

The Sacrifice of a Mother

Maurine Carr Ward

It has been said that a sacrifice without a price is meaningless. Today, I wish to speak of a mother's sacrifice.

It was in 1836 when the Richards family¹ in Richmond, Massachusetts, heard about the restored Church of Christ. Newly converted Brigham Young had introduced the Church to his first cousins. Phinehas, Willard, and Levi Richards, along with their sisters Rhoda, Nancy, and Hepzibah, immediately embraced the new teachings. Their parents and brothers Joseph and William rejected their supposed radical ideas, as did Nancy's husband and Phinehas's wife, Wealthy Dewey Richards.

Wealthy watched in horror and sorrow as her husband, Phinehas, and her children all became increasingly interested in Mormonism. In an attempt to investigate the Church more fully, Phinehas, Levi, Willard, Hepsy, and Wealthy's fourteen-year-old son, George Spencer, departed for Kirtland. There, in 1837, Phinehas and George were baptized.

That fall, Phinehas returned to the East, carrying the gospel message back to his extended and immediate families, leaving George with Levi and Hepsy. Although Phinehas was able to baptize his three older children and other family members, his dear wife was still not converted.

When the Saints in Kirtland left for Far West, Missouri, young George accompanied Levi and Hepsy, who settled on Shoal Creek. They were part of the thirty or forty LDS families living in covered wagons and tents and a few

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cabins surrounding Jacob Haun's mill. There, on 30 September 1838, Hepsy Richards, forty-two years old, artist, and college trained, died of ague and was put to rest, mercifully escaping the destruction that would come exactly one month later. At that time, amid threats from the Missourians and later a declaration from Governor Boggs, the small group of Mormons had gathered around Haun's Mill for protection and support.

Tuesday, 30 October, was a beautiful autumn day at the mill.² We are told that a mild breeze rustled through the gold and crimson leaves and corn in the fields. Laughter rang through the air as children played along the banks of Shoal Creek and around the mill pond. The women and older daughters were preparing the evening meal. South of the creek, a man and small child sat in the doorway of a cabin; behind the cabin, clean laundry danced on the line. Several of the men were busy digging a well next to the building being used as the blacksmith shop. The idyllic setting, however, did not erase the uneasiness of the settlers.

At four o'clock that afternoon, over two hundred men rode up to the mill. There was a single shot, a pause, and then a hundred guns at once mowed down the defenseless Mormons. Five minutes later, with seventeen men and boys dead or critically injured, these heinous men robbed and plundered the homes, wagons, and tents of bedding and clothes, drove off the horses and wagons, and even stripped clothing from the dead men.

Phinehas Richards was in Holliston, Massachusetts, when he received word that his son George Spencer had been murdered at Haun's Mill.³ Phinehas immediately wrote to Wealthy with the terrible news, followed by these poetic words:⁴

George, strong in faith, is gone.
An early Martyr in the cause of Zion
(Though Babylon Rage).
Lay not this thing too much at heart,
But trust in Christ alone,
And realize that God is right,
In taking of our son.

Oh, the sacrifice of a mother—to lose a promising son to a cause in which she did not believe. Why could not George have been laid to rest beside her first three infant children instead of being lowered into an unfinished well? However, in her grieving, the Lord blessed her with two things: a comforted heart and a believing heart. Soon, she entered the waters of baptism and united her family in strength.

Wealthy, in Richmond, was spared the sight of her son, lifeless, on that terrible day. But what of the sacrifice of another mother, Amanda Barnes Smith?⁵ Can you imagine Amanda grabbing her daughters as the firing began? Imagine

her searching frantically for her sons as she pulled the little girls down the bank, across the plank atop the mill pond, and up the hill on the other side. With bullets whistling past them, this mother reached the safety of some bushes and held



Massacre of Mormons at Haun's Mill
Courtesy of LDS Historical Department Archives

those little girls tightly to her bosom as the sun slowly set in the west. Throughout the dark, sleepless night, she knew not the future of her family.

At sunrise the next morning, Amanda joined the others as they carefully returned to the mill. There, she found her husband dead, as was her son Sardis, the entire top of his head blown away. Seven-year-old Alma had been thrown on the pile of dead bodies but miraculously was still alive, although the entire ball and socket of his left hip had been shot away. Oh, the sacrifice of this brave mother, who was not allowed the privilege of grieving for her dead. "I could not weep then," she remembered. "The fountain of tears was dry; the heart overburdened with its calamity, and all the mother's sense absorbed in its anxiety for the precious boy which God alone could save by his miraculous aid."

Oh, the sacrifice of that mother, who would not leave when ordered to by the mobsters but stayed behind to comfort and provide for her son. When told that she would be killed if she continued to pray aloud, she resorted to praying in silence. Finally, she could bear it no longer; and she crept into a cornfield, where she crawled into a shock of cut corn. There she prayed aloud until her "soul felt satisfied." Then, although no one was in sight, Amanda heard these words:

That soul who on Jesus hath leaned for repose
 I cannot—I will not desert to its foes.
 That soul, 'tho all hell should endeavor to shake,
 I'll never, no never, no never forsake.⁶



Nancy Jane Hammer
 Photo courtesy of Alzina Egbert

What about the sacrifice of another mother? Nancy Jane Hammer's husband, Austin, was one of those murdered at Haun's Mill.⁷ With others, he had retreated into the blacksmith shop, only to be shot with seven balls. Both thigh bones were broken by the shots. In this painful situation, he was dragged brutally into the yard where his new boots were ripped from his feet. He was carried into Jacob Haun's cabin. Only death about midnight released him from horrible pain.

