

## **Collection of letters written by Elizabeth Wilkins to her mother during her journey to America with her father Charles Wilkins**

Letters of Elizabeth Wilkins Steadman

In the town of Bucklebury Berks, England, near Newport, lived Charles and Jane Rixon Wilkins and their three girls and six boys. The youngest, Elizabeth, was born February 18, 1835. Her father was a blacksmith and one of her brother's letters reads: "Father should have left for America sooner, but he couldn't leave that old blacksmith shop where he hammered and blowed himself almost to death, and was so cornered up that it was about the only thing he could do without going into that disunion called 'Union'."

The Mormon missionaries visited Bucklebury Berks, and Elizabeth, with most of her family, was converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Many of their dear friends and neighbors were also converted. Elizabeth's two brothers, Charles and Christopher, left for America first. When she arrived in Utah, Charles had a family of five children. He wrote his mother often and told her of their struggles to secure a little farm in South Cottonwood. Christopher was not heard from for three years, when his mother received a letter telling her that he had been a soldier in the army of the United States of America. "I have been on the battlefield," he said, "and it is terrible to behold. However, my duties were light for I was a musician in a band and did not have to fire a shot, neither did I receive a scratch."

Even though their desire to come to America was great, it was not an easy thing to do. Few could afford for all of the family to come at one time. Elizabeth's father was not a young man, neither did he have good health, but it was finally decided that he and his youngest daughter, Elizabeth, should come first and later he would send for his wife. They set sail for America on the ship John J. Boyd April 23, 1862. The next day she wrote a few lines to her mother telling her about the first day and night on the ocean:

Dear Mother: It is now Sunday morning and I take this opportunity of writing to you. We are in a fine muddle. You have no idea how it is till you get here. But if we do right and look out for ourselves, we shall be all right. We have not been to bed tonight for it was very dark when I got my tinware. They don't have lights in the rocks. Father advised that old man to wait for me to make their beds and I could not see. We had a pleasant ride down here. There are some sharpers here, no mistake, I have not lost anything, nor but one of the rest of us. That old man that left his parcel behind, he has lost his sheets. He had his parcel all right at Reading. I covered mine with my bonnet and all on and laid my head on my bed. I bought a mattress; they are very cheap. I shall conclude now with my kind love to all. We remain yours truly, Charles & Elizabeth Wilkins.

P.S. You will want some nails, hammer and strong string, don't forget, and your eyes wide open. We shall be safer, I think, when we get farther from land.

Elizabeth seemed anxious to advise her mother of the things she would need when she

followed on the same journey. Her next letter was written from Florence. In this letter she does not have much to say about her own feelings. It was written June 24th, two months after leaving England:

Dear Mother: I now sit down to write to you. I hope you are all well and in good spirits. I feel anxious to hear from you and to know how Sophia is, but I must have patience. I have been blessed with more than I ever had in my life before. I expect you will hear before this reaches you that Father is dead, by John Adams' letter. But I wish now I had sent you a few lines at New York. But I felt very unfit for writing, and so I do now. But I am better now than I have been since I came from home, except my legs, they are very heavy and it is very hot here. Father died near a fortnight before we landed at New York. He filled in with the dropsy very fast, which you need not be surprised for it was coming on before he left home. He had many nourishments. There was nice gruel made and arrowroot sago broth received. Porter gin and brandy (was) taken round to those who needed it. He had as much as he could take, but not enough to hurt him for I fed him with a spoon, he got so helpless. I cut his shoes nearly all to pieces. I think it (death) was a great release to him. I hope he is better off. He seemed to die very easy without a struggle. He seemed sweetly asleep. It was about eleven o'clock in the day. He did not get up that morning but kept saying he would lay a little longer. He took his breakfast better that morning. I never saw a pleasanter corpse. I have not much reflection about him. I hope you will not grieve. I hope you will be blessed with health and strength. I would advise you to have a husband if you have the offer from a good man, for it is very awkward traveling without a man, but I have no inclination to get married. I want to get home. I am thankful I have got this far. We expect to be here six weeks. We were about 6 weeks on the sea. I was not seasick a whole day and father was not so much as me. Matthew Pickett was the worst. Sister Adams was very poorly all the way. Sister Pickett was confined the day we got here, with a son. It is not likely to live. Father slept with that brother you gave a cup of tea to at Reading. He was very kind to him to help him in and out of bed. I hope it will not be very long before you will have the opportunity to come. I am afraid you will work too hard. This is a country for living well and working light. There are no starving cattle here, either. It seems as if I must have seen nearly all the Saints and captain and sailors. We have some good meetings here but they are not all saints amongst us. You had need to scratch your mark on all your tin. You need a shallow tin for your puddings. You need baking powder. Fancy being without bread for six weeks. The name of the biscuits made many of us feel sick, and bring flour if you can and well soak the meat before you cook it. Take all the care you can of yourself. Don't carry any more in your hands from New York here than you can help, but bring a water bottle. If you bring a teapot, you can have tea in the cars. There are stoves and water closets in them. If you have money, you can get bread, butter, treacle, eggs and meat on the way. A tin cannister or two would be handy. Soap and towel to wash with and a cloth in your basket. It is very dusty, and get something to kill or keep the vermin from you. We had them on our heads and bodies too. Their bites are dreadful. They are in the seats. I think some breed them in their flannels by wearing them too long close to their skin. I think I wrote in too big of a hurry when I got on the ship. I did not dislike it so much when I got used to it. You need some shoes, there, to keep out the water. It is very wet on deck when it is washed. The brethren washed it where we live but you want a flannel. Sometimes

