HISTORY HISTORY

Sketch of the Life of
Sarah Walsh Swift
A Handcart Pioneer of 1856.
Prepared by her daughter, Alice Swift Condie
Sept. 20th, 1928.
Camp IO, Salt Lake County.

From handcarts to airplains.

From slow moving sailing vessels to grayhounds of the ocean.

From couriers to wireless telegrapny.

From tallow dips to arclights.

From Indian outrages to the serene safety of well regulated police protection.

No period in all the world's history can show such wonderful achievements of human endeavors as can the last half century.

Not alone has the subject of this little sketch lived through this remarkable period but she has played a part in many of those things which are forever buried in the past.

Into her life has come the tragedy, trials, sufferings, pathos and hardships that make the true pioneer, home-builder and citizen.

To write a detailed history of this life would take volumns; only a mear outline will be given, even the outline is incomplete, principally for the reason that like many of the other pioneers of Utah, she is to modest to talk much about her life and what she has passed through and perhaps, too, she does not realize the full importance of scenes in which she has been an actor.

Sarah Walsh Swift, daughter of William Walsh and Alice F. Bury Walsh Strong, was born November 19th 1855 in Overdarwen, now Darwen, England.

With her parents and two brothers she left Darwen when six months old, May 19th 1856. Six days later, May 25th, 1856, she sailed from Liverpool, England, in company with 856 saints under the leadership of Edward Martin, a name that will forever live in the history of the west because of the appalling tragedy of this journey.

One hundred and ninety days later what was left of that company arrived in what was then Salt Lake City.

Six long, dreary weeks with nothing but the sky and sea to greet the eyes of the passengers the sailing vessel "Horizon" slowly plowed her way towards the setting sun, finally docking at Boston. (Now the trip can be made in six days or less.)

From Boston the majority of the party, including the Walsh family, were compelled, through lack of sufficent rail-road rolling stock, to travel on flat cars to Iowa City; from which point they proceeded to Winter Quarters, now a part of the city of Omaha, Nebraska.

The Utah pioneers of 1847 and those of the next nine years made the journey from Winter Quarters to Utah by ox teams or with the aid of horses.

In 1856 there were too few oxen or horses available to transport the thousands of converts to Mormonism to the "valleys of the mountains" and handcarts were resorted to as a mode of transporting what little goods and chattle the converts had; they walking, pushing or pulling theis carts.

When the Martin Company reached Winter Quarters in July 1856 there were far too few handcarts ready to accommodate

the large company and otners nad to be built. The wood was not sufficently dry and to hold the carts from falling apart tney were bound togetner with rawhide thongs.

On August 25th, 1856, under the leadership of Captain Edward Martin, 576 saints, carrying all their wordly possessions and food left winterquarters with 146 handcarts and 7 wagons,

They were high with hope; they were on the last stretch of their journey to the "Promised Land".

The Journey of the Edward Martin Handcart company from Winter Quarters to Great Salt Lake City stands today as the most tragic, the most heart rending peaceful journey, not alone in the history of the west, but, in all the history of the world. It is without an equal for sorrow, suffering and death. No other "trek" in history records such a death rate, such hunger, such suffering, with the possible exception of the retreat of Napolian and his army from Moscow. Just how many of that herioc and noble band of men, women and children died of hunger and broken hearts will never be known.

The sorrow attending the daily, and towards the last the almost hourly visit of the grim reaper was too much even for those brave men and women to keep an accurate history of. A shallow grave, a few words, a final prayer, and then the order; "Push on", we must try and reach help before all perish.

According to Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jensen almost one third of that company died a marters death. Left to sleep the final eartnly sleep in unknown and unmarked graves, while those who were left with broken hearts and bowed heads moved slowly onward pushing or pulling their carts on that thousand mile journey over plains and mountains.

Two of those whose spirits passed back to the keeping of the Eternal Father and Creator were members of the Walsh family.

In an unmarked grave, made in the snow, for the ground was so frozen that an earth grave could not be dug, near Devil Gate, all that was once mortal of William Walsh was laid at rest, a victim of hunger and cold. (Nine other members of that party died the same night as did Brother Walsh) To the eastward a few days journey was the shallow, unmarked grave of his son, Robert.

With her two remaining children, one less than a year old, she knew that she must struggle on for the sake of those who were left to her. Just in time to save even the remnants of that heroic band from starvation and freezing, succor came, food and clothing and help, sent to them from Salt Lake City.

