

May 5, 1850:  
Sarah Louisa  
(Louie) Bouton is  
born in Norwalk,  
Connecticut.  
(Right: Engraving  
of Norwalk, circa  
1855.)



Sept. 19, 1866: Louie  
meets Joseph H. Felt, a  
returned missionary  
escorting the Saints  
on their journey from  
Omaha to Salt Lake  
City. They marry on  
December 29, 1866.

1867–69: Louie and Joseph leave  
in November 1867 for the Muddy  
River Mission (in present-day  
Nevada). Eventually, due to harsh  
living conditions and other fac-  
tors, Brigham Young orders the  
mission abandoned. Louie and  
Joseph return to Salt Lake City.

Aug. 25, 1878:  
Aurelia Spencer  
Rogers organizes  
the first ward  
Primary (illus-  
trated at right).

# Louie B. Felt

## DEDICATING HER LIFE TO CHILDREN

*Although Louie B. Felt did not have children of her own, her deep love for all children and her intense desire to better their lives manifested themselves throughout her lengthy service in the Primary organization.*

**By Janet Peterson**

Louie B. Felt, the first Primary general president, and her counselor May Anderson were walking along a street in Salt Lake City, Utah, one afternoon and saw a boy, apparently disabled by polio, having difficulty maneuvering on his crutches. As they continued their walk, they discussed the plight of sick children, especially those whose parents could not afford adequate medical care. Louie and May conceived the idea of providing a room for children at a local hospital. In 1911, the First Presidency approved establishing one room for boys and another for girls at the Groves LDS Hospital. While a small beginning, these convalescent rooms provided a way to help ailing children and led to the founding of the Primary Children's Hospital. Louie always wanted the best for children; the hospital was just one example of this desire.





*Sept. 14, 1878:  
Louie is called as  
Primary president  
in the Eleventh  
Ward (pictured  
at right).*



*June 19, 1880:  
Louie is sustained  
as Primary gen-  
eral president.*

*Oct. 5, 1889: President  
Louie B. Felt conducts  
the first Primary  
convention for stake  
leaders.*



*During her  
45 years of  
service as  
Primary  
general  
president,  
Louie B. Felt  
“mothered”  
100,000  
children and  
guided 30,000  
Primary leaders.*

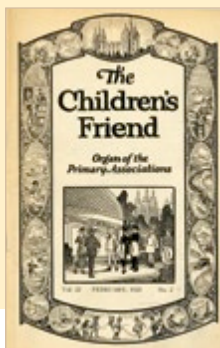


1895–96: Louie attends training classes of the Utah Kindergarten Association. She and her counselors implement child-centered education and age-group classes in Primary.



July 1897: Pioneer jubilee celebrations in Salt Lake include a children's parade.

Jan. 1902: The first issue of the Children's Friend is published.



May 29, 1902: The first Primary general conference is held in the Assembly Hall on Temple Square to aid communication among Primary units. All Primary leaders are invited.



Although Louie did not have children of her own, her deep love for all children and her intense desire to better their lives manifested themselves throughout her lengthy service in the Primary organization. Despite suffering ill health most of her life, she was described as being full of life: “Her face is pale, refined and spiritual in its expression; her spirit buoyant and cheerful, and her animated manner and smile as frank as a child’s.”<sup>1</sup> Louie’s strong testimony of the gospel and desire to serve others, coupled with her determined nature, shaped how she approached challenges in her life.

