

Not Every Missourian Was a Bad Guy: Hiram G. Parks' 1839 Letter to James Sloan in Quincy, Illinois

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The journals, letters, and reminiscences of Mormons who lived at one time or another in Missouri during the years 1831–39 contain few positive comments about the Mormons' "Gentile" neighbors. When we consider the fact that a large number of Saints were the victims of mistreatment, persecution, and civil injustice, this is not surprising. However, attitudes toward the Latter-day Saints covered a wide spectrum—from "Mormon eaters" on one end to sympathy or even friendliness on the other end. Although some Missourians detested the Mormons and carried out acts of aggression and violence against them, other Missourians were sympathetic, wished the Mormons no harm, and felt some dismay concerning how they were treated. In short, not every Missourian should be considered a "bad guy" when it came to how the Saints were treated.

One Missourian whose name should be classified as an advocate and ally to the Mormons is Hiram G. Parks of Richmond, Ray County, Missouri. As a militia officer, his name appears frequently in the documents related to the 1838 Mormon War where he played a prominent role. Although Edward Stevenson would later claim that the Ray commander was "a mobber in spirit and did not protect the Mormons,"¹ the documented evidence suggests otherwise. A careful examination of the sources suggests that Parks, like his military associates David R. Atchison and Alexander W. Doniphan, was a defender of justice. He labored to be true to his military command, he sought to establish peace between the Mormons and his fellow Missourians, and, as

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the letter reproduced below suggests, he also acted in the interests of the Latter-day Saints.

Hiram G. Parks and the Mormon-Missouri War

Hiram G. Parks held the rank of brigadier-general, the second highest field officer in the Missouri state militia. At the time of the Mormon conflict, generally one brigadier-general was commissioned in every county, although if one county was sparsely populated, the command sometimes included a second. This appears to be the case with Parks, whose command included Ray County and possibly the less-populated Carroll County, situated to the east. Alexander W. Doniphan, commander of the Clay County militia, and Moses Wilson, commander of the militia from Jackson, were also brigadier-generals. The highest ranking field officer was that of a major-general. David R. Atchison, commander of the state's Third Division, held this rank and was in charge of the Mormon operation until he was relieved of his command by Governor Boggs on 26 October 1838. At that time, Samuel D. Lucas, major-general of the Fourth Division, assumed temporary command, and it was he who brought about the Mormon surrender at Far West. Atchison's replacement was actually Major-General John B. Clark of the First Division from Howard County. Clark was ill at the time of his call-up and did not arrive at Far West until 4 November, four days after the Mormon surrender. He remained in charge until 29 November when the preliminary hearing against the Mormon defendants, presided over by Judge Austin A. King, concluded.

Parks participated in four operations during the Mormon conflict. His first call-out came in mid-September 1838, when four companies under his charge, along with four companies under the leadership of Alexander W. Doniphan from Clay County, were ordered to march to Daviess County to establish and maintain order following several outbreaks by local vigilantes against the Mormons. This military action, which came under the overall command of Major-General David R. Atchison, was quickly put down, after which Parks was ordered to remain in Daviess County with a hundred men to ensure that peace between the two groups would be maintained.²

With his peacekeeping force stationed in Daviess, beginning on 1 October, Missouri miscreants laid siege to the Mormon community of De Witt in Carroll County. In response to this outbreak, Parks was ordered to leave Daviess County and take two companies of Ray militia and march to the scene, marking his participation in a second operation. The detachment arrived on 6 October and camped five miles from De Witt. The following day, he addressed a letter to General Atchison and reported the current state

of affairs. In assessing the situation, Parks perceived that the Mormons had acted on the defensive and were determined to hold out. On the other hand, he expected the vigilante force would increase in size and would not leave the Mormons alone until they were out of the county. Believing the stand-off was bound to continue unless more necessary measures were taken, Parks wrote a letter to Atchison requesting that Atchison use his influence to persuade Governor Boggs to come to De Witt. "It would relieve me much if you would request the Governor to make his appearance here among the Carroll boys," he wrote. "He need not order out any forces, those already ordered by me I deem sufficient. You know a word from his Excellency would have more power to quell this affair than a regiment."³ Atchison wrote Boggs as Parks requested, but the message fell on deaf ears.⁴ Meanwhile, the Mormons were hopeful that the presence of the militia under Parks would be able to restore order. However, the Ray general informed the Mormons that the greater part of his men had mutinied and were mobocratic.⁵ Because his troops could not be depended upon to enforce the law or defend the Mormons, he proposed withdrawing his two companies for fear they would join the mob.⁶ In the end, Carroll County regulators gained the upper hand and demanded nothing less than the complete removal of the Latter-day Saints from the community. On 10 October, the Mormons agreed to surrender and evacuated the community the following day.

