

More Precious than Gold: The Journey to and through Zion in 1849–50

Fred E. Woods

The California gold rush, the first international gold rush in history, turned the world upside down, reaching its zenith in the years 1849–50.¹ As a result of the rush during these two climactic years, the population swelled our nation's Pacific coast, entitling California to receive statehood in the fall of 1850.

During these catalytic years, Latter-day Saints were journeying to the American West for a different kind of treasure. They gathered from afar to their Mormon mecca nestled in the Salt Lake Valley to fulfill their dreams of establishing Zion. Yet the California gold rush had a significant impact on the Latter-day Saint economy as thousands of Argonauts passed through Salt Lake in need of provisions. As a result, the Saints became able to further stimulate immigration from abroad, swelling the Mormon population in the West.² Subsequently, with the aid of the Compromise of 1850, on the same day California received her statehood (9 September 1850), Utah was granted official status as a territory in the United States.³ The story behind these parallel gatherings certainly deserves sesquicentennial recognition.

LDS Church leaders capitalized on the economic opportunity provided by the gold rush by creating a revolving fund called the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF), which the Saints were asked to sustain in the October 1849 conference in Salt Lake. Heber C. Kimball, counselor in the First Presidency, reasoned with the congregation then assembled, "Most of you are aware of the covenant made by the Saints in the temple at Nauvoo, that we would not cease our exertions until we had brought the poor to this valley. . . . Shall we fulfill that covenant or shall we not? The vote was unanimous to fulfill that covenant."⁴ Having received the sustaining vote of the Saints and subsequent donations to the PEF, Brigham Young sent a letter to Orson Pratt, then the presiding officer over the

FRED E. WOODS is an associate professor in the department of Church History & Doctrine at Brigham Young University.

LDS British Mission, with the following instructions concerning the Perpetual Emigrating Fund:

This Fund we wish all to understand is perpetual, and in order to be kept good, will need constant accessions. To further this end, we expect that all who are benefitted by its operations will be willing to reimburse that amount as soon as they are able, facilities for which will, very soon after their arrival here (in Great Salt Lake Valley) present themselves in the shape of public works; donations will also continue to be taken from all parts of the world, and expended for the gathering of the poor Saints.⁵

Yet, before the PEF was in place, a priesthood system of immigration had been established.⁶ The LDS periodical, the *Latter-day Saints Millennial Star*, published in Liverpool, announced when voyages would be made for the various companies of seagoing Saints. For example, on 1 December 1848, the following notice appeared to prepare eager converts for departure in the upcoming season:

Emigration: Our first ship will sail after the 20th of January. Those who secure passage in her [the ship *Zetland*] will be notified by letter what day they must be in Liverpool. If all the emigrants who intend sailing for New Orleans, during the season of emigration, would forward, as soon as convenient, their names, ages, and deposits, we should have more time, and be better prepared, to make all suitable arrangements for them.⁷

During the same month in which the enthusiastic Mormon converts left England aboard the *Zetland* to gather to Zion, the *New York Herald* ran the following dispatch, which told of another kind of gathering being launched in 1849 from Liverpool and London: “The gold excitement here and in London exceeds anything ever before known or heard of. Nothing is heard or talked about but the New El Dorado. Companies are organizing in London in great numbers for the promised land. Fourteen vessels have already been chartered.”⁸ The *Millennial Star* printed an article from the *Liverpool Mercury* stating that “the gold fever is raging more furiously than ever, thousands of people are flocking from all parts of the United States to the land of auriferous promise.”⁹ The *Liverpool Mercury* reported by the summer of 1849 that in the streets of San Francisco, people were digging gold by the shovelfuls.¹⁰ Such news of a golden promised land propelled foreigners to gather to California from all over the world. However, there were faithful British Saints content to gather to Zion, which they viewed as a far greater land of promise.¹¹

To help them reach their desired haven, Mormon immigration agents were appointed on both sides of the Atlantic. These agents assisted converts during their embarkation as well as at their arrival at American ports and frontier outfitting posts. The port of departure for all LDS companies in 1849–50 was Liverpool, and roughly thirty-seven hundred Saints set sail for Zion during these two years.¹² By this time, Liverpool was the leading port of emigration in the world with a population that had reached two hundred thousand by 1840. The

late Mormon maritime historian Conway B. Sonne wrote that “the main reason [for its being a transportation center] was its location, between the British Isles and Ireland with rail connections to such eastern points as Hull and Grimsby where emigrants from Europe landed. The harbor with its easy navigable channels in the Mersey was a convenient base for the larger packets. Furthermore, it was a day’s sail nearer in distance to America than from London.”¹³ Liverpool was a temporary gathering place for both Saint and sinner. By 1840, it contained more than two thousand drinking dives, which made it a sailor’s paradise.¹⁴ Here priesthood leaders (such as Orson Pratt) protected their flock and selected other priesthood holders to watch over the company of Saints and made sure each vessel was dedicated to safely cross the Atlantic.¹⁵

A significant challenge facing Mormon converts was the difficult task of saying goodbye to loved ones. Just before her departure on the ship *Zetland*, a touching scene took place at a British train station when Mormon convert Ann Coope Harvey bid farewell to her mother. She wrote: “I felt so bad my heart seemed to turn over. I had the impression not to look at my mother again, so I took my babe in arms stepped into the train, and turned my face toward Zion, and left the home of my childhood, all my kindred and associates, for the gospel’s sake.”¹⁶