Strong men were they of that party of rescuers; they had seen and lived through sorrow and suffering, yet they wept like children when they saw and realized the suffering of their brethern and sisters.

The Widow Walsh, holding her two children, set in the snow. The power to think, to feel, to act, seemed at an end. A place for the woman and her two children was found in one of the rescue wagons and the onward journey was resumed.

Tired, weary, footsore; with aching limbs and sorrowing souls, what was left of that noble and glad hearted company which had left Winter Quarters on August 25, arrived in Salt Lake City in November 30, 1856. They had been 98 days, making an average of 10 miles a day.

For the Gospel of Jesus Christ they had sacrificed their

all, save life.

Some day, from the fragments of history which has been preserved, a master mind will tell the story of the Martin Handcart company in such a way that it will thrill the world and compel the admiration of mankind.

In those early days the newly arrived saints were never without a home; someone was always on hand to take them in their homes, make them as comfortable as their worldly condition would permit and later, with the help of others, assist them to get a home of their own and a start in their new life.

The widow Walsh and her two children were made welcome at the home of Jacob Strong, which stood on the northeast corner of Eighth East and Fourth South Street. Later Mrs. Walsh became the wife of Mr. Strong.

In the history of Utah the year 1858 is known as the year of the "Move South". Johnson's army was approching Utah to put down an alleged "mormon Rebellinn". Rather than be driven from their homes, as they had been so many times in the past, the Mormon people decided to abandon them; leaving only enough men in Salt Lake City to burn everything to the ground should the army stop instead, as had been promised, pass through the city.

In company with her mother and brother John, (for many years a resident of Salt Lake City and later of Farmington, Davis County,) Mrs. Swift moved to Springville.

Johnson's Army passed through Salt Lake City and on to Cedar Valley in the western part of what is now Utah County where they established Camp Floyd.

The saints returned to their homes in Salt Lake City.

While the Mormon People, their history proves it, have ever been strong advocates of education; there were little opportunity for schooling in those early days. The people were compelled to spend their lives in trying to wrestle a living from the not too willing earth.

The greater part of the education of Sister Swift was secured in the greatest school on earth; experience.

While there was little or no chance for schooling neither was there much time for play. The keeping together of body and soul with food, clothing andshelter was a serious problem, one in which every member of the family, who was old enough, must take his or her part in the struggle for a livelyhood; Sarah Walsh was no exception; as a child she learned to and did knit the family stockings. Her mother often worked all day for a yard of "factory" then worth a dollar a yard, now IO cents a yard.

About 5 miles above the mouth of Emigration canyon was located, for many years, what was known as "Strong's Farm". The original homestead was supposed to contain I60 acres of which all but a few acres in the bottom of the canyon was mountains on which the settler ranged his few cattle and sheep. On the leval land wheat and a few other things were raised.

The family, or at least a part of them, spent the spring, summer and fall on the canyon farm returning to their home in the city for the winter. Many was the month which Sarah spent on that canyon farm as a girl.Today flockmasters of Utah number their herds by thousands and their wool clip by the tens of thousands of pounds. At that little canyon farm a few head of sheep were kept; as they worked their way from place to place, in search offood, through the scrub oak brush, which covered

the sides of the mountains, bits of wool would be torn from the sheep and cligh to the brush. The child Sarah would follow the trail of the sheep through the brush and bit by bit gather the wool which her mother carded into "Bats" with which quilts were made.

It was while living at this canyon farm that the girl got an Indian scare which was never effaced from her memory. Everyone on the farm, with the exception of a lame man, the subject of this sketch, and another girl had gone to the city on business. The other Girl when to what was known as "Upper Field" to drive home the cows for evening milking. When she did not return as soon as the lame man and Sarah thought she should they went in search of her. They found her in the grasp of a big buck Indian, who was trying to drag the screaming, fighting, struggling girl into the brush. At the sight of the other two "palefaces" the Indian beat a hasty retreat into the brush and fast gathering darkness.

The latch string on the door of that little log canyon cabin was taken inside that night.

She was a resident of the canyon at the time, 1862, when soldiers from Fort Douglas, went there to cut logs for the first quarters at the fort.

The fall of the year were the happy days of childhood in that long ago. Then if he or she, usually it was the girls for the boys could not be spared for that kind of work, was the first to get the consent of the owner, they would go gleaning. Mother would put up a lunch, the best there was in the house, and with a seamless sack, often called a "Mormon suitcase" in those days, they would go to the wheat fields. The greater

part of wheat raised near Salt Lake City in those days was on what was known as the "Big Field Survey", located below Ninth South and East of State Street.

