



WHITMER FAMILY

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BEGINNINGS



INTRODUCTION TO THE WHITMER FAMILY BEGINNINGS



This section on the Whitmer Beginnings is taken from the book by our cousin, Lyle E. and Marceline Whitmer, his father being the son of Benjamin Franklin Whitmer Jr., our grandfather, Angus Van Meter Whitmer's brother. The book is the "Descendants of the Swiss Immigrant, Sons of John Whitmer," Francis Suffare Whitmer and Sellestin T. Whitmer", telling how the Whitmer's settled America.

Lyle's book is full of faith-promoting stories of their conversion to the Gospel. They sacrificed much to leave Switzerland, and come to this land of freedom. They always knew they had not heard the true Gospel preached until finally, they heard the "horse thieves" known as Mormon missionaries preach in their little community. They immediately recognized its truth, and were among the first to join the church in Mathias. They suffered much persecution, until they finally fled their little home in West Virginia, and moved to colonize Arizona after counsel from the church leaders about where to settle.

It is easy to feel you are in the beautiful hills of West Virginia, and can almost hear the stream running down the Cove to their little home.

The first section takes the Whitmers from Switzerland to America and their settling West Virginia. The second section is a history of Benjamin Franklin Whitmer, Sr., followed by a section on Francis Suffare Whitmer.

THE WHITMER FAMILY HISTORY

1777-1890 West Virginia Roots

by Lyle E. Whitmer



The following is an account of the descendants of John Whitmer as nearly as I could obtain in the late Spring of 1943 in Hardy County, West Virginia. I was on a mission at the time while filling a mission in the Eastern Central States.

This information is based upon data gathered from the old timers, principally Abe Jenkins and Frank Delawder, who were in their nineties, and Jackson Whitmer, my grandfather's Benjamin Franklin Whitmer) youngest brother and from descendants of the Whitmers still living there. The genealogical data was obtained principally from the Whitmer cemetery located in the Cove on the south side of the creek, and from the County Clerk's records of Hardy County.

John Whitmer was born about 1777 in or near Switzerland. We have no information of his childhood or his marriage until he immigrated to the United States with two sons, Francis Suffara and Selestine who were born in Switzerland in 1803 and 1806 respectively. It appears that John with his two sons came on ship to Richmond, Virginia between 1806 and 1820. Legend tells us that Suffara worked to pay towards the ship fare to this country. He was young and as a result of this work, he was left extremely bow-legged. After arriving in Richmond, John and the boys made their way to Rockingham County, Virginia where there were other Whitmer families living. We are unable at this time to

determine any relationship between these families. There are descendants of these families still living there.

John finally settled on the Western slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains in a little place called the Cove, which is located about 5 miles east of Mathias, West Virginia, and has about 50 families residing there now. It is a round shaped canyon which narrows down to a small neck at the mouth and has a small mountain stream running through it. The mountains are heavily vegetated with underbrush and trees, and wherever the topography flattens out there are small farms which raise corn, oats, tobacco and some hay crops.

John made his home in the upper part of this cove where he spent the rest of his life. He is buried in the Whitmer cemetery which is located about 7 miles up to the Cove from Mathias, south of the Creek and on a long low ridge. When I was there in June 1943 this property was owned by a descendant of John Whitmer who had married a man by the name of Halterman. My companion and I found the Whitmer cemetery after talking to Frank Delawder who is 96 years old and one of grandfather's (Benjamin Franklin Whitmer) closest boyhood friends. After finding the people who owned the property, we had a rather difficult time getting permission to explore the cemetery. After obtaining permission, we had to take axes and cut away

the underbrush in order to find the grave markers. Most of the markers were of native stone and appeared to be handmade. Here we were able to obtain considerable information which we were unable to find anywhere else.

Francis Suffare Whitmer, son of John Whitmer was born in 1803 in Switzerland. He came to this country with his father sometime in the early 1800's. Very little is known of his boyhood until he married Catherine Delawder who was born January 6, 1803 in Hardy County, West Virginia. Of this union there were 12 children born. Their fourth child was David Whitmer, Sr. who was my great-grandfather. Suffara was a farmer in West Virginia and died in Hardy County, West Virginia, the 12th of November 1878. He is buried in the Whitmer Cemetery. His wife died January 10, 1886 and was also buried in the Whitmer Cemetery.

Selestine was born in 1806 in Switzerland, a son of John Whitmer and came to this country with his father. Apparently he was married but no record of any children was found. According to Frank Delawder and Abe Jenkins who remembered Suffare said that Selestine was a Dunkard preacher. (Dunkards were a Swiss/German pietistic sect much like the Mennonites, etc. They were called Dunkards or Dunkers because they believe in baptisms by immersion. They wore plain clothing, coats with standing collars for men, plain.) They remembered him as a large man with a great booming voice who could not "carry a tune" but always led the singing at his meetings. He died on the 21st of July 1881. His wife's name was Hannah Wetzel.

