

The Biography of Sarah Jane Backhouse

Submitted to the *Daughters of the Utah Pioneers* by Cora Hazelgren

Biography: SARAH JANE BACKHOUSE
Birthdate: 8 Mar 1861 Blackburn, England
Death: June 1861 By the Platt[sic] River, Nebraska
Parents: James Backhouse & Jane Williams
Pioneer: 1861 with Horace Eldredge Company

Sarah Jane Backhouse was born 8 Mar 1861 in Blackburn, England, just 4 or 5 weeks before her parents left England to come to America. She was the daughter of James Backhouse and Jane Williams. They joined with the Horace Eldredge Company.

Sarah Jane was only 10 or 12 weeks old when she could no longer endure the journey. She passed away and was placed in a hollowed out tree with a board from a wagon for a cover. A hole was dug beside the Platte River where the family was camped. Sarah Jane was laid there with large rocks piled on her grave to keep the wolves away. Such a brave and sweet little pioneer, who died in Jun 1861.

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Notes about this biography, by Natalie Grua Beesley, 1 July 2007:

The *Biography of Sarah Jane Backhouse*, by Cora Hazelgren, lists a few probable errors. She lists no sources, so I cannot verify her information. She states that Sarah Jane died "June 1861 by the Platt[sic] River, Nebraska." Records of Suzanna Mae Clark Grua as well as the *Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel (1847-1868)* both list "16 Aug 1861, along the Platte River, west of Laramie, Wyoming." *Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel (1847-1868)* also states that she died of diarrhea and that her age at her time of death was "5 months and 8 days old." Also, according to *Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel (1847-1868)*, the family came in the Ira Eldredge Company (1861).

Cora Hazelgren lists that they came in the Horace Eldredge Company. According to *Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel (1847-1868)*, the Horace Eldredge Company did not come across the plains in 1861, but rather in 1858. Also, the Ira Eldredge Company did not depart from Florence, Nebraska for the Salt Lake Valley until 1 July 1861, so it is not likely that Sarah Jane Backhouse died in June 1861 along the Platte River. The journal states that they first "rested on the Platte River" on July 14, 1861. The trail excerpt from the Ira Eldredge Emigrating Company, Journal, 1861, July-Sept, states the following for 16 Aug 1861:

"Aug 16th Travelled 7 hours and crossed the Platte, we are now on the right side going up. Evening 1½ h. Camped on the Platte. Our Road to day was rough as though we were in huge Stone Quarries. "

Sources used by Natalie:

- 1) *Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel (1847-1868)*; Sarah Jane Backhouse, Pioneer Company: Ira Eldredge Company (1861); see website at:
<http://www.lds.org/churchhistory/library/pioneercompanysearch/1,15773,3966-1,00.html>
- 2) Records of Suzanna Mae Clark Grua, grand-niece of Sarah Jane Backhouse.