



LOUISA SARGENT HARRIS 1841-1915

Louisa Sargent Harris was born 18 December 1841, in Newberry, Berkshire, England. She was the daughter of John Sargent and Sara Allen. Her mother died when Louisa was five years of age.

Louisa joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1850, and immigrated to the United States with her father and siblings, John Jr., Sara Ann, Ellen, and Joseph who ranged in age from 11 to 2. They crossed the Atlantic Ocean in the ship *Kennebec* on 10 January 1850, and arrived in New Orleans on 11 March. They continued up the Mississippi River on a small boat called *The Pride of the West* a name which no longer fit the vessel due to its dilapidated condition. When they reached Saint Louis, they were anxious to be on their way up the Missouri River to Council Bluffs to join the Saints going west, so they took passage on the dilapidated steamboat, *Saluda*. At Lexington, Missouri, the boilers of the vessel burst, and the boat blew up. The accident killed her father and 8 year old brother, Joseph, and left the Sargent children orphans and penniless, because thieves had stolen a considerable amount of money and valuables from her father's dead body. The body of her brother was never found. When officials found Louisa, she was unconscious and badly burned from scalding steam and water.

A kind family from Lexington took the grief-stricken Sargent children into their home. Ellen who was 12 chose to remain with the family and be adopted, but John Jr., Sarah Ann and Louisa continued their journey west. They probably went as far as Council Bluffs with the George May family who were friends from the Newbury LDS Branch in Berkshire. Mrs. May took the Sargent children into her care. Unfortunately, before three months had passed, both George May and his wife and three of their children had died of cholera. The three Sargent children crossed the plains to Utah in 1852 in the Eli B. Kelsey Company, possibly with the oldest surviving May son, James who was 20.

While still recovering from her burns, an accident occurred during her trip west which almost took her life. Her weak leg gave way, and she fell under a wagon. It stopped with the wheel resting on her head. She received an injury to her jaw and as a result, for the rest of her life, she could not open her mouth any wider than one-half an inch. She also received a back injury that she suffered from all of her life.

Shortly after their arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, her sister, Sarah Ann, became ill with typhoid fever. After she recovered, she found employment doing housework. John Jr. worked on the wall around the temple block for a time and then went to California and did not return to Utah. When spring came, eleven-year old Louisa went to work herding cows. One day while watching the cattle on what is now Capitol Hill in Salt Lake City, a large Indian rose up from behind the sagebrush and called out to her motioning for her to come to

him. She was so frightened she forgot the cows and everything except her own safety, and did not stop running until she reached home. On another occasion she encountered a vast army of large black crickets coming down the hills into the fields. Seeing no way to avoid them, she lifted her skirts and made a wild dash through them shuddering as her bare feet squashed their bodies.

At some point, after her sister Sarah Ann's marriage to John Martin, Louisa left Salt Lake City to join her sister and brother-in-law living west of Ogden. She was with them in the spring of 1958 when they made the move south to evade Johnston's Army. The Martins encountered snowstorms on the way and as Louisa had no shoes, she had to go barefoot in the snow. Soon, the Martins, along with other Saints, returned north to their homes. Louisa was a great help to her sister and brother-in-law who had two small children, and she remained with them until her own marriage.

On 3 April 1859, Louisa married Martin Henderson Harris, the founder of Harrisville. He was a widower and together they raised a son from his first marriage, Elmer Harris (1856), and six children of their own, Leander Sargent (1860), Louisa Georgeanna (1862), Nathan John (1864), Martin Dennison (1866), Louisa Pricilla (1868), and Ida Ellen (1875). All were born in Harrisville.

Louisa was a pleasant person with fair complexion and light brown hair. She was the first treasurer of the Harrisville LDS Ward Relief Society and served in this position for twenty-eight years. She also taught Sunday School and was the president of the primary. She was in charge of the Relief Society Cooperative Store for twenty years.

Louisa was very skilled at dressmaking and weaving. In 1861, she and her husband sent east for a Mendenhall loom for weaving cloth, the cost of which was \$150, a large sum for the times. It had an automatic shuttle for weaving the best cloth. On that loom she and her daughters wove linsey for blankets and clothing, and material for men's suits.

Louisa introduced the production of silk to Harrisville in the early 1870s. She and her husband planted mulberry trees for feeding the silk worms, and one year raised 11,000 worms. They needed very little room when small, but as they grew, they were moved from room to room until they occupied nearly the entire house. Louisa said, "We hardly had rooms to sleep and very little time for sleep, as they had ravenous appetites, eating continuously for the whole six weeks of their existence. The mulberry trees were almost stripped of leaves and small branches by the time the worms were ready to spin." One year, Louisa produced enough silk to have six white handkerchiefs woven with designs of the Salt Lake Temple and beehive. In 1878, she produced silk which was woven into cloth in Salt Lake City from which a dress was made. It was sent to the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago to represent the silk industry of Utah.

Louisa Sargent Harris was a widow for the last twenty-six years of her life. After her husband's death in 1889, she continued to live at the old homestead in Harrisville. She died there 19 May 1915, at the age of seventy-three. She is buried in the Ogden City Cemetery.

SOURCE:

Martin Henderson Harris Family Organization. *Martin Henderson Harris, A Utah Pioneer, Life , Labors, and Posterity.* 1952. Unpublished manuscript.

White, Ruth McFarland and Louis Belnap Erickson. Information gathered on Louisa Sargent Harris. 1991.

Allen, Sara	Kelsey, Eli B. Company
Harris, Emer	May, George
Harris, Ida Ellen	May, James
Harris, Leander Sargent	Sargent, Ellen
Harris, Louisa Georgeanna	Sargent, John
Harris, Louisa Pricilla,	Sargent, John Jr.
Harris, Martin Dennison	Sargent, Joseph
Harris, Martin Henderson	Sargent, Sara Allen
Harris, Nathan John	Sargent, Sara Ann