

A Sketch of the Life of Sarah M. Chaffin

Utah Pioneer of 1852

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Sarah M. Chaffin was born, June 2, 1815, in Mercer, Pennsylvania. She died August 2, 1891, at Cedar City, Utah. She was of the old Anglo Saxon Race. Her father, Epaphroditus Cossett, was a doctor and she often went with him to help with the sick during her youth. This experience proved to be of untold value to her later in life. Sarah's father read the Bible a great deal and had his children read it. She said she read it through three times before she was fifteen years old. This early training helped her a great deal spiritually. She was the only one of her immediate family to join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Her father's sister was the only other of the Cossett family to join.

Sarah married, first, William Martner Mayfield, by whom she had one son, William Oscar. This husband was in the mercantile business and when he died his partner, Mr. Gouvner, put everything up at auction, even her baby's clothes, leaving her almost penniless. She was so grieved over her husband's death that she did not realize what he was doing until he was gone. She taught a latin grammar class in a high school in the forenoon and worked as a seamstress for a taylor in the afternoon to support herself and child. She was a wife, a mother and a widow before she was twenty.

She married Louis Rice Chaffin, December 3, 1837, and eight children were born in this union. They re-

received their endowments in the Nauvoo Temple. Four of the children were born while they lived in La Harp, where they both had settled before their marriage.

Nancy, Sister Chaffin's aunt who had joined the Church, also lived in La Harp when Chaffins did. Her husband, George Conklin was President of the Branch there. At a time when the mobs were most dangerous he was stricken ill. They were using a shed for a kitchen and Sarah went out at night to prepare something for him to eat while an attack was on. The mob kept bullets "flying at her thick as hail". An old reboarst said, "Power and lead will never kill her for I have had five good shots at her and missed her."

The Saints from the small settlements were called into Nauvoo to protect themselves from the mobs. While there one of the mob came to Sister Chaffin at night and said, "I think so much of you and Mr. Chiffin, if you will lay your hand on the Bible I will tell you something that will save your lives." She laid her hand on the Bible. The man told her they were coming that night to clear Nauvoo of the "Mormons." Brother Chaffin was on guard that night until twelve. When he came home he saw she was frightened and asked her the cause. She thought to herself that a member of the mob had no right to administer an oath, so she repeated what he had said. He gave the warning. The Saints got ready and held the mob off. Some trials were the lot of all the saints there that winter. Sarah was often forced to stand over coals all night in order to keep from freezing as they did not have sufficient bedding and dared not keep fires blazing in their hearthes.

When they were driven out of Nauvoo Sarah crossed the

ice in an open wagon with a young baby. They went to St. Louis where Brother Chaffin's brothers helped them to get a good outfit to come to Utah after they had offered him every financial inducement to give up his Church and found it to be of no avail. The wife had a nice carriage and horses which she drove from the Missouri when they came to Salt Lake City in 1852. She always carefully chained the carriage each night and one morning forgot to unlock the chain. Her dog, Carlo, grabbed the reins then went to rattle the chain, just as the horses were ready to start, thus saving their lives.

Many hardships tested the faith of the Chaffins even after arriving in Zion. They settled first in Salt Lake City, where the remainder of their children were born. When the youngest child, Sarah, was an infant her mother left Laura to watch her as she lay on the bed. When she looked at them the baby was covered with blood and Laura had fainted. Their saw had fallen and cut Laura's head. Sister Chaffin threaded a needle with silk thread and sewed up the gash. Thanks to her experience with her father she was able to save much suffering to her family and neighbors. She would go any hour of the night and would not except any pay.

At one time Henry was out hunting cattle when a snow storm came up. He got lost. He tied his horse to a tree, laid down, put his saddle blankets over him and fell asleep. The mother and her son Darwin were setting up waiting for Henry to come home. When he did not return soon after night-fall she told Darwin to get on the fence and call Henry as loudly as he could. He did so. The sound was wafted to Henry and he woke up. It had puit snowing, the moon shone

brightly, and he knew which direction to go. He reached home after midnight.

In 1856, the Father was called to fulfill a mission in Australia. A short time before he left he loaned a Brother Hollingshead five dollars telling him to give it to his family if he saw them in need. Brother Hollingshead later went to Sarah and told her he would let her have twenty-five pounds of flour and to send George for it before daylight. When the boy reached home his precious burden was half gone although he had run some of the way. An aged man followed him and said, "If I had a pint of gold I would give it to you for a pint of flour." She gave him the pint of flour. When the Ward Teachers called they told Sister Chaffin that her husband had left enough flour for her family and if she gave it away and his children went hungry she would be held responsible. She gave it away, took the children up the canyon and lived on sarvis berries.

The third of December 1861, the children were first separated. The parents and three of the children went to St. George to settle with a group of pioneers. At that time this several days journey from the northern part of the state, so there was a sad parting. Two of the family were hastily married, and remained in Price. The party that came south camped in tents and wagons the remainder of the winter. They made circles of rabbit brush for meetings and recreation. The children all had a glorious time and learned to love each other dearly. In the spring the settlers left the camp for the city lots.

Later the Chaffins moved to Cedar City. Sister Chaffin

taught a primary school there for many years, while her husband ran the first grist mill there.

Her Bible was always dear to her. Just before she died she said, "Give me my Bible." Laura said, "You can not handle it," She replied, "Lay it on the bed. I can lean over and read it." She came to her son George after her death and said, "I will come for you at three o'clock in the morning." When he died, three o'clock was the time he passed.