David Whitmer, Sr., father of Ben Whitmer, son of Suffere Whitmer, was born on the 10th of April 1831 in Hardy County, West Virginia. Little is known of his early childhood. He married Catherine Snyder and of that union there were 5 boys and 2 girls. He built a home on a small farm about 3 miles up the Cove from the general store, on the north slope of

the canyon a two-story, wood-shingled, wood-sided house which was still standing when I was there in 1943. During the Civil War, David was called to fight on the side of the Confederacy. During the final battle of Winchester, Virginia, he and a friend were both wounded, he being shot in the chest with a 45 Caliber Muzzle loading rifle. His friend had a broken leg. They were left on the battlefield by the retreating Confederate Army and were put in an improvised hospital by the Union soldiers who captured them. On the third day, he and his neighbor escaped from the hospital on foot with over \$100,000.00 of Confederate currency which they had stolen from the hospital desk drawer as they escaped. While visiting Henry Jackson Whitmer, the youngest son of David, he gave me a \$20 Confederate Greenback which was supposed to be one of the bills from this \$100,000.00. As you know, the Confederates lost the war shortly afterwards and their money became worthless, 3 cents on the dollar. After escaping the hospital, they traveled at night and hid out in the brush during the daytime. They arrived some 2 months later at the Cove, footsore and fevered from their wounds. They had to immediately go into hiding until the Civil War was over. David never fully recovered from his wound as the heavy rifle ball was lodged in the lung tissue and whenever he strenuously exerted himself it caused hemorrhage in the lung and would result in coughing up blood. About 20 years later in 1883 he was cutting oats with a hand scythe when he started hemorrhaging. He walked towards the house and evidently became weak because he sat down leaning himself against an apple tree near the house and died there, as the blood filled his lungs.

David was a man of large stature, being more than 6 feet tall. He is reported to have a fierce temper and was feared by his enemies. He died in the fall of 1883 and is buried in the Whitmer Cemetery. His wife Catherine Snyder, was born in 1828 and died in 1891.

I am leaving the history of grandfather to those who are more qualified to write it. However, I would like to give a short summary as related to me by the aforementioned persons who knew him intimately during his early life.

While visiting Frank Delawder, he told me he was raised with Grandfather Ben Whitmer, and had known him since early childhood. He and grandfather became very intimate friends during boyhood and later built homes within a quarter of a mile from each other. He related the following story of how grandfather was converted to the Mormon Church.

He told me grandfather became interested in hearing the missionaries preach and was one of the first in the Cove to accept the gospel. He said that on the day grandfather was to be baptized, Frank was also going to be baptized. The resentment of this became very pronounced among the residents of the community, even to the point of mob violence. He became afraid and did not appear for the appointed baptism. However, Grandfather Whitmer was baptized and confirmed a member of the church. The following two years arrangements were made several times for Frank and his wife to be baptized; however, something seemed to happen each time and he finally decided against it. When grandfather was preparing to come west, Frank also was making arrangements to be baptized and accompany him, and even went so far as to put his farm up for sale, but when he saw the small amount that grandfather was offered for his farm in comparison to its worth, he did not feel he could make the sacrifice. Instead, he obtained money and purchased grandfather's farm. He told me he thought this was the greatest mistake in his life! He offered as evidence of this the fact that he reared five children who were all in their advanced years. Out of the five, one was married and the other four living at home, still single. He had no grandchildren, except as an adopted granddaughter.

When I told him of the numerous grandchildren of his old friend, tears rolled down his cheeks and he said, "The Lord blesses those who obey Him, and Ben told me before he left that if I didn't accept the Gospel my family would not amount to a thing, and as you see I am a very unhappy man and have been so the past thirty years. If I just had my life to live over."

He went on to relate to me many things that happened between him and grandfather. He told of helping build grandfather's house which was still standing. It was built out of logs hewn square with an axe and he took me to the house and showed me boards 30 inches wide which were hand sewed from poplar logs and used as coiling inside. The house was a two-story structure, two rooms on each floor. A crystal-clear creek ran within 25 feet of the house. It was located on the crest of a flat hill where there was about 25 acres of farmland. About 100 yards south of the house on the point of the hill was a small fenced grave plot. It had one small grave in it. A neat limestone marker which was neatly inscribed by hand with a chisel, Annie Wealthy Whitmer born 2 March 1889, died 2 February 1890, daughter of Benjamin F. Whitmer and Florenia Whitmer.

As we paused here, Frank related a very touching story about how he and grandfather became very embittered towards each other because he would not follow his convictions. When grandfather departed soon after Annie died, he did not have time to mark the grave. Frank placed the marker on the grave, to stand as an emblem for his continued love and friendship for grandfather. He made it with his own hand and through the years since, has fenced and weeded the grave plot as if it was his own child buried there.

Abe Jenkins told of going swimming and playing with grandfather in his childhood. He said the things that impressed him most of Ben was his determination to do that which he thought was right. He also said he always liked to have grandfather as a friend because as an enemy he was to be feared. To illustrate his point, he related the following experience:

One Sunday evening while a meeting was being held in grandfather's home by the missionaries, this being after he became a member of church, a mob gathered at the Forks with the intention of doing bodily harm to the Elders to the extent of frightening them out of the community and to convince grandfather he had joined the wrong church. They approached the house, some 15 in number, and knocked on the door. They were armed and ordered grandfather who stood in the door to one side so they could enter and take the elders. Instead, grandfather stepped out on the step and challenged the mob in this way. He told the mob "that he would have to be taken and that they would not take the Elders except over his dead body." An unnamed man with whom grandfather was acquainted, who was a large man weighing some 250 pounds, stepped forward and started to take hold of grandfather to subdue him. Mr.

Jenkins relates that there seemed to have been unlimited power in the arms of grandfather as he took the man and raised him high over his head and pitched him into the yard over the heads of the mob. This frightened the mob in such a way that they immediately disappeared and went to their homes. Mr. Jenkins said this was the most powerful act he ever witnessed any man do. He said it was beyond the strength of a human body. Some say that they brought tar and feathers to do the missionaries up.

Of the many people I met who knew grandfather, everyone had high respect for him, and hold him as one of their friends.

The above history as herein related is mostly from memory from both those whom I visited and of myself, being eight years since I obtained this information.