On 29 January 1849, the ship *Zetland* was designated as the first vessel of the year to embark from Liverpool carrying a company of Latter-day Saints to America. Gibson Condie recalled the mixed feelings experienced by the group as they rejoiced when Elder Orson Pratt promised the Saints a safe voyage to New Orleans, but Condie also recalled the emotion when farewell hymns were sung and the departing converts wept as they bid farewell to their native land and friends.¹⁷ Thomas Atkin, a sixteen-year-old convert, remembered mixed feelings of a different kind: “The large company of 358 Saints on board, presided over by Brother Orson Spencer, were joyfully singing the songs of Zion, but alas [in] a few short hours a change came over the spirit of dream, for the most of us were down with seasickness.”¹⁸

Condie recalled another startling change of events when the ship’s galley caught on fire and it looked as though the company was going to have to jump into the sea and drown. Fortunately, the fire was brought under control, and the Saints thanked God for sparing their lives.¹⁹ Condie also remembered the sad scene of children, who had died from disease, being sewn in sheets and thrown overboard amid sharks.²⁰

Other voyagers relate experiences of both joy and sorrow. The Saints who sailed in 1849 on the ship *Hartley* witnessed the baptism of four sailors.²¹ At the same time, twenty-eight Latter-day Saints died of cholera aboard the vessel *Berlin* during the same year. Such experiences were the reality of life and death for seagoing Saints in this period.²² Although there were times to sing and dance at sea, nothing seemed to compare with the joy the Saints experienced when they came to shore. The voyage from Liverpool to New Orleans was very long,

most ships taking about two months and some longer. The voyage took immigrants across the Atlantic into the Caribbean, through the Gulf of Mexico, and to the Belize up river to the port of New Orleans. This was the American port of arrival for all LDS companies for the years 1849–50.

Some Saints, though previously warned, celebrated to the extreme, and some at times even succumbed to alcohol. Upon the arrival of the *Zetland* in New Orleans in the spring of 1849, Orson Spencer, the appointed Mormon leader, reported the following:

Two Irish people have walked out of the boat, or from the shore into the river, to return no more, under the influence of strong drink. One of our own brethren even walked into the Mississippi upon a plank of moonshine (to use his own expression) taking the moon's reflection upon the water for a plank, but was fortunately rescued from death by brethren at hand. Strong drink was the sole cause of the perilous adventure!²³

At times, the Saints encountered sharks both by land and by sea. Not only did they face “sharks” in the form of thieves waiting to take advantage of new arrivals but also they faced the threat of apostates waiting to meet the Mormon immigrants at the docks of New Orleans. Elder Orson Pratt had warned immigrating Saints just prior to the 1849 immigration season with the following letter: “When the Saints shall arrive at New Orleans, they are expressly cautioned to beware of all such persons as Lyman Wight [former LDS Apostle], or any of his emissaries, who are endeavoring to decoy the Saints off to Texas, professing themselves to be Saints, when they are looked upon [by] our church as apostates, acting in direct opposition to the order of the church.”²⁴

Besides thieves and apostates, there were other things to beware of in this cosmopolitan city. For example, Mormon immigrant James R. Hall wrote the following description upon his arrival in New Orleans on Easter Sunday 1849:

I saw the most wicked abominable people I ever saw. I think Sunday seems to be their favorite day for gambling, dancing, drinking, fire works & I heard murder is no uncommon things as these men carry knives, daggers, or pistols and not only carry them but use them to fight with to kill each other. The inhabitants are a mixed race of French, Spaniards, Dutch, English, Irish, Scotch, blacks, and Indians, but French & English chiefly spoken. It is a lowland & unhealthy. Elder Scovil came on board to see the Saints and to give counsel to such as are willing to receive him as their counselor. Elder Scovil is a good man, one that is sent here by the authorities of the Church.²⁵

Under such circumstances, the Saints were much relieved to find immigration agents like Lucius N. Scovil, who protected and directed them upon arrival. When the *Zetland* arrived in the beginning of April 1849, James Bond noted the Saints' gratitude for the appointed agent at New Orleans. Bond noted, among other things, “We are very indebted to Brother Scovil for his prompt exertions and usefulness in facilitating our progress onward, and in saving our dollars.”²⁶

Shortly after the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in January of 1848, Lucius Scovil was appointed as the first immigration agent at New Orleans. While the California winter miners of '48 found the ground for digging a bit rigid, upon his March arrival in New Orleans, Scovil encountered a hardened city that was equally difficult to penetrate.²⁷

Nine months later, as the 1849 immigration season was soon to begin, Scovil sent a December letter to Elder Orson Pratt describing Scovil's circumstances and those of the Saints in New Orleans. Among other things, he informed Pratt concerning the prosperity of Sam Brannan in California. He also told how some of the Mormon Battalion had found a gold mine while working for Captain John Sutter and noted



Lucius Scoville
Daughters of the Utah Pioneers library collection
Springville, Utah

that some of these brethren had recently come to Council Bluffs with hundreds and even thousands of dollars worth of "pure virgin gold." Scovil also noted that Captain Sutter had recently arrived in New Orleans and had "created quite a gold fever here."²⁸

In the same letter, Scovil indicated that he had organized a branch among the transient Saints in the area and added that New Orleans was still "a very hard place, and the saints which have stopped have [probably meaning *here*, referring to the immigrants] are poor; yet I suppose there will be some way for our deliverance in the spring."