Nancy Jane would not see her husband again. By the time she got to the mill the next morning, the dead had all been buried in the well. However, the sight of the bloody floor and bullet holes in the blacksmith shop attested to the carnage of the previous night and would remain etched forever in her mind. Three weeks after the massacre, Nancy Jane was given ten days to leave the area. This thirty-two-year-old mother had six children to evacuate using one wagon and one blind horse. She was able to trade the wagon for two horses and a light one-horse wagon. Into this small wagon she put bedding, clothes, corn meal, and other scanty provisions and set out in the cold. She and one daughter were the only ones with shoes; her other children went barefoot or wrapped their feet in rags as they walked across frosty, wet, or snowy ground toward Illinois.

According to her son:

My mother seemed endowed with great fortitude and resolution, and appeared to be inspired to devise ways and plans whereby she could administer comforts to her suffering children and keep them in good spirits. Her faith and confidence had ever been great in the Lord; but now that all this care and responsibility came upon her shoulders, with no husband to lean upon, she felt indeed that God was her greatest and best friend.

Wealthy Dewey Richards did not personally experience the trauma of Haun's Mill, as did Amanda and Nancy Jane, but the death of her young son was very real. Her sacrifice did not end with her son's violent murder, either. In April 1846, Wealthy left Nauvoo, crossing Iowa with most of her family. Her sixteen-

year-old son, Joseph William, accompanied the Mormon Battalion because Uncle Willard said he must go. Too young to enlist, he went as a drummer for Company A. Joseph died in Pueblo where he had been sent with the sick camp. Wealthy lost a premature grandson, buried at Mt. Pisgah. Her three-year-old namesake and granddaughter died at Cutler's Park. Her son's young, plural wife died at Winter Quarters. When son Samuel contracted smallpox while serving a mission in Scotland, Wealthy cried, "Must I lose all of my sons." Thankfully, he survived.

Last year, the theme for the Daughters of Utah Pioneers was, "Our heritage binds us together." As I stand in this sacred land, I feel a kinship, not only to my dear great-great-great-grandmother, Wealthy, but to Amanda and Nancy Jane and all the other mothers who paid such a dear price with their sacrifices—because I am a mother also. I am proud and honored to be here today to represent them.

Notes

1. Information on the family of Phinehas and Wealthy Dewey Richards, as well as other members of the Richards' family is found in Joseph Grant Stevenson, comp., *Richards Family History*, 3 vol., (Provo: Stevenson Genealogical Center, 1977-1991). Specifically, see "Phinehas Richards" by Dorothy Streeper in *Richards Family History*, 1:110-266.

2. Secondary literature dealing exclusively with the Haun's Mill episode include Alexander L. Baugh, "The Haun's Mill Massacre and the Extermination Order of Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs," *Religious Studies Center Newsletter* 12 (September 1997): 1-5; Baugh, "A Rare Account of the Haun's Mill Massacre: The Reminiscence of Willard Gilbert Smith," *Missouri Mormon Frontier Foundation Newsletter* 18/19 (Summer/Fall 1998): 1-4; Alvin K. Benson, "The Haun's Mill Massacre: Some Examples of Tragedy and Superior Faith," *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Missouri*, 105-18; Alma R. Blair, "The Haun's Mill Massacre," *BYU Studies* 13 (Autumn 1972): 62-67; Blair, "The Haun's Mill Massacre," *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action* 2 (Summer 1972): 503-07; Blair, "The Haun's Mill Massacre," in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed. *Encyclopedia of Mormonism: The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. 5 Vols. (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1992), 1:577; S. A. Burgess, "The Massacre at Haun's Mill," *Saints' Herald* 88 (9 August 1941): 1002-04; Andrew Jenson, "Haun's Mill Massacre," *The Historical Record* 7 (December 1888): 671-84; and Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 162-68. Additional non-published studies of the massacre include Leland H. Gentry, "The Haun's Mill Massacre," A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri From 1836 to 1839 (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1965), 288-311; and Alexander L. Baugh, "The Massacre at Haun's Mill," in *A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri* (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1996), 253-98.

3. George S. Richards was killed while in the blacksmith shop where it was reported that he was shot in the head and died instantly. Baugh, "The Massacre at Haun's Mill," 425.

4. *Richards*, 1:127.

5. Several narratives about Amanda Barnes Smith experiences exist, including; Amanda Barnes Smith, "Reminiscence," in Edward W. Tullidge, *Women of Mormondom* (New York: n.p. 1877), 121-132; Emmeline B. Wells, "Amanda Smith," *Woman's*

Exponent 9 (1 April 1881): 165; (15 April 1881): 173; (1 May 1881): 181-82; (15 May 1881):189-90; and “Journal of Amanda Barnes Smith,” typescript, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 1-5.

6. “Hymn 82,” *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, Ohio: Printed by F. G. Williams & Co., 1835), 112-13, 7th stanza. Among present day Mormons the hymn is known by the title, “How Firm a Foundation,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Hymns* (Deseret Book Company, 1985) 85.

7. John Hammer, “Reminiscence,” in Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints* (Logan, Utah: The Utah Journal Co., 1888), 73.



*Site of the community surrounding Haun's Mill, near Far West, Missouri during the Commemoration on 30 October 1998
Photograph by Maurine Carr Ward*



*Haun's Mill site on Shoal Creek
Courtesy LDS Historical Archives*