FRANCIS SUFFARE WHITMER HISTORY & FAMILY



The first record we have been able to find of Francis Suffare Whitmer and Sellestine Whitmer is the marriage bond or license of Sellestine Witmer dated 18th March 1828. This record was accompanied by a Marriage Bond dated 20th March 1828. The census and bond were both signed by Suffare Witmer, Sellestine Witmer and others. This record is found in Book 3, Page 798 of Marriages in Rockingham County, Virginia. You will note the name was spelled and signed by both Suffare and Sellestine as Witmer. This is one of the German versions of the name and apparently was their name when they came to this Country. The "H" was added to the name in this country. A copy of the marriage record is included in this chapter.

We have found very little in the records concerning the parents or other family members. It is said by some of the older members of the family that there was a sister of Francis Suffare & Sellestine Whitmer that came over from Switzerland either with them or joined them here afterwards. Nothing is known of the sister and no record has been found of her.

We did find a John Whitmer in the 1850 census of Hardy Co., H. Va. living with Celestine Whitmer & Hanah Whitmer. He was 88 years old and was born in Switzerland, also a Mary M. Whitmer age 61, born in Virginia. It is reasonable to believe that this John was

Sellestine's & Suffare's father and that Mary M. was his wife but we have no proof. The 1830 census of Hardy County, W. Va. gave the following: Sellestine Witmer, 1 male under age 5, 1 male age 20-30 and 1 male age 60-70. One female age 20-30. The same John above would have been 68 in 1830. The male listed in 1830 may have been this John. We did not find Sellestine Whitmer in the 1840 census. The death record of Francis Suffare Whitmer, shown as Whitmore on the record gave as Suffare's father "J. Whitmore. This is the only record we have been able to find of the parents of Suffare Whitmer & Sellestine Whitmer. The 1860 census of Hardy Co., W. Va. listed a Mary W. Whitmore age 73 in the Isaac H. May family.

According to an account told by Jackson Whitmer, David's son, Francis Suffare and Sellestine came to this Country from Switzerland while in their teens. Jackson was 17 years old when his Grandfather Francis Suffare died and he knew both Francis Suffare and Sellestine during his younger life. He told the author that they came over to this Country while young, about 17 and 14 years of age. They had to work as bonded or indentured servants to repay the passage from Switzerland. He said they worked in a grist mill for a number of years and indicated that Suffare's legs were somewhat bowed or deformed due to lifting the heavy barrels of flour. Jackson thought they worked somewhere in Pennsylvania in

the mill and after several years they ran away from the Indenture Master and came down into Virginia where they stayed the rest of their lives.

The above accounts agree that they came to this Country while young, probably in their late teens or from 1815 to 1825. We know they were here by 1827. John, the oldest child of Francis Suffare and Catherine Delawder was born 6 Feb. 1828, which would indicate they were married sometime in 1827. Please note John is the oldest child of record.

Francis Suffare Whitmer married Catharine Delawder, daughter of Abraham Delawder, and settled in the Upper Cove near Mathias, Hardy County, West Virginia, where all his children were born, as far as we know. The Delawder family of Abraham Delawder and Barbara Licklitter (Lecklitter) settled on Cove Run near Mathias, Hardy County, West Virginia. We know very little about Abraham Delawder. It is reported, but not proved, that he came to America in the German Hessian Army during the Revolutionary War. Barbara Licklitter was born in Frederick Co., Maryland in 1775.**

In order to give the reader a better understanding of the first generation of this family in America, the author asked some of the descendants who live in the area of West Virginia where Suffare and Sellestine lived and raised their families, to write their impressions for the book. These writings give a special insight to the character of these people. Geneva Halterman, who has lived in this area much of her life wrote the following:

*“Some impressions my Mother gave of her grandfather, Francis Suffare Whitmer”
by Geneva Halterman.*

“My mother Ida Whitmer Halterman, lived with her grandfather, F. Suffare and grandmother, Catherine Delawder Whitmer. He died when she was approximately 6 years of age; however, my

Mother had a very good memory even to her dying of age 89 years.”

“I learned from her that her grandfather left home (Switzerland) and came to America on his own. She said he was 14 years of age. Then I thought how brave he must have been to start on the long slow journey of at least one month. This was a tremendous journey when travel was very slow. I learned from her that it was a very difficult and slow journey. Just think, he left home and friends behind to come to this new country!”

“Suffare must have been very religious and was very strong in the Catholic faith. He never would allow work to be done on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday and Ascension Day. These days he held to be Holy Days and were very sacred to him. My Mother followed his teachings and observed these days, abstaining from work, as her grandfather taught her. He taught her many nursery rhymes which she enjoyed, and would often sing them to her children.”

“His strong Dutch accent and idioms were reflected in his children’s speech and expressions. He must have had an amicable personality as his grandchildren, those who knew him, were attracted to him by his pleasing personality.”

Beulah Whitmer Halterman also gave similar remembrance of Suffare. She told the author that the Whitmer family was well respected and of good reputation. She also had the impression that Suffare was of the Catholic faith and a strict believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a man of his word and repaid his obligations as he agreed to do. She gave

the author a copy of an account that Suffare charged at Levi Rinker's store, over a period of years. At the end of the long list of charges and repayments was the notation "Rec'd Note in full". The fact that he was given credit speaks well for his honesty.

He was industrious and worked as a Cooper (carpenter, barrel maker, glazier, coffin maker and farmer). Some of his sons followed after these trades. His brother Sellestine was the Master Builder for the first Church of the Brethren built near Mathias, West Virginia, which indicates he also knew these trades.

We, the descendants of Suffare and Catharine, can be very proud of the heritage they left to us, and we should be thankful for their courage, their honesty, their love for the Lord, their sacrifices that we may enjoy the freedoms of is great country, and for the blood of good pioneers and good people that flows in our veins.