Such contrasting news of the prosperity of Brannan and the gold mined by the Battalion brethren, coupled with the gold fever that had struck New Orleans, may have generated in Scovil a sense of wishing for greener pastures for himself and his New Orleans flock. Yet, as noted above, he mustered the faith to believe that some form of deliverance was nigh at hand.

As the 1848–49 winter dragged on, Scovil grew a bit despondent as he considered his own financial circumstances as well as the poverty of the local Saints, most of whom were immigrants in need of more funding to reach Zion. This undesirable condition was augmented by the awful fact that although many had been struck by gold fever, the sting of death had once again attacked the

inhabitants of New Orleans caused by the spread of cholera.

In this trying condition, Scovil recalled that on 2 March 1849, he meditated on the difficult conditions in which he found himself. While he pondered, he had the impression that he should go to “Caliboo [Caliboose] Square.”²⁹ He further explained that he felt he should walk to a nearby bookstore and request to buy a lottery ticket from a Frenchman there employed. Although he concedes “the thought was foreign to my natural feelings as anything could be,” he explains:

Yet I walked forward and 15 minutes later I found myself at the book store and when I entered the store I felt that I had been very familiar with the Frenchman at some previous time. I inquired if he had lottery tickets for sale. He asked me who told me he had lottery tickets for sale, as there was no lottery tickets for sale in Louisiana, it being contrary to law, but, said he “I have lottery tickets for sale and the drawing is tomorrow.” He then spread out the tickets before me on the counter and I soon discovered a half ticket of the number I wanted, 9998. I asked him the price of it and he said \$2.50. I took the ticket and paid for it.

Ten days later, Scovil learned that he had won a hundred times his money and felt gratitude to God that he had opened up the way for him to perform his appointed task in New Orleans.³⁰ The spring deliverance he anticipated had actually fallen a few days early for Scovil in 1849, and he faithfully assisted hundreds of immigrating Saints up the Mississippi during the immigration season until he was replaced by Thomas McKenize in the fall of 1849.³¹

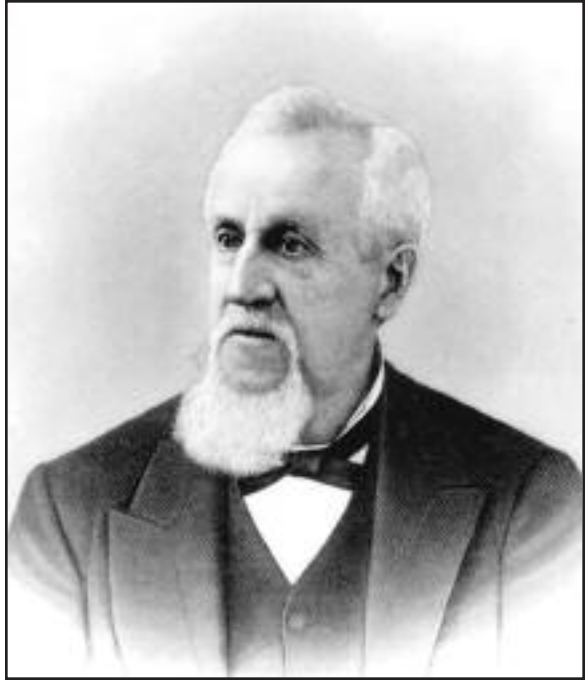
During the climactic gold rush years, the next important stop for immigrating Saints was St. Louis, which lay at an important juncture for steamboat travel on the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Throughout most of this period, immigrants were assisted at this point by Nathaniel H. Felt, who served as the St. Louis district president, which calling included his role as the immigration agent.³² Felt was a convert from Salem, Massachusetts, and was at one time the first president of the Salem branch (1843–45). He was a wealthy man who benefited from the Africa and China trade. He and his wife Eliza gave some of their furniture for the beautification of the Nauvoo Temple. Felt assisted thousands of foreign converts with his time and resources to allow them to gather to Zion. He gave priesthood blessings to many Saints when cholera was rampant in St. Louis, and all the immigrants he ministered to were spared.³³

Historian Stan Kimball wrote about the influx of Saints in St. Louis during the gold rush years when the city had a total population of about sixty-three thousand:

So many hundreds emigrants flooded into the city that President Felt took most of the Mound House Hotel for temporary housing, and rented the larger and more suitable Concert Hall on Market Street . . . for Sunday services. He divided the Gravois Branch into four units, one of which was Welsh and found himself by September 1849 shepherding from 3,000 to 4,000 members—the largest district in the Church.³⁴

The bulk of the membership consisted of earlier Nauvoo exiles and especially immigrants who were trying to work their way Zionward. The immigrating Saints were again confronted with cholera in St. Louis, as well as the plague of apostates.

Following the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Thomas Wrigley recorded what conditions were like for the Saints gathered in St. Louis: "It was sometimes hard work having to contend with the prejudice of the people of the world and every apostate that left Nauvoo came here and



*Nathaniel H. Felt
Courtesy of Afton Felt*

did their best to bring persecution on us."³⁵ Mormon immigrant Charles Dutton Miller wrote upon his arrival at St. Louis in 1849, "I found St. Louis abounding with Saints & apostates."³⁶ In this same year, another immigrant remarked, "I found the Saints in the sixth ward meeting in Bywardrobe [St. Louis area]. They locked the door for fear of the apostates."³⁷ Aside from such prejudice and persecution, immigrants also encountered dissenters who sought to prevent the Saints from journeying on to the Salt Lake Valley.

