

A life sketch of

Margaret Harley Randall

1823 – 1919

(Wife of Alfred Randall)

Margaret Harley, daughter of Benjamin and Elizabeth Harley, was born January 13, 1823 in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Her mother died when Margaret was eleven years of age. She was always a delicate child, and it was said of her that she would not live to be twenty years of age; however she lived to the ripe old age of ninety-six, dying April 15, 1919.



The century in which Margaret lived saw the most wonderful advancement in the history of the world – the perfection and bringing into use of the steam boat, railroad, and telegraph, and the invention of the telephone and automobile, and the improvement of the postal system.

In their Pennsylvania home, Margaret and her brother Edwin, four years her senior, were converted to the gospel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Records are not available to show when and by whom they were baptized. Their father was a kind and loving man, but not being converted himself, felt sad to have his son and daughter join such an unpopular religion. Naturally, he would do nothing to help them join the Saints. However, he told Margaret to come back home when she found out her mistake.

Margaret and her sister had been kind to a lonely old man who lived near and when he died he left one hundred dollars to each of the girls. Margaret used her portion to take her to Nauvoo to join her chosen people, but did not arrive in that city until after the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith. She talked very little about her life and thus not much is known of the particulars of her travels and early experiences.

At Nauvoo, Margaret Harley hired out to work for Alfred Randall and his wife Emmerette Davis. She was very anxious to go with the pioneers to Utah, but being all alone she had no way to go. The Randalls wanted to help her, but Alfred said the only way he could take her was to marry her. Margaret knew he was a good man and decided that this was the best thing to do, so at Winter Quarters, a temporary settlement on the west bank of the Missouri River, she was united in marriage to Alfred Randall by President Brigham Young on January 29, 1848. She thus embraced the principle of plurality of wives, being the second wife to Alfred Randall. Margaret was true, kind and benevolent in all her family relations. There was not one of her husband's wives or children who did not like to visit 'Aunt Margaret', and they all did so whenever convenient and often stayed several days at a time.

The family arrived in the valley of the Great Salt Lake in September 1848, having been delayed a year by a broken leg of the husband. They lived for some years in the Seventeenth Ward of Salt Lake City, just west of West Temple Street on First North. They were in the historic move of 1858, going as far south as Provo and returning when the danger was passed. Margaret was also taken by her husband and lived for a short time in the following places – what was then called Over Jordan, Bountiful and West Weber.

During these years times were hard and food scarce. One year the crops were almost an entire failure. They dug roots and whatever they could find to cook. At one time they were without any flour in the house for three weeks. Margaret said the boys would not play, but would lie on the floor most of the time. She wondered why, not realizing they were too weak to play. When they had bread again to eat she said the boys would again play.

One day during this period, Margaret became so exhausted while doing the family washing that she could not go on. Then she found only one egg, which she ate to give her strength to finish the washing. The boys were asleep, but it hurt her so to eat that egg without having some for the children that she could never forget it, but would sometimes tell about it and say, "That was the only time in my life that I ever ate anything when the children could not have some too." No doubt there were plenty of times when the children ate and she could not, but those times were never mentioned.

Margaret's husband, Alfred, went on three missions and on trips east to help immigrants into the valley. He was also away working on such projects as helping to build Camp Floyd, building saw mills, woolen mills, etc., so that much of her time she was alone with her family.

In 1862, Alfred bought a farm and home in Centerville, Utah, and moved Margaret there. While living here she had to make shoes for her sons out of jeans (a heavy cloth). She said the boys would go outside to work as long as they could stand it, then come in and warm and dry their feet before going out again. Clothing was very scarce. At one time Margaret procured some canvas of which she made a coat for Orrin. One cold stormy day he was in the canyon getting out wood. His mother worried about him. Melvin, the other brother, said, "Why do you worry about Orrin? He couldn't get cold with that coat on."

Margaret remained in Centerville the rest of her life, except the last two years when she was taken by her daughter, Alice Clark, to Georgetown, Idaho, to be cared for until she died. She lived in the same house in Centerville until sometime in the nineties when her house became so old that her son Orrin had her live in his house as he and his family was living in Morgan at that time.