Included in the text of this book are copies of deeds where Suffare & Catharine acquired the property where the Whitmer Cemetery is located. What he purchased was kept in the family. Also included are copies of Suffare's will and Catharine's will and a copy of the charge account at Levi Rinker's store as best we can read it. We have pictures of the headstones and grave markers in the Whitmer Cemetery located on the home place now owned by Jesse and Beulah Halterman, Suffare's great-grandchildren. This property has been handed down in the family and is now in the hands of the fourth generation. We should and do express our appreciation to Jesse and Beulah who have labored so many years to keep the Whitmer Cemetery in good condition and the grave markers in place.

*Date furnished by Rosa Whitmer Price, Granddaughter of John.

**See The "DeLauter Families in America" A Genealogy by Pauline Grace DeLauter Fry, published in 1982 by the Brethren Press, Elgin, Ill.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WHITMER, SR.

May 6, 1856 -- December 23, 1932

Life History



Among the emigrants which came to America from the old world were five Whitmer brothers. They were among the first ones to come to America. They were willing to endure the hardships and trials which go along with pioneer life. One of these brothers settled in West Virginia, one in what is now known as Maryland, and the others in the colonies including New York and New Hampshire. Likely, it is these brothers that helped found the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Benjamin Franklin Whitmer's father, David, was the third generation to live in West Virginia. He married a girl named Catherine Snyder. They married and made their home on a farm near the town of Mathias, in what was known as the Cove near the West Virginia border. It was a very beautiful country, up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. There were 200 or 300 acres, only about 30 of which were tillable, the rest on mountain slopes, which furnished good pasture for cattle, sheep and hogs.

Sparkling creeks ran down the mountains and across the meadows. Along these creeks grew wild apples, which were made into cider and apple butter in the fall. Wild sweet cherries, huckleberries, blackberries, and red and black raspberries also were plentiful. On the mountain slope grew pine trees, oaks, hickory,

chestnut and maple trees. The maples furnished maple sugar and syrup. It was a paradise for squirrels and bob whites. David was a very good rifle shot, and in the fall when the squirrels had fattened themselves on the nuts, he took his Kentucky rifle and went hunting. He could easily shoot a bob white through the head, and those squirrels made a very good pot pie.

David and Catherine had five sons and two daughters. Benjamin was the fourth child. When he was grown he purchased the farm, including the old family home from his father. He had been born there, May 6, 1856, in the little one room house, and there he took his bride, Florenia Sonafrank, April 16, 1878. Later, as he prospered, he built a new house, which consisted of one and a half stories.

On the farm he raised rye, wheat, buckwheat, corn, and white beans. The grains were cut at harvest time with an old fashioned cradle, and bound by hand, into swaths. Hogs and sheep grew fat on the mountain slopes. When butchering time came around, he spent several days at the job, butchering perhaps 25 animals at a time. His neighbors helped him and were paid in meat. The bacon was not considered worth much and was given to the poor of the district. In his smoke house he cured enough hams to last for the entire year.

Benjamin's mother was a devout Baptist, but his father never belonged to any church. He always said that none of them seemed right to him but someday, when he heard the right one preached, he'd recognize it and join it. Benjamin felt the same way. His father and grandfather were great readers of the Bible. They read it trying to find out which church was true. When Benjamin grew to manhood and had learned to read the Bible and reason, he and father would sit on Sunday and study their Bibles. They both claimed that the true Gospel of God was not upon the earth, and would not join any church. They would invite preachers from every church around them to their homes and entertain them and talk with them, trying to find the Gospel as it was taught by the Savior of the World.

One day news was spread around the district that some 'horse thieves' or Mormon missionaries, had arranged to have a meeting in the schoolhouse. They claimed to have a Gospel message for the people. Florenia was ill, but Ben decided to attend the meeting. "What did you hear?" asked Florenia when he returned home about ten o'clock that evening. "This is the first time that I have ever heard the Gospel preached," answered Ben "I have invited them to our house." The next day a room upstairs under the eaves was prepared for the missionaries, and Elders Heaton and Ensign came to the Whitmer home. There they stayed much of the time they were working in the district. The Mormon elders were being persecuted and ran from place to place, but he invited them to his house, listening to them and protecting them. On one particular occasion the power of God saved him and three other men and the elders from being killed. His brothers turned against him but he knew he was defending the Servants of God which he did on many occasions. Benjamin and Florenia were the first two converts to be baptized. According to the temple records, this occurred June 5, 1888, at night on account of the mob being so strong. He has many testimonies of seeing the sick healed by the elders and was gifted with the gift of administering to the sick. He

always knew that if there was sufficient faith, and if it was the Lord's desire, the sick would be healed.

One evening the elders were having a meeting in the schoolhouse, when a mob came in. They wore masks and startled the speaker. Brother and Sister Whitmer were in the audience. He started praying silently but earnestly that the Lord would preserve the Elders from harm. Then one of the Elders in the audience arose and spoke in a loud voice, "In the name of the Lord, I defy any one of you men to touch any of these people," he said. Then he sat down. It was said that there was a light shining around the elder's head as he spoke. The mob stood dumb for a moment, then turned and walked out. The meeting progressed without any further trouble.

Feelings ran high against the missionaries. Several times mobs gathered to run them out of town, or to tar and feather them. Ben always protected the missionaries but was never injured and felt that the Lord had protected both him and the elders. Even though his brothers turned against him, and his erstwhile friends turned to bitter enemies, he continued to defend and befriend the elders.

Five children were born to them in West Virginia, among which were twin girls who were named after the wives of the two elders, Minnie and Annie. Annie died before they left West Virginia.

At last the persecution became so great that Ben decided to take his family west to join a community of saints. Being unfamiliar with the west, he asked the elders where he should go. They took it up with the mission president, who in turn consulted with the church authorities. At that time the Mormons were trying to colonize Arizona, and suggested that the Whitmers go to the Gila Valley. But when he tried to sell his place, the people were so bitter that none of them would buy it. At last he sold it at a great sacrifice to an old family friend, Frank Delawder. He reached Arizona with \$1500, which was a pretty good sum of money for those days.