Following the removal of the Saints from Carroll County, Missouri vigilantes immediately recommenced hostile operations against the Mormons in Daviess County in an attempt to try once again to bring about their removal from that region. Faced with the fact that state troops would neither intercede nor take assertive action against the vigilante forces then operating, beginning in mid-October, the Latter-day Saints conducted their own operations against the local citizens. On 16 October, Parks and several members of his brigade staff traveled to Far West where they met with Sidney Rigdon. (Before his arrival at Far West, Parks had dismissed his own brigade and allowed them to return home on account of the bad weather.) Following his meeting with Rigdon, the field general and his staff proceeded on to Daviess County to examine the state of affairs there. Two days later, he arrived at Adam-ondi-Ahman and observed the entire community in a state of alarm with several hundred men under arms. His stay in the community lasted only long enough to converse with Mormon leaders and to ascertain the community's military posture as well as the attitude of the Mormon citizens whom he later indicated were "determined to stand and die, rather than be driven from that place." He then returned to Richmond, marking the third time he had been involved in military operations during the Mormon conflict.

In Richmond, Parks wrote a report to General Atchison relating observations of the present state of affairs. Parks informed his superior that he did not know how to allay the situation but that he believed a call-out of the state militia would not help restore peace.⁷

The governor's 27 October executive order calling for the removal of the Mormons reactivated the Ray militia for the final time. The Ray commander and his brigade marched to Caldwell County where they made up approximately four hundred of the twenty-five hundred state troops who were present when General Samuel D. Lucas negotiated the Mormon surrender on 1 November.⁸ Lucas then dispatched Parks and a portion of his brigade along with two other companies to travel to Adam-ondi-Ahman with instructions to disarm the Mormons.⁹ Parks did not immediately execute that order. Instead, he waited some distance north of Far West until Major-General John B. Clark arrived and took command. On 7 November, Clark authorized Robert Wilson of the First Division to march to Daviess County to carry out the Mormon surrender at Adam-ondi-Ahman.¹⁰ It was at this time that Parks and his contingent joined Wilson in this operation, which surrender took place two days later on 9 November. Unlike the Saints in Caldwell County who were given until spring to leave, the Mormons inhabiting Daviess County were required to leave the county within ten days.¹¹ By 20 November, the withdrawal from the county was complete, with most Mormon families seeking temporary refuge in Caldwell County. Following the evacuation, Wilson, Parks, and the men under their command were relieved of their duties and returned to their homes.

Parks apparently remained in Missouri through most of the 1840s, then emigrated to northern California in the 1849 gold rush where he settled in Sonoma County.¹² His name could not be found in the 1850 or 1860 U. S. Federal Census of California, but he does appear in the censuses conducted in 1870 and 1880. From the information extracted in these two enumerations, Parks was born around 1806-07, making him about thirty-two or thirty-three years old, and still unmarried at the time of the Mormon War. Around 1854-55 he married an Irish immigrant woman by the name of Louise, twenty-three years his junior. The couple had two children. By 1880 he was divorced and confined to the Sonoma County hospital for an undisclosed illness.¹³ He probably died a short time thereafter.

