

MORMON MIGRATION ON LAKE ERIE AND THROUGH FAIRPORT HARBOR

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Fairport Harbor

Courtesy of the National Archives

Background of Fairport Harbor

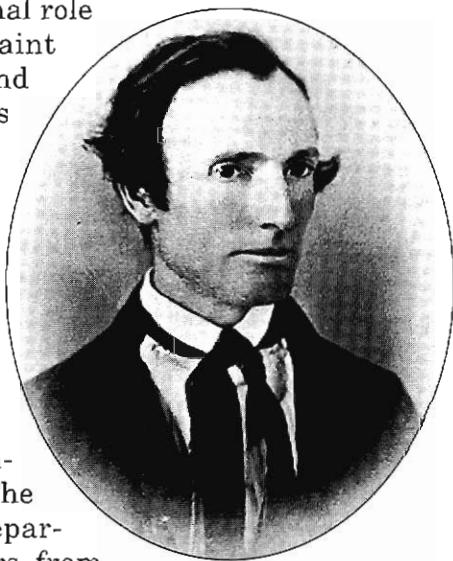
Fairport is an excellent harbor, and affords a safe moorage for shipping — Government has expended a considerable amount in extending its Piers several rods into the Lake, at the end of which a small Light House is now being finished to render the ingress of vessels more easy during the dark gales to which this Lake is subject. The main Light House is situated on a commanding eminence, and is some 60 or 70 feet from its base to its summit.¹

¹ The *Lighthouse Digest* (October 2001), 20, explains that the small lighthouse referred to here, constructed between 1834 and 1838, was known as the “Grand River Beacon,” situated at

So wrote Mormon convert Oliver Cowdery, editor of the *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, in its first issue, launched from Kirtland, Ohio, in the fall of 1834.²

Fairport Harbor played a transitional role during the 1830s for Latter-day Saint migrants who were gathering to and from the Kirtland region. Many Saints were guided by Fairport's beacons of light, which shone across the waters of Lake Erie. For those incoming Saints, the Fairport lighthouses signaled a new ray of hope, and for those missionaries embarking from her banks, new opportunities in the quest for more converts to Mormonism.

Mormon historians Karl Ricks Anderson and Keith W. Perkins note, "The seemingly constant arrival of and departure of Church leaders and members from Fairport reminds us of the role the Salt Lake City airport plays today."³



Oliver Cowdery
LDS Church Archives

the mouth of the Grand River on the east pier. It was torn down in 1875. The main lighthouse, known as the "Grand River Lighthouse," was built in 1825 and remained in use until 1869. The early lighthouse at Fairport was no doubt stimulated by the Erie Canal, which was also completed in 1825. The completion of this canal made it possible to transport passengers and goods from Fairport to the Hudson River and other ports in the east, and it had a profound impact on commerce along Lake Erie. See *Here Is Lake County Ohio* (Cleveland, OH: Howard Allen, Publisher, 1964), 30 on the Erie Canal and refer to *A History of Fairport Harbor, Ohio* (Painesville, OH: Lake Photo Engraving, 1976), 65–78 for a history of Fairport lighthouses. This is also a useful source for a general history of Fairport Harbor and her inhabitants.

² Oliver Cowdery, *Latter-Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1, no.1 (October 1834):3. Andrew Hedges, "Messenger and Advocate, Latter-day Saints," *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, eds. Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon and Richard O. Cowan, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2000), 738, notes that the *Messenger and Advocate* was the Church's official monthly newspaper, published in Kirtland from October 1834 until September 1837.

³ Karl R. Anderson and Keith W. Perkins, "Fairport" in *A Walk Through the Sacred Land of "The Ohio": A Personal Guidebook Through the Land* (n.p.: 1995). The Salt Lake City airport is where thousands of Latter-day Saint missionaries depart and return from their missions to various parts of the world.

The Call to Gather

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also referred to as the LDS Church or the Mormon Church) was organized 6 April 1830 in Fayette, New York. Just one year later, hundreds of Latter-day Saints began to pass through Fairport on their way to the Kirtland region as a result of instructions received by the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith. While living in the area of Fayette, New York, Joseph Smith and his scribe, Sidney Rigdon, were told in December 1830 to cease their labors and “go to the Ohio, and this because of the enemy and for your sakes” (D&C 37:1).⁴ The revelation added, “And again, a commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio” (D&C 37:3). Thus the Mormon gathering to the Ohio region was clearly a religious migration, stimulated by religious persecution of Latter-day Saints in New York.⁵

The following month (January 2, 1831), during the third conference of the church held in Fayette, the New York Saints were given more reasons as to why they should gather to the Ohio region.

