were three couples to one tent, and nine children under eight years of age. The weather was getting very cold, and the men had to stand guard every other night, but not having had much to eat they could not endure it. I have seen them come into camp looking wild for the want of food and clothing. When we arrived at Devil's Gate, we were all widows, with no protector or anyone to pitch our tent. Many nights we shoveled away the snow to make our beds on the ground; getting up in the morning wet through with the warmth of our bodies coming in contact with the cold earth. This we did day after day as long as we had strength. One night as I came into camp, I dropped to the ground in a dead faint, with my baby in my arms. I had some pepper-corns with me, and as soon as I came to my senses, I took some of them to warm me. I had only a little thin gruel all day, this being our ration. It was very hard to keep one's strength, especially with a nursing baby."¹¹

And so here she was, huddled with her children under the handcart, snow still falling on the handcart company. She finally fell asleep from sheer weariness. In the morning she arose to ice crystals on her hair and eyelashes and her feet had no feeling. Still she went on.

"At last help came from the [Salt Lake] Valley. Brother Joseph A. Young rode into camp on a white mule. When those brethren came, with a report that there would be someone to come and rescue us, I was sitting on the ground. The brethren had fixed a kind of a tent and I was sitting under it. It was snowing. I had a child on each knee and when they were ready to start, there seemed no place for me, but just before they left, it was decided that I should ride in the commissary wagon. This I did and remained in it until we reached Salt Lake. Joseph B. Alvord,

¹¹Alice Strong, "My Life Story", p. 3-5

the young man with whom I rode, understood frontier life and helped me with my children the best he could. We arrived in Salt Lake City, Nov. 30, 1856. Here I found myself in a strange land, not knowing anyone and possessing nothing but the clothes I stood in, my spare clothes being cached at Devil's Gate. I have not seen them since. A number of emigrants being allotted to each Ward, I was taken to the [old school house where we stayed until someone came to get us. We then lived in the] Tenth Ward in Salt Lake City diagonally across from the Tenth Ward chapel".¹²

Alice was treated kindly and when doctors saw the condition of her feet, they did what they could so that she would be able to walk. Alice wanted to let her mother know she had arrived in Salt Lake City, so she went out washing to earn the money to buy a stamp (25 cents) to write home. Her mother could not believe the letter was from Alice, thinking she had perished during the journey on the plains.¹³ Alice's family was taken in by a good family in the Tenth Ward, Jacob and Sarah Strong. Alice and Sarah got along well even though Sarah was quite a bit older and Alice became Jacob's second wife in March of 1857 under the system of plural marriage. He was an honorable man who cared for her and her children all his life and their family was a happy and close one.¹⁴

Life in the Salt Lake Valley was hard, but Alice knew that everything she had sacrificed for was worth it. She was living amidst the Saints of God, with a prophet, Brigham Young, who guided them. She went to church each Sunday and was active in the organizations of the Church, especially the Relief Society.

She began to put down roots and enjoyed the blessings of living in Zion. Shortly after her arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, word came by messenger that President James Buchanan was

¹² Alice Strong, "My Life Story", p. 5-7. The Strong Family lived at 837 E. 400 S., Salt Lake City which was in the Old Tenth Ward. (Note: The Tenth Ward was organized in 1849 with a bishopric consisting of three Mormon Battalion members. At the time of Alice's arrival, Bishop Pettigrew asked honorable members of the community, which the Strong's were, to take a family in. Many of the families at that time did. The Ward and Bishop served economic, cultural and education needs as well as spiritual needs. The Old Tenth Ward building was located approximately at 420 S. 800 E., SLC.

¹³ Aurelia S. Rogers, "Alice Walsh Strong," p. 4.