The Whitmer family went by train as far as Bowie, which was as near the Gila Valley as the train went in those days. Henry Clemens met them at Bowic about seven o'clock in the morning, and after a long, hard day of travel over rough, dusty roads, they reached the town of Central, where they planned to live. They first bought ten acres, and then added to it from the adjoining land, much of which was covered with sage brush. Many long arduous days of toil were required to clear the land and bring it under cultivation. But Ben was a hard worker and prospered on the land. At first they lived in a house made of cottonwood and thatched with dirt. Later, they built a larger, more comfortable home. Years later, after the family were grown and had dispersed, and Brother and Sister Whitmer had both passed on, the old home caught fire and burned to the ground, taking with it many memories of both pleasure and heart ache.

In the early 1890's they raised a very profitable crop of watermelons on the land later owned by the Sowell family, and cleared \$200. With that, Ben took his family to the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple in 1894. Before they returned home, they went to the Logan Temple and received their endowments and had their children sealed to them.

Three more children were born to them in Arizona. But in the spring of 1899, an epidemic of Black Measles swept over the valley. Florenia had recently given birth to a baby She contracted the dreaded form of the disease and died May 4th. A few days later, May 6, 1899, a son, David Simon Whitmer, died of measles also.

About this time he sent his son, Angus, on a mission to the Southern States. He was proud of this and only wished his other sons could go. After that Brother Whitmer hired Aunt Edith Kunz to work for him and take care of his house full of children. Some time later, a friend by the name of George Coombs was leaving for a mission to his native country, England. In a joking way George said, "How would you like me to get you a

nice little English wife?" Brother Whitmer said yes.

While in England, this friend met a girl by the name of Sarah Hannah Wibberly, who was investigating the Gospel. She was the daughter of Mary Ann Barnett and Bryan Wibberly. She was born August 27, 1867, in Warwick. Her parents did not get to hear the Gospel, as she was working away from home when she met the elders and heard their message. She prayed diligently and became converted to the Gospel. She and her dear friend, Florence Skinner worked for a rich family who were very good people. They allowed the girls to invite the elders to their house for dinner.

Hannah was baptized April 27, 1898 by Samuel S. Garbell, in Birmingham. She always attended her meetings and paid her tithing. She had many friends, some of which turned against her when she joined the church. When she met Brother Coombs, she was still unmarried, and wanted to go to America. Brother Coombs told her of Brother Whitmer, and gave her his address. He then sent her address to his old neighbor. This started a correspondence which ultimately ended in marriage, after they had exchanged pictures and made it a matter of very earnest prayer. When she accepted his proposal, she told him that she could love every face in the picture he had sent of himself and his family. She also told him that she was 33 years old and had never married, although she had several chances. She had turned them down because she wanted to marry in the church and go to the Temple.

He sent her money to come to Utah. When they met at the train in Salt Lake City, they knew each other immediately. They were married in the Salt Lake Temple March 1, 1901, and soon after left for their home in Central. She was a good mother to his other children. Four children were born to them, two boys and two girls. But the second boy died while still a baby. She was always kind and patient to all of the family. She did some church work, but with poor health she could not do as much as she would have liked to do.

Early in 1914 the doctor advised a change of climate for her. So the old home was sold, and they left for Salt Lake City by train. Their trip was delayed by storms and washed out bridges. The ten days of travel required to reach their destination were very trying for Hannah, who was ill most of the time.

At first they rented an apartment in Salt Lake City, but after three weeks they moved to a house with a small acreage. There Brother Whitmer put in a garden, and they had fruits, berries, and vegetables, some of which were sold in the city. The place was about five miles out in the country. Hannah's health did not improve as they had hoped it would. Instead, it grew progressively worse. Among their neighbors was a brother-in-law of Hannah's dear friend, Florence Skinner. When Hannah was so ill, his wife took care of her, leaving her own family to look after the Whitmers.

On the 27th of June 1914, Sister Whitmer passed away. Again, Brother Whitmer was left alone with a family of children. He asked them what they wanted to do. They wished to return to Central, so they did, taking with them the remains of the dear wife and mother, to be laid to rest beside the first wife.

Florence Skinner, who by this time had come to Arizona and married Brother Sowell, was living across the road from the old Whitmer home. Although she had a family of her own, she made room for the motherless Whitmer children, and took good care of them. She was patient and kind, much like their own mother, and made them feel welcome. The children got along fine together except for minor squabbles, and things went very well. There they lived for several months.

Then Brother Whitmer bought back their old home, and went peddling again. On one trip, he not only peddled, but made arrangements for a housekeeper, Aunt Edith Porter Kunz. At least the children thought she was to be their housekeeper. But they soon found out that she was to be their new mother. It was their own mother's wish that Ben find a good wife to take care of him and the children.

She was born at Parterville, Morgan County, Utah on April 14, 1864. They were married at Thatcher, Arizona by the Stake President, Andrew Kimball. He and his new wife worked hard for the children.

Benjamin was very religious and acknowledged the Lord in everything. He was a member of the High Council for many years. He never refused to do anything the church asked. Although he suffered much pain, he never complained to the Lord, and never doubted the truthfulness of the Gospel. His health began to fail about 1929. As time went by he grew worse. On 22 December 1932, he was called home to his two wives and four children who had preceded him. At the time he died he left 8 children, 52 grandchildren, 11 great grandchildren, 25 boys that bear the Whitmer name. The funeral was held in the Central Church House on December 24th.

