

LATTER-DAY SAINTS AT IOWAVILLE, IOWA:1846-1851

William G. Hartley

On August 3, 1994, descendants of Albert and Tamma Durfee Miner and a dozen local people and reporters gathered at the Iowaville Cemetery, sixty miles from Nauvoo in eastern Iowa, for an historic occasion.¹ With an Ottumwa TV station camera rolling, The Miners dedicated a monument to Albert Miner, who was part of the Latter-day Saints' 1846 exodus from Nauvoo. Fifteen months after leaving Nauvoo, Albert Miner died at Iowaville, a village that disappeared for a century.²

Appropriately, one side of the Albert Miner Marker memorializes Albert's life and death, but the history text on the other side tells about Iowaville and of Latter-day Saints from Nauvoo who stopped there between 1846 and 1851. A half dozen or more Latter-day Saints from Nauvoo are buried there, including Joseph Smith, Sr.'s brother, Asahel Smith, and Asahel's wife Elizabeth.³

Iowaville once sat a bit north of the original Mormon Trail taken by Brigham Young's early caravan of Saints. It was a small village twenty miles upriver from where the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail (as we now call it) crossed the Des Moines River.

Elias Smith, first cousin to the Prophet Joseph Smith, arrived with his family in Iowaville from Nauvoo on August 25, 1846. His parents, Patriarch Asahel Smith and Elizabeth, were with him. Their plan was to remain there just for the winter. Instead, circumstances forced Elias to stay for five years. His diary is the best first-hand document yet found that tells about Iowaville and about Latter-day Saint exiles from Nauvoo who stopped there.⁴

Iowaville developed on an Indian village site beside the Des Moines River. a trading post was estab-

lished there as early as 1822. Sioux Chief Black Hawk created a village, called Black Hawk, across the river on the south side. The Iowaville village site was purchased from the Indians in 1837, and settlement by whites began that year. Among the first settlers were James Jordan, William Phelps, John Tolman, and then the families of Joel T. Avery, John Newport, Job Carter, and Crittenden Forqurzen, many of whose members are buried in the Iowaville Cemetery. The settlers laid out the village in 1838, and the first riverboat to steam up the Des Moines to Iowaville did so the same year. Chief Black Hawk also died at Iowaville in 1838. No church was built in the village, but it received a post office in 1840 and a school opened there in 1843.

A Mr. Van Caldwell established a ferry two miles west (upriver) of Iowaville to afford access to a government mill a short distance beyond the Des Moines River. He operated this ferry for some years. In 1843 the Sioux began vacating lands in the Iowaville area, opening it up to more settlement. Iowaville became a "thriving and enterprising" little village. By 1850 or soon after, it had a flouring mill, a carding mill, a distillery, one or more stores, a blacksmith shop and other enterprises.⁵

Brigham Young's companies of Nauvoo Saints, called in standard histories the Pioneer Company or the Camps of Israel, left Nauvoo in February and started their trek west from Sugar Creek Camp on March 1st. Traveling before spring grasses grew, they stayed close to northern Missouri settlements in order to buy livestock feed. For nearly 300 miles across present Iowa, they followed existing roads and then blazed a few stretches of their own as they moved by and stopped at sites now well-noted on the Mormon Trail maps: Farmington, then Bonaparte (the fording place of the Des Moines River),

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Richardson's Point, Chariton River Crossing, Locust Creek encampments (where William Clayton wrote "Come Come Ye Saints"), Garden Grove, Mt. Pisgah, and on into present Council Bluffs.⁶

President Young's Pioneer Company has received primary historical attention because it was the first, or lead, group and was directed by the Church's top leadership. While historically the most important company, numerically it was not. Young's contingents were not the main wave of Saints to leave Nauvoo. In terms of numbers, most Nauvoo residents did not leave until April and May, two to three months after Young, when the grasses grew and the water flowed. This, the biggest wave of evacuees, headed west on their own or in small clusters, not in Church-led companies of fifties and tens. They chose their own routes, taking existing roads and better routes than the earlier wave, and reached the Missouri in three weeks compared to the three months required by the Pioneer Companies. Many stayed on the ridgeline road, a dragoon route that connected Keokuk with Raccoon Barracks (present-day Des Moines), paralleling the Des Moines River's northeast side. Some crossed the Des Moines at Bonaparte, like the Pioneers did, but others crossed farther upriver at or near places like Keosauqua, Iowaville, or Eddyville.⁷

Mormons' autobiographical writings show, and local Iowa records and folklore corroborate, that unknown numbers of Saints from Nauvoo stopped for a season or a year or more in Iowa towns not far from the Des Moines River.⁸ They halted because of poor health of a family member, the need to earn money or food, good job opportunities, or disabled wagons or teams. The Elias Smith family and the Albert Miner family were among those hundreds who stopped for an extended period.

