

Ensign » 1997 » June

The Pioneer Trek: Nauvoo to Winter Quarters

By William G. Hartley

William G. Hartley, "The Pioneer Trek: Nauvoo to Winter Quarters," *Ensign*, Jun 1997, 31

Latter-day Saints did not leave Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846 in one mass exodus led by President Brigham Young but primarily in three separate groups—in winter, spring, and fall.

The Latter-day Saints' epic evacuation from Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846 may be better understood by comparing it to a three-act play. Act 1, the winter exodus, was President Brigham Young's well-known Camp of Israel trek across Iowa from 1 March to 13 June 1846, involving perhaps 3,000 Saints. Their journey has been researched thoroughly and often stands as *the* story of the Latter-day Saints' exodus from Nauvoo. [1](#) Act 2, the spring exodus, which history seems to have overlooked, showed three huge waves departing Nauvoo, involving some 10,000 Saints, more than triple the number in the winter departure. Act 3, the fall exodus, has been studied only in part. It involved about 700 Saints, mostly poor, forced from Nauvoo at gunpoint. What follows is an overview of what we now know about these three phases of the 1846 exodus.

Original Plan Was for Spring Departure

On 11 October 1845, Brigham Young, President and senior member of the Church's governing Quorum of Twelve Apostles, responded in behalf of the Brethren to anti-Mormon rhetoric, arson, and assaults in September. He appointed captains for 25 companies of 100 wagons each and requested each company to build its own wagons to roll west in one massive 2,500-wagon caravan the next spring. [2](#) Church leaders instructed members outside of Illinois to come to Nauvoo in time to move west in the spring.

At its peak, Nauvoo had close to 12,000 people. [3](#) Another 2,000 to 3,000 lived nearby in Illinois and Iowa. A few hundred new arrivals came by the time of the exoduses, so a reasonable estimate is that 15,000 to 16,000 Saints in Iowa and Illinois were eligible to join the migration. Instructions for the trek asked people to bring enough food per wagon for five adults or the equivalent, which means that, adding children, each wagon on average probably had six people assigned to it. With six per wagon, 2,500 wagons would assist about 15,000 people. Some doubling up of friends, relatives, or single adults was expected. By 23 November 1845, reports indicated that 3,285 families were organized for the trek—800 more families than wagons. [4](#) By then the Saints were doing their all to prepare to leave in the spring. [5](#)

During January 1846, the Brethren proposed that a smaller group go in early spring, ahead of the main body. [6](#) Thus by 24 January, President Young planned to start with a company of young men and a few families and travel until they could find a good location to put in crops. "Any who want to go are welcome to go," he said. [7](#)

Act 1: The Winter Exodus

By January's end, LDS leaders heard of disturbing threats about attacks on Nauvoo, arrests of the Twelve, destruction of the Nauvoo Temple, stealing of wagons "to prevent us from moving west," Illinois governor Thomas Ford's sending troops into Nauvoo to enforce arrest warrants, and other designs to prosecute and persecute the Mormons. [8](#) Taking all of these threats seriously, the Twelve decided to leave quickly—partly for their own well-being and partly to remove themselves as a target that might bring attacks and result in harm to other Latter-day Saints. So departures started early, in February 1846 instead of springtime. This broke up the previous plan of organization, and what was expected to be a small, orderly group soon swelled to an unwieldy size. Winter departures caused family separations. "We bade our children and friends goodbye and started for

the West,” wrote midwife Patty Sessions. [9](#)

The winter exodus of the Camp of Israel involved about 3,000 Saints and nearly 500 wagons, although 100 wagons returned to Nauvoo during March to help move other Saints. [10](#) They journeyed 300 miles across southern Iowa, a three-and-a-half month trek. Their route is now designated as Iowa’s segment of the 1,300-mile-long Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail and is well mapped and marked. [11](#) Histories of this group draw from many records, including diaries kept by William Clayton, William Huntington, John D. Lee, Eliza Lyman, Elder Orson Pratt, Elder Willard Richards, Patty Sessions, John Smith, Eliza R. Snow, Horace K. Whitney, President Brigham Young, and Lorenzo Dow Young. [12](#)

On 4 February Nauvoo resident Charles Shumway ferried across the Mississippi River, starting the winter exodus. For three weeks, while temperatures plummeted, wagons ferried across, often dodging ice chunks, and then scores crossed on solid ice after Charles C. Rich walked across the Mississippi on 25 February. These travelers camped at the ever-expanding campground along Sugar Creek, seven miles inland. They braved cold temperatures and snow. Campfires burned constantly. “The wind blows, one can hardly get to the fire for the smoke,” Patty Sessions noted on the 19th. While organizing the people into subcompanies and developing camp and travel rules, President Brigham Young sent ahead a vanguard of strong “pioneers,” led by Bishop George Miller, to improve roads and bridges, locate campsites, and collect firewood.

On 1 March the Camp of Israel started moving west through Iowa Territory. Were it springtime, with grasses for cattle feed, they would have moved up existing roads partway toward present-day Des Moines before crossing the Des Moines River. But, it being winter, they chose to hug the Missouri border so they could obtain needed food for themselves and feed for their animals from Missouri settlers. On day five, at the village of Bonaparte, they forded the Des Moines River on a submerged rock ledge. While crossing, Eliza R. Snow “slung a tin cup on a string and drew some water which was a very refreshing draught.” Many Saints took grain to the Bonaparte Mills to obtain flour for the trek.