### Childhood to Marriage

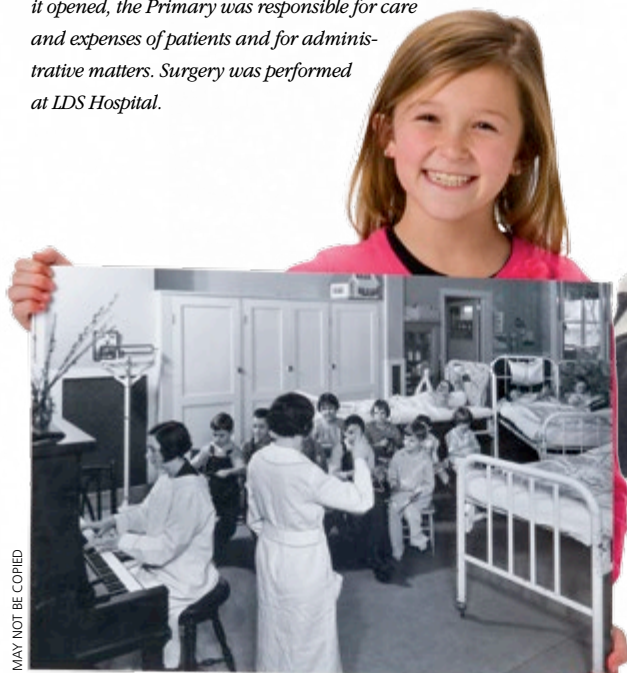
Known throughout her life as Louie, Sarah Louisa Bouton Felt was the third of Joseph and Mary Barto Bouton’s five children and was born in Norwalk, Connecticut, on May 5, 1850. The Boutons had joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints prior to her birth. Louie enjoyed many family

outings gathering berries and nuts, dredging for clams and oysters in the Long Island Sound, and tapping maple sap. She especially liked to ice skate in the winter. Louie learned homemaking skills from her mother and strict observance of the Sabbath from her father. During her youth, Louie developed a firm testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When Louie was 14 years old, the Bouton family decided to join the Saints in Utah. While they were en route by train to Omaha, Nebraska, a fire in the baggage car destroyed all their belongings. They thus returned to Norwalk to prepare for the trek once more. Louie’s father, Joseph, however, became seriously ill while they were en route again. Part of the family stayed near Omaha to care for him, but he insisted that Louie and two of her brothers continue traveling to Zion.

It was during this part of the journey that Louie met Joseph H. Felt, the leader of the wagon train and recently returned from a Scandinavian mission. Joseph was attracted

*When the Primary Children’s Hospital was built, the Church donated necessary equipment and renovated the Hyde home north of Temple Square. After it opened, the Primary was responsible for care and expenses of patients and for administrative matters. Surgery was performed at LDS Hospital.*



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*Top right: The Hyde home as it looked when it was converted to the first Primary Children’s Hospital.*

*Bottom left: Children singing in the interior of the 1922 Primary Children’s Hospital.*

1912–13: Primary revises its curriculum to focus on social and ethical training and activities.

1913: A two-room children's ward opens in Groves LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City, with partial funding from voluntary donations of pennies from Primary children. (Below: Example of a fund-raising bank used in later years for Primary Children's Hospital.)



1915: The Pioneer Day parade includes a horse-drawn float by the Primary. It features children dressed as flowers inside a huge woven basket.



to the tall, blue-eyed, blonde Louie and she to him. Once settled in Salt Lake City, 26-year-old Joseph and 16-year-old Louie married on December 29, 1866.

### Family Life

The following October, President Brigham Young called the Felts to help settle the Muddy River Mission (near today's Moapa in southeastern Nevada). They stopped in St. George, Utah, along the way, and it was around this time that Louie suffered a miscarriage (leaving her unable to have children). Joseph asked Louie about the possibility of staying in St. George. She characteristically replied, "We were not sent to St. George; we were sent to the Muddy. You may do as you please; I am going on."<sup>2</sup>

Once they had arrived at the Muddy, the colonists suffered extreme conditions in the arid, hot weather as they lived in tents and wagons until they could build adobe huts. Sandstorms filled irrigation canals and cut off water to the young shoots and plants that simply wilted in the heat. Two years later, when President Young saw the Saints' harsh living conditions, he closed the mission. Upon the Felts' return to Salt Lake City, Joseph found work at ZCMI, a co-op general store.