Upon reaching Iowaville, Elias Smith termed it in his diary "a small place" on the north side of the Des Moines River. The Smiths encamped one mile above Iowaville on the prairie. Elias decided to stay through the winter if he could find suitable employment. Not quite two months later, his mother, Elizabeth Smith, died, on October 15, 1846. Elias said she was buried in the cemetery on a hill on the north side of the bluffs, north of the Des Moines River, one mile northeast of Iowaville village--the present Iowaville Cemetery. (The oldest headstones still visible in the cemetery date from the early 1840s, such as one for Sarah Avery, who died on March 4, 1843.)

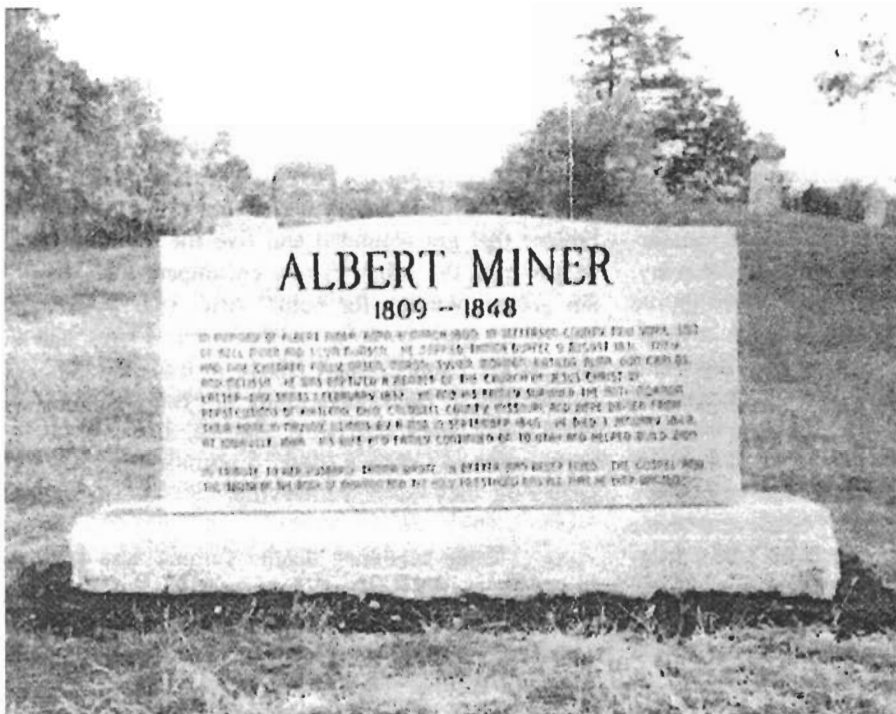
A month after the Elias Smith family reached Iowaville, the Albert Miner family showed up there too.⁹ Later in her life, Tamma Durfee Miner wrote about her family's forced departure from Nauvoo that September, when the last Saints were driven out at gunpoint. "Our men had to ferry the boat over five times for each family. My husband had to ferry it over ten times, five for my brother that got wounded and five for us." Across the Mississippi, the Miner family encamped. "We slept on the ground waiting for help." After two weeks, they started on their own, since the rescue teams had not arrived yet from Council Bluffs to transport the Poor Saints west.¹⁰ Three days along the ridgeroad towards Des Moines, their sick baby, Melissa, died. "We buried her the first of October 1846," Tamma said. Three days farther on, they reached Iowaville.

After Melissa's death, Tamma was sick and bedridden for the next nine months. Why did the Miners not push on to catch up with the main encampments of Saints at Council Bluffs? "My husband thought of moving to the Bluffs," Tamma explained, "but a good many came back to get work." They convinced Albert he must find employment where he was.