The companies made an extended stop (7–18 March) at Richardson’s Point, 22 miles west of Bonaparte. While stopped, men found work “such as building houses, chopping timber, splitting rails, husking corn,” wrote William Huntington. Meanwhile, Captain William Pitt’s Nauvoo Brass Band had been presenting concerts for pay at Farmington and in Keosauqua inside the Van Buren County courthouse.

Moving northwesterly along the Fox River, the companies passed just north of Bloomfield. “The cold more intense inasmuch that we were obliged to close the front of the wagon,” Sister Snow complained. They turned southward (at present-day Drakesville), crossed the Fox, and veered southwesterly toward the Missouri border. Briefly they followed the Old Mormon Trace, blazed in 1838 by Latter-day Saints fleeing Missouri. By then their plan was to move through the north edge of Missouri and cross the Missouri River at Banks Ferry, above St. Joseph, Missouri, and join the Oregon Trail west of there.

March snow, cold, rain, and awful mud made the trek miserable and exhausting. To cross the steep-banked Chariton River, they double-teamed the wagons to descend and ascend the muddy banks. “I spent the day helping the teams till I was so sore and tired I could scarcely walk,” William Clayton wrote. They established Chariton Camp (south of present-day Centerville) for an extended stop, 22–31 March. “The mud of our street and about our fires, in our tents etc. is indescribable,” Sister Snow said on 25 March. President Young recorded that late March storms and cold caused “severe colds” among the campers. While encamped, President Young regrouped the 400 or fewer wagons into six better-structured units of 50 or more wagons each.

When they left Chariton Camp on 1 April, they exited Iowa’s last organized county and moved into what could be called wilderness but still followed rudimentary roads. They made slow progress, being hampered by rain and mud. “Brother Brigham came up with his company driving his team in mud to his knees as happy as a king,” Patty Sessions said. By 9 April, roads were impassable. “Doubling and thrifling teams but to no effect,” Huntington wrote. “Many wagons were left stalled in the mud in every direction. Many families remained on the prairie over the night without fire [and] with their clothing wet.”

On 6–15 April the companies camped by Locust Creek, three miles above the Missouri border. [13](#) On 15 April, Englishman William Clayton, excited by news from Nauvoo of the birth of his son, wrote celebratory words to the English song “All Is Well.” His song became the Latter-day Saint pioneer anthem “Come, Come, Ye Saints.” [14](#) Ever since the Richardson’s Point camp, Latter-day Saint traders were constantly going into Missouri to trade at farms and hamlets. Changing the route, leaders decided to turn northwesterly and to cross the Missouri River at Kaneshville (present-day Council Bluffs, Iowa).

On the move again, by mid-April the travelers saw prairie grasses sprouting, trees leafing out, rattlesnakes slithering around, and in their companies “many cases of measles and mumps.” [15](#) At the headwaters of the

Weldon Fork River, they made an extended stop, from 24 April to 12 May, and created Garden Grove, the first temporary settlement along the way, on recently opened free federal lands. Starting on 27 April, leaders created work parties to split rails, cut logs for cabins, build a bridge, dig wells, make plow handles, and herd flocks. After a day's work, Saints ate supper and, weather permitting, enjoyed dancing and singing. Log cabins soon lined both ends of a common farm. [16](#)

Leaving people there to farm and develop the settlement, the Camp of Israel pushed on to the Grand River. There they stayed from 18 May to 1 June and established a second temporary settlement, Mount Pisgah, with cabins, farms, and fences. On 30 May, President Young and other leaders rode out three miles, set up two tents, and prayed, seeking divine help for the journey and for Saints still in Nauvoo. [17](#)

On 1 June the Camp of Israel moved on, leaving hundreds who lacked teams and supplies needed to push on for the Rocky Mountains that summer. By then President Young's company was being enlarged constantly by spring exodus arrivals. After passing a Pottawattamie village (west of present-day Lewis, Iowa) on 8 June, they encountered several rugged streams they had to bridge before moving on. Finally, on 13 June, the lead wagons halted in view of the Missouri River at present-day Council Bluffs. "Camped, plenty of strawberries," Patty Sessions wrote that day.

During subsequent weeks, successive wagon companies arrived from Nauvoo and camped next to previous arrivals, creating a long "Grand Encampment" [18](#) stretching about nine miles eastward from President Young's camp. Saints waited while workmen built a ferryboat to move wagons across the Missouri. By early July, stymied by slow ferrying, leaders realized that the constant delays had slowed them down too much, and they canceled plans to send an advance company to the mountains that year. Then, when U.S. Army recruiters from Fort Leavenworth enlisted 500 men in a Mormon Battalion for Mexican War service, leaders knew that the manpower loss meant they must winter the Latter-day Saint refugees there along the river. By September, they set up a main encampment, Winter Quarters, in present-day Florence, Nebraska (on Omaha's north edge). Some 4,000 to 5,000 Saints stayed there. Many more, however, wintered in small clusters all across southwest Iowa. [19](#)

The Camp of Israel trek was as heroic as it was historic. It was punctuated by sacrifice, sorrows, deaths, stressful travel situations, devout prayers and hymns, band music, good humor, and optimism. Histories about the Nauvoo exodus concentrate on the Camp of Israel rather than on the later departures for several good reasons: (1) it was the first wave of people who left Nauvoo en masse; (2) it pioneered several stretches of the route and various travel methods; (3) it contained the Church's leaders, including most of the Twelve, and was the decision-making group for the entire exodus; (4) it was an organized caravan that shared a collective, common history; and (5) its experiences are well described in diary entries and later recollections.