THE LIFE OF SAMUEL LEWIS

October 27, 1829 - August 31, 1911 as told by grandchildren
Compiled by his granddaughter, Laura McBride Smith



Samuel Lewis, the oldest son of Tarlton Lewis and Malinda Gimlin Lewis, was born in Simpson county, Kentucky, October 27, 1829. Nothing is known of his life as a child. It is so bad to think as long as we, his grandchildren, have lived around him and all the chances we have had, we were so thoughtless as to not ask him more about his childhood.

Tarlton Lewis moved his family from Kentucky to Macoupin County after his first girl, Mary was a baby, and in 1836 he was baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by his brother, Benjamin Lewis. He became one of the great builders of the city of Nauvoo, where the family was located. Before they located there, they settled at a place called Haun's Mill where they went through the terrible massacre which is written in the lives of Samuel's father and uncle's histories. He remembered well the bullets flying around his head like peas. That's all, only he wonders why he escaped. He might have run to the woods with Joannah and her children and stayed in the forest until morning, coming back to witness the death and burial of her husband.

Anyway, Grandfather came out whole and well and went with his parents to Commerce, Illinois, later Nauvoo, where his father worked on the great temple from start to finish. Although Samuel was only 11

years old, he commenced cutting stone for the Nauvoo Temple. Tarlton Lewis had a good home in Nauvoo but after all the mobbings and terrible killings and whippings they endured, they prepared to leave. They were asked not to retaliate when whipped as that would give their enemies a reason to do more, but to take their punishment with trust in the Lord and after the Temple had been dedicated, they, with many more Mormons, received their baptisms, endowments, and sealings. I make this clear as it has been said there might have been no sealings done in that Temple, but Tarlton and Malinda had all their work done in that Temple, according to the record we find on them.

Samuel left the beautiful city with his parents and camped with them on the prairies of Council Bluffs (so one account records). They endured hardships in the cold. The next morning after they had crossed the river, Tarlton and his son, Samuel, crossed back and went through the temple, climbing the stairs and looking over the city and taking a last look at the dear home and Temple. It is said, several men went there the next day, were caught and beaten by the mobs. The terrible beatings, burnings, whippings, and attacks on women can't be realized by us after all these years, only those who experienced it can appreciate the freedom they found in the west a long time later.

It was while the Lewis family was camped in Winter Quarters that Samuel volunteered to enlist in the Mormon Battalion, under the command of Corp. St. George Cook, for the United States Government. Samuel was too young for such a career and he signed up at 18 years and he wouldn't be 18 years-old until 1847. He signed up July 16, 1846, so he lacked more than three months of being 17 when he enlisted. It is said his father was so worried about it that his hair turned gray almost overnight. They were asking for men from 18-45. It was such a blow to the Saints to sacrifice so much after being driven from all they had in the world and in such hard circumstances. Why should they go fight for their country when their country had denounced them! This was supposed to be a free country and thousands of people from Europe had sailed for America for religious liberty, but these poor Mormons; what was their future? It looked very black Brigham Young promised the men, if they obeyed orders and lived the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as they had been taught, keeping out of bad company and saying their prayers, they would not have to fire a gun and would come home safely. So there were 500 men who volunteered, leaving their families to the mercy of heaven and earth.

Samuel marched with his company to Ft. Leavenworth, where he was equipped with clothes and sword. He marched in his company with James B. Brown in command, 90 men in each company. He was in company C. It was a company of noble men, according to his history and most all the Mormon men obeyed orders and went through all the sorrows and hardships of that long march.

When I was a child, Grandfather heard me complaining because there wasn't anything in the house to eat but some dry bread (we always had bread and milk for supper but this night the cows didn't come home and we had only bread to eat), and he repeated this little verse to me:

Never throw upon the floor, the crusts you
cannot eat;
For wilful waste makes woeful want, and
sometime you may say;
Oh, how I wish I had that crust that once I
threwed away.

Then he told me of how he suffered for food on that march. How he boiled his boot tops to get a little nourishment. How he strained water full of wigglers with a rag for a strainer to get a little water to drink when they were suffering from thirst. How they were nearly killed by a herd of wild bulls, and of the way some of the Mormons were treated, because they were Mormons. How they were all made to take a dose of Calomel and strychnine every night whether they needed it or not and how some of them died from its effect. How some held it in their mouths until this crazy doctor left and spit it out. This doctor had dozens of them right down in bed, sick. He had to leave for several days and when he got back they were all up and well. The devil was right there among our men trying to destroy them at every opportunity, and although they suffered much, they were true to their teachings, and returned home safely, all but a few who were weak and couldn't make it. It couldn't be a perfect plan with human beings, but the Mormon men did an excellent job, and preached the Gospel by their actions and the rest of the men couldn't help but see it. There were many men besides the Mormons on this march and some of them watched these Mormons and marveled at the courage they showed with the treatment they received from their supervisors. They had the spirit of the Lord with them and he sustained them.

It is my understanding that these men walked this long distance from Ft. Leavenworth to San Diego on foot, 2000 miles, over rough country, no roads not even trails, they blazed the way. They climbed steep mountains and pulled up the wagons which held their supplies where it was too steep for horses to climb, by windless, and let them down canyons the same way.

There was some confusion between these men and their leaders. Some shortcomings and ignorance. At one time when they had been on starvation rations, had even killed dogs to eat, one man had killed a crow, some had boiled their shoe soles and drank the soup, if you could call it soup, when one of the men killed a poor old cow and someone killed a deer. They had plenty of meat, and after satisfying their hunger, they proceeded to cut up the rest of the meat in strips to dry it as they knew they would need it later. But right in the middle of the process, the captain gave orders to move on and most of the meat had to be left to spoil, but orders were orders.