Latter-day Saint member Newell Knight, in attendance at this conference, recalled the following experience: “We were instructed as a people to begin the gathering of Israel. . . . Having returned home from conference, in obedience to the commandment which had been given, I, together with the Colesville Branch, began to make preparations to go to the Ohio. . . . As might be expected, we were obligated to make great sacrifices of our property.”⁶

Just three days after the conference ended, Joseph Smith announced that he had received more divine tutelage, which instructed: “And inasmuch as my people shall assemble themselves at the Ohio, I have kept in store a blessing such as is not known among the children of men, and it shall be poured forth upon their heads. And from thence men shall go forth into all nations” (D&C 39:15).

⁴ D&C is an acronym for The Doctrine and Covenant of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, cited hereafter as D&C. Latter-day Saints believe it is a book of scripture, along with the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

⁵ The area of the Western Reserve in northwestern Ohio was selected because early Mormon missionaries had found much success here, especially through the conversion of a former Campbellite minister in Mentor, Ohio, named Sidney Rigdon, who led many members of his Disciples of Christ congregation into Mormonism. Within a few weeks of the missionaries' visit, 130 new converts joined the Mormon faith, tripling the size of the entire Church population. See James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd edition, revised and enlarged (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1992), 63–65.

⁶ *Scraps of Biography — Tenth Book of the Faith Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 68. A branch is a term used by Latter-day Saints to represent a small ecclesiastical unit.

1831 Migration from Western New York to Ohio

Such words inspired many of the Saints in western New York to gather to the Ohio. Mormon historian Larry C. Porter surmises that there were three branches of the New York Church in Colesville, Fayette and Manchester, made up of the major groups of Saints who gathered to the Kirtland region during the months of May and June in 1831. Porter explains, "The sixty-seven Colesville Saints were led by Newell Knight, while the eighty members of the Fayette Branch were under the leadership of Lucy Mack Smith and Thomas B. Marsh." Fifty Saints came with the Manchester Branch, led by Martin Harris.⁷

The Saints from Colesville arrived in Buffalo, New York, in late April but were thwarted in their efforts to cross Lake Erie to Fairport due to the ice in the harbor.⁸ Jared Cared recalled, "Soon after this it was thought by the Church best to have about 12 or 13 of the brethren go on to Ohio by land or go to Dunkirk to take the steamboat." Cared also explained that after reaching Dunkirk, it was thought best to take a steamer for Ohio. He wrote, "We had not gone far before we met with a stiff headwind which made us in considerable dangerous sailing. So that the captain informed us of the danger, but at length we reached to Erie where the boat was tied by founts, to wait for the wind." Further,



Lucy Mack Smith
LDS Church Archives

There was an influence as a voice speaking with me. Go and command the winds in the name of Christ to cease. I immediately arose and went out of the hearing of the wicked crowd and said in the name of Jesus Christ, I command the winds to cease, and the wind from that moment began to cease and in about fifteen minutes it was stopped and the boat then soon started and we, in a few hours landed in Ohio, at Fairport.⁹

⁷ Larry C. Porter, "Ye Shall Go to the Ohio: Exodus of the New York Saints to Ohio, 1831," *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Ohio*, ed. Milton V. Backman, Jr. (Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University: Provo, Utah, 1990), 19.

⁸ *Scraps of Biography*, 69.

⁹ Autobiography of Jared Cared, typescript, LDS Church Archives, 2-3. This Lake Erie maritime narrative appears to be most significant in that it may be the earliest known account in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints of a Mormon using priesthood power to calm a storm on a lake, ocean or sea.

Another act of faith occurred when Lucy Mack Smith (the mother of the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith) arrived at Buffalo with a group of Fayette Saints, 7 May 1831. She soon recognized the predicament the remaining Colesville Saints were in. Concerning this incident she said:

Here we found the brethren from Colesville, who informed us that they had been detained one week in this place, waiting for the navigation to open. Also, that Mr. Smith and Hyrum had gone through to Kirtland by land, in order to be there by the first of April. I asked them if they confessed to the people that they were "Mormons." "No, indeed," they replied "neither must you mention a word about your religion, for if you do you will never be able to get a house, or a boat either." I told them I should tell the people precisely who I was; "and," continued I, "if you are ashamed of Christ, you must not expect to be prospered; and I shall wonder if we do not get to Kirtland before you."