Act 2: The Spring Exodus

During April, May, and June 1846, three times as many Saints left Nauvoo as went with President Brigham Young's advance group. Among the 10,000 spring evacuees were Apostles Wilford Woodruff and Orson Hyde, many of the 300 men who had been guards and pioneers in the Camp of Israel who now had returned to Nauvoo for their families, workmen who had finished the Nauvoo Temple, and new LDS arrivals from out of state. Because of grass and springtime weather, their treks across Iowa took only 4 to 5 weeks, compared to the Camp of Israel's 14 weeks.

Economic, health, and family difficulties prevented these people from leaving sooner. Thousands had trouble obtaining adequate outfits and provisions. They counted on selling, bartering, buying, and luck. When they tried to market their farms, houses, livestock, furniture, utensils, dishes, clocks, books, and other nonessentials, they found many sellers but few buyers. Most Saints sold or traded for pittance, suffering major financial losses. Ethan Barrows, for example, wrote, "[I] could not sell my house and lot, nor any of my furniture." [20](#) The Leavitt family received only "a yoke of wild steers" for their "beautiful farm." [21](#) Some had to pay off debts; others had to collect debts.

Ill health, too, slowed departures. Isaac Haight said that in February his company headed west "before my health was so that I could go with them," so he did not leave until June. [22](#) Amasa Lyman left in February, but his expectant wife, Maria, stayed behind, gave birth to a son, and left with her four children in June. [23](#) People delayed, too, while waiting for relatives not ready, not willing to go, or not yet in Nauvoo. Reddick Alfred, one of the advance pioneers, returned from Garden Grove and "found my folks on the Iowa side of the river opposite Nauvoo being unable to move till I returned." [24](#) A Pennsylvanian and a Canadian company were among Saints who reached Nauvoo in May and joined the spring departures. [25](#)

March. President Young placed leadership in Nauvoo upon his brother, Elder Joseph W. Young, senior

president of the Seventy, and Elder Orson Hyde. He instructed three trustees—Bishop Joseph L. Heywood, John S. Fullmer, and Almon W. Babbitt—to sell Church properties, handle Church finances, help complete the temple, and move needy Saints west. He sent word back for Elders Young and Hyde to dedicate the temple if the Twelve were unable to return to do it. [26](#) He sent word, also, that the Twelve were petitioning God to “open the way” for “the upright” to leave Nauvoo and join them. “Seek diligently,” he said, to “follow after us.”

April. During the April conference at Nauvoo, Elder Hyde instructed that all should leave as soon as possible, and the congregation voted to do so. He counseled the needy to find work along the Iowa route west, for, said he, “there is plenty of work all along [the] road.” [27](#) When Elder Wilford Woodruff arrived in Nauvoo from his European mission in mid-April, he “found all the Saints struggling for life, as it were, to gather with the Saints in the wilderness.” News that Governor Ford would pull guard troops from Nauvoo on 1 May, leaving the Saints unprotected, caused “considerable excitement.” [28](#) That report triggered a mass departure, the first of three large-scale evacuations that spring. Dangers caused Elders Hyde, Woodruff, Joseph Young, and others to privately dedicate the temple on 30 April. [29](#) Meanwhile, President Young sent word to sell the temple and use sale proceeds to move the poor and pay the temple construction crew. [30](#)

May. On 1 May the temple was dedicated publicly by Elder Hyde. In all, nearly 6,000 Latter-day Saints had received their temple ordinances in Nauvoo the previous winter. President Brigham Young in later months would draw upon these temple experiences to help motivate the Saints during trying times. “Let the fire of the covenant which you made in the House of the Lord burn in your hearts,” he counseled. [31](#)

After the dedication, a second wave of Saints departed. On 14 May Governor Ford reported that 50 teams and 1,350 souls had left Nauvoo that week. [32](#) Among them were Elders Woodruff and Hyde.

A week later, the *Bloomington Herald* noted that ferries crossed 35 times in 24 hours at Nauvoo, 35 times upriver at Fort Madison, Iowa, and several times downriver at Nashville, Iowa. From the town of Montrose to the Des Moines River, teams numbered about 1,400, with perhaps 7,000 to 8,000 persons, and the *Herald* reported, “The slopes of the hills and the prairie opposite Nauvoo, are still dotted with clusters of tents and wagons.”

June. Early in June, an anti-Mormon delegation marched into Nauvoo, producing such “great excitement,” Thomas Bullock said, that “many of the brethren packed up and crossed the river.” On 9 June Saints were “rushing to the ferry in order to cross the river” because, Lucius Scovil said, “the mob began to rage and threaten the Saints,” whipping some, shooting at others, and swearing at LDS herd boys. For the “panic struck” people, Bullock wrote on the 11th, the regular and extra ferries were not “half enough” for the job. The mob gave the Saints a week to vacate Nauvoo, time enough for them and non-LDS newcomers to organize a 700-man army that scared off the would-be attackers while Nauvoo continued to empty. “Hundreds, I might say thousands, of houses [are] empty where once happy Saints dwelt, sung, and prayed,” Bullock said on 27 June. “Fences nearly all down, gardens laid waste, fruit trees destroyed by cattle.” [33](#)

Companies and Outfits. No superior captains directed the three waves of spring departures; each wagon cluster was on its own. John Woolley put it this way: “As soon as a few families got ready, they would start.” [34](#) Few companies had more than 30 wagons. Most contained a dozen or less, belonging to relatives or friends. Among identified companies are those of Isaac Haight (13 families), Solomon Hancock (18 teams), the Tracy group (10 families), Saints from the town of Macedonia (32 wagons), Levi Hancock (2 wagons), Elder Woodruff (3 wagons and a carriage), the Woolley family (4 wagons, 1 carriage), the Knights and DeMilles (14 people, 3 wagons), the Scovil group (19 people, 3 wagons), the Phineas Richards group (20 people, 5 wagons), and a Canadian group (10 wagons).

