

IMPROVEMENT ERA for January 1941 gives the following account of
Grandma and Grandpa Davis, under the title

"FIVE YEARS ON THE SAN JUAN",

Taken, from the biography of James Davis. Much of it is actual quotation.



This introduction is by Author William Mulder.

Something of what remains untold in pioneer history may be found between the lines of the simple biographies of the men and women who a scant sixty years ago penetrated a remote and forbidding country, at the call of their Church leaders. "HO for San Juan" said an early advertisement in the DESERET NEWS. "There are many Saints needed with means and muscle to help settle that country." Such a call was a mission, and among the earliest colonists were James and Mary Elizabeth Fretwell Davis, who preceded the main company to the San Juan region by six months. There, in the face of flood, starvation, exposure, disease and Indian attack, they succeeded in making Montezuma a "community", for five unbelievably difficult years.

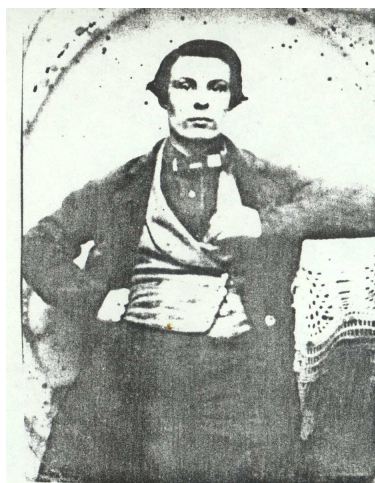
The names of these humble people have received fleeting remembrance in published histories of the San Juan stake, but here appear excerpts from their own unadorned account, singularly free from overstatement, void of a single word of complaint, and, in fact, making only passing mention of the succession of hardships that must have made up each heart-breaking day of their five year mission to a vindictive country. They left this only witness to heroic lives as a family account to be treasured by their children and grandchildren; it is worth a wider circle of readers. From such material is the whole cloth of pioneer history finally woven? The men and women, who were so, busy making history they had little time to write it, have unwittingly borne eloquent testimony to the faith that was in them.

Five Years on The San Juan
Compiled by
William Mulder
from Accounts of
James and Mary Elizabeth Fretwell Davis

As a lad of twelve, in his native London, James Davis, whose Uncle David had brought the message of Mormonism to the family the year before, longed impatiently to “gather” to Zion. Disappointment and heartbreak was his whenever luckier companions embarked, leaving him behind. “I think some of the zeal went from me,” he wrote of one time four years later, in 1856, when his parents, who had given partial consent for his going to America, felt at the last moment that they could not part with him. But as it turned out, 1856 was the year of the ill-fated Martin handcart company, and James Davis had reason to be thankful his going had been delayed.

In London, he worked as a coachman, but it seemed that he save enough money for his passage to the land of his desire. “One Sunday evening,” he relates, “I went to hear Apostle Amase M. Lyman preach, and at the close of the meeting the branch president told people that Brother Lyman was very much in need of help. I had only the money for living expenses for the 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 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.”

James Davis left England without a penny but arrived in Salt Lake City with money jingling in his pocket, for while crossing the plains he had a job as teamster and cook. The least he could do, he thought, to show his gratitude was to turn what money ha had to the Bishop as a “thank offering.” But a friend ridiculed the idea and the money was never given. “But I never felt well about it, and things did not seem to go my way. I did not have any more promptings and seemed to be left to myself.” In later years he was to seize as opportunity to make amends.



*My Father age 21
James Davis*



*My Mother. Age 18
Mary Elizabeth Fretwell*

James Davis and Mary Elizabeth Davis about
The time of their marriage

It came after his marriage to Mary Elizabeth Fretwell in 1864, in the Endowment House. She was an English convert, three years his junior, who had crossed the Atlantic on the ship Amazon, memorialized by Charles Dickens in "The Uncommon Traveler." "His eyes seemed to be on everyone, as he walked about the ship, writing," was the way Mary Fretwell remembered Dickens's visit. By ox-team the young couple journeyed to Cedar City, where their first home had been a dugout, the birthplace of two of their children. About the time Dan Jones arrived in Cedar City, the Davis's had been living for a number of years on a self-built log hut.