¹⁴ Arlie Campbell, "Alice Fish Walsh," p. 302.

sending an army to Utah for the purpose of destroying the Mormon Saints and their city. The Strong family, along with many in the community, was celebrating the tenth anniversary of the arrival of the Pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley with a feast near the head of Big Cottonwood Canyon when the news arrived. They thought that settling in Utah territory would put them out of danger from governments and mobs but now an army had come to wage war on them. Brigham Young called all able-bodied men to service preventing the army from entering and protecting the Saints and recommended strongly that all families vacate their homes and move south. In April, 1858 Alice and her family left all they had, packing what they could carry and moved south to Springville, Utah. Times were hard there and it was very difficult to find enough to eat.¹⁵ The army passed through Salt Lake City without disturbing the city and Alice and her family gratefully returned home in July.

Alice had 3 children by Jacob Strong--Lucinda, William Jacob, and Alma Ether. When one of the boys was born she was living in a log cabin with a dirt roof. One day it started to rain and it rained for seven days. Even when the rain stopped outside, it still rained and dripped on the inside. The women assisting the birth used cups, pans, and an umbrella to keep the water off the bed, but Alice caught cold and was ill for a long time.¹⁶ Her early days in the Valley were spent carrying water over 8 rods to use in cooking. She cooked over the hearth with a pot, a kettle and a fry pan and a bake kettle.¹⁷ For fuel they would use the butts of sage brush or "Mormon hickory", oak, maple, quaking aspen, pine and balsam logs from the mountains and canyons. Most of the time, life was just working hard to have enough for her family to eat and keep them clothed. All her

¹⁵ Aurelia Rogers, *Alice Walsh Strong*, p. 4

¹⁶ *Ibid.*.

¹⁷ John Walsh, (Written to his mother, Alice Strong), *While serving an LDS mission in Blackburn, England, Letter, 1924.*

children learned at an early age how to help with the cooking, in the garden and gathering wild fruits and berries, with the family animals, and to find odd jobs to bring in a little money for the family.¹⁸ After she had been living in Utah for some time, her sister who was living in England wrote Alice a letter and tried to persuade her to return to England and an easier life, where she belonged. She wouldn't go and replied, "No. I have no regrets that I have come to Zion."¹⁹

Alice was part of Utah's early history and viewed the events both she and the state passed through as interesting. A few years after arriving in Utah, in the summer of 1867, much of the Salt Lake Valley suffered another plague of swarms of grasshoppers again. Farmers in their fields described the sight as "great swarms of grasshoppers, obscuring the light of the sun, settled down upon the fields. Many of the Strong family lost their crops, famine set in. Prices went up again. Flour cost \$25.00 to \$50.00 a hundred [pounds] and was very hard to get at all."²⁰ This was a very difficult time for the family. When the damage by the grasshoppers had been done, Alice's oldest son, John, went to work on the Transcontinental Railroad, working in Echo and Weber Canyons and was very grateful for the work and the salary.²¹ Alice's family celebrated with the rest of the community when the Golden Spike was driven at Promontory; the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads connecting West Coast to East and Salt Lake City literally became the crossroads of the West. No longer was the small Mormon community isolated from the rest of the world. Utah began to change. Outsiders began to come in on the railroad, miners and the military were familiar sights in many of the towns and cities.

Jacob Strong died in 1872 leaving her once again a widow and now with five small children to care for. It was difficult for Alice to provide for her family. During these hard times she never

¹⁸ "Autobiography of Alice Fish Walsh Strong", The Jacob Strong Family Organization, website, accessed Feb. 11, 2011, www.jacobstrongfamily.org/histories/feature1.php

¹⁹ Arlie Campbell, *Descendants of Jacob Strong*, p. 303

²⁰ Aurelia Rogers, *Alice Walsh Strong*, p. 5

²¹ James T. Strong, <http://jacobstrongfamily.org/histories/Jacob%20Strong%20&%20Family.php>

complained. They spent some of their summers in Emigration Canyon. It was like living out on the frontier since it was a long distance from the city limits of Salt Lake City.²² Alice acquired some sheep and learned to spin and weave cloth, becoming very skilled. During shearing season, the wool would be sheared, scoured, picked clean of burrs, seeds, and trash, carded into rolls, spun into yarn, colored by dipping into a liquid made by boiling barks and roots, woven into cloth, cut and sewn into clothes. All of the work was done by hand.²³ She taught her older daughter, Sarah, how to spin wool and knit stockings. Sarah describes those days:

“We all had to work hard to earn a living in those early days; my mother often worked all day to earn a yard of factory, as it was then called, costing one dollar per yard. We went to live on a farm in Emigration canyon for a short time. There we kept some sheep and as they ran through the oak brush they often left pieces of their wool which I as a little girl, gathered up with great care to make bats for quilts for which my mother did the carding. We used to strip sugar cane and glean wheat, which my step-father would thresh out with a flail. We also gathered the milk weed pods to make pillows. When I was twelve years old I learned to spin yarn and soon became so much of an expert at that that I would spin my three skeins of yarn a day.”²⁴

As Brigham Young had told the Saints earlier “the desert was beginning to blossom as a rose.” Fruit trees, bushes and seeds so carefully brought across the plains were beginning to bear fruit. There were wild plum and currant bushes along the streams, blackberry and raspberry bushes in the mountains, and strawberry plants in damp meadows; also choke-cherries, service berries and thimbleberries to be picked. The Strong children spent a good part of their days gathering all of these, sometimes eating more than they gathered. Everything possible was utilized in one way or another: the bushes transplanted in their garden, the berries gathered and dried. Potatoes, beets, turnips and carrots were dug and pitted. Squash, pumpkin and melon were peeled, cut in rings and hung on willows or threads spun and dried. Apples, peaches, and cherries were welcomed to the

²² *The Descendants of Jacob Strong*, (Salt Lake City, UT: The Jacob Strong Family Organization, 1980), chap. XI.

²³ John Walsh letter.

²⁴ Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia, Volume 3*, (Salt Lake City, UT: Andrew Jenson History Company and Arrow Press, 1920), 256.

Strong table.²⁵ Alice and her children spent a good part of the summers and autumns gathering, drying, bottling and storing their bounty for the harsh Utah winters. This practice was carried on to her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

When the Prophet Wilford Woodruff issued The Manifesto in 1890, the institution of plural marriage was taken away. In the eyes of the world, she and Jacob Strong had not been married.

That year,²⁶ due to age related illness, she was no longer able to keep her household going and moved in with her daughter Lucinda's family in North Ogden where she lived for about 34 years²⁷. She insisted on always helping with the dishes, mending socks, patching clothing, and was always ambitious to do what she could.

January 4, 1896 was a red letter day for all of the citizens of Utah. Statehood had finally been won at a high cost. Alice knew that statehood would bring changes—both good and bad to Utah--but her family life went on much the same as before, with family members working together and helping each other. Her life continued to be centered around family, church and community.

After the work of each day was completed, the family found time to play. They enjoyed going to town dances. They all looked forward to seeing the friends they would not see all week since the community all came out for dances.²⁸

The town of North Ogden had many young men who loved to play ball. Using a ball made of soft yarn, the men enjoyed playing the games while the women watched, catching up on news and sharing recipes. Alice's family also enjoyed watching the horse, foot and relay racing, and wrestling matches. Living in North Ogden surrounded by so many friends and neighbors was unlike anything she had ever known. Being able to purchase necessities from the town store was

²⁵ Harold Campbell, (Bishop of North Ogden First Ward), "Records held as bishop".

²⁶ Aurelia Rogers, Alice Walsh Strong. p. 5.

²⁷ Email from Gaylen Campbell, great-grandson, Farr West, Utah, from personal knowledge, July 7, 2011.