On December 20, 1846, Elias Smith wrote that he and his family had some twenty boarders, including E. Durphy (possibly Tamma Durfee Miner's brother Edmund Durfee Jr.) and a Thomas Polls of Bonaparte. Both, apparently, were LDS men. On March 31, 1847, Elias wrote in his diary that Mrs. E. Edwards died and was buried next to his mother.

Meanwhile, the Miner family found lodging "while Albert worked at hauling and running a ferry boat." About February, 1847, Albert, "short of money" and apparently out of work, took a long journey on foot to Ohio to see his relatives. While he was gone, fourteen-year-old Polly Miner, the oldest daughter, took care of the Miner family of nine, including her ailing mother, Tamma.¹¹ After ten weeks, Albert returned, on May 17, 1847. But, having traveled in rainy weather, he became ill and was "one homesick, tired, wet and just plain sick man," Tamma said. He believed that after he had rested from his long trip he would feel better, "but instead he grew worse" as the year 1847 passed by. He tried to work half days and go to bed the other half.

Elias Smith documented the demise of Albert Miner. On December 31, 1847, Elias went to Iowaville



Albert Miner Monument, Iowaville Cemetery

“and got a little blacksmithing done. Whilst there I went in to see Br. Albert Miner who was very sick with the cholera morbus. The balance of the Brethren there were well as usual.” Weather then was warm, the road muddy, and the Des Moines River half cleared of ice. Then, on January 4, 1848, Elias “drew 2 loads of wool to Iowaville and whilst there heard of the death of Br. Miner who died last night at ten oclock, thus one after another of the Saints are taken away in this land of strangers, where they are only sojourners for a season in order to obtain the means to enable them to join their brethren in the west.”

Tamma Durfee Miner's recollections say of Albert's death that on January 3, 1848, “he suddenly left us which was a hard blow for we thought that he was getting better.” That July, widow Tamma led her children on to Council Bluffs and later to Utah, where they settled in Springville in 1850.

Elias' diary names several people who were Latter-day Saints living at Iowaville, including Ester Parrish and a Brother Woolsey. On May 18, 1848, he recorded that the Hiram Bennett family started for the Bluffs, as did William R. Orten and “Bro. Silas.” That left still at Iowaville, he said, William Parrish, M. Duw, W. R. Coles, R. Woodsen, E. Durphey, and the Smiths.

On July 21, 1848, he mentioned three more Mormons: Edward W. Parrish, "Brother Ballard," and William Parrish.

In January or February, 1848, Jonathan C. Wright left Kanesville for a mission to the east. He passed through Iowa places where Mormons like the Miners and Smiths had stopped. From Mt. Pisgah he went to Lost Camp, Chariton Point, Lone House, Soap Creek, and Iowaville. He preached at Iowaville to Saints there and "found a good feeling, unlike he found among Saints at Lost Camp." Levi Stewart joined him at Iowaville, and both elders preached twice to gentiles there, before moving on to Nauvoo.¹³

Elias Smith's father, Patriarch Asahel Smith, died at Iowaville at age seventy-five on July 22, 1848.¹² On May 6, 1851, just before departing for Kanesville to rejoin the Latter-day Saint migration, Elias Smith visited the Iowaville Cemetery to pay his last respects to his parents and to other Saints buried there. His diary says that others who accompanied him to the cemetery were Samuel P [Parrish?], a sister King, her daughter Jane, and people with first names of Mary Jane, Elias, and George. He recorded that buried in the cemetery were a Sister Edwards and her child and Joseph Orton. "There are several others of the Saints buried there but the graves I cannot describe," among which would be Albert Miner's grave. No original gravestones or markers for these graves exist in the Iowaville Cemetery today.

During the spring of 1851, when the Elias Smith family left Iowaville, the Des Moines River flooded, becoming about three miles wide there. The village survived the flooding and had modest prosperity until a railroad line bypassed it in 1857. In 1860, Iowaville had 200 residents, its biggest population. After the town of Eldon sprang up nearby in 1870, Iowaville declined and disappeared. Other than one foundation ruin near the river, no signs of Iowaville buildings have survived.