While we were walking with the Colesville brethren, another boat landed, having on board about thirty brethren, among whom was Thomas B. Marsh, who immediately joined us, and, like the Colesville brethren, he was decidedly opposed to our attending to prayer, or making known that we were professors of religion. He said that if our company persisted in singing and praying, as we had hitherto done, we should be mobbed before the next morning. "Mob it is, then," said I "we shall attend to prayer before sunset, mob or no mob." Mr. Marsh, at this, left considerably irritated.¹⁰

That same day, Lucy arranged for a night's lodging for her company and the next morning surmised the situation of the ice-bound harbor.¹¹ While addressing her Fayette companions she made this bold declaration:

I said, "Now brethren and sisters, if you will raise your desires to heaven, that the ice may be broken up, and we be set at liberty, as sure as the Lord lives, it will be done." At that instant a noise was heard, like bursting thunder. The captain cried, "Every man to his post." The ice parted, leaving barely a passage for the boat, and so narrow that as the boat passed through the buckets of the waterwheel were torn off with a crash, which joined to the word of command from the captain, the hoarse answering of the sailors, the noise of the ice, and the cries of confusion of the spectators, presented a scene truly terrible. We had barely passed through the avenue when the

¹⁰ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: S. W. Richard, 1853), 176 cited in Larry C. Porter, "Ye Shall Go to the Ohio: Exodus of the New York Saints to Ohio, 1831," 16–17.

¹¹ Larry C. Porter, "Ye Shall Go to the Ohio: Exodus of the New York Saints to Ohio, 1831," 17.

ice closed together again, and the Colesville brethren were left in Buffalo, unable to follow us.¹²

Church members viewed this occurrence as an answer to prayer, but some two months after the affair, one skeptical news writer for the *Niles' Weekly Register* cast doubt on the event:

Their great prophet Jo, has selected a part of Geauga county, Ohio, and pronounced it to be the "promised land," and thither the deluded people are flocking, chiefly from New York. . . . They say that a miracle was worked in their behalf, by clearing a passage through the ice at Buffalo — some of them affect a power even to raise the dead, and perchance, (such is the weakness of human nature), really believe that they can do it!¹³

The vessel Lucy and the Fayette Saints embarked on was commanded by a Captain Blake. The previous day, Lucy had directed Solomon Humphrey and another elder to locate Blake to make arrangements for their company's voyage, as this mariner had previously captained a vessel owned by General Stephen Mack, Lucy's brother.¹⁴ On the same day these arrangements were made, the *Buffalo Bulletin* recounted the details of a packet steamer line which ran back and forth across Lake Erie, and included the *Niagara*: "LAKE ERIE Daily Line of Steam Boats. Order of Sailing. *Niagara*, Capt. Blake, Sunday." There are then listed six other vessels with the names of each captain listed beside the steamers for each of the re-

¹² *History of Joseph Smith By His Mother Lucy Mack Smith*. With notes and comments by Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1958), 204–205.

¹³ "Mormonism," *Niles' Weekly Register* XL (16 July 1831): 352, Larry C. Porter, "Ye Shall Go to the Ohio: Exodus of the New York Saints to Ohio, 1831," 18.

¹⁴ Larry C. Porter, "Ye Shall Go to the Ohio: Exodus of the New York Saints to Ohio, 1831," 17. The *Buffalo Bulletin* 1, no. 49 (7 May 1831), 1, indicates, the same day arrangements were made for the Fayette Saints to voyage on the *Niagara*, agent for this vessel was Jas. M'Knight, who assisted Captain Blake in arrangements for freight and passage. Beside the name of M'Knight and other agents listed with their various vessels is this notice: "FREIGHT — will be taken at the usual rates — which with Baggage and small parcels, will be received only at the risk of the owners thereof."

That there were risks to passengers and freight is evidenced by the fact that four years later, Elder Erastus Snow encountered problems when the steamer *Columbus* ran into a violent storm while on his journey with Elder H. Aldrich to Kirtland. After being forced to return to the harbor at Buffalo, Snow wrote, "The next day, the passengers who were 300 in number were taken to shore in a small boat. The night before, the captain ordered considerable of the baggage thrown overboard to keep the boat from bilging, but the next day, they found the vessel was considerably broken and damaged. We therefore tarried one week until we decided it was neither wise nor prudent to wait longer for the boat; we then started on foot and traveled to Kirtland where we arrived the 3rd day of December [1835] and found our friends and brethren in that place in prosperous circumstances." (See Autobiography of Erastus Snow, typescript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, 4–5).

maining days of the week. Each of the seven steamers was destined for Detroit, then scheduled to begin their return voyage from Detroit to Buffalo three days later. The notice also noted:

The Boats will leave Buffalo at 9 A.M. and Detroit at 4 o'clock P.M. precisely. They will receive and land passengers on their outward and return passage, wind and weather permitting, at the Ports of Erie, Salem, Astabula, Grand River [Fairport], Cleaveland [sic] and Sandusky. The above line comprises the finest boats on Lake Erie, and all of which are stanch built, in the best of repair, and handsomely fitted up for the accommodation, both of Cabin and Steerage passengers. The public may depend upon the most exact punctuality of sailing of the above Boats throughout the season.¹⁵

Another weekly Buffalo newspaper states several vessels were lined up and ready to go when the ice broke in the Buffalo harbor, 8 May 1831. An article soon appeared in the *Buffalo Journal & General Advertiser*, titled "Opening of Navigation":

