

James Henry & Sarah Ipson Riley (Woolsey)

James Henry Riley
Born: Dec 10, 1853; Haslingden, Lancashire,
England
Father: George Riley
Mother: Jane Taylor
Died: June 22, 1888

Sarah Ipson
Born: March 13, 1860; Manti, Utah
Father: Niels Peter Ipson
Mother: Georgina Maria Keller
Married: James Henry Riley, June 15, 1877
Married: David Mark Woolsey, Dec. 8, 1892
Died June 12, 1948



San Juan Mission Volunteers

In the fall of 1879, Jim Riley, Sarah Ipson (his bride of two years), and their baby boy headed for the San Juan. With the excitement throughout Iron County over the colonization of The San Juan, the Riley's volunteered to go. Jim was 25 and Sarah was 19 when they left their humble home in Beaver, Utah.

Hole-in-the-Rock Explorer

At Dance Hall Rock / Forty Mile Spring, Jim was one of 13 men selected to explore for a possible route across the Colorado River gorge and beyond. These scouts were the first to descend the cliffs of the river gorge and ascend Cottonwood Hill, see the area around the Chute and traverse Wilson Canyon to the San Juan River.

Faith Tested - Lives Spared

With no conveniences, no privacy, and little if any fuel for fires or cooking, one can only imagine the hardships endured by Sarah and the other mothers as they cared for children during the harsh winter of 1879/80. Sarah, who was expecting a baby, recorded the following: "We did not expect our journey to be so long and hard, but cold weather set in early. Work was very hard with the few tools that were on hand. I carried my baby for many hours with his little feet in the front of my dress against my body to keep them from freezing. Water was taken from the deep holes in the rocks left from rain and snow for all purposes. Our faith was surely tested, but we put our trust in the Lord. Lots of sickness was endured, but our lives were spared."

Baby Born in Bluff

On July 24, 1880, three months after their arrival in Bluff and while still living out of a covered wagon, Sarah gave birth to George Peter.

Return to Beaver

After two crop failures resulting in the loss of nearly all of their earthly possessions, they returned to Beaver to start anew.

Jim and Son's Untimely Deaths

Shortly after their return to Beaver, Jim's health began to fail. At age 35, Jim passed away, leaving Sarah with four living children ages one to ten. Jim was preceded in death by Peter, their son born at Bluff, who died at age two. Following Jim's death, Sarah provided for her family by weaving rag carpets at a rate of sixty yards per week.



Collar made by James H. Riley in the 1870's. It is not known if this was a one-of-a-kind gift for Sarah or if Jim made and sold collars when his health limited his physical activities.

Sarah Raises Sister's Children as Her Own

One year following her husband's death, Sarah's sister Mary passed away. Sarah took in Mary's two boys, ages six and eight, and lovingly raised them as her own.

Sarah Marries David Woosley

In 1892, Sarah married David Woolsey, her deceased sister's husband. Concerning this marriage Niels Peter Ipson Jr. recorded: "The union was more a matter of convenience in helping them to better sustain the wants of this large mixed family, but later events proved the wisdom of this course. David Mark Woosley proved to be a kind and devoted husband and father." This union resulted in the birth of six more children, three of whom (triplets) died at birth.

Sews 400 Sets of Burial Clothes

Sarah's capacity to serve extended beyond the care of her husband and nine living children. Among many other acts of service, Sarah provided comfort to those who lost loved ones. This service was much more than a sympathetic word. Whenever a death occurred, it was Sarah who washed the body, obtained the cloth, sewed the burial clothing, and then tenderly dressed the deceased. In her later years, she recalled the names of 400 for whom she had performed this service. Of these, she was offered monetary compensation for two.



Treadle (foot-powered) sewing machine that Sarah used to sew 400 sets of burial clothes

Relief Society President

In 1913 Sarah was called as the Relief Society President of the East Beaver Ward. She was called again to that same calling/same ward in 1917 and again in 1921, making a total of 12 years of service in that capacity.

Sarah's Testimony

Sarah's brother Niels Peter Ipson Jr. recorded: "From the early period of her infancy up to the present there was never a time that she doubted the truth of the Gospel that inspired her father and mother to leave home, relatives and friends, cross oceans and prairies, pulling carts like oxen and horses that they might enjoy religious freedom in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." On her 78th birthday, Sarah expressed that her testimony was just as emphatic as was the declaration of Job.

Sarah passed away at age 88. Her second husband, David Woosely, preceded her in death by 13 years. As for the children, they all become stalwart citizens. They were true to their faith, and took great pride in thinking and speaking of their dear mother.



Sarah Ipson Riley Woosely in the 1940's



Sarah's toy dish set which provided hours of enjoyment for her grandchildren.

Submitted by James and Sarah's great grandson, Lamont Crabtree