

Sarah Maria Chaffin Leigh

(b. February 11, 1855; d. December 12, 1925)

Written by: Susan Clegg Biesele, Great-Great Granddaughter, 2004

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Sarah Maria was named after her mother: Sarah Maria Cossett Chaffin (b. June 2, 1815). She will be referred to as Maria in this history to distinguish her from her mother. Her father was Lewis (or Louis) Rice Chaffin (b. December 3, 1806). Lewis was a fairly wealthy man; he owned five city lots, a good home, a farm and a grist mill in LaHarp, Illinois when he married Sarah. Sarah's father was a doctor and she learned a great deal about medicine from him. She was a widow with one son, William Oscar Mayfield (born October 1, 1834), when she married Lewis. Her deceased husband had been in the mercantile business. When he died his business partner auctioned all their possessions, leaving her almost penniless. Sarah taught a latin grammar class in high school in the forenoon and worked as a seamstress for a tailor in the afternoon to support herself and her child prior to marrying Lewis. Lewis and Sarah were married on December 3, 1837. They joined the "Mormon" Church soon after its origination and received their endowments in the Nauvoo Temple. They remained true and faithful to the gospel for the remainder of their life.

Three children were born to them in LaHarp, Illinois, where Lewis was one of the first merchants, the first postmaster, and the first justice of the peace. They moved to Nauvoo, leaving everything behind except bedding and clothing when the Saints from the small settlements were called there to protect themselves from the mob. They were living in Nauvoo the night that Joseph and Hyrum Smith were killed, and Lewis went to the scene immediately after the killings. Lewis would stand guard until midnight each night, to protect the families at Nauvoo. One night, a member of the mob, who liked Lewis and Sarah, warned Sarah that the mob was coming later that night to clear Nauvoo of the "Mormons." He had her place her hand on the Bible, and swear she wouldn't tell anyone else, but she apparently felt a higher duty to warn the others. When her husband came home from being on guard, she told him what she had been told. The Saints were able, due to the warning, to hold the mob off. Later, when they were driven out of Nauvoo, the family went to St. Louis where Lewis had three brothers and three sisters. They gave Lewis and his two oldest boys positions in their stores, where they worked only until they could get an outfit to come to Salt Lake. Lewis's family did not approve of their going and offered every financial inducement they could to get them to stay in Illinois. When they couldn't convince them, they helped them get a good outfit for the journey. In later years, Lewis's brother, John, gave each of the children \$500 (\$4,000 total).

In 1852 Lewis, Sarah, and their seven children: William Oscar Mayfield (b. 1834), Henry Albert (b. 1839), Darwin Epaphroditus (b. 1842), Mary Adella (b. 1843), George Edwin (b. 1845), John Rice (b. 1849), and Laura Elizabeth (b. 1850) came to Salt Lake with the Henry W. Miller

Company. They departed July 8, 1852 and arrived September 10, 1852. ¹ Sarah drove a nice carriage, pulled by horses. They settled into the Salt Lake Valley. In 1853 they had a son, Joseph Louis, who died in 1854. Sarah Maria, the last child, was born on February 11, 1855.

Now we begin Maria's story. When Maria was an infant, her mother left her in the care of her older sister Laura. When her mother returned she found Maria covered in blood, and Laura, fainted. A saw had fallen and had cut a big gash in Laura's head, which had then apparently bled all over Maria. Maria's mother called on the training she'd received from her father, threaded a needle with silk thread and stitched up the gash in Laura's head. Maria's mother was able to "save much suffering to her family and neighbors...she would go any hour of the night and would not accept any pay."

In 1856 Maria's father was called to fulfill a mission in Australia. He was gone for about four years. Around this time there was a great famine in Salt Lake and the family, along with many other pioneers, endured the hardship of a shortage of food. Before Maria's father left on the mission he gave \$5 to Brother Hollingshead to give to his family, should they need it. At some point Brother Hollingshead told Sarah to send one of her children to pick up flour for the family. Sarah asked Maria's brother George to pick it up. In 1857 flour was selling at twenty-five dollars per hundred pounds and was a precious commodity. George got the flour but before reaching home his burden was half gone. In addition, an aged man had followed him and said "If I had a pint of gold I would give it to you for a pint of flour." George, feeling compassion, gave him a pint of flour. When ward teachers came to visit, they told Sarah 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. Sarah gave away the remaining flour and took her children up the canyon, where they lived on service berries. Maria's sister Laura, wrote that their mother was strong nerved and courageous; this seems a good example of those characteristics.