It is with great pleasure that we announce to our distant readers that Lake Erie is now clear of ice and that our lake trade has now opened with high flattering prospects. The schr. [schooner] *Gov. Cass*, Capt. Whittaker, left our harbour this morning of the 8th inst. although large quantities of ice impeded her offing: she was soon followed by the Steamboat *Pioneer*, *Niagara*, and *Superior* in succession.¹⁶

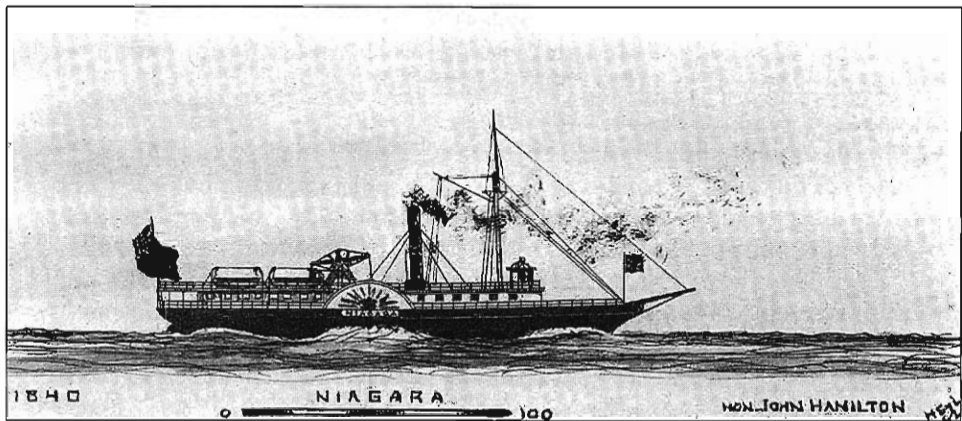
This Buffalo newspaper later listed the names of the vessels, alongside the captains, which cleared the port of Buffalo on 8 May and again confirms that the steamer the Fayette Saints were aboard was the *Niagara*, under Captain Blake's direction.¹⁷

William Smith, son of Lucy Mack Smith, described the Lake Erie voyage from Buffalo to Fairport and a happy reunion with his family in Kirtland:

¹⁵ The *Buffalo Bulletin* 1, no. 49 (7 May 1831), 1. The voyage from Buffalo to Grand River [Fairport] was about one day. Joseph Noble notes that his passage from Fairport to Buffalo took 24 hours, and also that this was a distance of 200 miles by stage. (See the Autobiography of Joseph Noble, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University 9.)

¹⁶ "Opening of Navigation," *Buffalo Journal & General Advertiser* XVI, no. 48 (11 May 1831), 2. Less than a week later, an article titled, "Lake Erie open," appeared in the *Painesville Telegraph* 2, vol. 48 (17 May 1831), 3, which suggested that lake trade, which was damned by the ice was now ready to gush forth. The article stated, "The ice so far disappeared from the lower end of the lake on the 8th inst. as to admit the departure of a steamboat. Since that time navigation has been brisk. It is said that near three thousand persons, and rising two thousand tons of merchandize [sic] and other property, were in readiness in Buffalo, destined up the lake. The weather is now mild and favorable for business."

¹⁷ "Opening of Navigation," *Buffalo Journal & General Advertiser* XVI, no.48 (11 May 1831), 3.



The Fayette Saints traveled aboard the *Niagara* in May 1831.

Drawing by Erik Heyl

After a long and tedious passage, facing many storms, cold winds and rains, we at length arrived at Fairport, about eleven miles distant from the settlement of the brethren. I started on foot with Bro. J. Salisbury, to find them. We soon discovered their place of residence, and with great joy in our hearts we again conversed face to face; while they on their part very gladly received us and bade us welcome.¹⁸

Facing Opposition to Mormon Migration in the Press

Such a gathering of joyful Saints soon met stiff opposition when the press picked up the news that unwanted Mormon converts had recently arrived on the shores of Fairport and begun to gather in Kirtland, which lay just 12 miles south. In the spring of 1831, Eber D. Howe, who founded and edited the anti-Mormon newspaper the *Painesville Telegraph*, wrote the following article, titled “Mormon Emigration”:

About two hundred men, women and children, of the deluded followers of Jo Smith’s Bible speculation, have arrived on our coast during the last week, from the state of New York, & are about seating themselves down upon the “promised land” in this county. It is surely a melancholy comment upon human nature to see so many people at this enlightened age of the world, truckling along at the ear of a miserable impostor, submitting themselves both soul and body, to his spiritual and temporal mandates, without a murmur, or presuming to question that it is all a command direct from Heaven.¹⁹

¹⁸ William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni: Herald Steam Book and Job Office, 1883), 18. This same source indicates that William moved to Ohio in the spring of 1831 and settled in Fairport.