Brother Dan Jones had been called on a mission to the Navajo Indians. His stopping in Cedar City was not by choice. He could go no farther, he told the people, until he obtained a badly needed pack animal. James Davis was there and heard the request. "The spirit told me to get the pack animal for Brother Jones. I was overcome with joy and could hardly wait until the meeting was over. Next day I bought a young mule and give it to Brother Jones. He turned to Bishop C. J. Arthur and said, "That's the kind of men the Lord will not part with." I had a feeling within that the Lord had forgiven me for not paying due attention years before when the Spirit had prompted me to pay my surplus money to the Bishop as a thank offering. From that time on we were blessed financially. We built a very fine brick home for those days. I was very proud of my home and surroundings and w were very happy except for the poor health of my wife.

So poor was his wife's condition that when, on December 29, 1878, they were called on a mission to settle the Arizona country, James Davis felt sure it was a misunderstanding. But surprise soon gave way to determination to magnify the call. Erastus Snow, pioneer leader in charge of colonization, had asked that all be ready by the following April. Home, store and land were disposed of at a sacrifice, and on April 13, 1879 the Davis family, in company with several young men, left Cedar City. A list of the scouts follows: From Cedar City:

J.C. Duncan, Robert Bullock, John T. Grower, Thomas Bladden, H. Joseph Wilson, George Urrie, George Perry and Kuman Jones.

From Parowan:

James Adams, G.H. Hobbs, J.B. Decker, Wilson Dalley, Isaac Allen, Del McGregor, Hansen Bayles, P.R. Butts, Z. Decker and John C. Dalton

At Parowan the family of H.H. Harriman joined them, making a total of twenty-six men, two women and eight children as the vanguard of the larger company, which was to follow them south, and east in the fall. James Davis has left an outline of the events, which overtook that little band, an unassuming record, which leaves the greater part unsaid.

"Before we left Bishop 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 upon to part with another child, *for out of 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, crossing 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. The Spaniards had carried water containers, like the Indians, but we were unprepared for this emergency. We dug numerous wells with great effort, under the rocks and in the sinks. Some of these yielded water and some did not. We suffered a great deal and one third of our cattle died.

Every morning my wife would arrange the children in the bottom of the wagon, then climb to the high spring seat and drive the team all day. There were only Indian trails to mark the way, so driving was a difficult task. In crossing the Buckskin Mountains we cut notches in the sandstone for a footing for our horses. We had to hitch eight teams to one wagon to pull it to the top. Then we would take all the teams off, tie a rope to the rear axle of the wagon, and with all the men holding the rope we would let the wagon down the mountain to safety. At night we would fortify with our wagons as protection against the Indians.

About the middle of May we crossed the Colorado at Lee's Ferry and stopped at a small village Moencopi. Settled by some Moquich, Oriba, Hopi and Navajo Indians, and a few whites. Among them were Wilford Woodruff, there on vacation; and John W. Young, son of President Brigham Young, who was building a woolen mill to take care of the great amount of wool produced by the Indians. They advised us with families to stay there, on account of the dangers ahead and let the young men go and find a suitable place to locate. We did so, and notwithstanding the wind blew sand continually, we enjoyed our stay at Moencopi very much.

In two months, on the first of July, five of the scouts returned and reported having found a place. We started again on our journey and traveled peacefully until noon on the third day. Then we were in some very bad Indian territory. One day an Indian by the name of Peokon came into our camp and caused a great deal of trouble. This Indian would kick the dirt into our food and strike our blades on the rocks. He would draw his knife blade 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 before nightfall. We expected them to return before sunrise, because those Indians were sun worshippers and believed that the sun could see and tell the Great Spirit all they did, but if the sun did not see, the Great Spirit would not know. So, when the sun came up and they had not returned, we felt very much relieved.

