



SARAH JANE FIFE

In a Mormon community in the Sixties and Seventies every man of property--and the proper religious convictions--felt responsible for caring for some of the sisters who had flocked to Utah in goodly number without proper male support or training for making a living. Barnard, however, had no desire for another wife. He had been married twice and now that he had his beloved Diana Mary to care for Elizabeth's boys he was perfectly happy. The brethren, though, looked at Barnard and his childless wife and thought that he was failing in his duty to populate Zion--especially as he had the "means" to care for more than one household.

Pressure began to be put on Barnard to go into polygamy. He held out against it, though, saying that he was happy as he was and he did not want to take the chance of bringing disharmony into his home. The brethren counseled with him again and again, and at last he consented to talk to Diana Mary about it. As religious a woman as she was, it was still hard for her to contemplate sharing Barnard with another woman. They counseled together time and again. There were no tears but just an attempt to let their consciences be their guide. After much prayer--and the weight of the advice of the brethren--they decided that it was "right" for Barnard to take another wife.

But who should she be? Certainly not one of the emigrant girls eagerly looking for a husband. She must be a girl he could truly love and honor a girl that Diana Mary could love like a sister. Discreet inquiries were made in regard to the unmarried girls in Ogden. There seemed to be a scarcity of local girls with so many polygamists in quest of suitable thirds and fourths. However, there was one girl, a girl who had vowed that she would not marry a polygamist--Sarah Jane Fife. She had been born July 10, 1855, in Salt Lake City, the daughter of Diana Davis and William Nicol Fife, the architect who had built the Ogden Tabernacle. Her family was a good one--and the girl was beautiful, with black hair and a beautiful face. That she was unmarried at the age of twenty-one was her fault alone, as she--and her father--had had many offers of marriage both by polygamists and single young men. She was an expert seamstress, thrifty, and a good manager.

After many consultations Diana Mary and Barnard decided that she was the one they would like. Little did they dream that as a young girl Jane had seen Barnard pass by driving a fine team and had decided that the handsome young man handling the fast team so dexterously was the one she wanted to marry. He had not even noticed the young girl dipping water from the irrigation ditch, so he hardly knew the girl who was rumored to have said she would never marry a polygamist.



15 years of age.
(photograph by H.H. Thomas
Main Street, Ogden)



32 years of age.
(taken at C.R. Savage's "Art Bazar"
in Salt Lake City)



About 55 years of age.



Taken at Exposition in
San Diego, California 1915

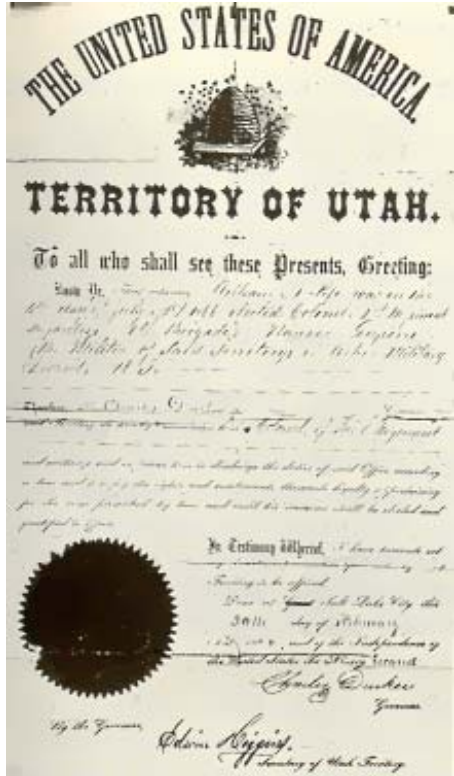
Mrs. Barnard White (Sarah Jane Fife White)

As Diana Mary still continued to do some sewing for people as well as to make burial clothes and to line caskets which Barnard made in his planing mill, she had a lot of sewing on hand. With such an excellent excuse for seeing Jane, she called upon her and asked her if she would consider coming to her home to help her sew for a couple of weeks. Jane was willing to make some money, as her father's large family allowed for few luxuries. She went home with Diana Mary to sew industriously, little knowing that the time was to be a trial to see if the two women could get along together harmoniously. They found many interests in common as they talked and sewed together. Diana Mary grew to like Sarah Jane very much. Barnard, too, had a chance to get to know her to some degree, although immersed in his business affairs as he seemed to be, no one would have known that he was looking upon her as a prospective wife. The two weeks were soon over and Jane returned home. Then Barnard was given the "go ahead" signal to try to win her.