A typical outfit was a fully loaded covered wagon pulled by two yoke of oxen; Saints replaced their horses with oxen as soon as they could. James S. Brown, while observing Latter-day Saint covered wagons “as far as the eye could reach” about 10 May, noted that “the teams were made up of oxen, milch cows, two-year-old steers and heifers, and very few horses and mules.” Drivers of the teams, he said, “were of both sexes, and comprised young and old.” Wagons had few passengers, and he said, “The people who could walk did so, and many were engaged in driving loose stock.” [35](#) Livestock control was a daily challenge. Elder Woodruff’s first day on the road was a disaster, his diary states, because he had no one to help him manage 25 head of livestock. “As soon as we started,” he said, “the calves and cows all [ran] various ways.” Elsewhere, spirited young woman Louisa Barnes Pratt “found great pleasure in riding horseback” and rendered “some assistance in driving the stock.” [36](#)

Spring Routes and Trail Life. Spring grasses (cattle feed) let spring exodus Saints take routes more directly west than the Camp of Israel’s track that hugged Missouri. More Saints followed the alternate routes than the so-called main Mormon Trail. Spring travelers crossed the Des Moines River at Bonaparte but also upriver at

lowaville, Eddyville, and near present-day Des Moines. They traveled on existing roads, which were in poor shape and muddy when it rained. Spring trail traffic was heavy, and sometimes, Newel Knight noted, the prairies were “spotted with wagons, cattle, horses and sheep, men, women and children.”

Some travelers, like Reddick Allred, enjoyed “good roads and plenty of grass.” [37](#) Most, however, faced problems relating to poor road conditions, rain, mud, heat, wagon breakdowns, accidents, livestock, illnesses, or deaths. “The weather was extremely warm,” John Mills Woolley recalled; “therefore, we were obliged to travel very slow.” [38](#) Accidents injured oxen and people and damaged wagons. On 27 May, Elder Woodruff’s father fell while getting into a moving wagon, and the heavily loaded wagon ran over his arms and legs, bruising him but not breaking any bones.

To keep up their spirits through the trek, members sang and met in social gatherings. “There was much singing, mostly of sacred hymns or sentimental songs,” James S. Brown recalled, “and from no quarter could coarse songs be heard.” Sometimes the camp “would meet in a sociable dance in the evenings, to drive dull care away,” he explained. [39](#) Early in June the women in Louisa Barnes Pratt’s company decided to organize themselves. They voted that when men call for prayers and then get sidetracked in conversation, “that the sisters retire to some convenient place, pray by themselves and go about their business.” Louisa said that “in the midst of our amusements we did not forget our prayers. We have large campfires around which we gather, sing songs, both spiritual and comic, then all unite in prayer.” [40](#)

Apparently the small companies did not hold formal Sunday church meetings during their trek. Saints enjoyed visiting with those they passed or who passed them, going either direction. Teenager George W. Bean, sent on foot from Mount Pisgah back to Nauvoo, “met about nine hundred wagons moving west and had a good time on the trip, answered hundreds of questions and ate five or six times a day, always meeting friends in every company.” [41](#)

Separations. While trying to move their families west, several LDS men (Lucius Scovil, Franklin D. Richards, Samuel W. Richards, and others) were called on missions, most to England, to proselyte and provide leadership. [42](#) To leave and let their families head west without them was a severe trial of faith—“a painful duty,” Scovil called it. “I was determined to fill my mission if it cost me all that I had on the earth, relying on words of Jesus for he says that he that is not willing to forsake all for my sake is not worthy of me, your houses, lands, fathers, mothers, wife, and children.” When Scovil left them on the trail, he said he “could not keep from bursting into a flood of tears.” [43](#)

Births, Deaths, and Health. Spring refugees recorded births along the way. For example, babies were born to Jane Snyder Richards, Mrs. John H. Tippets, Jane Roberts (during a downpour that “brought water around the wagons up to our boot-tops”), Elizabeth Breeding Hendrickson, Mrs. Ethan Barrows, and undoubtedly many others. [44](#)

Spring and summer sicknesses, especially malaria, made widespread by puddled water and mosquitoes, caused sickness and some deaths. Measles struck the Canadian Company. [45](#) All of Clarissa Wilhelm’s children had whooping cough and “not one of them could sit up in the wagon.” [46](#) The Driggs family cluster left Nauvoo late in May, and aging father Urial Driggs died soon after. [47](#)

Anson Call buried a six-month-old son on 15 June. [48](#) George Bryant Gardner told how his company camped near the Fox River, “the whole of us sick and unable to help ourselves.” A local man named Miller cared for them, lodging them in his smokehouse, but Brother Hill and one child died, and Gardner “was so sick that I couldn’t get out of bed but layed there with the dead men.” [49](#) Forty-five-year-old Nathaniel Ashby, unused to the “rough work” of handling three wagons and six yoke of oxen, became ill and died at Bonaparte. [50](#) During the Iowa crossing, the John Lowry Jr. family lost a four-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, and five-month-old son William. [51](#) Big Hyrum Spencer wore himself out while herding 100 head of cattle on the trail, died, and was buried at Mount Pisgah. [52](#)

Scores of Saints stopped temporarily along the way in order to work. They left Mormon imprints across a wide north-south span of southeastern Iowa that local residents today are aware of—place-names, grave sites, cabin sites, trail ruts, and buildings built by Latter-day Saint workmen.