We had about decided to cook breakfast when I saw at a distance, an old Indian coming toward us. He came and told us to hitch up our horses as quickly as possible, and travel

fast. We did so but were a little as to the Indians plans. We feared he might be leading us into a trap. The roads were through deep sand and the horses had to stop often. This seemed to annoy the Indian; he would stand up on the spring seat and look far and wide. Then he would urge us to hurry faster.

After a time he told us we could stop as long as we wanted and travel as slow as we wished. He asked me if I did not know him. I had thought I had seen him before, but could not place him. He seemed very much hurt. He told me my name and where I had come from, and said he had been to our place many times, and we had always given him food and treated him well. He knew I was there with my family. He had watched us on our journey, and we didn't know it. He said some Indians were planning to rob and kill us as soon as they found enough volunteers; and he had come to save us by hurrying us out of their territory.

In two weeks time we had arrived at the San Juan River, at a point called Montezuma Ford. We were just inside the Utah line in the extreme southeast corner of the state. I very much liked the looks of the country, but my wife felt that we were isolated from all civilization, and was very downcast.

The boys helped us build two small rooms, one for Brother Harriman and one for us. Then they left us. An old man by the name of Harvey Dunton was with us, so our company consisted of three men, two women and eight children. We were nearly a hundred miles through almost

impassable country, from the nearest settlement, which consisted of eight families.

Two weeks after our arrival my wife gave birth to a baby girl, the first white child born on the San Juan. Through all these hardships my wife was steadily regaining her health.

One beautiful afternoon as I was trying to build a fireplace, which would complete the walls of our room, a friendly Navajo came to tell us that the White-River Ute's were on the warpath and had killed the Weeks family up the river just over the Arizona line, and would be there to kill us about nightfall. He wanted us to go with him to his tribe where we would be safe, but we remembered that we had been promised that if we did our part no harm would befall us. We fortified ourselves as best we could in one room. We made holes in the wall to shoot through. The children were put to bed with many a tear and a kiss and the two mothers took their watch by the kids. We stood with our guns loaded. About midnight the dogs began to bark and run up the riverbank, but after awhile they came back. They were very restless for sometime, and when daylight came we found that the Indians had crossed the river a short distance up, and were making for the strongholds of the renegade Indians.

We passed the winter in peace but were very lonesome, in the spring we had the pleasure of seeing our old friend, Thales Haskell, Indian missionary and interpreter, Brother

Erastus Snow, hearing in Salt Lake City that we had been killed by the Indians, had sent Brother Haskell to see if it was true; and if so to give our bones as decent a burial as possible; and if not to stay with us until the second company arrived. When he saw, at a distance, the smoke coming from our chimney he offered a prayer of thanksgiving. He found us alive and well, but with very little to eat. We were living on wheat, ground in a coffee mill. When it became necessary we killed a milk cow; and because we were becoming very tired of meat we would roast it over an open fire until it lost its meat flavor. We had looked all winter for the company that left Cedar City in the fall, to bring us food. They had never arrived and we were very anxious for their safety.

Our wheat gave out and Brother Dunton said he would leave. On cleaning out his wagon he found a little wheat in a sack, which he gave to us, saying that he had a good gun and would live on wild game. Just after he left another Indian missionary called and told us that the company would be there in about ten days. My wife told him that we did not have bread to last two days. He was hungry and ragged and wanted to stay three days. My wife told him he was welcome, but she was at a loss to know what to feed him. He told her to be of good cheer for her worst days were over. He stayed his time and after he had gone I ask my wife where she was getting the wheat to make the bread. She said from the sack Brother Dunton had left. I hefted the sack and there seemed to be just as much as when he had left it. And again we knew there was an unseen hand controlling our welfare.