After that, visits were made to the Fifes, and as the winter went by, it became the custom for Barnard and Diana Mary to call for Jane when they were going to meetings and parties. The high seat on a lumberman's dray may not seem like a very romantic spot--especially when the man's wife was along--but there was an air of courting about these occasions, anyway. Sometimes it just was not possible for Diana Mary to go everywhere with them. At last by spring Barnard had made his decision, with Diana Mary's entire approval, to marry Sarah Jane. The next step was to get her father's consent to his proposal.

For years afterward Jane was to be teased by her brothers, John and Walter about Barnard's talk with her father. As the two boys sensed what was going to happen, they decided to hide in the only room in the house where there was a chance for privacy, their mother's bedroom. They slipped into the room, crowded down into the large cradle that was covered with a quilt, and waited for developments. After some time the two men entered the room, as the boys had surmised they would. Barnard came straight to the point in asking for Jane's hand, but her father refused his request, saying that he did not want his daughter to go into polygamy. He gave his reasons--two polygamous wives, one the widow of his friend Captain Brown. He told Barnard how happy his life had been before entering into that order. There were arguments and promises as the two strong-willed men endeavored to decide the future of Sarah Jane Fife. Meanwhile, the cradle was quivering as the two boys stuffed the quilt into their mouths in an attempt to smother their giggles. The men were too engrossed in their discussion to notice the cradle. At last Barnard won, and William N. Fife consented to Barnard's marriage with his daughter.

Barnard White and Sarah Jane Fife were married May 1, 1876, in the Old Endowment House in Salt Lake City, and Jane, the girl who would not marry into polygamy, became the polygamous wife of Barnard White. The marriage proved to be a very happy one, and the ten years they lived in polygamy, according to Jane in later years, were the happiest years of all. Sarah Jane lived forty-six years longer than Diana Mary. She was the one who comforted Barnard and helped him as he grew old. She bore him ten children that were the pride and joy of his old age. Barnard said that Diana Mary was the wife of his youth, but just assuredly Jane was the wife of his old age.



Commission of William N. Fife, appointing him a Colonel, 1868



Phoebe Adelaide Abbott
(Wife of William N. Fife)



Adelaide Brown and husband, Harry Snyder.
(Step-sister of Sarah Jane Fife White)

It took a diplomat to live in polygamy. No matter how sincere their religious convictions might be, the personal element could not help but enter in. Barnard loved his wives and they loved him and each other. Nevertheless they were two women with different personalities and they had to share one man. Barnard tried to treat his wives equally in every way. From the beginning each wife had her own home. Each one worked hard to help her husband, but each in turn received his love and all the comforts he could provide her. He often went away on buying trips where he could buy luxuries not obtainable in a frontier community. He was a good shopper and his wives eagerly looked forward to the gifts he brought them when he returned from these trips.

Diana Mary lived on the north side of 24th Street near Wall Avenue just across the street from the lumberyard. Sarah Jane's first home * was on Grant Avenue between 21st and 22nd streets or First and Second as they were called then. It was there that David Nicol White, Mary Ada White, and Joseph Barnard White were born just prior to John Fife White's birth she moved into a new house east of Diana Mary's. These two comfortable frame houses were modern for the time since they had bath tubs. Here the two wives lived in harmony until 1883 when Diana Mary moved to Three Mile Creek, or Perry, in Box Elder County. Barnard wanted a farm home for his family and the Asael Thorne farm in Perry was exactly what he wanted. This farm home was always to be "home" for the whole family. Shortly after this move had been made, the polygamy "Crusade" began to cause trouble for the White family. Jane was forced to go on the "Underground" and leave her good home in Ogden. She lived in Draper for a time at Elizabeth Stewart's home. Then she lived in a lonely cabin up in the hills above Paradise on Samuel McMurdie's ranch. It was this hiding and living in fear that marred the last year of Diana Mary's life. Her love for her husband and Jane made her suffer with them as they hid away from the marshals who thought there could not be such love and devotion in a polygamous marriage.

* at 2238 Grant Avenue, torn down about October 1964, to enlarge the Bon Marche parking lot.