The company finally reached Tucson and they weren't made very welcome. They succeeded in finding a tall pole nearly 150 feet high, set it up and displayed the United States stars and stripes over that small town, making it U.S. Territory. It took about six months to reach their western destination, San Diego. After serving a year in this service, he was discharged and he, with other of his comrades, walked back to Salt Lake. He was discharged in Los Angeles July 16, 1847. Samuel Lewis was the youngest man in the Mormon Battalion but one, and that was Lot Smith, who was two months younger.

Samuel Lewis was the first white man to carry the mail from Utah to San Francisco. He was the first Sheriff of Beaver County, Utah. He owned and operated the first cutting machine that ever cut grain in Beaver or Iron Counties, Utah. He worked on the Nauvoo Temple until the walls were completed, on the St. George Temple 18 months, on the Salt Lake Temple 14 months and on the Manti Temple four months.

Grandfather Lewis was a true Latter-day Saint. Although he was not a public speaker, he was true to the Gospel and all its teachings. Grandfather was a tall slender man, well built, and he loved to walk. In fact, he was built just right for walking. It is said by one of his grandsons, Edward Moody, that grandpa told the Prophet Joseph Smith wanted someone to take a

message down to Joseph City about 250 miles down the river. Samuel volunteered to do the job. It is said he took a bag of parched corn and some jerky and left on his errand. He made it there and back to Nauvoo in nine days. Some folks say it could not be done in that length of time but they didn't know Grandpa. He was a great walker and that was his hobby. He said that trip was just a prelude and preparation for the long trek of 2000 miles trip he took to the Pacific coast. He also told Edward he made a trip from Gila Valley up to Alpine, from Clifton it is only 50 miles distance, but it was one of the worst and hardest trips he ever took, worse than the trip to California or the one he took to Joseph City. It was down in a box canyon and they had to cross the river several hundred times. He was going there to see his daughter, Mary Judd, who lived in Alpine.

The oldest daughter of James William Huntsman and wife, Hannah Davis, Sarah Jane, fell in love with Samuel Lewis and they were married January 1, 1854. Samuel had been home for several years from his trip to California, after an honorable discharge. He came all the way home on foot to join his folks in Parowan, where they had built a home, in Southern Utah. Soon after they married, they moved to Minersville, with his folks. There they built another home and Tarlton Lewis became Bishop of that town. They all lived there for 14 years. The long freight and immigrant trains went right through Parowan, bringing merchandise and mail through to the coast. Later, the Pony Express was established in 1860, and regular letters cost as much as \$5.00 a letter. It took over 8 days to make the trip from Missouri to Los Angeles. It was while living in this place that four children to Samuel and Sarah Jane were born, Samuel Edward, Orson, Keturah Hannah, Mary Ellen. Then the family moved again to Minersville. Oliver, Keturah, Laura, Malinda, Joseph and Sarah were born in Minersville.

After Sarah was born, they moved to Panguitch and there Lula and Bertha were born. During this time, Samuel

spent a lot of time cutting stone for the several temples. He helped build while his boys cared for the farm and cattle, and at the close of the year 1880, the family decided to move to Arizona. That was a long trip in mid-winter, but they had been told there was opportunity there and our grandparents had the pioneer spirit in their veins and blood, and were used to pioneering. They packed all they could haul in two wagons, sold all they could, and gave the rest away and all but the two oldest girls were ready to leave their home. The night before leaving was a sad one. The girls sang:

Goodbye dear old home, sad is my heart,
To think that tonight, forever we must part,
Weeping we full of pain, we fear we shall
never see thee again.

They felt a little insecure, not knowing what they might have to endure, but were happy to have good teams and wagons, and were well prepared for the trip so away they went. Sometimes they were unable to find water, then no feed for the animals, but they crossed the Colorado River on a flat boat, taking the wagons across and swimming the animals. It was a long, slow trip but they finally landed in the town of Pima, February 10, 1881, and were given a corner lot bordering on the Cottonwood Wash, west of town, where Samuel and the boys cleared the lot, built a two room log house from cottonwood logs found on the Gila River and made a real comfortable home. The roof was made of willows and straw and dirt packed within it. It was fine until it rained then the mud trickled down on the lovely white cloth the girls lined the living room with. They didn't mind and as soon as the storms cleared up, down would come the factory, it was washed and put back again. At first, the family had a wagon box and a shed to live in until this house was built, so we can see how they appreciated their new home, and thanked the Lord for bringing them safely there. On their trip they saw lots of Indians but they were friendly.

Now they could settle down and send the children to school, and the log school house wasn't far away. They had to haul their water from a town well a block away. They used a barrel made of a forked log, hitched a horse to it and hauled all their water until they dug a well of their own. Food for such a big family was hard to get, but they had learned to kill cows to milk and grandfather always raised a good garden. It was his enjoyment to have plenty of every kind of vegetable for the table and grandma was a good cook. Grandfather had a garden up the Cottonwood wash several miles, where he had a garden every year. Aunt Bertha tells about it in her history.

I don't know how long the Lewis family lived in Pima, but it must have been 1886-7 that they sold out and moved to Thatcher, where Grandpa took up a quarter section of land, built a two roomed lumber house, and settled there. Then a very sad thing happened. For some reason our dear grandparents separated, after rearing a family of 12 children. They decided to each go their way. Grandma kept the house and Grandpa just spent the rest of his life as a wanderer. Lived first with one of his children and then another. He was always making a garden somewhere, and always walking. He would get up early and be gone, walking up in the hills when he lived with my mother, worrying her but he always came back safely. When he was cutting stone for the temples, a piece flew into his eye. They tried to get it out but never did, so in later years he had the eye out but it bothered him and he lost his memory and spent the last years of his life in Phoenix in a hospital, dying 31 August 1911 and was buried in Thatcher.