²⁸ Harold Campbell records.

also new to her. She enjoyed visiting with friends and neighbors and gave advice and help to those who needed her.²⁹

Alice enjoyed the yearly celebrations held in the small town. May Day and the beginning of spring was a favorite of the family as was the Fourth of July. Winter activities included celebrations for Christmas and New Years and were celebrated by horse-drawn bob-sleds driving through the streets singing and shouting good tidings. Parties were held when one might be expected to recite, tell a story or poem, dance a jig or sing. But the 24th of July was especially important to Alice and her family. Cannons announced the day. A parade was held to honor the pioneers that had settled the Salt Lake Valley. Usually, the parade would highlight new products Utah could produce and new tools and machinery. Alice was always reminded how far the state of Utah had come since its early beginning. Her thoughts would return to the husband and child she had left buried on the plains and how different her life was now. This date, more than any other, was a day of reflection and prayers of gratefulness for the Strong family.³⁰

In her later years, she enjoyed many close friendships and life for her was pleasant. Although she had severe rheumatism, she worked with her hands to help her family. She had difficulty climbing the stairs, so her son-in-law fixed her a room on the main floor of the home with a coal stove that she could stoke up as hot as she wanted. She had a little rocking chair in the kitchen that squeaked back and forth as she rocked. She visited with all her children from time to time and enjoyed being with the different families and giving advice to all her grandchildren.³¹

Known as Grandma Strong by the North Ogden community, she was revered and respected and her faith never wavered. She never grew old, she just gradually wore out.³²

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Arlie Campbell.

³² Aurelia Rogers, p. 6.

Alice took comfort in the patriarchal blessing given her by Patriarch John Smith in 1894.

“ . . . From early youth thou hast suffered privations for the gospl sake & without murmuring the Lord is pleased with thine integraty he has witnessed thine trials & thine affliction he has excepted (accepted) thine offerings and thine sacrifice & thou shalt verily receive thy reward & be crowned here after among those who have fought the fight kept the faith & won the prize. . . .)³³

At age 96, she passed away in the home of her daughter. All she had endured in her life was done for the glory of God. It was important to her that her children and grandchildren live the gospel and appreciate and understand her sacrifice. She never regretted that winter of 1856 or the lean times that came after that or the choices she had made. She knew that her sacrifice was acceptable to the Lord. “Her children knew that her greatest comfort she had was the knowledge she had of the gospel—its divinity and saving principles of the true doctrines that were brought to earth by the Prophet Joseph Smith and this knowledge of these truths were sufficient to repay her losses and suffering she was called to bear.”³⁴

Looking back over her life, certainly the handcart experience had been a testing ground of faith for her. But as with so many of the early pioneers who suffered for the gospel’s sake, the Refiner’s fire gave them courage and strength beyond what they ever thought they could endure. For Alice, the remaining sixty-eight years of her life were just as important as the winter of 1856. She remained faithful to her family and the church, enduring all to the end.³⁵

Before her passing, Alice bore testimony to the sacrifices she had made and of her willingness to always do the Lord’s will. She wanted to make sure her children, grandchildren and coming generations would remember her story and stay true to the faith. If they did, her trials would have been worth it:

³³ Patriarchal Blessing given to Alice Strong by Patriarch John Smith, March 15, 1894 in North Ogden, Weber, Utah, handwritten copy, p. 1.

³⁴ John Walsh letter.

³⁵ Robert L. Egbert, *Women of Faith and Fortitude*, Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum.

“I have always been proud to think I had the courage to join [the LDS Church] and although the suffering, which I passed through was terrible, I am still thankful that the Lord preserved my life and made it possible for me to gather to Zion. Jesus said, ‘Unless we forsake father and mother, houses and lands, for His sake, we are not worthy of Him.’ This I have done for Him because I am the only one of my father’s or mother’s family to join the church, and I left my loved ones and all those dear to me in England. I have passed through many trials, but have never regretted coming to Zion.”³⁶

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³⁶ Autobiography Alice Walsh Strong.

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