Today, the Iowaville Cemetery, still an operational cemetery, is ten miles north of Keosauqua on Iowa highway 1 and fifteen miles west of Iowa highway 1 on Iowa highway 16--exactly 0.7 miles northwest of the town of Selma and 2 miles southeast of Eldon. Located high up a slope north of Iowa highway 16, the cemetery overlooks the Des Moines River a half-mile away. It contains new markers for Asahel and Elizabeth Smith¹⁴ and for Albert Miner. The Albert Miner marker reads:

**Albert Miner
1809-1848**

In memory of Albert Miner, born 31 March 1809, in Jefferson County, New York. Son of Azel Miner and Silvia Munson. He married Tamma Durfee 9 August 1831. They had nine children: Polly, Orson, Moroni, Sylvia, Mormon, Matilda, Alma, Don Carlos, and Melissa. He was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1 February 1832. He and his family survived the anti-Mormon persecutions of Kirtland, Ohio, Caldwell County, Missouri, and were driven from their home in Nauvoo, Illinois by a mob in September 1846. He died 3 January 1848 at Iowaville, Iowa. His wife and family continued on to Utah and helped build Zion. In tribute to her husband, Tamma wrote, "A better man never lived. . . the Gospel and the Truth of the Book of Mormon and the Holy Priesthood was all that he ever wanted."

On the reverse side, the monument gives historical information about Iowaville and the Nauvoo Mormons who temporarily stopped there:

Iowaville

Settled 1837. Chief Black Hawk died here 1838. Post Office 1840. Village of Black Hawk was across river. Steamboats stopped here. Van Caldwell's ferry was 2 miles west. Iowaville never exceeded 200 people. After Eldon's rise in 1870, Iowaville quickly disappeared.

Mormons at Iowaville

In 1846, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), driven from Illinois, crossed Iowa by various routes. Dozens stopped here to earn travel money, including Albert Miner, who helped operate the ferry in 1847. Mormons buried in this cemetery include Albert, Mrs. E. Edwards and child, Joseph Orton, Asahel Smith (uncle of Mormonism's founder Joseph Smith) and his wife Elizabeth. Asahel's son Elias' diary gives much detail about Iowaville 1846-51 (copy in LDS Church Archives, Utah).

Erected 1993

By the Albert Miner Family Organization
of Utah

NOTES

1. Iowaville Cemetery is in Van Buren Country's edge, about twelve miles southeast of present Ottumwa.

2. Church News, Sept. 3, 1994.

3. Richard Lloyd Anderson, Joseph Smith's New England Heritage: Influences of Grandfathers Solomon Mack and Asael Smith (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 1971), 209.

4. Elias Smith Diary, LDS Historical Department Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

5. "History of Iowaville," Keosauqua Republican, July 9, 1935; "Pioneer Iowaville Distillery," Keosauqua Republican, Aug. 25, 1921, in Clippings File, Cities and Town, Iowaville, Iowa State Historical Society, Iowa City, Iowa.

6. For a site guide to the 1846 Mormon Trail across Iowa, see Stanley B. Kimball, Historic Sites and Markers Along the Mormon and Other Great Western Trails (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), and Kimball's campsite-by-campsite discussion in "The Iowa Trek of 1846," The Ensign (August 1971). 35-45.

7. For alternate routes and LDS sites not on the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail, see Stanley B. Kimball's Historic Sites and Markers Along the Mormon and other Great Western Trails, particularly his discussion of Trail Variant A and Trail Variant B in chapters 2 and 3, and his "The Mormon Trail Network in Iowa 1838-1863: A New Look," BYU Studies 21 (Fall 1981), 417-430. One crossing site, in addition to the one at Bonaparte, is marked. An "Ely Ford Mormon Crossing" sign stands on the shoreline of the Des Moines River in the beautiful Lacey-Keosauqua State Park, near the village of Keosauqua.

8. In dozens of lower Iowa counties, folklore abounds about Mormons who were there in the 1840s

from Nauvoo. Claims about Mormons buried in old gravesites are not unusual. In the town of Bentensport, 2 miles above Bonaparte (Bonaparte is where the 1846 Pioneers forded the Des Moines River), is a beautiful old restored brick building, the Mason House Inn, built by Mormon brickmasons in 1846. A block north of it is a callapsing old stone building local people call the Mormon House. The author's current research seeks to identify Nauvoo refugees who laid over in these small Iowa towns. County histories name a number of LDS families who dropped out of the Brigham Young-led church and became respected Iowa citizens. For those Saints who stopped and later joined the RLDS Church after 1860 see Pearl G. Wilcox, Roots of Reorganized Latter Day Saints in Southern Iowa (Independence, MO: The Author, 1989).