James Sloan

James Sloan, to whom Parks addressed the letter, was born to Alexander Sloan and Ann Marshall on 28 October 1792 in Tyrone, Ireland. It is not known when he joined the LDS Church, but he received a patriarchal bless-

ing under the hand of Joseph Smith Sr. in Portage, Ohio, in 1838. In February of that same year, he was ordained a high priest, and later (probably May or June) his family moved to Missouri, settling in the vicinity of Adam-ondi-Ahman in Daviess County where he secured property. At that time, his household consisted of his wife and four daughters. Following the Mormon surrender, he moved his family to Caldwell County, where he spent the winter of 1838–39. During his stay there, he visited Joseph Smith and the other Mormon prisoners in Liberty Jail on several occasions. Like the majority of the Missouri Saints, the Sloan family sought temporary refuge in Quincy, Illinois. The family did not move to Nauvoo until sometime after 17 March 1840, since Sloan swore out an affidavit in Quincy on that date. He played a prominent role in the Nauvoo community where he was appointed Nauvoo city recorder and later became secretary of the Nauvoo Legion. In 1843, he and his wife served a mission to Ireland. Upon his return, he subsequently immigrated to the Salt Lake Valley where he died a faithful member of the Church. His death date and location are not known.¹⁴

Background of the Letter

It cannot be ascertained when Hiram G. Parks and James Sloan came to know each other. As indicated, Parks spent some time in the vicinity of Adam-ondi-Ahman—about two weeks—in mid to late September 1838 and about another ten days during the course of the Mormon surrender and evacuation period in mid-November. It is likely that it was on one, or both, of these occasions that he struck up a friendship with Sloan and his family.

In the letter, Parks indicates that Sloan had written him on two earlier occasions with the hopes of trying to get his gun back, which he had turned over at the time of the Mormon surrender at Adam-ondi-Ahman. In his reply, Parks states that he had turned weapons over to General John B. Clark, who took them to Richmond where they were being held. Parks' reply also shows his awareness that during the 1839 session of the state legislature, the assembly had agreed to return the Mormon-owned weapons on the condition that the Mormons could prove ownership. This, however, would have been very difficult for most Latter-day Saints to do because individuals like Sloan, who at the time was residing in Quincy, Illinois, would have had to travel from western Illinois to Richmond, a distance of about 175 miles (350 miles round trip), to try to get their weapons back. This travel hardship was what Sloan was trying to get around. He wanted his gun back but did not want to travel to Richmond, so he was asking his Missouri friend, Parks, to do what he could to get it for him. The letter shows that Parks was dissatisfied with how the Mormons were treated by state officials, particularly

Boggs. Furthermore, it demonstrates that he did everything he could to help Sloan recover his weapon, even to the point of writing a personal letter to Governor Boggs to ask him what should be done with the Mormon arms, as they were just being stored and were going unclaimed.

The last two paragraphs of the letter, although brief, reveal the warmth and friendship Parks held toward Sloan and his family. It even discloses that before the Mormons left the state, Parks had taken some personal interest in Mary Jane Sloan, the twenty-year-old daughter of James and his wife Mary, having provided her with a cow and a calf, which he indicates at one time belonged to him. If Parks was indeed not married at the time, the tone of the letter and the fact that he asks if Mary Jane was married or not suggest that he had more than just a passing interest in her. Finally, his closing words, "Give my Respects to all my enquiring friends," acknowledge that he had made other acquaintances among the Latter-day Saints. The letter, dated 30 December 1839, is located in the Church Archives, Family and Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. The spelling and punctuation have been retained. Brackets indicate editorial insertions.

Richmond Dec 30th 1839

Dear Sir

I have received 2 letters from you since I last seen [saw] you on the subject of your gun but have delayed answering them untill I co[u]ld learn of the Governor what disposition he would make of the guns surrendered by your people¹⁵ Shortly after the rise of the Genl assembly last spring he (the governor) directed his Aiddecamp¹⁶ Mr. W. C. Williams¹⁷ of this place to let the Mormons have there guns by swearing to them besides doing this they had to pay the Justice of the Peace his fees and Mr. Williams fifty Cents on each gun for his tro[u]ble of handing them out to this rule of his I have demonstrated time after time but all to [no] purpose I have no doubt but that your gun is here¹⁸ but here but it can not be drawn unless you swear here or some one for you to prove the gun [was] the gun that was surrendered to me at Adam ondiamon [which] I delivered to Maj Genl John B. Clark at Far West who had the command of all the military forces at that time I am verry sorry for such a state of things to exist in the state in which I live but it is not less true that the Governor has holy [wholly] disregarded the¹⁹ treaty made with your people and by the officers commanding the forces sent against you at that time [p. 2] I have written to the Governor a few days [ago] ~~in relation~~ to know what he intends to do in relation to the ballance of²⁰ the guns yet

at this place and so [as] soon as I receive an answer from him I will write to you and if I can be of any service to you in processing your gun I will certainly do so.

