

# Benjamin Perkins and Mary Ann Williams, and Sarah Williams

## **Benjamin Perkins**

**Born: Jan 14, 1844; Shoot,  
Glamorganshire, South Wales**

**Father: William Perkins**

**Mother: Jane Mathews Perkins**

**Died: Mar 30, 1926; Monticello, Utah**



**Life in Wales:** Benjamin Perkins came from a poor family that depended on the coal mines for their income, and from the age of six, he worked in the mines as well, starting out as a water boy. At the time of his immigration to Utah in 1867, he had been well-trained in the use of blasting powder as a means of removing the coal from the mine walls.

**A New Start:** After coming to the States, he worked to earn money to send for the rest of his family and his sweetheart, Mary Ann Williams. They arrived in 1867 and he was sealed to Mary Ann in the endowment house shortly afterwards. Her family came over in 1878 due to the failing health of her father, and they were joyously reunited.

**The San Juan Expedition:** When the call came for the Saints to leave their comfortable homes and colonize the southeast corner of the state of Utah, Benjamin and Mary Ann were living in Cedar City and were amongst the first to be given the assignment to "volunteer." They had three young children at this time, and Mary Ann asked her sister, Sarah, to come along and help.

**A Dangerous Proposition:** The road had not yet been created for much of their journey, and Ben's experience with blasting powder came in handy as the Saints cleared way for their wagons to pass. His knowledge came into greatest play, however, when they reached the cliff that overlooked the Colorado River. In a classic case of "they can't go around it and they can't go under it," the Saints decided they would have to go down it. A notch already existed in the face of the cliff, and it was determined they would widen the notch and lower the wagons that way. However, one section was so steep, there was no way a wagon could possibly roll down.

It's unknown exactly how Benjamin came up with the idea that would eventually work. One assumes the answer came as a result of prayer and meditation. It's doubtless his time spent in the coal mines of Wales prepared him for this work, for the methods he employed were exactly those he'd used in coal mining. He suggested that a series of holes be bored and blasted out of the cliff face, and that oak staves be inserted into those holes to form a road that would hang in midair. If the holes were too close together, they could break into each other and the staves would fall out. If the holes were too far apart, the wheels would become stuck in the grooves and the road wouldn't work. Unschooling and unlettered, Benjamin did the math in his head and determined the spacing of the holes, the size of the auger needed, and trained the men in how to use the blasting powder to create the holes. Once the road was finished, it was dubbed "Uncle Ben's Dugway" in his honor.

**Settling in Bluff:** Upon reaching Bluff, Benjamin built a home for his wife and daughters, and then at the request

of leadership, built another inside the fort. During this time, he felt impressed to ask his sister-in-law, Sarah, to be his second wife. She didn't accept immediately, but did after a year, and took up residence in Bluff as well.

**A Life Well Lived:** The rest of Ben's life was spent moving his two families from place to place to keep them protected from the law. He did spend a short amount of time in jail for polygamy, but quickly won the trust of his jailers and was made a trustee. Although the law was against him, Ben never abandoned either of his families or his testimony of the gospel.

Benjamin Perkins died in 1926, having left a legacy of faith, determination, and courage. His descendants number in the thousands.

## **Mary Ann Williams Perkins**

**Born: Aug 27, 1851; Llantwit Vairdre, Glamorganshire, South Wales**

**Father: Evan Williams**

**Mother: Mary Davies**

**Died: Oct 11, 1912; Kane Springs, Utah**



**Early Life:** Mary Ann Williams was a gentle girl who loved beauty in all its forms. She especially appreciated music and was involved in the choir in her area, and this is where she met Benjamin Perkins. He too, enjoyed music and they had this in common. When time came for Ben to depart Wales and come to Utah, he asked Mary Ann if she would come if he sent for her. She said yes.

**Marriage:** Two years later, Ben managed to save enough to bring not only Mary Ann, but members of his family that had not yet made the trip. Mary Ann had the luck of being on the first train that would use the Transcontinental Railroad after its completion. Ben and Mary Ann were sealed in the Endowment House in 1869 and made their home in Cedar City, where they were blessed with a little girl, then a son who died shortly after birth, and two more little girls. Another was brought into their home to be raised after the death of her own mother.