¹⁹ “Mormon Emigration,” *Painesville Telegraph* 2, no.48 (17 May 1831):3.

Notwithstanding, the Mormon migration continued and soon Kirtland became the hub for missionary labors to the east; and Fairport was positioned as the point of embarkation for many Elders.²⁰ As a result, Fairport Harbor and Lake Erie became for many the scene of the first or last day of many migrant miles, as well as vivid maritime memories for missionaries and those who heeded their call to gather to the Kirtland region.

Fifteen vessels and several captains have now been identified which transported Mormon migrants to and from Fairport Harbor during the 1830s.²¹ The remaining body of this paper highlights in chronological order selected salient accounts which discuss the Mormon experience passing through Fairport and on Lake Erie during this decade.²²

First Mission of the Quorum of the Twelve (1835)

Orson F. Whitney, in his work *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, summarizes the mission of the Twelve less than three months after their call to the apostleship:

The Apostles started on their first mission, May 4, 1835. They traveled through the eastern states and Upper Canada, preaching, baptizing, setting in order the branches of the Church, counseling the Saints to gather westward, and collecting means for the purchase of lands in Missouri and the completion of the Lord's House in Kirtland. Like the Apostles anciently, they went forth two by two, traveling, "without purse or scrip" and preaching by the way.²³

Concerning this mission, Heber C. Kimball recorded the following in his journal:

"Sunday [April] 26. We received our charge from President Joseph [Smith]. May 3. We bid our brethren farewell, and on the morning of the 4th we started leaving Kirtland at 2 o'clock and proceeded to Fair-

²⁰ On proselytizing during this era, see Davis Bitton, "Kirtland as a Center of Missionary Activity, 1830-1838," *Brigham Young University Studies* 11 (Summer 1971):497-551.

²¹ These fifteen vessels have been identified from a variety of first person emigrant narratives. The probable names of the captains who plied Lake Erie during the 1830s are listed in parenthesis beside each known vessel and were taken from newspaper accounts and migrant narratives. The vessels are listed in alphabetical order as follows: *Buffalo* (Levi Allen); *Charles Townsend* (Simeon Fox); *Columbus* (Captain Walker); *Daniel Webster* (Captain Taylor or Tyler Morris); *Erie*; *Great Western* (Captain Walker); *Illinois*; *Monroe* (Captain Whittaker); *Niagara* (Captain Blake); *Robert Fulton* (Captain Hart); *Sandusky* (T. J. Titus); *Uncle Sam*; *United States*, *William Penn* (John F. Wight), *Commodore Perry*.

²² I wish to thank my friend and colleague Karl Ricks Anderson for graciously providing a copy of his Fairport file, which contains the source citation of many first-person Mormon accounts containing material pertaining to Fairport in the 1830s.

²³ Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967, 3rd ed.), 79.

port, where we arrived precisely at 6 o'clock. A boat was there as had been predicted by Brother Joseph on which we embarked."²⁴

Joseph and Hyrum Smith Meet their Beloved Grandmother (1836)

On 17 May 1836, Joseph recorded:

I went in company with my brother Hyrum, in a carriage to Fairport, and brought home my grandmother, Mary Duty Smith, aged ninety-three years. She had not been baptized, on account of opposition of Jesse Smith, her eldest son, who has always been an enemy to the work. She had come five hundred miles to see her children, and knew all of us she had ever seen. She was much pleased at being introduced to her great-grandchildren, and expressed much pleasure and gratification on seeing me.²⁵

LDS Church Historian Andrew Jenson sheds background on this event while providing background on Elias Smith, who at age 32 had accompanied his grandmother, Mary Duty Smith, other Smith family members, and a number of converts they had made to Kirtland. Jenson carefully notes that when the company completed their voyage from Buffalo to Fairport, Elias took special care of his grandmother. He wrote this informative account:

During the landing of the company he sat her on the Wharf to give her fresh air, but a shower coming on, he sat a public house near by for a room for her during the night, but was refused; whereupon he went to a hotel, on the same block, and was cordially treated. While he was taking his grandmother to the hotel, . . . The meeting between the grandmother and her Prophet descendent and his brother was most touching. Joseph blessed her and said she was the most honored woman on earth. She desired to see all her children and grandchildren before she died, which with one exception was providentially granted her, and she passed away contented. She arrived in Kirtland May 17, 1836, and died on the 27th, aged 93 years; was buried near the Kirtland Temple. Elias Smith and his cousin Joseph had not seen each other since they played together when small boys until they met at the hotel at Fairport.²⁶

²⁴ Heber C. Kimball, "Extract from Journal," *Times & Seasons* 6 (1845), 869. HC 2:222, indicates that the name of the steamer was the *Sandusky*.

²⁵ Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols., 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 2:442–43.