### Becoming a Leader of Children

Though "denied the great privilege of being a mother," Louie found fulfillment in loving, teaching, and serving others' children. She firmly believed that God gave her "many, many lovely children through other mothers, that I may pray for, think of, and love."<sup>3</sup>

In 1878, shortly after Aurelia Spencer Rogers started the first ward Primary in Farmington, Utah, leaders called Louie as president of the Eleventh Ward Primary. One of



*Spanish Fork Primary, circa 1917*

her co-workers observed: "Louie had a most wonderful influence over the little children of the Eleventh Ward. They were fascinated by her gracious manner. Every child was willing and anxious to do whatever she suggested."<sup>4</sup>

Primary quickly spread throughout other Latter-day Saint communities, aided by Relief Society general president Eliza R. Snow, who

encouraged the organization of Primaries as she traveled throughout Utah and surrounding Latter-day Saint settlements. By 1888, almost every ward had its own Primary. All the children met together and participated in singing and other activities.

At the morning session of a special women's meeting in June 1880, President John Taylor (1808–87) created presidencies for the three reorganized auxiliaries. Louie B. Felt was sustained as the Primary general president. In the afternoon session, Eliza R. Snow was sustained as general president of the Relief Society and Elmina S. Taylor as general president of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association. Thirty-year-old Louie knew this calling came from the Lord. While she felt unqualified and unprepared and did not want to be in the limelight, she nevertheless said, "I will do the best I can."<sup>5</sup> That determination, combined with her faith, fostered organizational as well as personal growth during her lengthy administration.

Louie visited Primary leaders, held conferences, and conducted meetings in many parts of Utah, despite health challenges of partial paralysis and rheumatism. During one train trip, Louie met May Anderson, a young convert from Liverpool, England. That initial introduction led to a lifelong friendship; Louie was like an older sister to May, and they

1917: Primary girls join in the effort to knit socks and bandages for World War I soldiers.



1918: Primary is not held during the worldwide flu pandemic.

May 11, 1922: President Heber J. Grant dedicates the Primary Children's Hospital, a 35-bed facility across the street from Temple Square. Primary children donate birthday pennies to help support the hospital. (Right: Patients on an outing to Liberty Park in Salt Lake City.)



Oct. 6, 1925: At age 75 and in failing health, Louie, upon her request, is released as Primary general president. She is made an honorary general board member.

served together for 35 years in the Primary. Louie's husband, Joseph, supported her in her new calling. Twice during the 1880s, he was called as a full-time missionary, as many married men were: he served in the Indian Territory Mission (in present-day Oklahoma) and later in the eastern United States.

### Shaping a Child-Oriented Primary

Early Primary classes followed the same pattern as 19th-century education: children learned by drill, rote, and reciting. Louie, however, became aware of an educational movement, the "kindergarten movement," that was gaining ground in the United States in the 1890s. It was child-centered and focused on a child's development, nature, and needs. Teachers served as leaders rather than taskmasters. Learning took place through activity, art, play, experimentation, freedom, curiosity, and interest.

Both Louie and May enrolled in classes for this progressive kindergarten movement and together opened a private kindergarten. Their training and teaching had a profound influence on the development of Primary as the two women saw ways to implement child-centered education in Primary. Following educational trends, they created age-groups and geared lessons to the various levels of children's development. Singing, storytelling, drama, dancing, and arts and crafts began to fill weekday Primary meetings.

### Establishing the *Children's Friend*

Louie felt a great need to communicate with local Primary leaders and provide printed lessons for each age-group. She suggested to the First Presidency that the Primary publish a periodical. During this time in Church history, each auxiliary was responsible to raise its own money to support its work. Church leaders told Louie that a magazine would be too costly. Still, she continued to repeat her request. In 1901, President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) gave approval for a magazine with the provision that the Primary manage it and keep it out of debt. Louie thus offered her own home as collateral. Louie's counselor May oversaw the new magazine.

First published in 1902, the *Children's Friend* was initially a magazine to help leaders and teachers and did not contain illustrations or stories for children. Later, the magazine became fully child-oriented and was eventually renamed the *Friend*.

In 1907, Louie's husband, Joseph, passed away at the age of 67. Now a widow at 57, Louie continued her dedicated work in behalf of children.

### Aiding Children through the Primary Children's Hospital

With the opening of two convalescent rooms at the Groves LDS Hospital in 1913, Louie realized her dream to improve the physical well-being of children. This space, however, soon became inadequate to handle the number of children who needed care. Seeking to learn more, Louie and May visited convalescent hospitals in the East to study modern practices but learned little. They decided to develop their own hospital program.