Overtaking the Camp of Israel. Several Camp of Israel diarists noted when the spring exodus Saints caught up with them. Perhaps a bit enviously, Patty Sessions wrote the following on 15 May, when a few miles beyond Garden Grove: “Some from Nauvoo overtook us. They have been on the road but three weeks. We three months.” Early in July President Young counted 1,805 wagons between his Missouri River camp and Mount Pisgah—1,300 more wagons than his Camp of Israel started with—and hundreds more were still east of Mount Pisgah. [53](#) By the end of July most of the spring exodus groups had caught up with President Young’s company and merged with it beside the Missouri River.

In July the Saints' activities along the bluffs, as seen from the Missouri River, presented quite a sight to non-LDS visitor Thomas L. Kane: "[The bottomlands] were crowded with covered carts and wagons; and each one of the Council Bluff hills opposite was crowned with its own great camp, gay with bright white canvas, and alive with the busy stir of swarming occupants. In the clear blue morning air, the smoke streamed up from more than a thousand cooking fires. Countless roads and bypaths checkered all manner of geometric figures on the hillsides. Herd boys were dozing upon the slopes; sheep and horses, cows and oxen, were feeding around them, and other herds in the luxuriant meadow of the then swollen river. From a single point I counted four thousand head of cattle in view at one time. As I approached the camps, it seemed to me the children there were to prove still more numerous." [54](#)

Act 3: The Fall Exodus

During the summer months of 1846, small numbers of Saints continued to leave Nauvoo sporadically. By September only 700 to 1,000 Saints who wanted to go west were still in the city, some being new arrivals. Many lacked wagons and teams. Some were too ill to travel. In the fall exodus crowds were Mary Fielding Smith, clerk Thomas Bullock, temple architect Truman O. Angell, and Joseph Knight.

On 13 September armed anti-Mormons attacked these Nauvoo defenders and won what is called the Battle of Nauvoo. The Saints signed a formal surrender of the city three days later, whereupon victors drove them out at gunpoint. LDS refugees swarmed across the river to Montrose, and many camped a mile north at Potter's Slough, on the river's shore. Most were destitute and sickly.

During the next weeks, this mass of beleaguered refugees gradually dissipated—they moved into nearby Iowa settlements, downriver to St. Louis, into nearby states, westward by their own means, or in time westward in two rescue wagon trains sent from the main camps.

Scores found temporary work and lodging in eastern Iowa. Jonathan Crosby borrowed oxen for his teamless wagon, moved to Bonaparte, worked to earn two yoke of oxen, and headed west the next spring. [55](#) Wendle Mace, a temple workman, moved his sick wife into a house in Keosauqua, worked as a mechanic for the flour mill, built several sawmills and gristmills in the area, and headed west in 1848. [56](#) Albert and Tamma Durfee Miner left the poor camps and lived in lowaville for two seasons; after Albert died there in 1848, Tamma took her children west. The Prophet Joseph Smith's uncle Asael Smith and family also stayed in lowaville. Both he and his wife, Elizabeth, died and are buried there. [57](#)

Some Saints found refuge downriver from Nauvoo. John Ellison, ill with fever, took his wife, Alice, and two small children nine miles east of Nauvoo to John's father's home. In November, John and Alice went to St. Louis and stayed until 1851, when they headed west. [58](#) Edwin Rushton, his wife, and ill mother went to St. Louis, where the mother died on 20 September. [59](#)

Many, like the Stillman Pond family, crossed Iowa on their own. Along the way the Ponds suffered from malaria, buried four children, including a baby born during the trek. Stillman was so sick he had to drive the wagon by lying on his stomach, peering through a knothole in the front board, and holding reins with one hand over the board. The Pond survivors reached Winter Quarters, Nebraska, on 16 October. [60](#) The Martin Bushman family crossed Iowa in company with several other families. Nearly all the Bushmans became ill en route. Their daughter Elizabeth, 9, died on 12 October. A week later their baby, not yet a year old, died. Near the Missouri River, they settled in the Latter-day Saint hamlet called Highland Grove. [61](#) In another wagon group, Scotsman Richard Ballantyne, 29, handsome and single, met Huldah Meriah Clark, 21. They fell in love and, soon after reaching the Missouri River, married at Winter Quarters, Nebraska, in February. [62](#)

Hyrum Smith's widow, Mary Fielding Smith, left about the time of the Battle of Nauvoo. Her daughter Martha Ann, age 5, recalled, "We bid goodbye to our dear old feeble grandmother [Lucy Mack Smith]. I can never forget the bitter tears she shed when she bid us goodbye." Mary bought supplies and teams downriver in Keokuk, flour at Bonaparte, and then headed west. Her company had 9 wagons, 18 people, 21 loose cattle, and 43 sheep. They arrived at Winter Quarters on 21 October. [63](#)

One mid-September count found between 600 and 700 Saints camped by Potter's Slough. Many of these had moved out by the time Thomas Bullock counted only 17 tents and 8 wagons in camp on 4 October. "Most of those are the poorest of the Saints," he said. "Not a tent or wagon but sickness in it."

