

# Rachel Evans Rowland Robertson Harris



Rachel Evans Harris with a granddaughter. Photo from [welshmormon.byu.org](http://welshmormon.byu.org).

***Buena Vista*** with the first large group of LDS emigrants from Wales. Other passengers on this voyage of the ***Buena Vista*** that eventually settled in Cedar City, Utah, include Thomas Jones, Sage Treharne (Jones), Samuel Leigh, and Mary Treharne (Leigh). After arriving in New Orleans on 18 April 1849, most passengers from the ***Buena Vista*** continued from New Orleans to St. Louis on the Mississippi Riverboat ***Constitution***, and then from St. Louis to Council Bluffs on the Missouri Riverboat ***Highland Mary***, arriving in Council Bluffs on 17 May 1849. In a twenty-three day period between 28 April and 21 May 1849, forty-four of the original 249 ***Buena Vista*** passengers fell victim and died from the cholera epidemic.

Rachel Evans was born 30 August 1830 at Hirwaun, Glamorganshire, South Wales. Rachel's mother died when Rachel was five years old, and she lived with her father's sister, Mary Evans Rowland, who had married William Rowland.

The Rowland family, along with Rachel, were early converts to the LDS Church in Wales. William Rowland was widowed in 1848. He then married nineteen-year-old Rachel Evans, his first wife's niece. William's four children from his first marriage were: Mary (b. 1838), Rachel (b. 1841), Ann (b. 1843), and David (b. 1845).

William and Rachel Evans Rowland, along with the four children, sailed from Liverpool, England, on 25 February 1849 on the ship

The William and Rachel Rowland family are shown in the 1850 census for Pottawattamie County, Iowa, District 21. Their child, William, was born in Council Bluffs in 1849. Another child, Sarah, was born in St. Louis in 1851.

In April 1852 William and Rachel boarded the aging sidewheeler river boat **Saluda** to make the trip up the Missouri River to Council Bluffs. There were an estimated 175 passengers, perhaps 100 of whom were LDS converts who had just arrived from overseas. On 4 April, a Sunday, the **Saluda** reached Lexington, 370 miles from St. Louis, but she lacked sufficient power to push around the Lexington Bend, a hazardous, left-bending horseshoe. “Whipping around the point of this bend,” one historian noted, “the current created a treacherous ‘cross-over’ from the north bank to the south bank along the Lexington bluff.” Captain Belt jockeyed the **Saluda** from bank to bank, probing the current and dodging ice chunks. Finally, defeated, he maneuvered the **Saluda** to the north shore, opposite Lexington. The next day he moved her across the river, but not before ice chunks broke parts of the paddle wheels. She moored at the Lexington’s upper landing for repairs, remaining there Wednesday and Thursday, 7 and 8 April. An unspecified number of passengers, already behind schedule and being close to their destinations at Independence, Liberty, or Kansas City, disembarked at Lexington.

On Good Friday morning, 9 April 1852, at 7:30 a.m., **Saluda** nosed out from the Lexington wharf into the Missouri River, with orders from Captain Belt to maximize steam power. Suddenly its boilers blew up, disintegrating two-thirds of the passenger-loaded vessel. Among those killed were twenty-eight Latter-day Saints, with at least that many wounded, some severely. William Rowland and one of his children were blown overboard and never seen again. His wife Rachel was in bed with two more of the children “when a piece of the deck fell on them and killed both children at once and broke Rachel’s leg in two places and crippling her for life. The children Rachel, David, William, and Sarah were all killed in the accident. Surviving children were Mary and Ann.

The **Saluda** explosion is considered one of the worst—possibly the worst—steamboat disasters on the Missouri River. In LDS history, it is the only accident of consequence on the waters — oceans or rivers — that befell companies of European Saints emigrating between 1840 and 1868.

Riverboat explosions in early 1852, including the ***Saluda***, prompted the federal government to enact laws in August of 1852 to set new rules for operating and inspecting riverboats. Because of the *Saluda* disaster and the cholera in 1852, the Church's emigration avoided the Missouri River the following year by outfitting in Keokuk, two hundred miles north of St. Louis. Then, beginning in 1855, rather than sailing from Liverpool to New Orleans, LDS immigrants sailed to New York and other eastern cities. Leaders decided travel would be safer by railroad travel from East Coast ports to Iowa City or to Quincy, Illinois.

It is most certain they went on to Council Bluffs to be among their own people as soon as Rachel was able to travel. Rachel was 21. Mary was 13, and Ann was 9.

I do not know the date, but Mary went on to Utah with the family of Abel Evans. The sketch of his life said he was the son of Samuel Evans and was born in Carmarthenshire in 1813. He came to Utah in 1850 and spent two years in Council Bluffs and went to Utah in 1852. He settled in Lehi, Utah. This is surely the missionary mentioned in the sketch of Sage Treharne Jones.

It is not known when or with whom Rachel and Ann left Council Bluffs. It is known that she arrived in Salt Lake City in 1852 and went to Cedar City in 1853.

It is known that Rachel married again to a man named Robertson. Family legend says that Rachel left him when she discovered he had a wife in the old country. Rachel had a son born in Cedar City (William Robertson) in April 1854.

Rachel married James E. Harris in Cedar City and gave birth to eight more children. She died in 1918 at Cedar City.

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