

My name is Sarah Jane Edwards. I was born on March 24, 1801 in Barbados to Richard and Dorothy Burgess. When I was growing up, Barbados was an English colony and we were very British in customs and manners. In fact, the nickname for Barbados was "Little England." There are eleven parishes in Barbados and we lived in the St. Peter's Parish which is located on the northern portion and spans from the east to west coast. It is a place that consists of both powdery white sandy beaches and lush rolling green hills, a perfect environment for tropical agriculture for growing sugar cane, which made many plantation owners wealthy.

My family lived in Barbados for at least a few generations and we were of white British ancestry. I mention this because during my lifetime the majority (about 80%) of the Barbados population was of Black African heritage. They were captured slaves who were brought and forced to work on the sugar plantations. Increasing resentment among the slaves led to several uprisings. The largest rebellion in the island's history took place in 1816, when I was a teenager. The rebellion involved twenty thousand slaves from over seventy plantations. The revolt failed and 120 slaves were killed in the fighting and 144 were executed. This event caused fear for many of us. This social unrest along with it becoming economically harder for small plantation owners to compete with the larger plantation owners who were increasing their monopoly on sugar, made our future in Barbados unknown.

But in spite of our fears, my family and I stayed. On October 28, 1818, I married Lawrence Edwards, a farmer/planter, in an Episcopal church in St. Peter's, Barbados. We had several Children.

Jane Abel, born: 16 Nov 1819

Lawrence Barnes, born: 11 May 1821

Sarah Elizabeth, born: 18 July 1823

Mary, born: 14 February 1829; Married Benjamin Franklin Smith

Edward, born: 17 July 1830

Francis, born: 9 March 1833

Elvira, born: 10 September 1834; Married: George Henry Weeks

My son John was born in New York

Change started happening in August of 1834. This was when an act of parliament granted the slaves of Barbados emancipation. A couple of years later, we left Barbados on schooner George and arrived in New York on August 10, 1836. There was no turning back for us. We settled in Bayport, New York. My husband bought a large parcel of land east of the Brown farm and built three homes on the north side of Middle Road. My husband was a farmer throughout his life, but our two sons Lawrence and Francis became mariners.

My husband built three homes in Bayport. Our house was located at the corner of Middle Road and Baygrove Court, and was later bequeathed to our daughter Elvira. The house at 473 Middle Road was given to our daughter Mary, and the one at 463 Middle Road to our son Lawrence. So, as you can see, I always had some of my children near me.

My husband, Lawrence, died October 8, 1860. My death occurred nearly 9 years later on February 8, 1869. Even in death I am surrounded by family. My husband is to my one side and my daughter Mary Anna, who married Benjamin Franklin Smith, and died in 1874 is to my other side.

Diane Haberstroh