I would be glad to here how your family are and how they are satisfide with their new home tell Mary Jane²¹ that I would be glad if²² she would send that cow & calf that I own of hers tell her to write to me and let me know how she is doing and if she is married or expects to be in a short time tell Mrs. Sloan²³ that I would be glad to see her

Write to me on the receipt [of] this Give my Respects to all my enquiring frends and except [accept] for yourself my best wishes for your future welfare

I am yours Respectfully

H. G. Parks

[*front of letter, not franked*]
Quincy Illinois
Richmond MO
January 8 1840

James Sloan Esq

Providence Dec 30th 1837

Dear Sir

I have received 3 letters from you since I last saw you on the subject of your men but have delayed answering them until I had seen of the Governor's disposition he would smother of the men surrendered by your people shortly after the rise of the land although last spring he (the Governor) directed his Adjutant General Mr. B. Williams of this place to let the Mormons have their guns by allowing to them besides doing this they had to pay the Justice of the Peace his fees and Mr. Williams fifty cents or each gun for his trouble of handing them over to this State of his I have remonstrated time after time but all to purpose I have no doubt but that your gun is here but it cannot be drawn out if you were here or some one for you to prove the gun the guns that was surrendered to me at Adam on a manner I believe the Key Genl John W. Clark at Fort West who had the command of all the military forces at that time I am very sorry for such a state of things to exist in the State in which I live but it is no less true that the Governor has fully disregarded the treaty made with your people and by the officers commanding the forces Genl against you at that time

Notes

1. Edward Stevenson, "The Life and History of Elder Edward Stevenson," holograph (copy), 90, L. Tom Perry, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. B. H. Roberts is one who portrayed Hiram G. Parks in a negative light. See Chapter 34, "Armed Hostilities in Caldwell and Surrounding Counties—The Treachery of General Parks—'Dismounting' of General David R. Atchison," in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Corporation of the President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), 1:445–67, see particularly 456–61.

2. See David R. Atchison to Lilburn W. Boggs, 12 September 1838, and David R. Atchison to Lilburn W. Boggs, 20 September 1838, in *Document Containing the Correspondence, Orders, &C. in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; And the Evidence Given Before the Hon. Austin A. King, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the State of Missouri, at the Court-House in Richmond, in a Criminal Court of Inquiry, Begun November 12, 1838, on the Trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and Others, for High Treason and Other Crimes Against the State* (Fayette, Missouri: Boon's Lick Democrat, 1841), 19, 27 (hereafter cited as *Document*). See also Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 3:81–82 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

3. Hiram G. Parks to David R. Atchison, 7 October 1838, in *Document*, 37–38; also in *History of the Church*, 3:155–56.

4. David R. Atchison to Lilburn W. Boggs, 9 October 1838, in *Document*, 38.

5. See Henry Root and John Murdock sworn affidavits in Clark V. Johnson, ed., *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 332, 504 (hereafter cited as *Mormon Redress Petitions*).

6. *History of the Church*, 3:158.

7. Hiram G. Parks to David R. Atchison, 21 October 1838, in *Document*, 47.

8. Lilburn W. Boggs to John B. Clark, 27 October 1838, in *Document*, 61.

9. Samuel D. Lucas to Lilburn W. Boggs, 2 November 1838, in *Document*, 72–75.

10. John B. Clark to Robert Wilson, 7 November 1838, in *Document*, 86. See also John B. Clark to Lilburn W. Boggs, 10 November 1838, in *Document*, 66; and John B. Clark to Lilburn W. Boggs, 29 November 1838, in *Document*, 90.

11. *History of the Church*, 3:207.

