SARAH ANN DEVOE WOOLF

Sarah Ann Devoe was born 10 April 1814 in Fordham, Westchester, New York. She was the youngest child of a family of 5 children, 2 boys & three girls. Her father was John Devoe Jr., born 5 Feb. 1778 in Westchester County, New York. His father was John Devoe, Sr. Whose father was Daniel, the son of Frederick DeVeaux, a French Hugenot. Sarah Ann’s mother was Sarah Weeks, born 13 April 1781 in New York, married 1804 and died 23 April 1864. Sarah Ann’s parents were wealthy people and were ranked among the aristocrats of New York.


Sarah Ann’s mother, Sarah Weeks, was the daughter of Absalom & Mary Weeks, and John Anthony’s mother, Phebe Weeks, was the daughter of Abel Weeks. According to information handed down through the family, Sarah & Phebe were cousins, making Sarah Ann and John Anthony second cousins. As yet our research work has failed to produce a family where Absalom & Able were brothers.

Sarah Ann’s wedding cake contained 30 eggs and it was stirred for about 2 hours. Her silk wedding gown was ashes of roses. Her slippers were white satin and were made by the groom, an expert shoemaker, who made slippers for many of the aristocrats of New York City. To make her outfit more nearly complete, she wore white kid gloves which caused her considerable embarrassment when she pulled the thumb out of one, in her hurry to remove them when the wedding cake was being passed.

As both she and her husband possessed a deep religious feeling, they investigated the beliefs of the different denominations. In the year 1834, 2 Mormon Elders visited the locality in which they lived and after hearing them preach, Sarah Ann joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She was baptized 20 May 1841 by James G. Devine, John Anthony often praised her for having seen the light about a year before he did. She never tired of telling how she had met the Elders and how thankful she was that they had found her.

While they were living in the town of Westchester, Westchester, New York, their first son was born on 4 Feb. 1832 named Absalom. Here, too, their first daughter, Sarah Ann was born 2 July 1834. The next 4 children were born at Pelham, Westchester County, New York: James 22 July 1836, Hannah Eliza 5 Nov 1838, Isaac 9 Feb. 1841, and John Anthony 27 Feb. 1843.

During the year 1843 John Anthony Sr. Took his wife, Sarah Ann and the 6 small children and emigrated to the far western state of Illinois, traveling part way by canal boat and part way by river steamboat. They arrived at Nauvoo in the spring. Here they purchased a large farm out in the prairie about 2 miles east of the city. When interviewed by a news reporter some 6 years before her death, she said, “They let us stay there long enough to raise one crop. We lived neighbors to the Prophet Joseph Smith and I knew him well. One could not help but respect and trust him, he was so kind and thoughtful, yet very dignified. Every one liked him and our personal regard for him was quite strong as our respect for his calling and authority. I remember how much we sorrowed over his death.”

While the son, John Anthony, was still a babe in arms he was taken seriously ill. The Prophet Joseph upon entering their home said, “I see you have a very sick child.” Joseph then administered to him and promised him that he would live. After he left he sent a nurse to help
take care of the baby.

The sufferings and persecutions of Sarah Ann and John were very much the same as those endured by others of those days. On 15 Feb. 1846, their 7th child, Andrew, was born at Nauvoo, Hancock, Illinois. Later that spring they were compelled to sacrifice their beautiful home and seek refuge in the wilderness still farther west, of which little was known except its being shown on the maps as the unexplored regions, inhabited only by wild savages. Nothing daunted, they crossed the Mississippi River near the vicinity and pushed on into the Indian Country as far west as the Missouri River in the vicinity of Council Bluffs, then the headquarters of the Pottawatamie Indians. Here they built a log shack and spent the winter. The hardships of the winter caused disease to spread among the Saints, and 5 of the 7 Woolf children suffered with chills & fever.