In 1922, Louie oversaw the conversion of a large home across the street from Temple Square in Salt Lake City into the LDS Children's Convalescent Hospital. While the Church donated the building and equipment, the Primary paid for the expenses of caring for patients and of hospital administration. During the facility's 30 years of operation, nearly 10,000 children received inpatient or outpatient care.

To raise funds for this hospital, the Primary, under Louie's direction as general president, initiated the Penny Parade, which called for children to donate a penny for every year of their age. These pennies provided a large portion of the hospital's funding for many years. In 1952, the hospital moved to a larger and full-service facility on Twelfth Avenue, with the Primary paying half the cost. Until the Church turned the hospital over to a private organization in 1975, the Primary general presidency was responsible for the administration and operation of what was called the Primary Children's Hospital. In 1990 the hospital was moved to its current location on the University of Utah campus and is regarded as an extraordinary children's facility.

Feb. 13, 1928: Louie B. Felt dies at home at age 77. (Right: Elder David O. McKay with Primary children in Hawaii, 1921.)



## AURELIA SPENCER ROGERS (1834–1922)



Though Aurelia Rogers never served as Primary general president, she has always been recognized as its founder. As the mother of 12 children, 44-year-old Aurelia felt that the neighborhood boys should be taught values that would prepare them to be responsible adults. At this time there was no auxiliary for children, so she discussed her ideas with Relief Society president Eliza R. Snow. Soon, with the approval of President John Taylor, Aurelia received a calling from her bishop to begin a Primary in their ward. Leaders decided that boys and girls ages four to fourteen would be invited. Under the direction of the priesthood, Aurelia and others taught 224 children in that first Primary meeting on Sunday, August 25, 1878, in Farmington, Utah. (See “History of Primary,” [lds.org/callings/primary/getting-started/history-of-primary](https://www.lds.org/callings/primary/getting-started/history-of-primary).)

### Serving Children for Four and a Half Decades

At age 75 and experiencing a marked decline in health, Louie asked for a release, which was extended at the October 1925 general conference. During her 45 years as Primary general president, it is estimated she “mothered” 100,000 children and supervised 30,000 teachers and leaders. In turn, Louie was beloved by Primary children and their leaders. As one board member expressed it, “Not only has she intelligently directed the affairs of the Primary Association of the Church but she has held the sisters together in love.”<sup>6</sup> Louie’s co-workers hosted a party to celebrate her birthday in 1911. At another celebration, 1,500 Primary children sang and danced in her honor.

Louie B. Felt died February 13, 1928, at the age of 77. By turning her life’s sorrow into loving service, she blessed children throughout the Church. Her determination to better their lives was manifested through the programs she initiated as the longest-serving auxiliary general president in the history of the Church. ■

*The author lives in Utah, USA.*

#### NOTES

1. “Louie Felt,” in Augusta Joyce Crocheron, comp., *Representative Women of Deseret* (1884), 59.
2. In “Louie B. Felt,” *Children’s Friend*, Oct. 1919, 408.
3. Louie B. Felt, in “Report of the Sixth Annual Convention of Primary Association Workers,” *Children’s Friend*, July 1908, 276.
4. Lillie T. Freeze, in “Louie B. Felt,” *Children’s Friend*, Oct. 1919, 413.
5. Louie B. Felt, in Adelaide U. Hardy, “Living for a Purpose,” *Children’s Friend*, Dec. 1918, 476.
6. “Louie B. Felt: A Tribute,” *Children’s Friend*, Nov. 1925, 424.

*Unlike today, the Primary was responsible for funding its own magazine. To keep the Children’s Friend out of debt, Louie offered her home as collateral. One of her counselors, May Anderson, resigned her teaching position at the University of Utah to work on the magazine. Right: Early magazines—such as those from 1921 (2) and 1916 (3)—were small (6" x 9"). They have been enlarged here for easier viewing. Other issues shown here—1925 (1), 2014 (4), and 1969 (5)—are actual size.*