In spite of these obstacles, the Saints continued to move forward. Most who could afford to travel onward left the Mississippi at St. Louis and then traveled the Missouri River by steamboat to the Council Bluffs area. Here it was common for immigrant groups who had crossed the Atlantic to wait for a time in the Kaneshville area before joining with other pioneer companies who were crossing the plains. William LeFevre, who sailed on the ship *Zetland*, arrived at St. Louis on 1 April and had reached the Bluffs by 20 May. However, his pioneer company did not leave the Kaneshville area until 7 June.³⁸ Many would wait much longer because they were ill prepared or did not have sufficient funds to complete their journey to the Salt Lake Valley.

During this interim period, the Saints were exposed to several obstacles, which again included apostates. Many Latter-day Saints left the Mormon trail in this area for a variety of reasons, to return to the Church no more, while most

proved faithful and continued their journey to Zion.³⁹ Again, there was an agent to guide the Saints through such hindrances, as there had been at New Orleans and St. Louis.

The agent in charge of immigration at Kanesville during the years 1849–50 was Elder Orson Hyde, who also served as editor of the *Frontier Guardian*, which was often flooded with news for Mormon immigrants and eastern immigrants heading west.

At the same time as the Saints were marching in, so were the gentiles. Thousands of travelers heading west for California created a potential hazard for Hyde and the Saints he presided over. The *Guardian* issued the following account as the steamboat *Mustang* reached the shores of Council Point at the Bluffs in the spring of 1849: “First Boat This Season. . . . She brought some few passengers who are on their way to the gold regions, and a large lot of whiskey. This should go to the gold regions too.”⁴⁰ Perhaps devout Mormon readers read a double meaning into these words in the sense that “should go” meant they hoped the whiskey would move on quickly with the ’49ers. In addition to the potential cultural threat the whisky-toting boys created, gold fever also struck Kanesville (both Saint and sinner alike) during this same year. The surge of ’49ers who passed through generated an excitement that caused some Saints to feel there was gold beneath their feet in the Kanesville terrain. Nelson Whipple recollected: “Some person . . . found some thing in the bluffs west of Kainsville that had the appearance of gold this raised a grate excitement of corse. Brother Hyde went over to the place with some others and saw it and dedicated it to the Lord. This was all right and in good shape but the stuff turned out to be entirely worthless and no body could tell what it was.”⁴¹

Yet the gold rush proved also to be a blessing, as thousands of Argonauts poured into the Kanesville area and boosted the economy. Latter-day Saint Warren E. Foote recalled in May of 1849, “We are crowded with ‘Gold diggers’ as we call them.” One farmer reported, “We are busy every day and night grinding and the mill is crowded full. . . . We are making money midling [sic] fast now, but it can’t keep this way long.”⁴² Yet the following year, even more gold diggers made their way west through the area; and with the additional resources, many poor Saints who had been temporarily located in the Bluffs area were now able to continue their journey west to the Salt Lake Valley.⁴³

The initial fear of the damaging influence of the ’49ers soon subsided in Kanesville. The Saints in this area were actually surprised at the respectable behavior of most passing gold-seeking emigrants, as can be ascertained from the following article published on 16 May 1849 in the *Guardian*:

We are most agreeably disappointed in the character and appearance of the great mass of Emigrants through this place, destined for the “Gold Regions.” They certainly appear to be men of character and wealth, and possess a good share of general intelligence. We have not seen a drunken man among them—they have good health so far as we can ascertain, and are generally in fine spirits. If all the emigrants

to that country are as fair a specimen of honor, of integrity and uprightness as those are that pass through our country, (with a few exceptions) there must and will be order established and maintained in the mining districts of California.⁴⁴

Two weeks later, the *Guardian* published the constitutions of several of the companies that were headed to California to the gold fields as well as the names of the immigrants in each company. These constitutions further reflect the order and caliber of the passing immigrants. For example, besides setting up a military organization for their members of the Wisconsin and Iowa Union Company, their constitution further required in Article 13 that the members “observe the Sabbath.” Article 14 specified that “the members of this company shall abstain from the use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, and gaming shall not be tolerated in any form.” Article 15 required that each member “solemnly pledge” his honor and influence to preserve harmony.⁴⁵

The *Frontier Guardian* offered advice to all passing immigrants who journeyed west. Such counsel included a continual reminder to beware of Indians who might rob the immigrants on the plains of wagons, animals, etc.⁴⁶ In light of this apparent danger, the *Guardian* counseled the California-bound companies to travel in “a strict military organization” and to have fifty well-armed men with fifty wagons.⁴⁷

Instances are recorded where groups or companies of non-Mormon gold miners joined LDS companies on the trail to increase their combined numbers. In June of 1849, a group of gold miners heading west joined the Samuel Gully/Orson Spencer Company, agreeing to obey the rules and regulations of their Mormon company.⁴⁸ Two months later, the company of Captain A. W. Rathburn from Cleveland, Ohio, joined the Mormon Company led by Allen Taylor for protection against Indians they might encounter on the plains.⁴⁹