In the spring of 1847 they crossed the great muddy Missouri River, and again set their faces toward the setting sun. Sarah Ann drove one of the teams and cared for the children, the youngest being a little more than a year old. They arrived at Great Salt Lake Valley 6 Oct. 1847 and here they endured more hardships & privations. Here William Henry was born 2 Nov. 1848 and Phebe Elizabeth 23 Jan 1851.

In April John Anthony was called to go to Iron County to help settle that part of the Territory. He and one of the sons went and spent the summer preparing a home, then in the fall they returned to move the family down to Iron County. So in October they were again on the march, however, because of losing their cattle and because of the poor health of Sarah Ann, they were compelled to spend the winter near Provo River. The following spring they again took to the road, but when they got as far south as Willow Creek (now Mona) in Juab County, they obeyed council from Pres. Brigham Young and stayed to help pioneer Mona. With 2 other families they built houses, made water ditches, and sowed quite a large tract of land in grain. But in a year and a half they were again doomed to disappointment; on account of the Walker War they were forced to seek refuge at Nephi which was then in its infancy. Indians burned and destroyed their improvements, thus compelling them to commence anew.

It was in Nephi that Harriet was born 11 Oct. 1853, Homer was born 10 Oct. 1855, & Wallace the 21st March 1858. (The foregoing dates were verified from the old family Bible, now in the possession of Erwin B. Evans of Blackfoot, RFD, Idaho). Then on 21 Feb 1856 William Henry died, and Wallace died 9 Nov. 1859.

Due to the scarcity of water in Nephi in the spring of 1861 the family moved to Hyde Park, Cache County where land and water were plentiful. Here Sarah Ann took up her household duties again. She was not very strong and John would try to see to it that she did not work too hard, but being very industrious she was never idle. Besides her own family she took many others into her home: One was an Indian girl named, Caroline, then there was Henrietta Douglas, Sarah Hymas, Phebe Brown & Hattie Cranney. Later she shared her home with her daughter, Phebe Gibson, and her family of 5 children, namely: Sarah, Hattie, Carrie, William and Tracy Gibson.

She was an excellent cook and always prepared delicious meals. Her buttermilk soda biscuits and squash pies made from squash that she had cut in rings and dried in the attic, cannot be surpassed today and they were never forgotten by those who had the privilege of eating them. Animals were raised on the land and meat for the family was produced; those parts of pork which were suitable were smoked and became very delicious. Portions of beef were processed to make dried (chipped) beef while other parts were made into corned beef. They were frugal and practical people and never was a particle of anything wasted.
At first they did not have fruit for winter. They used molasses which they made from red table beets. Later John would take a load of grain to Salt Lake and exchange it for other food supplies, among which would be small hard peaches, brought loose in the wagon box, a year’s supply of sugar that sold for one dollar a pound and factory at one dollar a yard. The peaches were either dried or preserved and sweetened with molasses. Like other pioneers Sarah Ann made butter, cheese, candles, soap and lye. The lye was made from ashes of grease wood gathered from what they called “the bottoms” west of town, and later planted into pasture land. The ashes were placed in a lesch, which is a box with a cone shaped part in the bottom. Water was poured over the ashes and it would gradually work its way through them and drain off into a large container placed under the cone. This was their only source of lye.

Their starch was always made in the spring from potatoes left over from the winters supply. Before they began to wilt they were peeled and grated and placed in a large tub, filled with water and left to stand for a while. Then the pieces of potato were strained out and the milk-like water retained. More water was added to this, and after it was well stirred, the starch was allowed time to settle to the bottom of the container and then the water was poured off. This process was continued a number of times to whiten the starch as the potatoes would turn dark when grated. When the starch became as white as snow it was placed on plates to dry ready for use.

Scouring, used to polish their steel knives and forks, cook utensils, and the bare board floors, was made from sandstone from the hills east of town. This was made into a very fine powder and when used with water and plenty of energy it would make the wide floor boards look very clean and attractive.