²⁶ Andrew Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., "Elias Smith," 1:719.

The First Mission to England Led by Apostles Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde (1837)

Helen Mar Kimball Whitney wrote from a personal perspective of her father's leaving Kirtland on 13 June 1837:

My father and brethren bade adieu to their families and friends in Kirtland and started without purse or scrip to preach the gospel in a foreign land, the first elders to Great Britain. My mother and children with a number of the brethren and sisters, accompanied them to Fairport. Sister Mary Fielding, who afterwards became the wife of Hyrum Smith, gave my father five dollars with which he paid the passage of himself and Brother [Orson] Hyde to Buffalo.²⁷

On 1 June 1837, Brigham Young wrote, "There were a few missionaries appointed for England — Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde, of the Twelve. Brother Kimball was very anxious I should go, but Brother Joseph told him that he should keep me at home with him. . . . I accompanied the mission as far as Fairport, and saw them safe on board a steamer for Buffalo."²⁸

1839 — Departure of Quorum of Twelve to England. (Brigham Young calms a storm.)

In the fall of 1839, the Twelve departed on a mission to England. Concerning their departure, Brigham Young records the following:

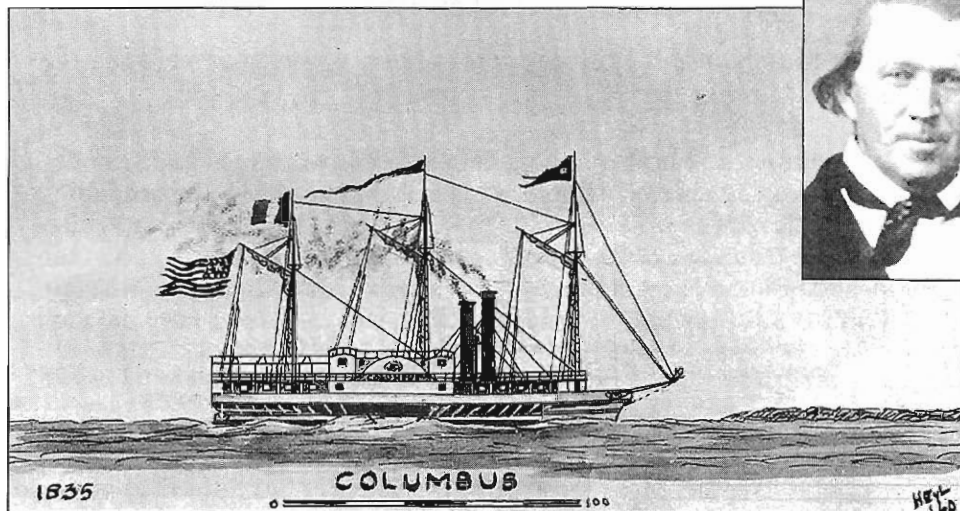
[November] 22, [1839] — Elders [Heber C.] Kimball, [John] Taylor, G. A. Smith, [Reuben] Hedlock, [Theodore] Turley and myself, proceeded to Fairport. The lake was so rough that no boat came into port until the 26th, when we went on board the steamboat *Columbus*, at one o'clock, and arrived in Buffalo next morning.²⁹ We had an excellent time on the lake. The wind rose about one o'clock in the morning. I went upon deck and felt impressed in spirit to pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus, for a forgiveness of all my sins, and then I felt to command the winds to cease, and let us go safe on our journey. The winds abated, and I felt to give the glory and honor and praise to that God who rules all things.³⁰

²⁷ Helen Whitney, "Life Incidents," *Women's Exponent* 10 (1881–1882), 6.

²⁸ *Brigham Young History, 1801–44*, ed. E. Watson (1968), 19.

²⁹ In an epistle written from England on 9 July 1840 by Heber C. Kimball to Joseph Smith, Elder Kimball states, "On the 22nd, we left Kirtland for Fairport. We did not sail from this place until the 26th on account of a heavy snow storm on the lake. On the 27th we arrived at Buffalo." (See *Times and Seasons* 6 (1 April 1845), 860–861.)

³⁰ *Brigham Young History, 1801–1844*, ed., E. Watson (1968), 58–59. HC 4:23 also notes the following for the date of 27 November 1839: "About 1 o'clock in the morning the wind arose, when Brigham Young went on deck, prayed to the Father in the name of Jesus, when he felt to command the wind and the waves to cease, and permit them to proceed on their journey in



Brigham Young (inset) boarded the steamboat *Columbus* for his trip to Buffalo, New York, in 1839.