In an attempt to sell subscriptions to the *Guardian*, with tongue in cheek, this Kanessville newspaper alluded to the idea that the '49ers would be safer on the plains if they had a copy of the *Guardian* with them. They also warned, “Should you leave without this pre-requisite, and after you got well out on the plains, should there discover, off in the distance, a war party of Indians, following you up—then think that you neglected to take the *Guardian*.” The article also reminded the California-bound miners that “the Mormons found the gold there.” Finally, the paper noted that the *Guardian* would “even draw out gold where there is no mine at all,” while adding, “Our circumstances are such that we cannot go to the gold regions ourself, but we would like to have a little gold, notwithstanding, and we know not how to get it, except we say to you, subscribe to the *Guardian*.”⁵⁰

By the time the LDS converts reached Council Bluffs, the Mormon trail that had begun in Liverpool gradually became crowded with California-bound immigrants, wagon loads of cargo, and clouds of dust. The *Guardian* speculated that about twenty-five thousand immigrants were headed west on the plains by the spring of 1849.⁵¹ Mormon journals indicate that LDS companies passed

many gold hunters on their way to California as well as soldiers who had deserted.⁵² They also tell of many who died of cholera along the way.⁵³

Although some Mormon immigrants stayed together from the time they crossed the Atlantic until they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, many did not. Throughout the journey by land and by sea, economics was a key factor in whether Mormon immigrants could make their way to Zion in one season. With time, the Perpetual Emigrating Fund identified LDS immigrants in one of three categories. The “independent” group was classified as those who could pay their entire way to Utah. The second category was called the “ordinary” immigrants, who had enough money to cross the ocean and then were forced to work at a port, city, or frontier post before journeying on. The third group was the “PEF” immigrants, who were assisted almost entirely by funds from the Perpetual Emigrating Fund.⁵⁴

Many Saints lacking means to continue their journey west lodged for months and sometimes years at New Orleans, St. Louis, or Council Bluffs. For example, while most of the Mormon immigrants on the ship *Berlin* (1849) continued to travel up the Mississippi, some remained at New Orleans, where they were fortunate to find employment for the winter.⁵⁵ Some of the passengers on the *James Pennell* (1850) remained in St. Louis for years before being able to afford to continue on to the Salt Lake Valley.⁵⁶ Gibson Condie, a passenger on the ship *Zeland* (1849), “lived in Council Bluffs two years and three months” before emigrating.⁵⁷ Condie further elaborated on the process of company organization by Orson Hyde.⁵⁸

Regardless of how long it took to reach the Salt Lake Valley, the Mormons who joined such companies were grateful to finally cross the plains and have their first glimpse at the heart of Zion. Condie notes after describing his journey down Emigration Canyon and onto the bench, “We had a beautiful view of the Valley and its surroundings.” However, the view could not compare with the joy of friends and family being reunited in the city of the Saints.⁵⁹

During the peak gold rush years, Salt Lake City was a busy place of commerce. Historian John Unruh describes this “desert mecca” as the “Mormon Halfway House.” He notes that at least ten thousand ’49ers stopped at this unique oasis, while thousands more passed through Salt Lake City in 1850 and in ensuing years.⁶⁰ During the summer months, hundreds poured into the valley daily.⁶¹

While faithful foreign converts who arrived in Salt Lake were always welcome, the gentile populace was cautiously monitored. Yet the Saints tolerated the ’49ers and took advantage of what they left behind. Brigham Young and his associates often counseled the Saints to charge high prices to the passing ’49ers, who they thought could afford the prices because they were supposedly on their route to great wealth. On the other hand, there were also reminders not to take advantage of poor overlanders who were passing through.⁶²

Many mining suppliers were eager to get rid of their multiple supplies in Salt Lake when they received the disturbing news that California had already been saturated with goods. They reasoned that they would unload their commodities to the Mormons and head for the mines themselves. As a result, the Saints cashed in on the precious items at very low prices.⁶³

Some '49ers were in such a hurry that they had to discard unwanted materials to lighten the load on the trail.⁶⁴ Howard Stansbury, who in 1849 directed an exploration of the Salt Lake Valley for the Corps of Topographical Engineers, wrote that many items had been left along the trail between Fort Laramie and the Salt Lake Valley: "Before halting at noon, we passed eleven wagons that had been broken up, the spokes of the wheels taken to make pack-saddles, and the rest burned or otherwise destroyed. The road has been literally strewn with articles that have been thrown away."⁶⁵ The *Frontier Guardian* also noted, "Oh! the sacrifice of property thrown out and left by the road side by the Californians, between Laramie and the Valley is beyond calculation."⁶⁶

Mormon immigrants who passed by on the trail capitalized on this opportunity and reaped the harvest. At times, local Saints scoured the area, gathering the abandoned items and providing additional means to help bring more foreign converts from abroad.⁶⁷ Mormon lawyers such as Hosea Stout benefited economically by those who were on their way to California through trail disputes that had to be settled in court. Some parties left feeling disgruntled toward the Mormons. Others expressed their appreciation for Mormon hospitality. The *St. Louis Organ* published an article (reprinted in the *Guardian*) noting that although the Mormons did not have at the time sufficient supplies for passing immigrants because of the loss of crops and cattle, they extended their hospitality in a kind and liberal manner with no compensation.⁶⁸ Some California-bound immigrants chose to stay for the winter season, and several even joined the Church.⁶⁹ The Second General Epistle from the First Presidency declared at the close of 1849, "Many who came in search of gold, have heard the Gospel for the first time and will go no farther, having believed and been baptized."⁷⁰