9. Albert Miner was born on March 31, 1809, in Jefferson County New York, and died at Iowaville, Iowa on January 3, 1848. Tamma Durfee Miner was born on March 6, 1813 in Lennox, New York, and died in Provo, Utah on January 30, 1885. See, "Life Story of Tamma Durfee Miner Curtis," typescript, LDS Church Historical Department.

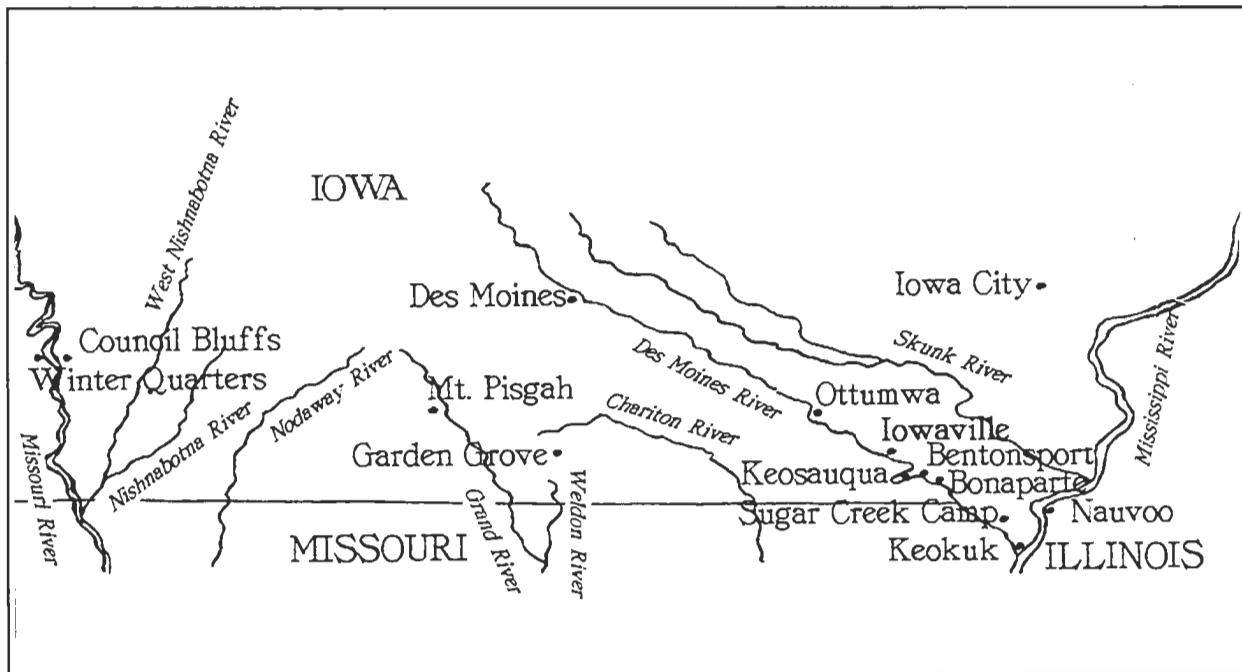
10. Richard E. Bennett, "Eastward to Eden: The Nauvoo Rescue Missions," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 19 (Winter 1986), 100-108.

11. The Miner family included, besides parents Albert and Tamma, children named Polly, Orson, Moroni, Sylvia, Mormon, Matilda, Alma, and Don Carlos. Melissa, who died a few months before, was their ninth child.

12. Richard Lloyd Anderson, Joseph Smith's New England Heritage, 209.

13. Jonathan C. Wright to Brigham Young, Feb. 11, 1848, Journal History, Feb. 11, 1848.

14. The Asahel and Elizabeth Smith marker is east of the Albert Miner marker. It was erected by the Jesse M. Smith family of Utah, apparently in the 1970s.



Iowa Map



*Asahel and Elizabeth Smith Monument
Iowaville Cemetery*