For the benefit of the younger generation "Gleaning" consisted in following the harvester, usually the owner of the field, not a machine, who gathered the crop, often with a sickle, sometimes with a scythe and in later days a scythe with a "cradle" attached. After the crop had been gathered the gleaner went over the field and around the edges of the field picking up each head of wheat that had fallen or had been overlooked. The wheat was then separated from the chaff, usually with a "Flail" perhaps ground in a coffee mill, then there was bread from new wheat instead of dry bread with an onion and salt in place of butter, which was the fare of Sister Sarah more than once in her childhood days. Many was the sack of "gleanings" which she gathered and carried home.

It was also in the fall of the year that some of the girls could get a job that meant a supply of molasses for the family for the winter. This was "striping" sugar cane. At First this was done while the cane stood in the field which meant a lot of long reaches for the child for the upper blades. Later the method was changed, the cane was cut and stacked at the mill. "Striping" was easier then, unless the frost came which meant that the blades of the stalks would cut likea sharp knife. If the mill man took a liking to the "Striper" out of the goodness of his heart he would give them some of the "Skimings" a "frothy" substance of a greenish color from which they would make molasses candy.

In those early days there were no electric lights, not

not even lamps and coal oil. The people used a "tallow dip" To one end of a piece of cotton rag, or wick, was placed a button, or something else to hold in the greese in a bowl while the other end gave the light. Later they made tallow candles; then came the "Sperm" candle and then coal oil lamps, a most wonderful light, so the people thought.

There were no fancy rugs and carpets in those days; if the people wished to cover a floor, and feel a little better than their neighbors, they saved every bit of cloth or rag that had outworn its usefullness for anything else; these were torn into narrow strips, sewed together and then weven into a many colored carpet. many was the pound of rags which Sister Sarah tore and sewed in those days. In those days featners were scarce but the inner part of the pods of the milkweed made a good substitute these she gathered for the making of family pillows; the head of the cattail was often used with which to fill the bed ticks.

When she was I2 years old she could spin her three skeins of yarn a day as good as older women.

At this date, Oct. I928, she can remember distinctly the grasshopper plague of I868 (the cricket plague was in I855) With other members of the Tenth Ward she went to Calder's, now Nibley, park for a days outing. During the day the sun was darkened by the myriads of grasshoppers. When the girl returned home that evening the garden, of which the family had been so proud, the fruit trees, the schade trees, all were stripped bare. not a leaf nor blade was left to show the beauty and prosperity of the morning.

When 15 years of age she was called to labor in the Relief Society of the Tenth Ward. In company with an older woman

the homes of the saints were visited. Offerings of anything were accepted from those who could afford to give and distributed among those who were in need. The sick were visited and cared for. The home visited by affliction found tender sympathy and loving care in the acts and words of these women of mercy.

When the Female Retrenchment Society was organized in the Tenth Ward Sister Swift, then Walsh, was chosen as second counsilor.

In 1874 she was called as a teacher in the Tenth Ward Sunday School, a position which she filled with credit and ability for a number of years.

On June 6th, 1877 she was married to William Swift. At last it looked as though the long struggle for existance was at an end. "Man proposes. God disposes."

On Sept. I6th 1884 William Swift died leaving a widow and three children, two of them but five weeks old. With that fortitude, which alone is possessed by the heroic soul, she faced the future and the struggle for existence of herself and those whom God had given into her care. At what a cost she alone knows. At what result those who know her children can best testify.

In I898 she was chosen as second councilor in the Tenth Ward Relief Society. A position which she filled until November I906. A position of trust and responsibility which required much time in addition to that which she had to give to the earningsof a living for herself and children and the care and bringing up of them.

On April 23, 1907 she was called as a stake missionary in the Relief Society of Liberty Stake. A position which she held until October, 1915.

When the Daughters of the Handcart Pioneers organized she was elected as first vice-president; later she was elected second vice-president and still later president after which she served as chaplain of the organization.

For three years she labored as a home missionary in the Tenth Ward, spending two nights a week, no matter what the weather, in her duties.

When Camp 10, Daughters of the Pioneers, was organized she was chosen chaplain, a position which she holds at this date, September 20th, 1928.

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Sarah Walsh Swift
History read Sept. 26, 1929,
in Pioneer Hall, 8th East & 4th South Sts.,
by Captain Charlotte A. Moyle.