On December 3, 1861, when Maria was six years old, she went with her parents and two siblings to settle St. George, Utah. Two of the children were hastily married prior to departure. The other three children remained in Salt Lake. It was a sad parting.

They left Salt Lake with two wagons, one drawn by a team of horses and the other by a team of oxen. The trip took five or six weeks. Much of the time was spent clearing sagebrush and boulders so that the wagons might pass. The Indians were "bothersome" to the pioneers, often coming to the camps to beg and bargain, and they were very persistent. The route taken was called the Old Mormon Trail. The Company that first went over this country consisted of about fifty people, with about fourteen wagons drawn by horse and oxen. The Chaffin wagon was the third wagon to move on the campgrounds, which were near the present town site of St. George.

¹ Internet Source: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/companies/206/henry-w-miller-company>

They camped in tents and wagons the remainder of the winter. They made circles of rabbit brush for meetings and recreation. In the Spring the settlers left the camp for the city lots and began building homes and tilling the soil. The homes were log and willow cabins. One log cabin was made for a schoolroom. Worn books that they had brought with them served as texts for the school. Cottonwood trees were cut to be used as seats in the school. Broken slates were used to write on, and pieces of slate to write with. Maria, along with her siblings, attended this school. Life there was hard. Floods persisted in washing out the dams and ditches, thus destroying the crops. Sarah found the climate to be very unhealthy for many of the people.

For amusement, there were plays, dances, molasses candy pulls, rag bees and sugar cane husking parties. Maria remembered that they would loan their shoes to each other at the dances. Some would sit with their feet under the bench, and let others take their shoes to dance.

In 1863 William Jennings wrote Lewis, saying that he would give him eleven hundred dollars for his business place on Main Street in Salt Lake. Lewis wrote back to Jennings saying that when he doubled it, he could have it. The next mail brought him twenty-two hundred dollars. In 1866, Apostle Erastus Snow told Maria's father that a grist mill was needed in Cedar City and suggested they might move there. So when Maria was about eleven years old, the family relocated to Cedar City, where her father set about starting up the first grist mill in that area.² Once the mill was under way, Henry, Maria's brother took over running the mill, so their Dad could go to St. Joseph to start up another grist mill. Lewis took George and Laura with him. He also started a cotton mill there. St. Joseph was a fort town. The houses were all covered with rushes and culinary water had to be hauled in from two miles away. Laura returned to Cedar City in May, and in July of that year the fort caught fire and was destroyed. Apostle Erastus Snow said "Brother Chaffin, you have lost all you have, I would advise you to settle at Cedar City where you have a grist mill." Maria's father returned to Cedar City in 1868, where he served as justice of the peace, notary public and held many positions of trust. Maria's mother taught Primary for many years.

On November 30, 1874, at 19 years of age, Maria married John David Leigh, a farmer in Cedar City. John was two years old in 1849 when his parents, Samuel (b. 1815) and Nancy Ann David Leigh (b.1815), and three siblings immigrated to America from Wales after converting to the LDS faith in 1848. John's mother and a new-born sibling died soon after they arrived in America. His father married Mary Treherne in 1850 in Council Bluffs. Lewis and Mary had two children before they arrived in Salt Lake in 1852. They came to Salt Lake with the William Morgan Company leaving in June and arriving in September.³ That same year, Samuel, Mary and their six children were sent to settle Cedar City. They spent the winter in Parowan before establishing their home in the Fort at Cedar City in 1853. Samuel was a carpenter and furniture maker. He

² Internet source. Utah Government website: https://heritage.utah.gov/apps/history/markers/detailed_results.php?markerid=1089 . Monument placed at site by Daughters of the Utah Pioneers.

³ Internet source. <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/companies/212/william-morgan-company-1852>.
Page 3 of 7 *Sarah Maria Chaffin Leigh b. 11 February 1855*

made all his own furniture and opened a furniture store on what is now Main Street. He ran a sawmill in Cedar Canyon and owned and operated an iron foundry. He acquired and farmed land and joined in a cooperative sheep herd that grew to ten thousand head in one decade. He was active in the LDS church and in the community. He was ordained a High Priest and served on the High Council of the Stake. He was First Counselor to the Bishop and Superintendent of Sunday School for 18 years. He served as the 2nd Lieutenant and CO of the 2nd Platoon, Company F, 34rd Battalion of the Iron Military District, and served on the City Council for two years. Samuel and Mary had nine more children, bringing the total number of children to 15.

