

HISTORY OF JOHN McDONALD, SR's MARRIAGES TO
SARAH JOHNSON, CLARA MARSDEN & HARRIET ZELNORA MARSDEN

On February 1863, Sarah Johnson Marsden married Thomas Allsop; then divorced him on December 24th of that same year, also cancelling their endowment.

Two days later she married John Kilpatrick McDonald, Sr. on 26 December 1863, about 14 months after she had emigrated from England. He was almost 67 years old and she was 36. They were sealed as husband and wife in the Endowment House four months later on 30 April 1864. John's first wife, Rachel, had died 8 months earlier. He was a prominent pioneer and polygamist in the Salt Lake Valley, eventually having a grand total of 24 wives (most of whom were deceased when sealed to him). He and Sarah did not have any children, but he was stepfather to Sarah's daughters Harriet (8) and Clara (5), who was almost blind.

A most interesting story developed from this marriage. In order for a man to take additional wives he had to have consent of Church leaders and also his first wife. Not only did Sarah give her consent, but she persuaded and convinced her two youngest daughters of her first marriage to also marry and be sealed to her current husband.

HARRIET ZELNORA married John on 31 May 1869, 18 days after her 15th birthday. (He was 72 -- 57 years older than she!)

Four years later Clara also married John on 26 May 1871 at age 15-1/2. He was 60 years older than Clara! Also of note is that Harriet was 7 months pregnant at the time!

Economic reasons could have played a big part in this relationship. Times were difficult and financial support was a paramount concern. Another possibility could have been that these young girls were promised to John. We will probably never know.

Harriet Zelnora had three children by John. Their firstborn, Sarah Johnson McDonald was born on 20 April 1870 but died the next day. Child #2, AGNES KILPATRICK McDONALD, was born 6 August 1871. She reached adulthood and married THOMAS HENRY NOTT, JR. in 1891 and died on 30 October 1901. Their only son, Alexander, arrived on 29 July 1873, but died 20 days later.

Clara had only one child by John, Flora Jane, born 29 November 1873. (She had only been married six months.) The baby lived just 11 months, dying on 31 October 1874, two months after her father died. Harriet Zelnora's two children and Clara's only child are buried in the McDonald plot in Salt Lake Cemetery.

While John was working on a haystack at his residence in the 13th Ward (on 1st South between 2nd and 3rd East), on 29 August 1874, he slipped from the haystack. He fell upon a coal shed, striking his back, and fell to the ground. His injuries proved fatal to his 77-year-old body and he died on August 31, 1874. He is buried in Salt Lake Cemetery next to his first wife, Rachel Taaffe McDonald.

With his death he left three widows: Sarah, age 47; Harriet Zelnora, age 20; and Clara, almost 17 years old. They continued to live in John's home and later in apartments on the property (243 and 249 E. 1st South). The 1880 Census lists Sarah and Clara as being washwomen.

Sarah had trying times after John's death trying to support herself as well as her two daughters who were also his wives. Clara's blindness made life even more difficult. Court proceedings and Federal harrassment against polygamists and their families caused much turmoil during this period.

Harriet Zelnora married Welcome Chapman in 1876 at age 22. They had only one child, Welcome Jr. born 14 August 1877, but he only lived five days due to a premature birth.

Harriet and Welcome were living at 37 South 4th East in the 13th Ward when he was called to go to St. Johns, Arizona along with other Saints to help settle difficulties there between the Mexicans and the Mormons.

On 5 May 1884 the Chapmans packed up their family and belongings in a mule-drawn wagon donated by their ward. Welcome had two daughters by his first wife who had died in 1874. (Mary Ann and Elizabeth) Harriet Zelnora had her own daughter, Agnes Kilpatrick McDonald. The trek south took six weeks, traveling through Kanab and crossing the Colorado River. In the middle of June they arrived at St. Johns (located in east-central Arizona near the New Mexico border).

A tragedy occurred in the late fall of that year. While Harriet Zelnora was milking a cow, another cow hooked her. She lay very ill for the next ten weeks, never to recover. On 23 December 1884 she passed away and was buried the next day, Christmas Eve, being only 30 years of age.

After her mother's death, Agnes (called Aggie) lived with Willard and Mary Farr and their family. On the trip to Salt Lake City for the LDS conference, the FARRS took Aggie with them to visit her Grandmother Sarah McDonald and Aunt Clara McDonald. Aggie made such a fuss that the FARRS allowed her to remain with her own relatives and she lived with these widows until her marriage in 1891.

Sarah and Clara moved to 1160 Washington Avenue in the Norwood Addition of Salt Lake. (The house was purchased in Clara's name for \$300.) A tragedy occurred while living in this house. Clara, being almost blind, fell prey to an intruder and was raped. (Daughter Jessie Neeham said he was a negro which the family knew.) In any event, a traumatic nine months followed and on 12 September 1886 Clara gave birth to Maybeth Laurel. This infant was blessed, but died on October 6th, less than a month after her birth.

Welcome Chapman remarried after Harriet's death in November of 1887. He and Harriet Ann Davis parented six children.

On Sep 30 1891, Harriet's daughter Agnes Kilpatrick McDonald Nott married Thomas Henry Nott, Jr. in Salt Lake.

In 1892 (18 years after John's death) Sarah married again to Henry Coleman. He was excommunicated from the Church and Sarah divorced him one year after the marriage so she would be allowed to go to the Temple (as well as inherit from the McDonald's). She then resumed her McDonald surname.

Even though Sarah became executrix of John's estate after his death and inherited the west half of the 1st South property, in 1892 the remaining sons of John's 1st wife Rachel contested his Will and after a court hearing and an inventory and appraisal of the property, Sarah (along with Clara and Agnes Kilpatrick) lost their inheritance since the law did not recognize wives or children born to polygamous marriages. They had to convey their rights to the west half of their property to John McDonald, Jr. and in return were to receive \$25 per month for the rest of their lives.

Clara remarried in 1898 to David Needham after 23 years of widowhood. They parented three children in a polygamous marriage that ended in divorce.

Welcome Chapman died in St. Johns, Arizona on 20 February 1900 at age 50 and is buried there alongside Zelnora. (Tragically, his third wife gave birth to his last child on the same day Welcome was buried.)

Sarah lived with Clara until her death on July 11, 1900, a strong-willed, probably stern woman of the 1800's after enduring 73 years of the hardships of pioneer life.

On October 30, 1901, Harriet's daughter Agnes Kilpatrick McDonald Nott died after giving birth to 7th child Agnes Sarah Nott. She had been married only 10 years.

Clara lived 24 years after her mother's death and died on July 25, 1924, at the age of 67, due to heart trouble. If ever there was an example of a tragic life, this noble woman personified it.