Inset photo from LDS Church Archives. *Columbus* drawing by Erik Heyl

It appears that this story was carried not only across the waters of Lake Erie, but also across the Atlantic, given that it was published decades later in the *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*.³¹ On occasion, Brigham or one of his companions who was an eyewitness of this event, may have told his story of commanding the winds and waves of Lake Erie during his 1840–1841 mission in England. It may have influenced early British converts who crossed the Atlantic in their belief that if necessary, God would deliver them through his divine priesthood, as he had delivered Brigham Young on Lake Erie and others who had been entrusted with this sacred power.³²

safety. The winds abated, and he gave glory, honor, and praise to the God who rules all things." This account is similar to the biblical account in Matthew 8:26 in which we find Jesus Christ who "rebuked the winds and the sea" during a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

³¹ "Brigham Young History," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 25, no. 42 (17 October 1863), 663–664.

³² This hypothesis may be strengthened when it is understood that the British Saints began immigrating to America in 1840 under the direction of the Twelve. As early as 6 June 1840, John Moon led the first company of 40 Mormon converts on the vessel *Britannia*, across the Atlantic to Nauvoo. In the "Autobiographical Sketch of Hugh Moon," 2 June 1840, LDS Church Archives, Moon recalled that at the time of embarkation, members of the Twelve were there to provide instruction and lend their support: "We found Elders Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball aboard. They stretched a curtain across our cabin and commenced blessing the company. They bid us walk in." We may suppose that instruction pertaining to matters of the priesthood (such as rebuking the elements when necessary) would be given at the time of embarkation. This became a common practice throughout the nineteenth century as Church leaders consistently provided instruction to LDS company voyages embarking from the British Isles.

Deliverance Comes to the Passengers Aboard the Steamboat *Great Western* (1842)

The following year, a similar Mormon maritime phenomenon again took place on Lake Erie. In November 1842, Elders James Houston and Samuel Mulliner embarked from Nauvoo, Illinois, on a mission to the East.³³ When they crossed Lake Erie from Chicago to Buffalo, the vessel they were aboard ran into a terrifying storm, which destroyed almost every vessel with the exception of the one the two Mormon Missionaries were on. Concerning this event, Andrew Jenson wrote:

In parting with the captain of the vessel (Mr. Walker) at Buffalo, Elder Mulliner made him a present of some Church books and thanked him for bringing them safe across. The captain replied with emphasis: "Elder Mulliner don't thank me; it is I who am under obligation to you for a safe voyage, for I am fully convinced that had it not been for you Mormon Elders being on board, the ship would have gone to the bottom. I wish you when you get back home to tell your brethren that if any of your Elders wish to cross these lakes, let them enquire of Captain Walker, and they shall have a free passage."³⁴

Kirtland/Fairport Latter-day Saint Era Subsides

By this time, most of the Mormons who had once settled in the states of Ohio and Missouri were gathered in Nauvoo, Illinois. However, in the fall of 1842, Mormon Apostle Lyman Wight reported he had visited Kirtland and found there a congregation of some 500 to 700 Saints. In 1843, the second major Latter-day Saint exodus occurred as a result of Elder Wight strongly encouraging the Kirtland Saints to migrate to Nauvoo. Finally in 1845, the few Saints who remained in Kirtland were again reminded by letter from Brigham Young that they needed to gather to Nauvoo, "leaving Kirtland to the owls and bats for

³³ In 1838, most Latter-day Saints left the Kirtland region due to persecution and settled in Western Missouri, primarily in the area of Far West. In this same year, Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs issued an extermination order which forced the Mormons to flee the state. They temporarily found a safe harbor in Nauvoo, Illinois until they were again exiled from that area in the winter of 1846.

³⁴ Andrew Jenson, *The Historical Record* vols. 5–8 (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson, 1889), 352. Buffalo New York newspapers indicate that the name of the steamboat Captain Walker was running on Lake Erie in 1842 was the *Great Western*. In an article titled "Early Days on the Lakes," *Publication of the Buffalo Historical Society* 5 (1902), 287–318, an autobiographical sketch discloses that the captain's first name was Augustus and in his own words he reveals his early maritime life and love of his vocation: "I first came to the lakes in May 1817, when I was only 17 years old, led only by my desires to become a sailor." I wish to thank Jack Mesmer of the Lower Lakes Marine Historical Society in Buffalo New York for gathering this information, which he kindly sent me in an e-mail note dated 25 March 2004. This Captain Walker appears to be the same captain who was onboard the *Columbus* three years earlier with Brigham Young when he stated that he commanded "the winds to cease." Captain Walker may have also recalled this prior experience transporting Mormon missionaries.

a season.”³⁵ Such counsel caused the Saints to leave the Kirtland region, and thus Mormon maritime migration in and out of Fairport Harbor subsided. The port continued to transfer passengers and goods. In 1847, Fairport reached its zenith of prosperity, recording nearly 3,000 vessels using the harbor.³⁶ In this same year, the Mormon pioneers were distanced from Lake Erie as they began to enter the desert region of the Salt Lake Valley which they hoped to make blossom.

