

Sarah Righter Major

Sarah Righter was born in 1808 near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her father, John Righter was a minister of the Church of the Brethren. Sarah received a common school education. At the age of eighteen Sarah heard Harriet Livermore preach. Livermore was a well-known evangelist who was privileged to have preached in the US Congress three times.

After hearing Livermore, she got the urge to preach, but knowing the negative feelings that most people had against female preachers, she resigned herself to resist. After urgings from her father and invitations to preach at various congregations, she decided to follow her calling.

In 1842, at the age of 34, Sarah married Reverend Thomas Major, a minister of the Church of the Brethren. Thomas, born in 1811, received a common school education and learned and practiced the carpenter's trade in the Philadelphia area. A year after the marriage, the couple sold their home and moved to Ohio, first settling in Scioto County and moving to Highland County before 1847.

Between the years of 1843 to 1847 three infant children died, one of which is thought to have been adopted. Three more children were born to Sarah and John between the years of 1847 and 1852. These children grew to adulthood.

Over a period of 21 years John purchased 128 acres in Paint Township near the intersection of Karnes and Overman roads. In 1876 he purchased lot 168, 434 Mirabeau, in Greenfield.

Thomas and Sarah held preaching meetings in Ohio and Indiana. Sarah would enter with Thomas and sit in the front row while Thomas would sit on the stage. Only after the opening of the meeting would Thomas invite Sarah to come up on the stage to sit or to address the meeting. At some meetings she would only give a prayer because of opposition to women preaching, especially married women.

Many men who were opposed to her preaching changed their minds after hearing her. Elder James H. Tracey, an Indiana minister wrote: "*I could not give my voice to silence someone who could out preach me.*"

J. H. Warstler described her: "*In dress she was neat and plain, a very plain bonnet which she soon laid aside, and a shawl over her shoulders. Her face showed marks of age and care and labor. She was the picture of meekness and humility completely subject to the will of her husband. After the opening exercises she was invited to preach. She arose, slowly announced one of the old texts, and from it brought forth new truths that delighted my heart. The sermon was a masterpiece.*"

She ministered to the poor and wretched, visiting jails and infirmaries on their trips. The couple were strong abolitionists, working in the Underground Railroad, even teaching one Negro to read and write; he later became an elder in the church. Sarah became involved in the temperance movement in her later years.

By 1880 the Majors had built a home at 434 Mirabeau in Greenfield that still stands today. In 1882 Thomas sold his 128 acres in Paint township. In the 1880 census he and Sarah are listed as living in Greenfield with their son, Samuel, who was listed as being 31 and the superintendent of Greenfield's

Union Schools. Samuel was listed in the 1879 census as a student living in a boarding house in Delaware, Ohio, (probably attending Ohio Wesleyan University).

Sarah died on September 18, 1884. Thomas followed her four years later. They are buried in the Greenfield cemetery. Sarah's tombstone inscription reads:

For more than fifty years, a preacher of the Gospel
Her Life, Her Monument, Her Savior, Her Hope
"She hath done what she could"

Thomas's tombstone inscription reads:

He trusted in the Lord.
For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved,
we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.