One such convert was William Morley Black, who at age 22 caught gold fever to the degree that he resigned from being sheriff of Cuba, Illinois, and joined a joint stock company in the spring of 1849 and went west to get rich. He entered the Salt Lake Valley on 24 July, 1849, two years to the day that the vanguard Saints had first entered the Valley. There to his surprise he found a well organized city. He states, "At first I thought we had lost our reckoning and that this was the Sabbath day, but this could not be as the Mormons were an unchristian lawless sect and doubtless paid no heed to the Sabbath." He further notes that he ate dinner with a friendly Mormon family and was influenced by the blessing on the food. "This was the first time in my life that I had heard a blessing asked on our daily food and this prayer fell from the lips of an uncultured Mormon." Shortly thereafter at the conclusion of his first day in Salt Lake he relates the following:

Toward evening I met another Mormon, a Mr. William Wordsworth . . . To my surprise Mr. Wordsworth invited us to attend their church services the next day. I accepted the invitation and he promised to call for me.

Sunday, July 25, 1849 is the day ever to be remembered by me. Mr. Wordsworth called early and after chatting ten or fifteen minutes with members of our company and again extending an invitation to us all to attend their church, he and I walked to the bowery. We secured seats near the front of the congregation. On the west was a raised platform of lumber on which were seated some twenty of their leading Elders, including Brigham Young. Under the shade of the bowery seated on neatly-made slab benches were the choir and congregation. Services opened with singing and prayer, and the sacrament (bread and water) of the Lord's supper was blessed and passed to all the people. Then a man of noble, princely bearing addressed the meeting. As he arose Mr. Wordsworth said, "That is Apostle John Taylor, one of the two men who were with our Prophet and Patriarch when they were martyred in Carthage jail." The word "Apostle" thrilled me, and the sermon, powerful, and testimony that followed filled my soul with a joy and satisfaction that I never felt before, and I said to Mr. W., "If that is Mormonism then I am a Mormon. How can I become a member of your church?"

"By baptism," he answered.

"I am ready for the ordinance."

He replied "Do not be in a hurry. Stay here and get acquainted with our people. Study more fully the principles of the gospel. Then if you wish to cast your lot with us it will be a pleasure to me to baptize you." That night I slept but little, I was too happy to sleep. A revelation had come to me and its light filled my soul. My desire for gold was swept away. I had found the Pearl of Great Price, and I resolved to purchase it, let it cost what it would.

After a few days rest the company pushed on for California, but another man drove my team. I gave them my all, and in exchange received Baptism at the hands of Levi Jackman. I had lost the world and become a "Mormon." "He that putteth his hand to the plow and turneth back, is not worthy of me."⁷¹

As the LDS immigration season of 1850 drew to a close, the *Millennial Star* reported the following news from Salt Lake City:

Quite a number of gold diggers come from the States with their knapsacks on their backs: hundreds have taken the Hasting's cut off: numbers are being baptized and are remaining here. Our city has been filled with lawyers, doctors, priests, merchants, mechanics, &c. &c., who, after cursing Joseph Smith all their lives as a money digger, are marching, half distracted with excitement and gold fever, to quickly lay down their honorable, legal, or sacred professions for the honorable calling of money diggers.⁷²

The following month, the *Star*, in a article titled "Great Sufferings of the Overland Emigration To California," outlined the demise of the California-bound immigrants and noted the stark contrast between the life of the Argonauts and the Saints: "It is lamentable indeed to reflect with what eagerness the children of men pursue after the treasures of the world which perish with the using, while the revelations of Jesus Christ, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit which testify of the remission of sins, and give the knowledge of God

which is eternal life, are lightly esteemed or counted a vain thing.”⁷³

While living in Salt Lake on 30 August 1850, Hosea Stout wrote of the immigrants he witnessed in the streets of the city of the Saints: “This evening Milo Andrus and a company of about 50 wagons of saints arrived here all in good spirits it seems. Capt. Andrus waggon bore a large flag with Holiness to the Lord inscribed on it.”⁷⁴ In an earlier diary entry, Stout wrote that the ’49ers were “selling out and going on to the Gold Regions.”⁷⁵

During these peak gold-rush years, Stout’s diary provides a wide contrast between Mormon immigrants, who arrived peacefully in the valley, and most ’49ers, who were anxious to move on. Most of the California miners burned out from gold fever and never found the treasure they were seeking. Although some Saints did not find the riches they were seeking and returned to the East, most immigrating Saints “struck it rich” in a spiritual sense as they sought to build the kingdom of God with their fellow Saints. In their abode they called Zion, they found a jewel they considered more precious than gold.

Notes

1. J. S. Holliday, *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 42. See pages 25–44 for an overview of how extensive the international gold rush to California really was.

2. Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints 1830–1890* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), 64.

3. Richard O. Cowan and William E. Homer, *California Saints: A 150-Year Legacy in the Golden State* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996), 166.