While living in Orrin's house her eyes began to fail. One day while cleaning her pantry she found a paper containing what she thought was some old useless onion seeds. She threw the paper into the stove. The 'seeds' proved to be gunpowder, which exploded burning her eyebrows and scorching her hair. Her son, Melvin said, "That's enough, you are coming to live with us." This she did and was taken to Idaho in 1917. She never wanted to leave the farm, which her husband had owned and left in the names of his sons for the maintenance of the family. She was very independent and when her daughters tried to get her to live with them she would always say, "No, the boys has to keep me."

From 1871 to 1901 Margaret was President of the Relief Society. Sisters from Salt Lake City – Eliza Snow, Zina D. Young, Precinda Kimball, Emeline B. Wells, and many others often visited in her home. If anyone in the community was sick, Sister Randall was called in and was always there either day or night, often staying days at a time with persons sick with any kind of

disease. It was said of her that she was truly a ministering angel. Besides caring for the sick and preparing the dead for burial, she was often sending food and needed articles to those in need, but never mentioned it. She would quietly slip it out of the house. If her daughters happened to see her taking it she would say, "If we give it to them maybe we won't need it." She truly followed the admonition, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand doeth."

Margaret also went to Salt Lake City and studied obstetrics and practiced in the capacity for a number of years, officiating at sixty births. However, she did not follow that work as she felt it was too much responsibility. On her sixtieth birthday the Ward Relief Society gave her a surprise party with a big dinner and lovely presents.

Margaret was a small woman with dark eyes and hair, very active and energetic. She was truly a wonderful woman with unusual good sense in managing her home and in helping others.

Much of the food for the family was produced at home. From the farm came wheat, potatoes, corn, squash and hay for the cows; for the garden, all kinds of vegetables for both summer and winter use; from the orchard all kinds of fruit then raised in Utah. There was also milk, cream, butter, chickens and eggs. Meat was not so plentiful, but sometimes there would be a beef or veal or pork. Money was scarce. A dozen eggs or a pound of butter would buy a little sugar and other staples. In later years, many a grand meal was made with all home grown foods except sugar, salt and spices. Even the vinegar was made on the farm and honey obtained from a few hives of bees.

Margaret was an excellent cook and loved to give small dinner parties to her friends, of whom there were many. The married sons and daughters who lived in Centerville often came with their families, especially on Sundays.

Margaret worked in her garden, dried fruit, tended her cows and chickens and did everything there was to do in a pioneer home, such as carding wool, spinning and dyeing cloth, making quilts and carpets, sewing clothing, etc. Her sewing was all done by hand as she never

owned a sewing machine. She was also engaged in raising silk worms for the silk industry of Utah.

She rejoiced in her knowledge of the gospel and never found it to be the 'mistake' her father thought it would be. She bore her testimony to the truthfulness of the gospel to the end of her life. She was loyal to the Priesthood and all presiding officers, and always paid her tithing and donations. How she did love and obey every word of President Brigham Young.

She was the mother of seven children; two sons, Orrin H. and Melvin H., and five daughters, Mary, Elizabeth, Margaret Ellen, Thurza Amelia, Alive and Emily. As the latter part of her husband's life was spent mostly in North Ogden, she depended upon and took comfort in her two sons.

Her life was happy because of her faith and fortitude, and because of her love for her family, and friends, and religion. Her time was spent in the service of her family, and the poor, and sick in her community.

The latter years of her life were spent in blindness, at first partial and then total blindness, caused from cataracts. To one who all her life had been a busy worker and who loved to read, especially the scriptures and the Deseret News, this was naturally a great trial. Yet she never complained but said, "Some folks can't hear. I can go to meeting and hear what is said and can talk with my friends." The last few years her memory failed her also.

The children and posterity of Margaret Harley Randall have reason to rejoice in the heritage that is theirs through this true, loyal and faithful woman.

NOTE: Margaret Harley Randall passed away April 5, 1919 in Georgetown, Davis County, Utah. She was buried April 11, 1919 the Centerville City Cemetery, Centerville, Davis, Utah.