It was not until April 6, 1880 that the second company arrived, six months after they had left Cedar City. They had spent most of the time in the 'Hole-in-the-Rock'. No lives had been lost but all had suffered many hardships, and were without food. They settled twenty miles down the river at a place called Bluff. A few came to live by us.

Life at Montezuma took on a community aspect; a ward (or branch) was organized, a Sunday school conducted; holidays were celebrated with a home made American flag fluttering in the breeze; and neighbors visited each other, often walking many miles to do so. The town was even granted a post office, with Brother Davis acting as postmaster. He also had a store and bought wool and buckskins from the Indians. He built a water wheel, and was the first to get water on the land. But the same water, which meant life to the struggling colonists, also threatened to destroy them. They had to build their houses on successively higher ground. A flood in August of 1881 carried the river a quarter of a mile beyond its banks to the Davis threshold, where men watched night and day ready to carry Sister Davis and her days old baby to safety.

As menacing as flood, was the constant danger of hostile Indians. One-day word came that the whites had killed a tribesman and the Indians were seeking revenge. Brother Davis closed up his store and, strange to say, was prompted to unload his gun. When the warriors came and found the store closed they became angrier. One raised his gun to shoot Brother Davis' son. As the father jumped between the weapon and the boy, the boy reached for the family gun - but it was unloaded, and the episode let to talk and reconciliation rather than gunpowder and bloodshed.

That night while the family sat around the open fireplace, Sister Davis, ears alert, suddenly slipped outside to return as suddenly with fifteen to twenty heavily armed warriors at her heels. She had heard their approach and walked quietly, alone, down a long dark bowery to welcome them. They wanted to know why the family was not afraid of them. The fearless reply that the family firmly believed good would be returned for good, seemed to please the Indians. Fed and appeased, they shook hands, told the family to stay within their own fence for safety, and departed good friends.

Such was the daily fare at Montezuma on the San Juan, a country which even cliff dwellers ages ago had found hard to face. A fullness of affliction came in mid-year in 1884, when the banks of the steadily rising river gave way and destroyed the settlement.

"Higher and higher it came until all but Brother Haskell's and our home had gone with the rushing water, in the midst of the flood could be seen houses, furniture, everything that goes to make a home. Even the dogs and cats were trying to climb their own homes. All we had gained in our five years of hard labor and suffering was swept away in a single night. In one weeks time our beautiful crops were reduced to sand bars."

Concluding his account James Davis has written:

We never set foot on our land again. After receiving our release we were compelled to leave our home and store just as they stood. Again we traveled through some very rough country. We camped on the banks of the Grand River for one week. There was only a rowboat to take six or eight wagons over the wide and swift river. The wagons were taken apart and a wheel at a time was taken. We came up through salt Lake and Cache Valley and on up through Logan Canyon. As my wife looked down on beautiful Bear Lake she was filled with fear. Experience had taught her to have a great fear 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."

. "Calm and safe" _ that was the most appealing aspect of their new life in Paris, Idaho, first on a hundred -and-sixty-acre farm and finally in a comfortable large home in town. James and Mary Davis passed their remaining years tranquilly, years filled with the satisfaction of knowing they had answered the calls made upon them. James Davis died Feb.7, 1920, and his wife eight years later, on November 20, 1928. Characteristically, James Davis left to his family," the history of the principle events of my life so that when I pass away, it may, I hope, strengthen their faith in the Gospel of Christ."



James Davis and wife Mary Fretwell Davis and their family...
 Grandmother Stella Davis Hays is the young girl sitting next to (*her father*) James Davis



James Davis and Mary Elisabeth Fretwell Davis
 In their later years

*Note: James and Mary Davis parents of Stella Davis Hays
 Stella Davis Hays mother of Edward Davis Hays
 Edward Davis Hays father of Jean Hays Cornwall
 Jean Hays Cornwall mother of
 Tori, Chauntelle, Amorette, Ben, Brandi and JD*