4. *Millennial Star*, 12:9 (1 May 1850), 132. In October of 1845, Elder George A. Smith reminded the Saints assembled in the Nauvoo Temple of the Missouri covenant and said, “When we were to leave Missouri [fall and winter of 1838–39] the saints entered into a covenant not to cease their exertions until every saint who wished to go was removed, which was done.” He added that it was now time to help the poor to move out of Nauvoo by making a similar covenant. Brigham Young then asked the saints to vote on the proposal, and the motion was sustained unanimously. President Young promised blessings upon the heads of the saints who would use their property and influence to the best of their ability to accomplish the task. See William G. Hartley, “How Shall I Gather?” *Ensign* (October 1997), 7. This request for influence and property to allow others to gather to Zion with the subsequent blessings became part of Latter-day Saint scripture as a result of Brigham Young’s instruction received 14 January 1847. (See D&C 136:10–11.)

5. *Millennial Star*, 12:9 (May 1, 1850), 141. Two standard works that deal with the Perpetual Emigrating Fund are Gustive O. Larson, *Prelude to the Kingdom* (Francesstown, New Hampshire: Marshall Jones Company, 1947) and chapters three and four of Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1958).

6. David H. Pratt and Paul F. Smart, “Life on Board a Mormon Emigrant Ship,” *World Conference on Records* (1980), 2. They note that during the first year of LDS international immigration to America (1840–41), “the first Mormon emigrants were booked individually on ships. However, by the time the *Tyrean* sailed in September 1841, the Church had settled on the more economical system of chartering ships.” This was done

under the direction of priesthood leaders who had their headquarters in Liverpool. The first company of Saints to America came under the direction of John Moon in June of 1840. Although much is not known about the role of the priesthood in this organization of this voyage on the *Britannia*, by the time the second voyage of Saints left Liverpool, a more systematic priesthood system was already in place. Pratt and Smart also point out that Brigham Young had picked the leaders to oversee this voyage on the *Sheffield* and that by the emigration season of 1848–49, the Church authority in England would select a president to preside over subsequent voyages (*ibid.*, 3).

7. *Latter-day Saints Millennium Star*, 10:23 (1 December 1848), 361.

8. Holliday, 55–56. See Oscar Lewis, *Sea Routes to the Gold Fields* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949) and Octavius T. Howe, *Argonauts of '49* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923) for the story of voyages made during the California gold rush.

9. *Millennial Star*, 11:2 (15 January 1849), 28.

10. Cited in Brigham D. Madsen, *Gold Rush Sojourners in Great Salt Lake City 1849 and 1850* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), 5.

11. Frederick S. Buchanan, *A Good Time Coming: Mormon Letters to Scotland* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1988) points out that not all the Saints viewed Zion as such.

12. Significantly, between 1840–90, about 80 percent of all Saints who voyaged to America embarked from Liverpool. For a list of all the LDS voyages for 1849–50 and for this entire fifty-year period of the Saints' immigration to America, see 1997–98 *Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1996), 159–67.

13. Conway B. Sonne, "Liverpool and the Mormon Emigration," unpublished paper presented to the Mormon History Association Conference in Liverpool on 10 July 1987. This article has been placed in the Conway B. Sonne papers, which are at the Merrill Library, Department of Special Collections, Utah State University.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Between 1840 and 1890, there are no known ships that sank crossing the Atlantic carrying a company of Mormon immigrants.

16. Autobiography of Ann Coope Harvey, Historical Department, Archives Division, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, 5, hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives.

17. Reminiscences and Diary of Gibson Condie, (1849) LDS Church Archives, 23.

18. Autobiography of Thomas Atkin, LDS Church Archives, 4.

19. Condie, Reminiscences and Diary, 24.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Reminiscences of John Ormond, *Utah Pioneer Biographies*, 22:59.

22. Thomas McKenize, "Letter to the Editor," *Millennial Star*, 12:1 (1 January 1850),

14.

23. Orson Spencer, [letter] *Millennial Star*, 11:12 (15 June 1849), 184.

24. Orson Pratt, *Millennial Star*, 10:16 (15 August 1848).

25. Reminiscences and diary of James R. Hall, LDS Church Archives, 48–49.

26. James Bond, [letter] *Millennial Star*, 11:10 (15 May 1849), 154.

27. Journal History of the Church, 14 March 1848, LDS Church Archives, hereafter cited as Journal History.

28. *Millennial Star*, 11:4 (15 February 1849), 54–55. Orson Spencer, *Millennial Star*, 11:12 (15 June 1849), 184 wrote upon his arrival in New Orleans, "The gold excitement is the most common topic of conversation here. It is thought that 40,000 persons will cross the mountains to New Orleans this season. The price of wagons, provisions &c., &c. Are all affected by this great rush." See Cowan and Homer, *California Saints: A 150-Year Legacy in the Golden State*, 105–26 on the role of the Saints in relation to the dis-

covery and advertisement of gold in California. For an overview on the subject of the Mormons and the California gold rush, see J. Kenneth Davies, *Mormon Gold: The Story of California's Mormon Argonauts* (Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Co., 1984).

29. Caliboose means "jail house" and was located in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

30. *Journal History*, 12 March 1849, 2–3.

31. While Scovil was a Connecticut Yankee, McKenzie was a Scotsman. During McKenzie's tenure as agent in New Orleans (fall of 1849–52), the New Orleans branch rented two rooms for church meetings. During the 1849–50 zenith gold rush years, very complete church records were kept at New Orleans. These records describe the worldly conditions that challenged the local Saints. See David Buice, "When the Saints Came Marching In: The Mormon Experience in Antebellum New Orleans, 1840–55," *Louisiana History*, 23:3 (1982), 221–37.