Back to Maria. She and John had four children while living in Cedar City.

Sara Anne	1875, Cedar City
Sophia Lydia	1877, Cedar City
Betsy Rice	1879, Cedar City
Mary West	1882, Cedar City

One can only imagine their lives there. The children had both sets of grandparents, all of whom were prominent members of the community and of the LDS church. And, particularly on the Leigh side, they had a large number of aunts, uncles and cousins living nearby.

In 1882 their family was called by Church authorities to move to Price, Utah to help settle the Castle Valley. John and Maria's house was the second one built on the town site of Price. At first they lived in tents right on the river bank, and the Leigh family shared a tent with the family of C. H. Empey. Maria would often bake biscuits and send Sophia Lydia with a small pan of them to Bishop George Frandsen, who was the first bishop, who lived a few tents down from them.

John built the second log house. In January of 1884 he, along with George Frandsen, Calib B. Rhodes and a few others went up Miller Creek where they got logs to build a meeting house. Once built, it was also used as the court house, school house and for dancing and drama. John Leigh was one of the first trustees of the Price School District. He would haul water for the town, charging 50 cents a barrel. One day the school house caught fire and John saved it with his barrels of water.

When Betsy, Maria's daughter, was almost four years old, a neighbor boy, Frankie McIntire, who was only five years old, came calling on the Leigh family, wearing his father's hat. In all seriousness he said to Maria: "Can I have Betsy for a wife?" Betsy died shortly after that and the young boy grieved her death for a very long time.

Maria's second oldest daughter, Sophia Lydia, was chosen for secretary for the Primary when she was only eight years old. She would call the roll and each child would answer with a verse. A few years later, when they left Price to return to Cedar City, the Primary gave Sophia Lydia a

little work box with a looking glass in the lid, with scissors, needles, thread and a thimble. The mirror was especially rare for a young girl to have, and Sophia Lydia felt quite smart to have it.

The family lived in Price for ten years. John and Maria had six more children, bringing the total number of children to ten. Two of the children died before they reached one year of age (Corrina and Epaphreditus) and one child died when she was four years old (Betsy).

Corrina Elizabeth	1884, Cedar City
John David	1885, Price
Epaphreditus Cassitt	1887, Price
Echo Fern	1888, Price
Caroline Chaffin	1890, Price
Laura Lusk	1893, Price

In November of 1887, Epaphreditus, the second son, died; he was only eight months old. As John and Maria were caring for him on the night he died, they were unaware of a smoldering pair of overalls near the bedroom door. They found Sophia Lydia unconscious, and had a difficult time reviving her. It was a close call - they almost lost two children that same night.

In April of 1887 Maria's father was called to serve a LDS mission in the northwest. He returned home to Price in May of 1889, due to poor health.⁴ Around 1871, John had been thrown from a horse and dragged. It left him with a serious wound on his face that never fully healed and led to bad health later in life.

While in Price, the bodies of Elders Gibbs and Berry, who were missionaries, were brought from Tennessee. Maria helped drape the car that brought them on into Utah. Maria lost both of her parents in 1891. Lewis died in Cedar City March 5, 1891 at the age of 84 and Sarah Marie died in Cedar City August 2, 1891, at the age of 70.

In 1892 the family moved back to Cedar City. They lived in an old adobe home. School was taught in one of the rooms of the home. Maria's husband had been ill for twenty-five years, and became an invalid soon after their return to Cedar City. He died in 1896, at the age of forty-nine. Maria Leigh worked hard to support her family and to provide her children with a good education. She took in washings, and also obtained a large loom and wove carpets for many people all over the valley. All of the children helped out with what work they could get. Sophia Lydia worked as the janitor at the school, and would ring the curfew bell from the top of the school, at nine o'clock every night. John David would get up at four in the morning and haul bricks before going to school. After school, he would haul bricks for the rest of the day.

