

Sarah Brown Woodruff

Born January 1, 1834

Henderson, Jefferson County, New York

Died May 9, 1909

Smithfield, Utah

Buried in the Salt lake City Cemetery

Sarah Brown Woodruff was born January 1, 1834. Her parents, Harry Brown and Rhoda North were early converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, having become members prior to 1834.

It is not certain where Sarah spent her childhood. However, she had the advantage of a better education than was usually given to girls at that time. She attended school until she was sixteen years old and was awarded a teacher's certificate. After coming to Utah, she taught school at South Weber, a settlement west of the mouth of Weber Canyon, in the Fourteenth Ward in Salt Lake City, and at Randolph in Rich County.

In 1852 the Brown family boarded a steamboat on the Missouri River on the first lap of their journey to Utah. However, tragedy struck almost immediately. The river steamboat, Saluda, on which they were passengers, had left St. Louis on March 30, 1852. Near Lexington the steamer encountered a mass of floating ice, which delayed it for several days. When the journey was resumed, the engineers allowed the boilers to get dry and consequently very hot. When cold water was put into the boilers, an explosion occurred and the boat sank within ten minutes. Of the 175 passengers, (90 of whom were Latter-Day Saints) about one hundred were killed or injured. Only 26 bodies of those killed were recovered.

Members of the Brown family were among those injured. Harry Brown, the father, was so seriously hurt that he died three weeks later. Ira, a son, received a broken leg, and Sarah was struck on the head by a flying object and knocked unconscious.

In spite of these difficulties, Sarah's mother and the children started across the Plains, although they must have sorely missed their father's support and help. When they reached Laramie, Wyoming, Ira's leg, which had become infected, had to be amputated. Mrs. Brown decided to remain in Laramie for the winter. Sarah however joined with the Henry Miller Company and continued on, arriving in Salt Lake on October 1, 1852. Her mother and the other children came the next summer but apparently becoming discouraged, remained only a year before returning to their former home.

Sarah stayed in Utah, the only one of her family to do so. Perhaps she, too, would have returned to the east, but on March 13, 1853 she married Wilford Woodruff as his fourth wife. She was nineteen years old. The same day, Woodruff took his third wife.

For a short time after her marriage, Sarah lived in South Weber and then moved to Salt Lake City, where she lived in the big Woodruff home. Her apartment consisted of one

room upstairs and one room downstairs. Their last years in Salt Lake were spent in a new five-room adobe house. Seven of Sarah's eight children were born in Salt Lake City.

Sarah augmented the family income by teaching school and making buckskin gloves, straw hats and bonnets. The gloves, some of which were beautifully embroidered with silk thread, she sold to the stores, receiving from seven to fifteen dollars a pair.

Richland County, later known as Rich County, in northern Utah had been settled as early as 1864. In 1871 Wilford Woodruff was asked to assist with the settlement and development of that area. He responded by moving Sarah and six of her children to Randolph. Her next to oldest son remained in Salt Lake to continue his education. Sarah's daughter, Phoebe Arabell Woodruff Moses, wrote the following about the move to Randolph: "This was a severe trial for me. There were no good schools or teachers in Randolph. I arrived there on my twelfth birthday. We lived in a tent for six months. I went boat riding with my sister in a tub on Little Creek. In the fall we moved into a new home, the only home in Randolph with an upstairs. Mother taught school two years and was secretary in the Relief Society. I often attended these meetings with her."

In 1873 Sarah's last son and child was born in Randolph. He lived only a few days. In 1876 she moved to Smithfield in Cache County, Utah where she lived the rest of her life. Shortly after settling in Smithfield, the family was struck by tragedy. Sarah's son, Brigham, who had remained in Salt Lake, came to visit his mother in June of 1877. Within 4 hours he was dead. He had gone duck hunting with his brothers and shot a duck, which fell into the water. He took off his clothing and lunged into the icy water to retrieve the duck but quickly developed cramps and was drowned. His body was not found for five days. His father, who was at the time president of the St. George Temple, was unable to come to the funeral, so Sarah had to bear her sorrow alone.

Sarah Brown Woodruff died May 9, 1909, in Smithfield and was buried in the family plot in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. She was 75 years old.

(Sources of information: Chronicles of Courage, DUP, Vol. 2 M.F. Cowley, Wilford Woodruff, 1909)