32. Stanley B. Kimball, "The Saints and St. Louis, 1831–1857: An Oasis of Tolerance and Security," *BYU Studies*, 13:4 (Summer 1973), 507. Kimball later notes (p. 509) that Felt was replaced in 1850 by his first counselor, Alexander Robbins.

33. Andrew Jenson, *L.D.S. Biographical Encyclopedia*, 2:380–83.

34. *Ibid.*, 508.

35. *Ibid.*, 499.

36. Reminiscences and diary of Charles Dutton Miller, LDS Church Archives, 19.

37. Autobiography and diary of David D. Bowen, LDS Church Archives, 18 July 1849.

38. History of William LeFevre, LDSCA, 2; for others who left between 5–7 June 1849, see 1997–98 *Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News), 168.

39. Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons on the Missouri, 1846–52, "And Should We Die . . ."* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 227, suggests that such reasons for apostasy could be either "economical, social, doctrinal or personal." He also notes, "The exact dimensions are difficult to ascertain, but certainly substantial numbers were involved—at least two thousand during the six-year period from 1846–52."

40. *Frontier Guardian* (18 April 1849), 1:6, 2.

41. Journal of Nelson W. Whipple, Spring 1849, cited in Bennett, 222.

42. Journal of Warren E. Foote, 15 May 1849, cited in Bennett, 222.

43. Bennett, 222–23.

44. *Frontier Guardian* 1:8 (16 May 1849), 2.

45. *Frontier Guardian* 1:9 (30 May 1849), 3.

46. *Frontier Guardian* 1:7 (2 May 1849), 2.

47. *Frontier Guardian* 1:8 (16 May 1849), 2.

48. Journals of Reuben Miller, LDS Church Archives.

49. Reminiscences and journal of Silas Richards, LDS Church Archives, 6.

50. *Frontier Guardian* 1:7 (2 May 1849), 2.

51. *Frontier Guardian* 1:8 (16 May 1849), 1:83.

52. *An Autobiography of Peter Olsen Hansen, 1818–1895*, comp. by Leland Hansen Ashby (second printing, 1988), 55–64 and variant account in *Journal History*, 7 August 1849, 1–11.

53. See autobiography and journal of Nelson Wheeler Whipple, LDS Church Archives, 88; Autobiography sketch of Edward Phillip, LDS Church Archives, Reminiscences of James Fisher Madison, 1906, LDS Church Archives, 9.

54. Richard L. Jensen and William G. Hartley, "Immigration and Emigration," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow et al. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1992), 2:674.

55. *Millennial Star*, 11:23, (1 December 1849), 364.

56. *Church Emigration Book*, 1850.
57. Reminiscences and diary of Gibson Condie, LDS Church Archives, 33. *The Frontier Guardian*, 1:2 (21 February 1849), 1:2. Page 2 indicates that when fifty wagons could be brought together, they could be organized into a company.
58. Orson Hyde organized many pioneer companies in Council Bluffs during the peak gold rush years. For a list of these companies of 1849–50, see 1997–98 *Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1996), 168.
59. *Ibid.*, 35.
60. John D. Unruh Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840–60* (Urbana and Chicago, 1993), 302–3.
61. *Ibid.*, 308.
62. *Ibid.*, 307.
63. Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints 1830–1900* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), 67.
64. Merrill J. Mattes, *Platte River Road Narratives* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 120–317, provides a wonderful list of overland accounts to California in 1849–50. John D. Unruh Jr., *The Plains Across*, gives an excellent overview of the overland experience. Finally, George R. Stewart, *The California Trail* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1962) is a helpful source to interpret the journey to California during the gold rush years.
65. *Ibid.*, 70.
66. *Frontier Guardian* 1:16 (5 September 1849), 2.
67. Although more Saints benefited from the '49ers who passed through Salt Lake City, the Church did not overlook the opportunity to benefit from the California gold. In public sermons, Brigham Young strongly discouraged the Saints from rushing to California, as they were needed to build Zion; and he was concerned for their spiritual welfare. However, after the gold was discovered, he did authorize private gold-mining missionaries, as he recognized the economic benefits the gold would have on Deseret. As a result, with California gold and tithing gathered from the California mining Saints, Brigham Young was able to gather \$80,000 for the Church between 1848–51. Davies, *Mormon Gold*, xii–xv. See also Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, chapter three, "The Harvest of 49," 64–95.
68. *Frontier Guardian* 1:20 (31 October 1849), 3.
69. An excellent monograph that provides more detail on this topic is Brigham D. Madsen, *Gold Rush Sojourners in Great Salt Lake City 1849 and 1850* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983). See also Madsen's unpublished article, "Social Relations between the Mormons and the 49er's," paper presented at the Salt Lake Community College, 14 April 1999.
70. *Frontier Guardian* 1:24 (December 26, 1849), 1.
71. Autobiography of William Morley Black, courtesy of L. Brent and Mareid Black Horton. Mareid is a great-granddaughter of William Morley Black.
72. *Millennial Star* 12:22 (November 15, 1850), 350.
73. *Millennial Star* 12:24 (December 15, 1850), 377.
74. Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout 1844–61*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964, reprint, 1982), 1:379.
75. *Ibid.*, 1:354 (for date of 26 June 1849).