



Sarah Strong Wilson & Josiah Franklin

Sarah Strong Wilson Franklin

Compiled by Florie S. Fullmer and E. June Carroll

Sarah was born 5 December 1822 in Strongstown, Indiana County, Pennsylvania—the firstborn child of Jacob Strong and Sarah Hill. The town of Strongstown was established by her two grandfathers: James Strong and James Hill.¹

Sarah was christened the 26th of June 1823 in the Brush Valley Lutheran Church where her parents and grandparents were active members.

Within three years, her sister Susan joined the family; a couple of years later William was born, and in 1831 Lucinda joined her three siblings.

In the fall of 1836, a young 18-year-old missionary named Erastus Snow came to their little community preaching of a new religion called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Sarah's parents joined this new church, but we have no record that Sarah ever joined. Three years later Jacob and Sarah Strong took their younger children and moved to Illinois where they could be closer to other members of their new faith. But, before they left, three major things happened to their little family. First, their youngest daughter Lucinda, died at the age of 7 and was buried in the old Union Cemetery in Strongstown. Second, another son, John Albert joined their family in 1838. And third, their oldest daughter, Sarah, married Samuel Wilson and remained in Pennsylvania for several more years.

We have not been able to find a record of Sarah and Samuel's marriage. It was not recorded in the Lutheran Church where she had attended as a child—even though other marriages of that time period were recorded there. Perhaps a missionary from her family's new faith performed the marriage, but no record was kept. Or, perhaps she was married in the Methodist Church. She later claimed to be a member of the Methodist faith.

Samuel was the son of William and Mary Wilson of Jackson Township, Cambria County, Pennsylvania. The Wilson property actually crossed over the county border from Cambria County into Indiana County and Samuel and Sarah lived on a part of the Wilson property in Pine Township, Indiana County. When Samuel's father died, they inherited that piece of property.

On January 22nd, 1840, Sarah Wilson gave birth to her first child, William, in Brushvalley, Indiana, Pennsylvania. Another son, Jacob, was born about 1841 followed

¹History of Indiana County, Pennsylvania (Internet), page 528, heritagequestonline.com.

by a daughter, Susan born Oct. 23rd, 1841/1843. Two more girls, Lucinda Jane and Mary Ann, joined the Pennsylvania family before they sold their property and moved to Illinois in 1852.

Were they trying to find Sarah's parents, Jacob and Sarah Strong? How good the communication was between the two families, we do not know. By the time Sarah and Samuel Wilson moved to Illinois, her parents had been driven out by mobs and had moved to Salt Lake City with the rest of the evicted "Mormons". Did Sarah ever meet her younger siblings, James Thomas and Hyrum who were born in Nauvoo? We don't really know. She did write to James T. in Salt Lake City in 1880—asking, ". . . is my dear old mother alive?" So, we know they communicated, but not often.

Sarah and Samuel Wilson had two more children while in Illinois: James born in 1855 and Utah Elizabeth born Jan. 1, 1859. By 1860, the family was living along the Mississippi River in Rock Island County. Samuel and William both worked as millwrights- meaning "a person who designs and builds mills, windmills, watermills, etc. Usually a skilled mason and carpenter."² They appear to have owned livestock, but not property.

Then, suddenly, disaster struck this family. Samuel died and so did Jacob. We hunger to find documentation of details, but are still searching for confirmation. Family stories say, "Samuel died in a flash flood while rounding up cattle." (Possibly a daughter died at the same time, but we do not have record of her name or circumstance.) And, Jacob (who was believed to be unmarried) "died of a chest wound in the Civil War."

By the end of the war in 1865, several of the older children were married. Susan married George Gibbens in 1857; William Married Edith Wallace in 1862; Lucinda Jane married Jonas Johnson in 1865; and Mary Ann married John Jennings in 1865. The three sisters: Susan, Lucinda Jane and Mary Ann all lived next door to one another in New Boston, Mercer, Illinois. We're not sure where Sarah Wilson was in that particular year, but we suspect that she was with one of her married children. (William Wilson's obituary states that he moved to North Bend, Nebraska in 1865.)

The family seemed to gain strength by staying together. Even though they were in a migration pattern, they lived near one another. Only the Johnson family stayed in Illinois. All the rest migrated into Iowa during the 1870's.

Sarah's son, William, bought 80 acres of land in Plymouth County in 1873, and Sarah, herself, bought 71 adjoining acres in 1874. Coincidentally, Sarah's daughter, Utah, married Michael William Hoover in 1874 and they all seemed to farm the land together. It was difficult. *History of Plymouth County, Iowa*, by W.S. Freeman states:

²Evans, A to Z: A Comprehensive Dictionary For Genealogists & Historians

Everyone who lived in Plymouth county from 1869 to 1879 knows more than a historian today can possibly write concerning the wonderful plague of grasshoppers which in armies of multiplied millions devastated northwestern Iowa. The first introduction I had to the pests was about the first of August, 1868, when mowing in the Floyd bottom, about four miles southwest of Le Mars. Suddenly the grasshoppers commenced dropping and became so numerous that it was impossible to drive my team through them.

We had but little planted, but what we had was completely eaten up before they left. My neighbor Burns had fifteen or twenty acres of corn and he did not get enough to fatten four small hogs. Some years the grasshoppers left certain parts of the earth full of eggs, which hatched out the next spring. These we had to feed all summer. They were the lads that gave us the worst dose. At that time there was only a very small portion of the land in this neighborhood under cultivation and they gathered from all the prairie surrounding these small fields and literally stripped everything that a man was depending on for a living for himself and family. Some, who could, left the country and others would if they could.

In 1880, Sarah wrote a letter to her brother, James T., saying that they had sold their farm. She said, "William is going to look for land this summer. I don't know if it will be in Kansas or in Nebraska. The two boys want to go where they can get good range for stock, for farming does not pay as well as stock does. . .the grasshoppers ate all the small grain last year, but we had good corn crops. The hoopers hatched last year here, but there is no eggs this year."

She also wrote of heartache in losing loved ones. ". . . my daughter and her husband in Illinois [Lucinda Jane & Jonas Johnson] both died a year ago last November. One died the 24th [and the other died] the 26th and left five children--an infant four days old (it died a month old.) There are two boys and two girls; one boy--14 years old-- we have him. The others are in an Illinois orphan home. I sent and got the girls, but we could not keep them on the account of their estate not being in Iowa and that caused me a good deal of trouble."

This 14-year-old grandson, John Johnson, stayed with his grandmother and Uncle William until he reached adulthood. Within the next 5 years, Sarah, her unmarried son, James, and John Johnson all moved to Saunders, Nebraska with William's family. In 1889-90, William and his brother Samuel James worked as waiters at the Millard Hotel in Omaha. By 1900, William was farming his own land again--free of mortgage, and his brother, James, was helping him. Also, John Johnson was buying a farm in Brown County, and his two sisters, Dora and Esther (from the orphanage), were now his neighbors.

Sarah, however, had an opportunity for a new life. She married a widower, Josiah Franklin, on 9 January 1887 in Clackamas County, Oregon. We're not sure how they met, but Sarah's daughters, Utah Hoover and Susan Gibbens were both living in Oregon with their families. And, on Christmas Eve, 1885, Josiah's son, William Hackney Franklin, had married Sarah's granddaughter, Sarah Lucinda Gibbens. That following year must have included an interesting courtship between Sarah and Josiah.

Sarah enjoyed a fairly stable life living with Josiah on his farm located in Clackamas County--near the boarder of Monitor, Marion County, Oregon. She joined the United Brethren Church and was active there until her death 28 September 1896.