**The Call:** When time came to leave Cedar City, Mary Ann had to say goodbye to the little house she'd spent so much time in, making it a home. She packed up all her belongings and made the arduous trek, a helpmeet and companion for Ben along the way.

**Plural Marriage:** After reaching Bluff, Mary Ann learned that Ben meant to take Sarah as his second wife. She had known from his patriarchal blessing that he would someday take another wife, but the fact that he chose her own sister was very hard to bear. But Mary Ann didn't want to add to the burden Ben was already carrying, and after a time, she came to accept the situation and make the best of it, even though it certainly was difficult and trying.

Mary Ann passed away while living in a small cabin in Kane Springs, from which Ben operated a stagecoach route.

## **Sarah Williams Perkins**

**Born: May 23, 1860; Tonteg, Llantwit Vairdre, Glamorganshire, South Wales**

**Father: Evan Williams**

**Mother: Mary Davies**

**Died: June 30, 1943; Monticello, Utah**



**The Early Years:** Sarah was her mother's little helper. When Sarah was a young girl, her father was sent to Russia to help with a mining project there, leaving Mary expecting again and with the care of several little ones already. Sarah became her mother's right hand. Possibly because of this, Sarah grew up to be very logically and practically minded.

**Religion:** Sarah's father had experimented with religion in his life, including a brief stint meeting with Dryads. When the Williams were introduced to Mormonism, they were all converted, all except for Sarah. She wanted the chance to discover for herself which religion she should join, and met with the Methodists for a time. When she left Wales to come to Utah, she was warned by her pastor that she should take care lest those Mormons ensnare her. She did not inform him that her entire family was comprised of Mormons.

**Coming to Utah:** Sarah thought of coming to Utah as a great adventure, but the language barrier was a concern for a time. She had a few embarrassing experiences as she became accustomed to life in the States, but she faced it with her typical practicality and determination.

**The Trek:** Sarah was more than happy to go along with Ben and Mary Ann as they embarked on their journey to the San Juan, but she thought her duties would be merely watching over the children. To her surprise, shortly into the drive the first day, Ben put her in charge of the second wagon. She had never driven a team in her life, but never one to shirk from a challenge, she took the reins and came to think of the team as her own.

**Conversion:** Sarah still considered herself a Methodist at the start of the journey, but as she traveled with the Saints, she became impressed by the faith they showed along the way. She also was touched deeply by the spirit of the hymns they sang at night around the campfires. By the time the group reached Bluff, she was ready to be baptized.

**Adjustment to Polygamy:** Hardly any time passed after Sarah's baptism before Ben made her the proposal to become his second wife. She was unfamiliar still with much of the doctrine, and this teaching in particular was hard for her to understand. She met with Church leaders and explained it all to her. She returned to her parents' home in Cedar City for a time to think things over, and one year later became Ben's wife, sealed in the St. George temple.

**Contention in the Family:** This marriage caused a great deal of contention in Sarah's family. They felt she had gone after her sister's husband and would not allow Sarah into their home. This did nothing to soothe Mary Ann's feelings, either. Sarah left Cedar City to return to Bluff, feeling the sting of her family's rejection. They did soften their hearts after a time, and she was welcomed back in to the family fold.

**Family Life:** Sarah raised her children mostly on her own. In 1890, the Manifesto was issued and the law cracked down on polygamy more than ever before, and Ben was forced to move his wives from place to place for their own protection. The two sisters were rarely in the same town, but rather, Ben kept them apart and traveled back and forth to see them as often as he could. Sarah took in laundry to make ends meet, and was able to give her children a loving, happy environment in which to grow. After Mary Ann's death, she came to live with Ben and he finished out his years with her.

The descendants of these good people now number in the thousands, and they all have stories to tell of the wonderful legacy left by these pioneers who truly loved the Lord, gave up much for their faith, and lived with determination every day. Truer words could not be spoken than these, as quoted from the hymn - they were "blessed, honored pioneers."

**By:** Tristi Norton Pinkston, great-great-granddaughter of Benjamin and Sarah Perkins. For more information, see the book 'Season of Sacrifice' by Tristi Pinkston at <http://www.tristipinkston.com/books.htm>