

Harmon, James 1801-1851
Smithson, Mary Ann Blanks 1808-1897
Information found on Findagrave.com
by Josephine Berry Ferrell

Mary Ann Blanks Smithson was a Utah pioneer of 1847. She came with her parents, Bartley Smithson and Sarah Weatherford, from Mississippi, who spent the winter of 1846/47 in Pueblo, Colorado. She was born in the Pendleton District of South Carolina. She and James Harmon moved to Auburn, California in 1848 where she ran a Miner's Boarding House. After James' death, she and her younger children moved to Carson City, Nevada where she raised Cattle in the Carson Valley. She returned to Utah in 1859 and lived with her children until her death in 1897.

The story of the Harmon family who traveled to Utah as pioneers of 1847 reads like a romance of the Old South. The father, James Harmon, was born in 1801 in Boonesborg, Kentucky, descendant of a long line of adventure-loving people. In his early youth he was a friend of Daniel Boone and greatly admired this picturesque old frontiersman. Like so many of the settlers of Kentucky his parents, Steven and Lucy Goslin Harmon, came from Virginia where their people had originally settled after leaving England. They proudly boast, as many southerners, of being one of those famous families "the first families of Virginia."

In about 1828 James married Mary Ann Blanks Smithson, who was the second great granddaughter of the Duke of Northumberland. She was born in Pendleton district, South Carolina, December 25, 1808, the eldest daughter of Bartley and Sarah Weatherford Smithson. The family lived in South Carolina where they owned a vast plantation with hundreds of slaves. Mary Ann showed remarkable leadership even as a young girl, often riding with her father over the plantation and advising and assisting him in the management. Before her marriage, she also taught school in Alabama. Thus, it may be seen, she was well trained for the work in store for her after leaving the luxury and comfort of her southern home. She was a woman of large stature and great physical strength, as well as mental alertness. After her marriage, she moved with her husband to Monroe county, Mississippi where five of their six children were born. The two younger children were born after they joined the Latter-day Saint Church.

In the early days of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints there were many southerners who felt the urge to join the Church and assist in the building of the great western empire. With that now famous group of Mississippi converts the Harmon family started west in 1846. James Harmon was a blacksmith by trade. He worked some time on the Nauvoo Temple, then returned to Mississippi for his family when the Mormons started west. The Harmon family was remarkably well equipped for travel, even for those times, as they sold their plantation and slaves and purchased horses, mules, wagons and other necessary supplies. Upon reaching Pueblo, Colorado, they remained with those camped there for the winter where a son, John Taylor Harmon, was born April 6, 1847.

The family arrived in Utah July 29, 1847. The father established a blacksmith shop on Pioneer Square with Dimick Huntington. He also took up and attempted to run a tract of land in Big Cottonwood Canyon. In 1849 the family moved to Sacramento and then to Auburn, California where James engaged in placer mining and Mary ran a hotel, the first in Auburn. They lived there

until James died of fever contracted during a trip across the Isthmus of Panama. After the father died, Mary Ann bought a large cattle ranch at Carson City, Nevada where she lived until 1859.

At this time, with her three youngest children James, John and Josephine, "Mother Harmon," as she was affectionately called, returned to Utah. The older children had married and established homes: Mary Eliza Nevers in Nevada; Sarah Elizabeth Winters in California and Paralee America Garn in Utah. Josephine Smithson Harmon, then a girl of fourteen, rode on a beautiful white horse which was given to her on the eve of her departure all the way from Auburn, California to Centerville, Utah.

On reaching Centerville, Mother Harmon purchased land within Old Fort, Centerville, and members of the family still reside on this property. Two years after reaching Utah, Josephine married Jonathan Benner Evans, also a pioneer, and to this union were born twelve children. All were born in Centerville. Later James Harmon married Agnes Browning and moved to Montana and John Taylor Harmon married Susan Chesley White. Each had one child.

Mary Ann Blanks Harmon was always an active church worker. She served as the first president of the Centerville Ward Relief Society. She was naturally a wanderer and made numerous trips to California to visit her children. On one of these trips, February, 1872, she had sent to Centerville by express from Knights Landing, California, twelve walnut trees, twelve almond trees, two fig trees, twelve quince trees and a large number of grape vines. These were, probably the first trees of this kind planted in Utah and it is of interest to note that five of these walnut trees still stand on the old homestead (1934). The fig trees were potted in tubs and carried to the cellar each winter but finally died. Several of the trees were blown down. Mother Harmon was also a weaver and spent much of her time making beautiful pieces of cloth from wool, linen and cotton. She always had a particularly fine piece of linen on hand for an unexpected wedding or for a burial robe.

Active and capable until January 15, 1897, she suffered a stroke while visiting in Salt Lake City with her son, John, and passed away January 25th at the age of eighty-nine years.