Their buckets were made of red cedar staves held in place by brass hoops. These hoops, as well as the 5 brass kettles of various sizes from very large to small, were always scoured with wood ashes. They raised sheep and with their wool Sarah Ann would wash, pick, dye and spin it to make her own yarn. She hired someone else to weave the yarn into cloth, called linsey. The finer cloth was used for bed sheets and women’s and children’s clothing while the coarser and firmer grade was made into men’s jeans and skirts. She was an expert tailor and made, by hand, clothing for both men and women. The trimming for dresses consisted of very many small tucks, or perhaps 8 or 10 bias ruffles. Their basques were usually fastened in the front with a row of closely set buttons and a matching row of neatly made button holes. Long stockings were knit by hand and Sarah Ann could knit one in a day.

All quilts were pieced by hand from scraps left from their clothes and worn out clothes were made into carpets. Later, when sewing machines could be purchased in Salt Lake City, Sarah Ann had one of the first ones to come to Hyde Park. She ironed beautifully and took great pride in having her clothes look just so. She often talked of the beautiful flax linen they made and used while in New York. After the flax was made into linen it was spread out on the grass to be bleached by the dew.

Providing headgear as well as clothes was also a problem for pioneer women to solve, which they also did by making their own. At first the woman made and wore homemade bonnets, the front portion of which was kept stiff with thin wooden slats. These were called slat bonnets. Later the fronts were quilted and starched. These were worn for everyday. For best, which usually meant for Sunday wear, they made hats from straw. The straw was gleaned from the fields in the fall, tied into bundles and hung in the attic until spring. Then it was soaked in water to soften it. The natural straw was an extremely golden color and if white was preferred, a
bleach was added to the soaking water. Following the softening process, the straw was spliced together with a small steel implement made for that purpose. The sharp end of the splicer fit into the small round hole of the straw and when pulled down split the straw in two. A child could do the job os splicing. Next the straw was braided and placed over wooden blocks to be shaped into hats. These blocks were in 2 pieces fitted together with screws, and could be altered to fit any head size. Before acids came into use, the hats on the wooden blocks were placed in tubs where sulphur was being burned and kept tightly covered to be bleached by the sulphur smoke. The straw for men’s hats was never split or bleached. Sarah Ann was very adept at making straw hats with either plain or fancy plaiting.

She thought her girls should know how to do all kinds of work and so she taught them to knit, crochet, and tat in addition to the usual arts and crafts of home making.

She taught all of her children the fundamental principles of the Gospel, both by precept and example. The Bible, Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, were kept on a small table in the center of the room where they were always ready and handy for the family to use.

Water for drinking and culinary use was at first carried from a nearby spring, later they had a well, and still later a flowing well. The latter is still in use-1935. Sarah Ann was an ideal housekeeper and homemaker. She was kind and even tempered; never too tired or too busy to help those in need or to prepare a meal for anyone who called, whether it be an Apostle of the Church or the humblest of her town folk.

During the latter part of her life she lived with her son Absalom and his wife, Lucy Ann, where she was given considerate and loving care until she passed away on Sunday 19 March 1905 lacking but 21 days of being 91 years old.

Of her 12 children, 10 lived to a ripe old age. Phebe Elizabeth who died the youngest was in her 76 year. Hannah Eliza lived the longest and was passed 89 when she died. Her husband was nearly 77 when he passed away. Her living descendants at the time of her death numbered 303: 10 children; 6 sons and 4 daughters, 81 grandchildren, 189 great grandchilddren and 23 great, great grandchildren. 54 others had preceded her.

Note: This Biography was compiled and written in 1935 by Phylis Ashcroft (Scholes) and Mildred Daines from info. Given to them by living members of the family who had personally known Sarah Ann and her family. Now in 1957 added info. Has been included & some of the dates changed to correspond with those found in John Anthony Woolf’s family Bible now in possession of Erwin B. Evans. This copy made by Ada E. Morrell, Historian, John Anthony Woolf family Org.

Typed into computer 15 Oct 2002 by Kathleen Jardine Woolf Idaho Falls, Idaho