

# Introduction: They Gathered to Zion, 1846-1869

*William G. Hartley*

When the Latter-day Saints left Nauvoo in 1846, the routes they chose for their westward journey were mostly along existing roads—they blazed few miles of new trail themselves. Nevertheless, the general route President Brigham Young’s contingents followed now is known as the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

During the Mormon Trail’s twenty-three-year lifetime, 1846 to 1868, an estimated sixty thousand to seventy thousand Latter-day Saints followed it to “gather to Zion” in Utah. (By comparison, three hundred thousand emigrants went to California and Oregon on the overland trails.) Each year, an average of fourteen LDS companies traveled westbound on the Mormon Trail (or variants), comprised of close to ten thousand covered wagons in total. The average wagon train travel time to Utah from the Missouri River outfitting points was ten to twelve weeks. Ox teams moved at about two miles per hour, so wagons covered an average of twelve to fourteen miles per day. In addition to wagon companies, ten handcart brigades moved about three thousand Saints to Utah between 1856 and 1860.<sup>1</sup>

Many thousands of those traveling with the wagon trains and handcarts did so only after coming from Europe and crossing the vast Atlantic Ocean. Between 1847 and 1868, an estimated 127 ship voyages, sponsored by the LDS

---

WILLIAM G. HARTLEY is an associate professor of history at Brigham Young University and research historian for the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History. He is currently writing a booklength study of the stages, processes, routes, and migration of people involved in Nauvoo Exodus. He is co-editor with Susan Easton Black of *The Iowa Mormon Trail* and author of a prizewinning biography, *My Best for the Kingdom: History and Autobiography of John Lowe Butler, a Mormon Frontiersman*. He was founding president of the Mormon Trails Association and currently is on the executive board of editors for the *Journal of Mormon History*.

Church, carried convert-emigrants from Europe—mostly from Liverpool—to “the States.” Voyages by sailing ships from Liverpool to New Orleans averaged fifty-four days at sea. When New York became the Church’s new arrival port of preference, starting in 1855, the Atlantic crossing time was reduced to an average of thirty-five days. (When the Church switched from using sailing ships to steamers, starting about 1868, the crossing time fell to an average of but eleven days.)<sup>2</sup>

Such statistics demonstrate that the Latter-day Saint “gathering to Zion” was numerically massive, physically taxing, and financially challenging. But time and energy and money costs are subordinate realities in the story of “the gathering.” Fundamentally, “they gathered to Zion” because of religious convictions and spiritual strength. For nineteenth-century LDS converts, there were five—not four—“first principles and ordinances of the gospel.” After faith, repentance, baptism, and the reception of the Holy Ghost, the fifth principle—could it be called an ordinance?—was to gather to Zion. Masses of converts obeyed and migrated.

As historians continue to study various aspects of the impressive LDS “saga of the gathering,” new insights and understandings continue to emerge. This issue of the *Nauvoo Journal* publishes seven papers offering an array of new findings and perspectives. These papers were presented at a history conference held last September at Brigham Young University. The conference was built around the theme, “They Gathered to Zion, 1846-1869: A Sesquicentennial Symposium.”

During 1996, the Mormon Trail Wagon Train, community celebrations in Nebraska and Wyoming and Utah, videos, musicals, and service projects dominated the commemorations honoring the Mormon Pioneers’ sesquicentennial. In addition, for serious students of LDS history, two major history conferences that year dealt with aspects of the Mormon Trail, LDS migration, and the gathering to Zion. The first conference took place in late May when 350 historians and history buffs gathered at Omaha (twenty minutes from Winter Quarters) for the Mormon History Association’s annual convention. Of the sixty papers and presentations offered there, more than a third dealt with the Mormon Trail, the LDS migration, or “the gathering” themes.

The second major conference was the “They Gathered to Zion” symposium. There, historians repeated some of the Omaha papers or presented new ones to an even-larger audience than at Omaha. Cosponsors of the symposium were the Mormon History Association and six BYU units: the Smith Institute for Church History, Department of Church History and Doctrine, History Department, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, the Religious Studies Center, and the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences.

Along with Dr. Craig Ostler of the Department of Church History and Doctrine, I cochaired that event. Afterwards, my colleagues and I at the Smith

Institute felt that a collection of the symposium's papers ought to be published. Therefore, we were pleased when Maurine Ward and the editorial board of the *Nauwoo Journal* agreed to our proposal that this issue feature some of the symposium papers.

What follows are seven of the symposium's history essays, ones that author interest and *Nauwoo Journal* space limitations have allowed us to include.