Kirtland Revived in the Twentieth Century

Nearly 140 years later, Kirtland again revived. In the fall of 1982, a Mormon meetinghouse built by Latter-day Saints in northeastern Ohio was dedicated in Kirtland.³⁷ Two decades later, several Kirtland Historic Sites were researched and restored in order to capture the life of Kirtland in the 1830s. Among the treasures of historical knowledge mined was the ledger of Mormon convert Newel K. Whitney, who owned a prosperous store in Kirtland in the 1820s and 1830s. The ledger reveals that in a 1827 business transaction, Whitney had sent 94 barrels of ashes (billed to New York) from his Kirtland Ashery.³⁸ It also appears that these barrels were shipped through Fairport Harbor to Buffalo. Thus, Fairport not only served as a point to transport Latter-day Saints, but apparently also as a port to transfer commercial goods that came in and out of Kirtland.

The Kirtland Ashery and other restored buildings were dedicated in the spring of 2003 by LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley, to the end that they might remind all visitors of this unique chapter in American history.³⁹ In May of this same year, the Mormon Historic

³⁵ Milton V. Backman *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, Co. 1983), 370–71.

³⁶ *The History of Geauga and Lake Counties Ohio with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Pioneers and Most Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: Williams Brothers, 1878), 219, under a subheading titled “Fairport’s Fairest Days,” notes that “the zenith of its prosperity was probably reached in 1847.” A list documenting the “Commerce of Fairport, 1847,” also reveals that a total of 2,986 steamboats and other vessels arrived and departed from Fairport Harbor during this prosperous year.


³⁷ Milton V. Backman *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, Co. 1983), 373.

³⁸ Mark L. Staker, Curator of the Museum of Church History and Art in Salt Lake City examined the Kirtland ledger. In a 27 May 2003 e-mail, Mark indicated that the ledger reveals that [in 1827] 94 barrels of ash were shipped from the Whitney Store. Staker, in “Thou Art the Man Newel K. Whitney in Ohio,” *BYU Studies* 42, no. 1 (2003):85, indicates that Whitney purchased land for the ashery in the fall of 1822. He further comments (p. 94) that the ashery which proved profitable was expanded in 1828. Finally, Staker notes (p. 118) the destruction of the ashery: “Although it’s impossible to date such an event precisely by archaeological methods, the destruction could have occurred in fall 1834. Whitney was able to list only the ‘entrails to the ashery’ as an asset by 1837.”

³⁹ The Kirtland Ashery, one of the early Latter-day Saints history sites, was rebuilt on site and today it is the only known restored ashery in all of North America.

Sites Foundation erected a portable museum exhibit at the Fairport Marine Museum to tell the early maritime history of the comings and goings of the Latter-day Saints through Fairport Harbor and its connections with the Mormon settlement in Kirtland.⁴⁰

On 23 August 2003, a boulder with a bronze plaque was placed below the Fairport Lighthouse to commemorate Mormon maritime migration through this port in the 1830s. Edna Davis reported, "The mayor of Fairport Harbor Village [Frank Sarosy] helped unveil a marker erected to pay tribute to . . . members of the [LDS] Church who came to Kirtland through the harbor."⁴¹ Following remarks by the mayor, the Executive Director of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation (the organization which funded the commemorative monument) spoke on behalf of the Foundation. He expressed gratitude to Mayor Sarosy and the Fairport community for allowing the Latter-day Saints to have a commemorative marker which is fast becoming known as the "Mormons' Plymouth Rock." The unveiling service concluded with the reminder that "in the essentials there should be unity, the non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity."⁴²

This attitude was demonstrated by Mayor Sarosy, the Fairport Historical Society and local community during research for this article, the Fairport Marine Museum exhibit and through the installation of the commemorative monument. Such support has again demonstrated what Mormon writer Oliver Cowdery penned 140 years ago, that "Fairport is an excellent harbor, and affords a safe moorage for shipping." I would add that Fairport contains a praiseworthy people who continue to provide support for passing Latter-day Saint migrants and other visitors.⁴³ 

About the Author: Fred E. Woods is a professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. His field of expertise is Mormon maritime migration. In the spring of 2003, Fred gave a presentation on the topic of this paper for the Great Lakes Historical Society. He is also the Executive Director of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation.

⁴⁰ This exhibit will rotate seasonally between the Fairport Marine Museum (June–Oct.) and the Lake County Historical Society (Nov.–May).

⁴¹ Edna Davis, "Fairport Honors Pioneers," *Church News* (6 September 2002).

⁴² The author is the Executive Director of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation.

⁴³ I wish to especially thank my friend John E. Ollila, trustee for the Fairport Harbor Historical Society, for his support with research for this article, arrangements for the exhibit at the Fairport Marine Museum, and wonderful sailing expeditions on Lake Erie.