HISTORY of WILLIAM MARS DEN (1824)
and SARAH JOHNSON (1827)

On 5 January 1824, William Marsden was born in a small hamlet in England to John and Rachel Dyson Marsden. He was christened in The Church of England (Episcopalian) one month later on 5 February at Penistone, Yorkshire. His father (an agricultural laborer) and mother resided at Thurleston, one mile west of Penistone, on the Don (Dun) River.

As a young man he journeyed to Sheffield, in Yorkshire, which is about 13 miles southeast of his birthplace. This large city (population in 1841 of 68,186) is located on the pleasant wooded slopes overlooking the River Dun and River Sheaf, from which it received its name (originally Sheafield). The rivers provided water power to turn numerous machinery employed in the manufacture of steel, cutlery and hardware. Knives, razors, axes and edge-tools were produced and became widely known for their quality. Even today Sheffield cutlery means quality.

William became a cutler by profession, more specifically a table blade forger. (Definition: After heating the steel in ovens it was hammered into the rough shape of a knife.)

It was in Sheffield that William met and married Sarah Johnson, the daughter of John and Hannah Radfield Johnson. They were married by Banns on 26 November 1843. Banns is the process of posting their names before the local congregation for three consecutive Sundays to see if anyone had any objections to their marriage. This was also a less expensive way to marry than by license.

William stated his age was 21 and Sarah as 18. Simple arithmetic shows that he was actually 19 and she was only 16 years old. They both lived on Edwards Street in Sheffield at that time.

In 1845 they parented a daughter named Emma. They lived on Wentworth Street in Nether Hallam (a township 1-1/2 miles northwest of Sheffield). Child #2, John Walter, was born in 1847, but died 15 months later. Sarah Ann was next on 29 June 1849, but she died when only four months old.

Their next child, William, was born in 1850, but died six weeks later. More tragedy occurred when their 5th child, John, died the same day he was born in 1852.

It must have been traumatic for these parents to lose so many children. Their firstborn, Emma, was the only survivor for nine years until 13 May 1854 when Harriet Zelora was born. Then came another daughter, Clara who arrived in 1857. These three girls were the only fortunate ones in this family of seven children to enjoy adulthood.

A story has been handed down from Sarah that when Clara was born her father was at the horse races. The name "St. Ledger" was unofficially added as her middle name because it was on St. Ledger Day on which she was born. Sarah added it to remind her husband where he was when her daughter was born.

Sarah possibly met the LDS missionaries in 1847 but was not baptized until September of 1852, followed by Emma in 1853. William did not join the Mormon Church until eight years later in September of 1861. Sarah's family ostracized her after she became a Latter-Day Saint.
Emma was the first in this family to emigrate to America. She sailed on the clipper ship "Underwriter" from Liverpool, England on 23 April 1861. She was only 15 years old and worked as a servant on board to pay her way. She arrived one day after her 16th birthday with some 600 other Saints to New York City. The company then journeyed to Florence, Nebraska (Winter Quarters), arriving on June 2nd. Then they finished their trek to Salt Lake City in Utah Territory via covered wagon, arriving on 12 September 1861.

Thirteen months after Emma left England, Sarah and her two remaining daughters, Harriet Zelnora and Clara, left for America also. William stayed behind. It has been said that when a wife left her husband and crossed the ocean that it constituted a divorce. Proving this has not yet been accomplished, but apparent this was one of the motives which led to Sarah's departure.

Sarah applied for assistance from the Perpetual Emigration Fund (PEF) sponsored by the LDS Church to aid Saints in emigrating to Utah. This fund had been established in October 1849.

Sarah and the two girls traveled by railroad to Liverpool in Lancashire and on 14 May 1862 they began their voyage on the ship "William Tapscott." They sailed into the Irish Sea between Wales and Ireland and then south thru St. George Channel into the North Atlantic. From there the course was somewhat southwest towards the United States. After 44 days on the seemingly endless ocean, the ship arrived safely in New York on 26 June 1862 with over 800 Saints aboard.

While on this voyage they became acquainted with a family named Abel -- George, Mary Ellen and five children. The two families continued across the plains and when arriving in the Valley, the Abels went south to American Fork. In later years their descendants remained good friends.

When Sarah and her daughters reached Florence, an incident occurred that dramatically affected Clara's life. She fell into a stream and caught cold in her eyes. Whether or not this was the beginning of cataracts forming on her eyes is not known, but as she grew older blindness hindered her from doing normal routines. The story has been handed down that Rocky Mountain Fever contributed to her blindness.

At Florence, the Saints who were not able to purchase wagons were assigned transportation. The PEF provided "down and back" wagons that were donated by the Utah Saints to help emigrating members make their way to Utah. This program continued until 1868 -- just prior to the completion of the transcontinental railroad.

Sarah probably traveled in one of these outfits on their trek to the Great Salt Lake Valley. Their company of ox-driven wagons was led by Capt. Horton B. Haight. Thirty people in this company lost their lives while on the plains. Their arrival date in Salt Lake was 19 October 1862.

With education being basic to the LDS Church, many women took it upon themselves (most without formal training) to teach the young people. Sarah was one of these individuals. Sarah taught school in a house in the city shortly after arriving in Salt Lake Valley. Clara would sit at the bottom of the stairs and listen to her mother teach in the room across the hall. The cataracts forming on young Clara's eyes were thought to be contagious, so she was not permitted to mingle with the other children. But in spite of this adversity, she was able to learn her three R's.
On 14 February 1863 Sarah Marsden (now allegedly divorced) married and was sealed to Thomas Allsop. She was 36 years old. This union ended in divorce, and sealing cancellation on December 24th of that year. Two days later she married John Kilpatrick McDonald Sr. He was 30 years older than she, he being age 67. (See History of John McDonald, Sr.) He died 10 years later.

That same year William emigrated to American, sailing on the ship "Cynosure." He left on 30 May 1863 and arrived in New York City on 19 July 1863. The Civil War was raging and the city was a mess of confusion. They were processed at Castle Gardens then followed the Hudson River to Albany. When they reached Palmyra, New York the leaders got the conductor to stop the train and the Saints were told to look and "See the Grove where Joseph Smith had his first vision." They sang two or three hymns in ten different languages, stopping for only 15 minutes, then went on their way rejoicing.

From Albany they were loaded into cattle cars and sent to St. Joseph, Missouri, then took a boat up the Missouri River to Florence, Nebraska. There the leaders had the task of teaching Saints who didn't speak their language how to drive teams, yoke cattle, and hitch wagons -- none of which they had ever tried. The first week they made only from 5 to 10 miles a day. But by the end of two weeks, they could make twenty-five. After a difficult trek across the Plains, William arrived in Salt Lake only to find that his wife had remarried since he last saw her.

About 16 months later William remarried after he arrived in Salt Lake. In 1865 he wed Ellen Cottam and they parented three children. He resided at 238 North 7th West in the 16th Ward and lived to age 54. He died on 5 August 1878.

To continue the story of Sarah's life, see "History of John Kilpatrick McDonald's marriages to Sarah Johnson, Clara and Harriet Zelhona Marsden."