Elder John Carmack, a member of the First Quorum of Seventy, currently serves as Assistant LDS Church Historian. He led off the symposium with a comparison of the leadership styles of Elder Sam Brannan in California and President Brigham Young. Elder Carmack received a law degree at UCLA, became president of a law firm in Los Angeles, and lived in and provided Church leadership in southern California. In 1984, while president of the Idaho Boise Mission, he was called to the First Quorum of the Seventy. Appropriately, Elder Carmack's symposium address, "California: What Went Right and What Went Wrong," is our lead article.

Pennsylvanian Thomas L. Kane became Mormonism's "sentinel in the East." A non-Mormon friend to the Saints, he wielded useful influence in their behalf among government leaders in Washington, D.C. Mark Sawin, graduate student in American Civilization at the University of Texas at Austin, presented an essay about Kane, "A Sentinel for the Saints: Thomas Leiper Kane and the Mormon Migration." Based on newly available records, his article proffers a new look at this important friend and supporter of the Saints during their trek west and during the colonizing period.

Although the term "unfurled" is familiar, "furled" is not. Obviously, a banner is not unfurled unless it is furled. Dr. Richard Bennett makes that imagery part of his theme in his article, "The Star-Spangled Banner Forever Be Furled: The Mormon Exodus as Liberty." He discusses the Saints' troubled-but-liberating feelings about leaving "the States" and the American Republic to head into non-U.S. territory in the West. Dr. Bennett was the archivist at the University of Manitoba and is author of the history of the Saints at Winter Quarters (*"And Should We Die": Mormons at the Missouri*). Recently, Richard was appointed to the faculty in BYU's Department of Church History and Doctrine.

When New York City became the arrival port for LDS-chartered sailing ships starting in 1855, the passengers disembarked and proceeded into Castle Gardens, the city's spacious immigrant depot, to be processed into the country. Don Smith, in "Castle Garden, the Emigrant Receiving Station in New York Harbor," draws from LDS immigrants' life writings that tell about their Castle Garden experiences and from secondary literature to provide a solid understanding of that entry point's central role in much of LDS migration history. Don Smith is an orthodontist in Pullman, Washington. He is completing a definitive book-length study of the Willie Handcart Company.

Those who heard the fascinating presentations by Audrey Godfrey and John

Nealon gained several new insights into the relationship between travel modes and water realities along the Mormon Trail. Audrey Godfrey's paper, "All Are Safely Across," deals with how the Saints crossed rivers and streams. That is, she shows what was required in terms of equipment and procedures to ford and ferry people, animals, and wagons across. Audrey has edited and authored several books and articles dealing with women and families during the westward migration and in early Utah.

In a path-breaking type of Mormon history-related study, John Nealon, P.E., a civil and hydrology engineer, provides a fascinating scientific explanation of the unique water and land forms the Saints encountered while crossing Iowa and Nebraska—eastern Iowa's series of deep-channeled rivers and creeks flowing southeasterly; the early-1846 season of rain and mud; unique and strange bluffs in the Council Bluffs and Omaha area; and the strange "upside-down" Platte River that flows under the riverbed more than on top of it. John's study is titled "Morning Fair, Roads Bad': Geology, Topography, Hydrology, and Weather on the Iowa and Nebraska Mormon Trails, 1846-1847." John is a registered professional civil engineer in Nebraska, with expertise in civil and in geological engineering, particularly relating to the soils and water courses in Nebraska and western Iowa. He is founder and team leader of the Mormon Trail Earth Sciences Team. Currently, he is a project geotechnical engineer with Dames & Moore in Phoenix, Arizona.

Our final article is Mel Bashore's symposium paper, now titled "New Mormon Emigration Finding Aids: The Compiler's Personal Experiences." Mel is a reference consultant at the LDS Church Historical Department. For years, researchers have used and praised the guides Mel and the LDS Church Historical Department have produced—and which he constantly updates. In a fat binder and on his massive computer databases, he has compiled lists of first-hand travel accounts of specific LDS wagon trains and of individual LDS-chartered ships. The wagon trains are listed by year and then alphabetically by the wagon captain's name. The ships are listed alphabetically by ship name. Many of the sources on his list include summaries of what they contain. Anyone needing to find an account about a particular wagon train or ship, or about LDS travels in general, must consult Mel's priceless guides. His article explains what these finding aids are and then shares his personal experiences in using accounts identified on his lists.

We appreciate Marilyn Parks Rich for helping to recruit and round up the essays and Ted Stoddard and Maurine Ward for copyediting.

### Notes

1. A rich resource book of facts and literature about the Mormon Trail is Stanley B. Kimball, *Historic Resource Study: The Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Interior/National Parks Service, 1991).

2. Conway B. Sonne, *Saints on the Seas: A Maritime History of Mormon Migration, 1830-1890* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), 69, 115.