

The Sheen Family

A Story of Faith, Endurance, and Little Blossom

Historical Context & The Record

This illustrated chronicle is based on the research of Ted L. Hanks in his work *"Blossom, The Enoch Train, and the Edmund Ellsworth Handcart Company of 1856"*. The narrative is reconstructed from a blend of oral family folklore—specifically regarding the child "Blossom"—and the meticulous daily journals of those who lived it, including the official company secretary Andrew Galloway and the carpenter Archer Walters.

In the mid-19th century, Mormon missionaries, including Wilford Woodruff and John Taylor, found great success proselytizing in the United Kingdom, converting families like the Sheens of Worcester. The core tenet of their new faith was the "Gathering to Zion"—a call to leave "Babylon" (their homeland) and physically relocate to the Great Basin of Western America. To assist the poor in this massive migration, the Church established the **Perpetual Emigration Fund (PEF)** in 1849, a revolving loan system where immigrants borrowed travel costs and repaid them after arriving in Utah.

By 1856, to reduce costs, Church leaders proposed a radical experiment: immigrants would travel by rail to Iowa and then walk the remaining 1,300 miles pulling their own handcarts. The Sheen family was part of the very first group to attempt this handcart experiment. Their journey spanned 187 days—from their departure on the sailing ship *Enoch Train* in March to their arrival in Salt

Lake City in late September. It was a saga of immense sacrifice, testing the limits of human endurance.

The Sheen Family Profile

The Sheen family hailed from Barrow, near Worcester in west-central England, where the men worked as laborers and quarrymen. The traveling party numbered 12 family members led by the patriarch James Sheen Sr. (60) and his wife Maria (57). They were accompanied by their married sons Robert and James Jr., their wives, numerous grandchildren, and two unmarried daughters, Hannah and Ellen.

Little Blossom (Ann Eliza) became the 13th member when her mother gave her to the Sheens to ensure her passage to Zion. They were the first Europeans to utilize the PEF assistance for the handcart experiment, a journey that would exact a heavy toll on their number.

VITAL STATISTICS: BIRTHS

- **Sidney Sheen:** Born April 17, 1856, aboard the *Enoch Train* in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

VITAL STATISTICS: DEATHS

- **Maria Loveridge Sheen (57):** Died June 9 in Iowa City, the day the handcarts departed.
- **Sidney Sheen (Infant):** Died June 24 on the trail (age 69 days).
- **Emma Sheen (3):** Died June 26 of whooping cough.
- **James Sheen Sr. (60):** Died 3 days after arrival in Kaysville, Utah.

The Promise

In 1856, the Sheen family of Worcester, England, prepared to leave their home to gather in Zion. As they made their final preparations, a neighbor came to Maria with a desperate request: "Will you take my little girl with you?". The mother felt her child's future was more promising with the Sheens than remaining in England. The Sheens graciously accepted the responsibility, effectively adopting the child, even though she was only three years old, black, and blind. Her name was Ann Eliza, but the family called her "Blossom". Together, they traveled to the Waterloo Docks in Liverpool to board the ship *Enoch Train*.



The Vessel



The *Enoch Train* carried 534 Saints. Below deck, in the "steerage" compartments, families were packed into cramped bunks where they ate, slept, and languished in semi-darkness. It was a 39-day passage marked by storms that caused boxes to rattle and bedsteads to break. Rations were often short, and passengers suffered from seasickness and the confinement. Yet, amidst the rolling waves, life persisted. On April 17th, Mary Sheen gave birth to a son, Sidney, while at sea. Blossom and the youngest Sheen daughter, Emma, likely became inseparable companions during these long days in the dark belly of the ship.

The Delay

Upon arriving at Iowa City, the terminus of the railroad, the emigrants faced a disheartening reality: the handcarts were not ready. They were forced to camp for 28 days while carts were hastily built from green lumber. During this delay, they slept as many as 20 to a tent in rainy conditions, and disease began to spread through the camp. Tragedy struck the Sheen family before the trek even began. Maria Loveridge Sheen, the matriarch who had promised to care for little Blossom, died and was buried in Iowa City on June 9th—the very day the company finally departed for the plains.



The Trek



The company faced a 1,300-mile journey, walking and pulling handcarts across the open frontier. It was a time of immense hardship. On June 24th, the infant Sidney Sheen, born at sea, died and was buried near Four Mile Creek. Just two days later, Blossom's companion, little Emma Sheen, died of whooping cough at the age of two and a half. The family had to bury her and move on immediately. To ensure the safety of the blind child during the arduous daily march, family oral history recounts that Blossom was sometimes tethered with a rope to a handcart or another child, guiding her through the dust and heat of the plains.

Zion

On September 26, 1856, the Edmund Ellsworth Handcart Company finally emerged from Emigration Canyon. They were met by Brigham Young, a brass band, and a concourse of citizens who had prepared a welcome. The ragged and weary travelers were greeted with wagons loaded with melons and other provisions. President Young personally welcomed them, though he warned the hungry pioneers to eat moderately. For the Sheen family and little Blossom, the long walking was over. Blossom survived the trek and reportedly lived nearly 80 years in Salem, Utah, a testament to the family's endurance and charity.



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