⁴ <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QKDW-T7RL> Early Mormon Missionary Database. LDS Church.
Page 5 of 7 Sarah Maria Chaffin Leigh b. 11 February 1855

The adobe house was cracking and Maria and the children put a rod through it to keep it from falling down. Some years later they took the old house apart. Maria and her daughters cleaned all the mortar off the dobbies and placed them in a pile. When the frame house was built, they carried the dobbies over to it and lined the new house with them.

Maria Leigh wanted all of her children to get a college education. All but Sophia Lydia graduated from college and went on to be school teachers or held other responsible positions where ever they lived. Sophia Lydia went to Parowan Stake Academy for three years, then quit to take a job for 50 cents a week. Sophia Lydia always regretted not getting the education that her mother so wanted her to get.

Sarah Maria Chaffin Leigh died at the age of 70, on December 12, 1925, in Cedar City, Utah. The following was written in her honor and was printed in the Iron County Record, December 18, 1925:

“I cannot suppress the desire to add my little tribute to the eulogies in honor of Mrs. Sarah C. Leigh at the services last Tuesday. Repeated reference was made to her remarkable habit of service and work which we know truthfully was seldom equaled, yet work was not the outstanding feature of her life, but the purpose of her unceasing efforts. A mother of ten children, three who died in their baby days. Of the seven living, six have graduated from institutions of learning, four of whom have been instructors in public or high schools. Through sacrifice she educated her children and this reared an imperishable monument to her name. Educational ideals have been transmitted to her grandchildren. Students and mothers who must work for their attainments have few indulgences in unnecessary pleasure, neither do they contribute to crime and lawlessness. Farewell dear sister, your achievement will help to make a better world and the only fitting plaudit is “Thou has done well.”

Note:

Sophia Lydia is my Great Grandmother. She was a member of the D.U.P. She married George Little, a farmer in Cedar City. They had six children and moved to Idaho. George was a lot older than my Great Grandmother, and he died when the children were young. She married Jack Lindsey, who died in 1937. Then she married W. W. Post in 1946; he died in 1953. I remember her making woven rugs out of old clothes on a big loom when I was a little girl. This must have been something that she learned from her mother, Maria, having read that in Maria's history too.

Sources

Sources (on file with the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers):

A Sketch of the Life of Sarah M. Chaffin, by her daughter, Laura Allen, November 1934
A Sketch in the Life of Lewis Rice Chaffin, by his daughter, Laura Allen, November 1934
Biography of Maria Chaffin Leigh, by granddaughter, Beryl Froyd, September 24, 1924
History of (Sophia) Lydia Leigh Little Post, by a friend, Stella Johnson

Samuel Leigh, by Susan Clegg Biesele, January 2005 with the following sources:

Leigh web site: <http://www.leigh.org>, The history/information on this web site, was researched/compiled/written by descendants: Norma Leigh Rudinsky and Allen Wilford Leigh. Since the website might not always be available, these are their sources, applicable to information I have used:

1. *The Call of Zion: The Story of the First Welsh Mormon Emigration* (Provo, Utah, 1987),
2. Samuel himself wrote a long journal or autobiography, but his handwritten original is now apparently lost. We (Norma and Allen) used the typescript copy in Southern Utah University, Cedar City (Special Collections, Box 8695 L447 Copy 2)
3. *Lehi Willard Jones 1854-1947* (Salt Lake City, 1972), *Mayors of Cedar City* and *Histories of Cedar City, Utah* (Cedar City, Utah, 1986), and (by Evelyn alone) *Henry Lunt: Biography* (BYU, Provo, 1996).
4. *Mormon Spirituality: Latter Day Saints in Wales and Zion* (Nottingham, 1987)
5. Treharne Family History

Other sources:

1. Family Search, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Family records for Samuel Leigh and Mary Treharne or Treharne.
 2. History of Samuel Leigh, submitted to the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers by Mignonette Leigh. Includes pages from Samuel Leigh's personal journal. Read at Mulberry Camp, Washington County, D.U.P.
 3. www.welshmormonhistory.org. A website developed by Ronald Dennis, Professor of Portuguese and Welsh at Brigham Young University, and a descendant of Captain Dan Jones.
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Note: This amended history corrects and adds information about her parents and their immigration to Utah, adds additional information about Samuel Leigh (her father-in-law) and his family, makes some minor corrections. adds additional information about her husband (John Leigh) and corrects Sarah Maria's name from Cossett Leigh (her mother's name) to Chaffin Leigh in the next to the last paragraph.