Meanwhile, in mid-September at Winter Quarters, Nebraska, the high council and Presiding Bishop Newel K. Whitney organized an 11-man rescue party under Captain Orville M. Allen. It left for Montrose on 14 September (one day after the Battle of Nauvoo, about which they knew nothing). [64](#) Then, on 25 September, news reached Winter Quarters about the attack (12 days after it was fought). "Rise up with [teams] and go straightway and bring a load of the poor from Nauvoo," President Young urged the Saints. [65](#) In response, the high council

across the river in present-day Council Bluffs, Iowa, sent back a rescue team early in October, led by James Murdock and Allen Taylor. [66](#)

Captain Allen's company of 20 rescue wagons reached the poor camps on 6 October. Bishop Whitney, in the area buying flour at Bonaparte for Winter Quarters, Nebraska, and for the poor camps, estimated 50 wagons could haul everybody in the poor camps, which means they numbered 400 or less. [67](#)

On 9 October 1846, Saints camped by Potter's Slough participated in the "Miracle of the Quail," when large flocks of exhausted quail flopped into the camp, landing on and under wagons and in tents. "Every man, woman and child had quails to eat for their dinner," Thomas Bullock wrote. [68](#)

That same day, Nauvoo trustees Fullmer, Heywood, and Babbitt brought shoes, clothing, molasses, pork, and salt to the Saints, after which Captain Allen's wagon train started their journey, comprising 151 men, women, and children—44 of whom were ill. Captain Allen had a list of specific people he was instructed to bring back, but he accepted a few who were not sent for. Scores were left behind to await the next rescue train, including the poorest of the poor. When the Allen train camped opposite Bonaparte, Bullock recorded, "the sisters had a regular washing day, and the men were ordered to fetch water for them." More Saints joined the train, he said, so by the 22nd it had 28 wagons and 157 people.

Notable experiences of the Allen Company's trek include Sarah Gubbett's death caused by falling under a rolling wagon, men fighting a prairie fire that threatened a farm and fence and receiving pumpkins as rewards from the grateful farmer, Joan Campbell's delivering a stillborn baby and then dying, and constant delays caused by cattle wandering off by morning. The group reached Mount Pisgah on 4 November, left some Saints there, including Joseph Knight (he died soon after), and halted by the Missouri River on 27 November. Captain Allen's drawn-out trip from the poor camps took 50 days, 17 being no-travel days.

The Completed Evacuation

The fall exodus essentially emptied Nauvoo of Latter-day Saints who desired to go west. As noted earlier, Nauvoo and nearby areas held perhaps 15,000 Saints who could have joined the exodus, augmented by hundreds of newcomers. Where were they at year's end? Based on incomplete data, the estimate is that by the winter of 1846–47 perhaps 5,000 exiled Saints were at Winter Quarters, Nebraska; 7,500 were in LDS camps across the river from Nebraska and elsewhere in Iowa and at Ponca Camp north of Winter Quarters; [69](#) and 1,500 were in St. Louis or other Mississippi River towns. At least 1,000 and possibly 2,000 or even more defected from the Twelve's leadership and scattered from the Nauvoo area. A few members, including Emma, the Prophet Joseph Smith's widow, and Lucy Mack Smith, his mother, later returned to and stayed in Nauvoo. [70](#)

When the winter of 1846–47 enveloped Illinois, it found Nauvoo mostly a vast, tragic ghost city. Its former inhabitants and other Saints from nearby had become homeless and exposed refugees, most of whom were now encamped in precarious circumstances. Yet they, full of faith, like modern children of Israel sojourning in the wilderness, had tried to reach a new promised land in the American West during 1846 but only made it one-fourth the way. When spring came again, in 1847, they would try again.

[illustration] Beginning in February 1846, many Latter-day Saints were found crossing hills and rivers on the trek to Winter Quarters. (*One More River*, by Glen S. Hopkinson.)

[illustrations] For a brief time in February 1846, the Mississippi River froze, allowing many Latter-day Saints to cross on the ice. (*Crossing the Mississippi on the Ice*, by C. C. A. Christensen, © courtesy Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, all rights reserved.) Inset: Eliza R. Snow.

[illustrations] Fleeing Saints temporarily gathered on Sugar Creek, seven miles west of the Mississippi River, where President Brigham Young organized the travelers. (*Sugar Creek*, by C. C. A. Christensen.) Right: While on the trail, President Young and a group of Saints prayed around the campfire. (*Brigham Young Offers Prayer*, by Minerva K. Teichert, courtesy of the Teichert Family Collection.)

[illustrations] This scene was typical as the pioneers forded stream after stream. In spring 1846, river crossings were complicated by unusually deep mud. (*Go Forth with Courage Strong*, by Glen S. Hopkinson.) Inset: William Clayton, a member of the Camp of Israel, wrote of the awful mud at the Chariton River in Iowa.

[illustrations] Miller's Hollow, Iowa, was renamed Kaneshville by the Latter-day Saints. When the Saints left Kaneshville, local residents renamed it Council Bluffs. (*Council Bluffs Ferry and Group of Cottonwood Trees*, by Frederick Piercy.) Right: Nearly 500 men joined the Mormon Battalion in support of the United States in the war against Mexico. (*Calling Volunteers for the Mormon Battalion*, by C. C. A. Christensen, courtesy of

Museum of Church History and Art.)

[illustrations] Far left: Many Latter-day Saints settled in Winter quarters, Nebraska, in 1846. (*Winter Quarters*, by C. C. A. Christensen, © courtesy Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, all rights reserved.) Below: On 13 September 1846, a mob attacked the few hundred Saints still in Nauvoo and won the Battle of Nauvoo. (*The Battle of Nauvoo*, by C. C. A. Christensen, © courtesy Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, all rights reserved.)

