

Life Sketch of Isabella Jane Bradshaw Astle
A Member of the Edward Martin Handcart Company of 1856
Written by her daughter, Sarah Astle Call



Isabella Jane Bradshaw Astle was born March 14, 1846, at Bolton, Lancashire, England, the daughter of Richard Bradshaw and Elizabeth Simpson.

Her early childhood days were lived in England with her widowed mother, as her father died when she was four years of age.

She attended a school for girls and at the age of eight years, surprised her mother by making the announcement that she was promoted to the “Big Girls School” to continue her schooling. She was making rapid progress with those several years older, when at the time she was ten, the family decide to immigrate to America and join the Saints in Utah. Before leaving England, she was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The story of events during this journey of the Edward Martin Handcart Company has been told in the life of her mother that has also been written. However, it might be well to say that she walked every step of the thirteen hundred miles and often helped push the handcart, as some of the older ones pulled it along. They would sing the Handcart Song, “Some must push and some must pull, as we go marching up the hill.”

After arriving in Utah, she worked whenever possible to help care for herself and help her mother. The wages paid were very small and did not consist of money, but such things as a pound of butter, a little flour or a few vegetables. In this way, all helped to do their share in providing the necessities of life for the family.

While very young, she learned to sew and knit. A little later, to card wool and spin yarn. For a short time she attended school taught by George Osmond at Bountiful, Utah. He said of her, “This little English girl was, of all pupils that I have ever taught, the most intelligent and advanced for her tender years. It was surprising to see her holding her own with those several years older.” (These remarks were made at her funeral service.)

At the age of sixteen years, in 1862, this family was asked by the Church to go to Cache Valley and help pioneer that country. They located at Hyrum, Utah, where she was active in Church and community life. She loved to dance and to sing, especially the hymns of the Church.

She became an expert spinner of yarn on the old spinning wheel, and this is how she earned her living, taking her “wheel” with her. Sometimes she worked by the day and at other

times by the week or month, but at night returned home to spend the time with her mother, or take part in the activities of the people.

Here she met the young man, John Astle, whom she later married, December 9, 1866. He, too, was a convert to the Church and a recent emigrant from Nottingham, England.

Their first home was a one room log building on a few acres of choice ground her husband had purchased for a few bushels of wheat that he had received as a wage for work. They also owned the first cook stove in that community. Father (John Astle) had made a trip, by ox team, to the Missouri River to meet a company of Saints. While in Omaha, Nebraska, he purchased the stove as a wedding gift for his “bride-to-be”.

In the summer of 1867, they were called by Brigham Young to move to the Bear Lake country, in Idaho, and again help pioneer a new place. Obedient to the call, they packed up their few belongings that filled but one half of the wagon box, with a pig, two sheep, and a few chickens in the other half.

They located in Montpelier, Idaho, where the seasons of the year were short and their crops were frequently frozen. It was really hard times. Sugar, if it could be purchased at all, was one dollar per pound and other articles at a proportionately high price.

Great inducements came to return to Utah, but the call had come to them from the authorities of the Church, and to follow their leaders’ advice was first and foremost to them.

Mother (Isabella Jane) often recalled incidents in their life at Montpelier. She attended church wearing her mother’s wedding dress, with moccasins on her feet or else carrying the only pair of shoes she owned and walking barefooted or in her stocking feet until with sight of the Meeting House, as it was then called.

Social affairs of the community were greatly enjoyed. She spoke of dances attended and of the recess period when the dance was half over, a group would leave and go to one of the homes, partake of a good meal, and return. The parties began at an early hour and there was plenty of time for a full evening of pleasure.



John Astle



L to R: Sarah Isabella, Isabella Jane, Violet Eliza, Joseph Hyrum

Mother (Isabella Jane) gave birth to nine children, five sons and four daughters. One daughter and one son died in early childhood. During this time, she made every piece of clothing for her whole family except the shoes, all sewed by hand until August 1879. There is a family group picture down to and including the seventh child, taken about ten months after she obtained her first sewing machine. The fit of the clothes she had made for her husband and sons, also herself and daughters would do credit to any seamstress.

She was an excellent manager and housekeeper. With her, cleanliness was next to Godliness. Yet, she was not too particular for the family and friends to enjoy her home to the fullest. The stranger and the Indian were always fed and no tramp was turned away hungry.

She was known as Aunt Belle Jane to her family and friends. One characteristic, we are happy to remember, is her cheerful way in times of distress and trouble, or when events did not come just as we would like them to, she would say, "There isn't time to be sad, let us sing, 'Come, Come Ye Saints, or O, Ye Mountains High'" and soon all despondency was forgotten.

They persevered in their pioneer life, and as time went on, even the climate became somewhat subdued, and modern farm implements began coming into use. They became prosperous and while not rich financially, had plenty to live and enjoy life.

At this time, Father (John Astle) decided to make another move into the Star Valley of Wyoming. Little was known of this country. The road into the valley was little more than a trail and Montpelier Creek must be crossed by fording seventeen times. In early spring the roads were impossible to travel until very late in the season. The earliest trips were made on horseback and to the surprise of all the family, Mother (Isabella Jane) offered to go in this way. She and Father (John Astle) left early one morning before daylight and she made the journey in on horseback safely, although it was a very dangerous one, even for a man.

She liked the place, so in October 1887, they moved to Afton, Wyoming. Father had built the fifth house on that township, a one room, dirt roofed house, sixteen feet square. We did have a rough lumber floor, and here with our parents and seven children lived through the first winter. Mother (Isabella Jane) said she had never spent a happier time in her life.

During the winter months, we were completely "snowed in" from the outside world. When we awoke on Christmas morning, we were all happy. Mother (Isabella Jane) had stretched

a line across the room and hanging from it were socks and mittens for Father (John Astle) and the boys and stockings and mittens for the girls, all knitted by herself. Nicest of all was the rag dolls she had created for my little sister and me. They had hair made from brown zephyr yarn, blue eyes and a red mouth. I know we never loved any dolls we ever had as we did these. It was a splendid Christmas.

She loved beautiful Star Valley and its people, and as one of its earliest pioneers, watched it grow into a prosperous place.

Mother continued active in her home and Church. She always loved to bear testimony of God's blessings to her and thankfulness for having the privilege of coming to Zion.

Almost to the last, she loved to have the neighbor ladies in for afternoon luncheon at four o'clock.

Her health was excellent up to the last three months. From then on, she suffered intensely, and died May 16, 1912, at Afton, Wyoming.