when the ship rocks so you make a mess. We have been here about a week. I ought to have written before but it seemed a burden, though I wanted to do it. I will write again as soon as I get to Charles' place. Please give my love to all my brothers and sisters, aunts cousins, and those who may require and a kiss for little Jane. No more at present, from your affectionate daughter, Elizabeth Wilkins. P.S. Father lost his new hat the first day we begun sailing. He did not put the elastic under his chin.

July 22, 1862 Elizabeth started across the plains in the Homer Duncan company. She walked much of the way, and arrived in Salt Lake Valley September 24, 1862. Soon the following letter was written:

Dear Mother, I was glad to have a letter from you, but almost afraid to look at it. I was sorry to hear Sophia is dead. It must be very dull for James and you too. I am glad you have a good neighbor. I wish you could come next season. There was several in the ship I came in that had no money to take them to Florence. There was a gathering for them and they got there. They were allowed just as much victuals when they got there as the rest and a plenty too for a moderate person, more than I could eat when I had a good appetite. I was very hearty at Florence, I got so fat I could hardly get about. When I came along the plains I got thin enough. I had the diarrhea a month before I got here and a very bad appetite. I had five or six gatherings on my feet which made it worse. I have not the least desire to come back. If you could get a little cinnamon to bring you might get a little milk for that purpose. (a cure for diarrhea) Brothers Barnett and Fuller came in the same ship I did and brother Jones lodged in the same house as we did at Florence, and brothers Reed, Barnett, and Payne crossed the plains with us. Brother Margetts came to see us the same evening we came to the valley and sister Allen met us when we got here and stayed one night, a little time back. Adams was going to start for Salt Creek the morning we came here. I have not heard from them since. It is nearly a hundred miles from here. I have been to the city once on a Sunday since I have been here. I saw brothers Brigham, Heber and Daniel and several others. Brigham is a fine looking man, not a bit like the drawing Mrs. Mayer has. I did not go to conference. Ury, (Charles' wife) and I agree first rate. She is a very good mother to Lillian. Ury's mother and father are glad to hear from you and would do you any good if they could. I have a comfortable home here and I am to stay as long as I like, but I suppose that won't be much longer. I have my choice to have a single man or a man with one wife and I don't know what to do, nor anybody can't tell me, for both are very good men. I hope you will write again as soon as you receive this and tell us how you get along, Uncles, Aunts, Cousins and all.

Elizabeth did not write home again until after her marriage to George Steadman, February 18, 1863.