[illustration] The remaining Saints left Nauvoo after the Battle of Nauvoo. With few resources, a group of these Saints were camped by Potter's Slough in Iowa when on 9 October 1846 large flocks of exhausted quail flopped into the camp. (*Catching Quails*, by C. C. A. Christensen, © courtesy Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, all rights reserved.)

Notes

1. The Brigham Young winter exodus is detailed in Russell R. Rich, *Ensign to the Nations* (1972); Preston Nibley, *Exodus to Greatness: The Story of The Mormon Migration* (1947); James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (1976); B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965), vol. 2; Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846–1852* (1987); Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (1992); and a special issue on Mormons in Iowa in *BYU Studies* 21 (fall 1981).
 2. Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 11 Oct. 1845.
 3. Susan Easton Black, "How Large Was the Population of Nauvoo?" *BYU Studies* (spring 1995): 91–95.
 4. Journal History, 23 Nov. 1845.
 5. Journal History, 23 Nov. 1845.
 6. Journal History, 30 Dec. 1845.
 7. Journal History, 24 Jan. 1846.
 8. Journal History, 22, 27, and 29 Jan. 1846; Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1848* (1964), entry for 30 Jan. 1846; cited hereafter as Hosea Stout Diary.
 9. "Journal of Patty Sessions," typescript, 12 Feb. 1846, LDS Church Archives.
 10. Trail expert Stanley B. Kimball estimates the Sugar Creek numbers as 500 wagons and 3,000 people (see Stanley B. Kimball, *Historic Resource Study: Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail* [1991], 37). President Young estimated there were 500 wagons on 1 March but said that 100 had returned to Nauvoo by month's end (Elden J. Watson, comp., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young* [1971]). Some 300 single men were serving as pioneers, guards, or artillerymen. On 9 March Horace K. Whitney estimated that the camp number "somewhat exceeds 2,000" (Horace K. Whitney Diary, typescript, LDS Church Archives).
 11. Congress gave official status to the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail in the 1970s. Solid information about the trail route and sites is in Stanley B. Kimball, *Historic Sites and Markers Along the Mormon and Other Great Western Trails* (1988); Kimball, *Historic Resource Study: Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail*; Iowa Mormon Trails Association, *Iowa Mormon Trails: The Map Guide Across the State* (1995); and the National Park Service's 1996 map-brochure, *The Mormon Trail*.
 12. Unless cited otherwise, all quotes used here from those individuals are from their diaries and are not given separate endnote citations. Published diaries are the following: Clayton Family Organization, *William Clayton's Journal* (1921); "Eliza Maria Partridge Lyman Journal," in Melvin A. Lyman, comp., *Amasa Mason Lyman Family History*, vol. 2 (1969), 13–38; Elden J. Watson, comp., *The Orson Pratt Journals* (1975); Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, ed., "The Iowa Diary of Lorenzo Snow," *BYU Studies* 24 (summer 1984): 261–74; Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1848* (1964); Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, "Our Travels Beyond the Mississippi," *Woman's Exponent* 12 (1884–5): 102–3, 110–11, 117–18, 126–27, 135–36, 161–62, 170, 182, 186; and 13 (1885–6): 2, 10, 18, 49, 50, 58, 65–66, 75, 87, 91; Wilford Woodruff Journals, 1833–1898; Elden J. Watson, comp., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young* (1971); "Diary of Lorenzo Dow Young," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 14 (1946): 132–70.
- Unpublished diaries and autobiographies in the LDS Church Historical Department Archives are those by

James Willard Cummings, Mosiah Hancock, Willard Richards, John Smith, Eliza R. Snow, Horace K. Whitney, George Whittaker, and Patty Sessions. William Huntington's diary is at BYU Library Special Collections, Provo, Utah. Spelling and punctuation corrected.

13. Several diary entries support the possibility that their Locust Creek encampments were a few miles farther south, in Missouri, below the disputed boundary line between Iowa Territory and Missouri.

14. *Hymns*, no. 30.

15. *Brigham Young Manuscript History*, 17 Apr. 1846.

16. Hosea Stout Diary, 8 May 1846.

17. William Clayton Diary, 30 May 1846.

18. The title "Grand Encampment" comes from Hosea Stout Diary, 5 July 1846.

19. See chart, *Ensign*, Jan. 1997, 13.

20. "The Journal of Ethan Barrows," *Journal of History* (25 Apr. 1922): 205.

21. "Autobiography of Sarah Studevant Leavitt," *Autobiographies of Mormon Pioneer Women*, vol. 1 (1994), 35.

22. Isaac Chauncy Haight Journal, LDS Church Archives, 12 Feb. 1846.

23. Albert R. Lyman, *Biography of Francis Marion Lyman* (1958), 7.

24. "Diary of Reddick N. Allred," *Treasures of Pioneer Heritage* 5 (1956): 303.

25. The Pennsylvania company is mentioned in Wilford Woodruff Journals, 19 May 1846 (LDS Church Archives). The Canadian company is told about in Delila Gardner Hughes, *The Life of Archibald Gardner* (1939), 31–33.

26. Nibley, *Exodus to Greatness*, 131–33.

27. Samuel W. Richards Diary, 8 Apr. 1846, typescript, author's possession.

28. Wilford Woodruff Journals, 22 Apr. 1846.

29. Wilford Woodruff Journals, 30 Apr. 1846.

30. Hosea Stout Diary, 29 Apr. 1846.

31. Journal History, 28 Sept. 1846.

32. Elder Hyde reached Mount Pisgah by 7 June, Elder Woodruff on 15 June; see Orson Pratt Diary, 7 June 1846; Wilford Woodruff Journals, 15 June 1846.