Wife of Samuel Lewis
SARAH JANE HUNTSMAN LEWIS
5 April 1834 – 20 March 1917



Sarah Jane Huntsman was born in Steuben County, Indiana, April 5, 1834. Her parents, James William Huntsman and Hannah Davis had two children when they joined the Church, Sarah Jane and Joseph. They moved to Nauvoo in 1840 when Sarah Jane was about six years old, and was in Nauvoo when the Prophet was killed and she remembered him quite well all her life.

She said one morning in early childhood while her father James was milking the cow at the first home she ever knew or remembered, somewhere in Missouri, a wicked cowardly, cruel mob came in their yard, knocked her father down and lashed him to a fence rail. After beating him nearly to death, turned him loose and gave him this choice; if he would betray his people and join the mob he could keep his home and property. If not, he could take the old blind mare, hitch her to an old cart he had abandoned to the dump, fix it up and he would be allowed to take from his home all he could pile on the cart, and leave within a short time. His home and all he had would be taken over by the mob.

Sarah Jane saw her father staggering to the house, and while her mother dressed his wounds he told her of the threat made by the mob. There was nothing for them to do but get out. So they laid their plans. While her father repaired the old cart, her mother packed up what she needed the most and the cart was

overloaded. They said goodbye to their good home they had worked so hard for and were on their way to they didn't know where. Father leading the old blind mare, and Mother walking behind leading the children - a very sad family. Where would they go?

All they knew for sure was that the Gospel was true and they wouldn't deny it for all the world. This is an example of what all the Saints went through for the Gospel's sake and it was the plan the Lord had in teaching his faithful followers the way of sacrifices they must make in order to gain the testimonies they must obtain to qualify them to be staunch members of His Church here on earth. This was only the beginning of their persecution.

It is said that Sarah Jane Huntsmen worked in a Post Office and a store on the banks of the river just out of the town on the river front. She couldn't have been more than thirteen years old; but Grandma was doing a woman's work at home then, so she could have managed a job like that I am sure. She was smart and quick at figures so this may be true, but we have no proof. Sarah Jane and Samuel Lewis who would become her husband, lived in Nauvoo. Their backyards backed up against each other. (I found this true when I went to Nauvoo and looked at the map. I had picked up my son, Dave Cox, from his mission in Iowa.)

After leaving Council Bluffs in 1851, Sarah Jane crossed the plains to Great Salt Lake with her father and oldest brother, walking most of the way. She worked for other families a lot. She lived with Hyrum Kimball's family while in Nauvoo to help out.

After coming to Salt Lake, she moved south as far as Parowan and worked for Tarlton Lewis. Later she married his son Samuel Lewis. They had four children while there, Samuel Edward, Orson James, Hannah Keturah, and Mary Ellen. Then they moved to Minersville, where six children were born; Oliver, Adelbert, Laura, Malinda, Joseph Tarlton, and Sarah Lavira. Then they moved to Panguitch where two more children were born, Lula Jane and Bertha Maria, making twelve children in all.

From one of their son, Oliver's letters to his sister Laura, we learn a little about the happy home Sarah Jane and Samuel had in Panguitch, Utah: "I am dreaming tonight of our dear old pioneer home in Panguitch, and the snow is on the ground, the storm is raging wild outside, and big snowflakes are falling down. Mother is singing her sweetest lullabies to her babe on her knee. Father is reading the old reliable L.D.S. News, just as happy as a father can be. They have eleven children [Orson James had passed away at five years old] all at home, all happy, healthy and bright with a pitch pine log for a candle. We have all our lessons to get tonight and all huddled around the fire with our hearts plumb full of glee. We are back to the winter of 1876. The old home is warm with plenty of room with a big pile of wood outside. We have plenty of milk cows out under the shed and plenty of horses to ride, a herd of cattle on the range, and a big fat hog to kill any time we choose with plenty of beefsteak on hand and a dandy farm to boot. The best of neighbors by the score and a whole town full of friends. Both school and playmates all around, surely such pleasures will have no end. The peoples most valuable possessions were their community and their health, their hearts were full of mirth, trying to do all the good they could, their hearts were bound together with friendship and love. They never rode a bicycle or the kids

a tricycle. They always rode a horse, or in a wagon when they went on a hike. Never saw an automobile, never rode a train. They were harmless as a kitten, but as rugged as a bear. They never used bad language, if you were looking for neighbors, you could always find them there."

In 1881 the family moved to the Gila Valley, settling in Pima, Arizona. They later moved to Thatcher where Sarah Jane lived the rest of her life. Sarah Jane was a Relief Society teacher, but she was so heavy she couldn't walk much so she contented herself by reading. She had good eyesight, so she read night and day. She was familiar with many prominent writers of her day and became well versed in the scriptures and in the Gospel. She was standing with her back to the fireplace one morning. The coals must have rolled down close to her skirts and before she knew it, a blaze ran up her back. She was old and inactive and was very heavy. She must have weighed close to 250 pounds and was almost helpless.

Her screams attracted Uncle Winfred Moody, who lived just down the lot. He ran, but was too late to save her. She was burned so badly that she died within a half hour afterwards. She and her daughter Keturah lived there together, but Keturah was away at the time. It was a terrible experience and it was a blessing she could go so soon.

Sad to note is that Grandpa and Grandma Lewis divorced later in life. Grandpa's profession was chipping away, smoothing then placing granite block on four temples. No doubt this strained their relationship since he was gone so much.

Funeral services were held in the Thatcher Chapel, March 20, 1917 with Bishop Franklin in charge. Appropriate selections were rendered by the choir and President and Sister Payne sang a song. The opening prayer was given by John Morris. The speakers were Selena Phillips, John Nash, Thomas Kimball and President Andrew Kimball. Each spoke of the noble character of Sarah Jane. The closing prayer was given by James H. Moody. Interment was in the Thatcher Cemetery.