Mill Creek—Territory of Utah

Dear Mother,

We received your letter the beginning of July, I think. It is a long time since we wrote to you. It is too bad. I seldom go to sleep but I am dreaming about all of you and that I am back there but I am glad I am here. I wish you were all here that would like to come. I should have more pleasure in writing to you if I had something cheering to tell

you. That I would have some chance of sending for you but I don't at present. I regret that I had not asked if I could send the money back that I had left when at Florence and come with some independents, and worked my way here. Then I should not have had any more immigration to pay. But I had not much spirit for anything. I am glad Charles had not got to pay it. My man pays that. I was married on my last birthday to a single man, four years older than myself. We live comfortable together so far. He came here when Mark Lindsey did from Sussex. He is a good fellow to work and to make things handy and comfortable indoors and out. He works a farm on shares. We had two cows last summer to milk. We shall have but one next summer. We traded one, and a fat pig and more, for some oxen and bought a new wagon this fall. Charles has killed a fat pig for us, our own use. We don't live far from him. I expect to have a little boy the latter part of February and I want you for a nurse. I expect cousin Mary is in the same fix for she is married. I hope her cough is better. I ought to write to her but I don't know what to say, more than I wish her comfortable and happy and some good little children and thank her for her letter and I would like to see her. I have not heard from Christopher nor wrote to him. Sister Allen sends her love to you. She is not very settled yet. I have not seen nor heard of Joseph Kimber. I seen brother Yates and Margetts at conference. I hope you will have strength and health and be able to keep up your spirits and live to come here. I feel safe if the soldiers are here, but some don't like it here. I don't know whether brother Reed is gone to California or not. He and another brother started to go awhile ago, but was frightened back again by Indians. I have plenty of their company. In the summer they come begging. I think John would be contented here. If people come here for nic nacs and comfort they have to wait 'til they can make them and they that don't pay tithing here, can hardly live. I hope you won't be long writing if we are. I want to know how you all are getting along. I have not very good health now, so often bad at the chest. Please give my love to brothers and sisters, Aunt Elizabeth and Uncles and cousins Saints and acquaintances that may inquire and accept the same yourself.

I remain, yours truly,  
Elizabeth and George Steadman

The following letter was written more than a year later:

Dear Mother: It is a year ago last January as I wrote this first piece. Charles wanted me to write first, then I waited for him. I kept getting so sick that I had to keep in bed and there I lay 9 weeks. I was nothing but a frame. I had a little girl born on the 16th of February. She was a poor little thing but very healthy and hungry. When I got better she began to get fat and got stouter than Charles' boy, who was born a week before her. She could walk on her birthday. She has not had a days sickness since she was born. Charles said he would wait and see if I got better before he wrote, now he don't find time. He had no faith that I should get better nor scarcely anybody else that seen me. I had a doctor that Brigham Young sent out. He was afraid I was too far gone. He said he would try and do what he could for me. I began to get better in a day or two. I had lots of tumbles when I began to get about. I could not turn around very well nor yet bend my legs without there giving way all at once. By then I got pretty well and strong. I took sick again with the same complaints, diarrhea and liver complaint and canker for three months. But I did not

take so many colds as to lay me up. I am very well now and have been all winter. Charles and his wife and all the children had bad eyes last summer. His wife was blind for nine weeks. Her mother often has bad eyes and her father is very near sighted. Charles has some land of his own. He built a house on it himself. We have a stove but not as big as the one Charles has. We have wash boilers to it to take off and put on, so we can wash and bake at one time, with one fire. Charles is a teacher and he is out a good deal but he will write soon. They are well. We are moved from where we was on account of being sick. George had to be about so much nights he said he could not work days. We have a house and a good sized garden, with peach trees, little plum trees and lots of currant trees. We had no crop of anything last summer. We came after it was put in. Our new wagon was sent back to the States to fetch the Saints. We bought another, an old one, also a cow and a calf, and then traded that and the oxen for this place. Then we had no cow nor no fat pig last fall. We traded our wheat, what he earned in harvest for some more oxen. We have been living from hand to mouth all the long, cold winter. We have had provisions but they have been very dear lately and clothing too. Our young heifer calved a month ago. I would have it when I was so sick. Last spring I thought you were coming; thought so all summer. I hope you will write as soon as ever you can, if 'tis even such a little bit, to let me know how you are getting along and where you are. I am saving my new stays for you, I don't wear any. Here is some of Jane's hair. Charles says he would like to send for you if he could. It is time you were here if you are ever coming.

Charles sent for his mother in February, 1866. She was 65 years of age at the time of her arrival in Utah.

Elizabeth was the mother of seven children. She died February 13, 1918 at the age of 83 years.—Lydia Kilpack