12. Parks could not be found in the 1840 U. S. Federal Census for Ray County, Missouri. It is assumed that he was not counted, or he may have moved to another county in the state. However, his move to California can be documented. In Robert D. Parmelee, *Pioneer Sonoma*, he indicates that in 1867 an organization called the Society of California Pioneers for the District Composed of Sonoma, Napa, Marin, Mendocino, and Lake Counties was founded in Petaluma, California. The society was composed of men who had arrived in northern California prior to 9 September 1850 (statehood day). Parmelee writes, "A recap shows that membership was about divided in half among Americans and foreign born, most of the Americans . . . coming from New York and Missouri. . . . Seventy percent wrote that they were farmers, although merchants and carpenters, physicians, and teamsters, and other trades and skills were represented. H. G. Parks, a Sonoma 49er, merely listed his occupation as 'gentleman.'" Robert D. Parmelee, *Pioneer Sonoma* (Sonoma, California: The Sonoma Valley Historical Society, 1972), 108–10. I am indebted to Christopher T. Jones for helping me find this reference.

13. The biographical material on Hiram G. Parks was extrapolated from the 1870

and 1880 U. S. Federal Censuses. A man identified as H. G. Parks appears in the 1860 census, but the data given clearly indicates he was not the same person as the Hiram G. Parks listed in the two later censuses.

14. Information about James Sloan was obtained from Andrew Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History, 1901–36), 1:254; and Susan Easton Black, *Membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1848*, 50 vols. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 39:590–91 (hereafter cited as *Membership*). Information was also obtained from a sworn affidavit and a written statement given by Sloan in Quincy on 17 March 1840. See Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions*, 340–41, 711; also *History of the Church*, 4:69.

15. As part of the conditions of surrender, the Mormons were required “To give up the arms of every description to be receipted for.” Samuel D. Lucas to Lilburn W. Boggs, 2 November 1838, in *Document*, 73. Approximately 630 guns were confiscated by the state militia at Far West, not including pistols. See John P. Greene, *Facts Relative to the Expulsion of the Mormons or Latter-day Saints from the State of Missouri, Under the “Exterminating Order”* (Cincinnati: R. P. Brooks, 1839), 15 (hereafter cited as *Facts Relative to the Expulsion of the Mormons*). An additional 150 weapons were surrendered by the Mormons at Adam-ondi-Ahman. See John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints (Commonly Called Mormons, Including an Account of their Doctrine and Discipline, with the Reasons of the Author for Leaving the Church* (St. Louis: n.p., 1839), 42–43. In *Mormon Redress Petitions*, over forty petitioners specifically listed the guns taken from their possession and then indicated each gun’s approximate value. The estimated value ranged from \$8 to \$40, with \$20 being the amount most frequently given. If we work with this figure, the approximate value of the total number of weapons turned over by the Mormons at Far West and Adam-ondi-Ahman (780 total) would have been around \$15,600. This is in line with John P. Greene’s estimate of \$12,000 to \$15,000, although he was not including the weapons confiscated at Adam-ondi-Ahman. Greene, *Facts Relative to the Expulsion of the Mormons*, 15.

16. An aide-de-camp was an officer whose duty was to receive and communicate orders of a general officer. In this case, the officer was Governor Boggs, who served as commander and chief of the state militia. In the Missouri militia, an aide-de-camp also held the rank of major.

17. The individual referred to is Wiley C. Williams, who, as Parks mentions, was also from Ray County. Williams was the messenger who brought word to Governor Lilburn W. Boggs of the Battle of Crooked River, which occurred on 24–25 October 1838 in northern Ray County and which led him to issue the extermination order. See Lilburn W. Boggs to John B. Clark, in *Document*, 61.

18. In 1837–38, six hundred Missouri militiamen were called out by President Martin Van Buren to fight in an uprising in Florida by the Seminole Indians. Upon their return, a public arsenal was established at Richmond to house some of the government weapons issued to the Missouri troops. The Mormon weapons were probably being kept at the arsenal.

19. The word *the* is repeated twice in the manuscript.

20. The word *of* is repeated twice in the manuscript.

21. Mary Jane (also Maryjane) Sloan was born on 13 February 1819. As noted in the text, she would have been twenty years old at the time. Black, *Membership*, 39:593.

22. The word *if* is repeated twice in the manuscript.

23. Mary Magill was born 1 August 1801 in Cove, Ireland. Black, *Membership*, 29:118.