

## Story of Rachel Harris, Southern Utah Pioneer

By Jay M. Jones

Several early residents of Cedar City had major hardships in getting to Iron County. One of the early pioneers to Southern Utah that had an especially difficult time along the way was Rachel Evans Rowland Harris.

Rachel Evans was born in Hirwaun, Wales in 1830. Her mother died when Rachel was 5 years old, after which Rachel was raised mostly by her father's sister, Mary Harris Rowland.

Rachel's Aunt Mary died in 1848, leaving four young children for Mary's husband, William Rowland to raise. Soon afterwards, William married Rachel, who was then 18.

In 1849 the Rowland family started their journey from Wales to Utah as part of 249 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints aboard the sailing ship "Buena Vista." After arriving at New Orleans, the passengers traveled via steamship up the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers to Council Bluffs, Iowa.

During a twenty-three day period moving up the Missouri River from St. Louis to Council Bluffs aboard the steamship "Highland Mary", 44 of the original 249 "Buena Vista" passengers fell victim to a cholera epidemic and died. The Rowland family was one of the few families to escape this epidemic without losing at least one family member. (Other passengers of the "Highland Mary" that survived and later lived in Iron County were Thomas Jones, Sage Treharne [Jones], Samuel Leigh, Mary Treharne [Leigh], and William and Rachel Davis.)

Later that year in Council Bluffs, Rachel gave birth to her first baby, a boy they named William. Two years later, a baby girl Sarah was born in St. Louis. The Rowlands had returned down river to visit relatives or for employment, or both.

In 1852 the Rowland family, now with six children, was ready to complete their journey to Utah. They boarded the steamship "Saluda" to travel from St. Louis to Council Bluffs. From there they planned to continue by wagon train to Utah.

The "Saluda" encountered swift currents and chunks of ice, stopping at Lexington, Missouri for paddle wheel repairs. After unsuccessful attempts to make it past strong currents around a bend in the river above Lexington, the captain ordered full steam on another attempt. When cold water rushed into a nearly empty, superheated boiler, a tremendous explosion occurred that sent passengers and debris flying in all directions.

William Rowland and one of his children were blown overboard and never seen again. His wife Rachel was in bed with two young children when a piece of the deck fell onto them. The two children were killed instantly. Four of the six Rowland children perished in the tragedy, along with their father. Rachel broke her leg in two places, which left her crippled for the rest of her life.

Out of an estimated 175 passengers and crew on board the ship, between 90 and 100 are believed to have died in the incident.



***Rachel Evans Rowland Harris with granddaughter Erma in Cedar City, about 1917 or 1918. Photo from FamilySearch.org, used with permission.***

Rachel continued west with a wagon train company led by William Morgan in 1852, and arrived in Cedar City the following year. In 1855 she married John Harris in Cedar City. The family also lived in Adamsville and Greenville in Beaver County before moving back to Cedar City. John died in 1878, just four months after finishing a home on North Main Street.

Rachel Evans Rowland Harris died in July 1918. According to an obituary in the Iron County Record, she was survived by seven children, forty-six grandchildren and forty great-grandchildren. She was described as a kind and devoted mother and a hard worker both in her home life and in church and community affairs.