

## LEAH (LEIGH)

**James H. Leah**, husband

Born: 11 Dec. 1798, of Manchester, Lancashire, England (In Beswick)

Died: between 14 and 31 Oct 1856

**Sarah M. Berry Leah**, wife

Born: 31 Jul 1798, Hulme, Lancashire, England / or

19 Jan 1800, Kirkheaton, Yorkshire, England

Died: 4 Oct 1856, near Scott's Bluff, Nebraska

### MARTIN HANDCART COMPANY

After joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Manchester, England, James and Sarah Leah courageously decided to emigrate to America with other Saints longing to be in their "Zion" in the Rocky Mountains of Utah. They left a comfortable apartment and James' profession of working in a silk mill. They sailed on the ship *Horizon* under the direction of Edward Martin, who also became the captain of their handcart company upon reaching Iowa City, Iowa.

Sarah and James walked and pulled their handcart the 300 miles from Iowa City to Florence, Nebraska, between July 28 and August 22 of that year. The more difficult part of their journey that lay ahead, however, was the next thousand miles of plains and mountains between Florence and the Zion of their dreams in Salt Lake City, Utah. Sarah survived the first 6 weeks of this part of the journey. Completely worn out, and probably suffering from dysentery, she died the same day as two others, as recorded by fellow traveler, John Jacques: "Oct. 4, Sarah Leah, wife of James Leah, Manchester, worn out, died 2 miles east of Scott's Bluff at 12 ½ PM."

Sarah may have died while sitting on a rock in her husband's arms, as a grandson, Stephen James Hart, remembers the retelling of the story this way: "*[Sarah and James Leah] were separated or side tracked somehow from the rest of the company. Becoming alarmed at their long absence, search parties were sent out to find them. I don't know how long they were lost, or how long they searched for them, but when the searchers were about to give up hope of finding them, they found them sitting on a rock. Grandfather was leaning forward with his forehead resting on his hands which were supported by his cane; and grandmother was huddled close beside him, her head resting on his shoulder. . . . [a] mute testimony of unconquered faith.*"\* Their names are reportedly carved on Chimney Rock, which they passed on Oct. 2, just two days before Sarah's death.

It was much colder by the time James Leah died. On Oct. 17, the Martin Company lightened their handcart loads by discarding and burning bedding and clothing. They desperately tried to hurry on with their large company, but two days later they had to ford the icy and deep N. Platte River as the first winter storms descended on them. They made little progress the next few days and had all but given up when the first rescuers found them stranded by the river on Oct. 28. (See Martin Company Meeting Document at [http://tellmystorytoo.com/pdf/Martin\\_Company\\_Meeting.pdf](http://tellmystorytoo.com/pdf/Martin_Company_Meeting.pdf) for more information about events between Oct. 16 and 28, the probable time period in which James died.)

James and Sarah would not be in the Salt Lake Valley to welcome their daughter's family when they immigrated in 1864. Sarah Ann Leah Hart (age 31) was a highly skilled tailoress and had received a diploma for this work. She and her husband worked hard to save money for their own journey, but they were still short, so Sarah Ann's husband, Samuel C. Hart, stayed in England to work a little longer while Sarah and her four children emigrated in 1864. Due to persecution, Samuel did not stay in England as long as planned and soon joined his family in Utah.

There are some similarities recorded regarding Sarah's immigration to that of her parents

eight years earlier. One is the singing of a song around the nightly campfires that was also very popular among the Martin Company members. It was included in the 1840 Manchester Hymnal that had been compiled by Wilford Woodruff during his mission to England. It was entitled, "O Zion, When I Think of Thee." Sarah probably had sung this hymn with her parents while they were all still together in England. See words to this song included in art work entitled "Hope" on the "Fine Art" link at [www.tellmystorytoo.com](http://www.tellmystorytoo.com). Robert McBride, who was the chorister in the Martin Company, sang this song the night before he died, which was during the same time that James died.

Sarah Ann Leah Hart was not to enjoy being in the Valley with her beloved parents, but she passed on her faith to their posterity. The legacy left by James and Sarah Leah is recorded in a little poem that their daughter, Sarah Ann, loved and often recited. It was written by Sarah Ann's daughter, Marantha Hart (Guest):

When you come to the 'Red Sea' place in your life  
And you hardly know what to do  
When there's no way back and no way ahead  
And only one way and that's through  
Then trust in the Lord with a faith supreme  
Till the night and the storm is gone  
He will still the winds and part the waves  
When he says to your soul, "Go on!"

---

\*Stephen J. Hart's account also wrongfully indicates "Thus they were found - frozen to death . . ." Although the nights were frosty by this time, the daytime temperatures in the various diaries are recorded as "HOT" and "WARM". Sarah's death is reported at half past noon by Jacques, disproving the grandson's account of freezing to death. Also, if correct as noted in other biographical sources, James died two to five weeks later than Sarah. Although James' exact death date is not known, it seems that Jacques would have recorded it along with his wife's if they had died together. (Jacques quit writing later for a time as it was too cold.)

#### Sources:

1. E-mail communications, Dec. 2008, between Matt Hart, Andrew Olsen, and Jolene Allphin
2. International Daughters of Utah Pioneers files, Salt Lake City, Utah  
(Various biographies of the Leah's daughter, Sarah Ann Leah Hart her mother, Sarah M. Berry Leah, by descendants)
3. Mormon Immigration Index CD, ships *Horizon*-1856 and *General McClelland* - 1864
4. "Tragedy and Triumph, Your Guide to the Rescue of the 1856 Willie and Martin Handcart Companies" by Howard K. Bangerter and Cory W. Bangerter