33. Lucius N. Scovil Journal, commencing 6 May 1846, microfilm, LDS Church Archives; Thomas Bullock Journal, typescript, LDS Church Archives.

34. Leonard J. Arrington, *From Quaker to Latter-day Saint: Bishop Edwin D. Woolley* (1976), 159.

35. James S. Brown, *Giant of the Lord: Life of a Pioneer* (1960), 32.

36. "Journal of Louisa Barnes Pratt," *Heart Throbs of the West*, comp. Kate B. Carter, 12 vols. (1939–51), 8:237, 31 May 1846.

37. "The Diary of Reddick N. Allred," *Treasures of Pioneer Heritage*, 6 vols. (1952–57), 5:303.

38. Richard W. Jackson, "John Mills Woolley, 1822–1864, His Writings," (1976), 26.

39. Brown, *Giant of the Lord*, 33.

40. Louisa Barnes Pratt Journal, 7 June 1846 and 8 June 1846.

41. *Autobiography of George W. Bean*, 28–29.

42. Samuel W. Richards Diary, 3 May 1846.

43. Lucius Scovil Diary, 30 May 1846.

44. Richard N. and Jeni Broberg Holzapfel, *Women of Nauvoo* (1992), 173; Maurine Carr Ward, ed., *Winter Quarters: The 1846–1848 Life Writings of Mary Haskin Parker Richards* (1996), 17; John H. Tippetts Autobiography, typescript, LDS Church Archives, 8; Hughes, *Life of Archibald Gardner*, 31–32; Eugene Rasmussen to the author, 17 May 1996, copy in author's possession; Journal of Ethan Barrows, 205.
45. Hughes, *Life of Archibald Gardner*, 33.
46. Clarissa Wilhelm Autobiography, typescript, Utah Historical Society.
47. Howard R. Driggs, *Driggs Family History, Book One* (1972), 77.
48. *The Journal of Anson Call* (n.d.), 15 June 1846. Joseph Holbrook was with the Calls, and his journal entry for 5 June locates this death; see "The Life of Joseph Holbrook," typescript, LDS Church Archives, 43.
49. "Diary of George Bryant Gardner," typescript by Thelma Gardner Crandall, copy in author's possession, 3.
50. Louisa Adeline Ashby Noble Badger, "A Sketch of the Life of Susan Hammond Ashby Noble," typescript, LDS Church Archives.
51. Olive Anderson, "Sketch of the Life of John Lowry, Jr.," typescript, copy in author's possession, 1.
52. Aurelia Spencer Rogers, *Life Sketches of Orson Spencer and Others and History of Primary Work* (1898), 42–46; Clarissa Wilhelm Autobiography, typescript, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.
53. *Brigham Young Manuscript History*, 7 July 1846.
54. Thomas L. Kane, *The Mormons: A Discourse Delivered Before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, March 26, 1850*, 25–26; this published talk is reprinted in the appendix in Albert L. Zobell, Jr., *Sentinel in the East: A Biography of Thomas L. Kane* (1965).
55. Jonathan Crosby Autobiography, typescript, LDS Church Archives, 26–28.
56. Journal of Wendle Mace, 1809–1890, typescript, LDS Church Archives, 194–211.
57. William G. Hartley, "Latter-day Saints at lowaville, Iowa, 1846–1851," *Nauvoo Journal* 7, no. 21 (spring 1995): 38.
58. William G. Hartley, *To Build, To Create, To Produce: Ephraim P. Ellison's Life and Enterprises, 1850–1939* (1996), chap. 2.
59. William Evans Perkes, *History of Richard Rushton Sr. and Family* (1977), 35.
60. "Graves Along the Trail," *Heart Throbs of the West*, 2:188.
61. Darryfield N. Smith, ed., *John Bushman, Utah-Arizona Pioneer, 1843–1926* (1975), 7.
62. Conway B. Sonne, *Knight of the Kingdom: The Story of Richard Ballantyne* (1949), 37–39.
63. Don Cecil Corbett, *Mary Fielding Smith: Daughter of Britain* (1970), 192–201.
64. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri*, 82–83.
65. Journal History, 25 Sept. 1846.
66. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri*, 84.
67. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri*, 268.
68. Thomas Bullock Diary, 9 Oct. 1846.
69. U.S. Indian Superintendent Thomas H. Harvey estimated there were 10,000 Mormons on both sides of the Missouri River in December 1846, meaning in the general area of Winter Quarters, Nebraska, and present-day Council Bluffs, Iowa; see Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion*, 115.
70. My conclusions are different and higher than Richard Bennett's estimates of some 6,500 in the Omaha–Council Bluffs area and a grand total for Nebraska–Iowa and Missouri of only 11,800, which includes 1,500 in St. Louis, Missouri; see his table and his discussion of its numbers in *Mormons at the Missouri*, 89–90. It is hard to know how many Saints were like Noah Packard, who moved to Wisconsin to work in the lead mines and then later went to Utah; see "A Synopsis of the Life and Travels of Noah Packard," typescript, BYU Harold

Notes

William G. Hartley, an associate professor of history and a research professor at BYU's Joseph Fielding Smith Institute, teaches Sunday School in the Riverside Third Ward, Murray Utah North Stake.

[E-mail to a Friend](#)

Official Web site of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
© 2010 Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.