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## DOORS OPENING NOW TO OLD COUNCIL BLUFF(S)

*Gail Geo. Holmes*

After almost a century and a half of entrenched anti-Mormon history, southwest Iowa is welcoming revisionism. It is socially acceptable now to talk openly and extensively about LDS history in the middle Missouri Valley.

Suddenly, newspapers on both sides of the Missouri River welcome features favorable to Mormons and to Mormon history. An Omaha college *requests* a summer session course on Mormonism.

Historical societies ask for talks on LDS history. The City of Council Bluffs hastens to offer land for a matching grant to reconstruct the 1847 Kanessville Tabernacle. A prominent non-LDS member of a historical society warmly greets me as Brother Holmes. A busy judge takes great pains to shepherd an LDS organization to non-profit status in Iowa. Service clubs schedule LDS history talks well in advance.

There is almost a "Welcome to the Club" atmosphere about the switch from cool distance to warm interest in LDS history. That warming has not been overnight, but it has come on rapidly and with increasing audience. Some of the warmest welcomers have been leaders for a number of years in persuading others to hear and accept the "new" LDS history.

What brought this mighty change of heart?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is growing and building at a remarkable rate, in the United States and abroad. Its holiday season telecasts

surprise and please non-members. Scandals among radio and television evangelists, sharply increasing street crime, and a deepening crisis in American family life make the LDS Church look like a safe haven in a troubled world. LDS emphasis on youth and family strikes a receptive public chord. The distinctively clean-cut appearance of LDS youth and adults please many non-members who see their own world falling apart. The spirit of Elijah is abroad.

The "new" Middle Missouri Valley LDS history is filled with persuasive detail. It is accompanied by "new" Indian, French and Spanish history which enhance the touristic appeal of the Greater Omaha/Council Bluffs/Bellevue area. The "new" LDS history is so intertwined with non-LDS history that it is more palatable to those whose biases tend to outrun their historical interests.

There is an economic factor to consider, also. Council Bluffs, especially, is looking for ways to fill empty store fronts and bring business back downtown. Long considered a bedroom community for the bigger, busier, more prosperous Omaha, Council Bluffs is flirting with dreams of revenue from Indian tribal-sponsored gambling casinos, riverboat gambling and with tourism.

LDS representatives have tried to spit the issue into gambling or tourism, rather than gambling and tourism. They have pointed to the collapse of Ak-Sar-Ben horse racing in Omaha with the proliferation of racing and gambling interests spreading across the Midwest. Gambling casinos and riverboats will suffer the same

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fate as community after community succumbs to the enticements of gambling operators, LDS representatives say.

Tourism, on the other hand, according to the LDS, is an industry which will show healthy growth during the foreseeable future. They point to short-term benefits, too, in the 150th anniversaries of the Mormon Trail/East in 1996 and the Mormon Trail/West in 1997. Council Bluffs and a number of southwest Iowa communities, as well as the State of Iowa, will celebrate sesquicentennials in 1996. Those celebrations are expected to bring a wave of tourists to a long-neglected area of LDS Church history. City councils, county commissioners, chambers of commerce, and concerned citizens are listening and actively responding. Their interest in gambling revenues is still high, but their growing interest in and their growing belief in the potential of tourism is encouraging.

The "new" LDS history of the middle Missouri Valley is, in fact, made up of loosely aligned fragments of original history of 1846/1853. Those fragments are looking more and more like a mosaic and less and less like broken shards of a pioneer past.

Orson Hyde's *Frontier Guardian* has been a rich source of information. The writings of Almon Babbitt and Joseph Ellis (J.E.) Johnson in the *Weekly Bugle* and in the *Omaha Arrow* have provided some useful facts. Family diaries, letters and journals have been very valuable.

The generally excellent, though sometimes misleading, *Early Days at Council Bluffs*, published in Washington, D.C. in 1916 by Charles H. Babbitt, has been helpful. Andrew Jenson's unpublished *Journal History* has been extremely valuable. Other sources too numerous to mention have helped reconstruct the map of Middle Missouri Valley with trails, towns, bridges, ferries, mills, tabernacles, Indian villages and so on.

More than 80 LDS communities have been identified and located on roughly an 80-mile square of southwest Iowa and eastern fringe of Nebraska. With only 47 branches of the Church identified in southwest Iowa, it is assumed that an average of two LDS communities shared a branch of the Church.

As detail is added to detail, the picture of LDS communities in the Middle Missouri Valley almost a

century and a half ago takes on a more attractive, appealing, intriguing color. It is no longer logical to emphasize destitution, death and apostasy.

One is struck, rather, with the industry, ingenuity and economic miracle performed by the Saints in Old Council Bluff(s). The name Council Bluffs from 1804 to 1853 meant about a 50-mile radius of Indian country on either side of the Missouri River. When the LDS virtually left in 1853, new residents of Kaneshville changed the name of the city to Council Bluffs. That robbed the district of a useful name. But changes in the area when the LDS first arrived were even more notable.

Consider the miraculous timing in 1846 of Indian land sales, making it possible for the Mormons to work a seven-year stage through Old CB. Chiefs of the Pottawattamie/Ottawa/Chippewa Indians agreed in Washington, D.C. in May 1846 to sell southwest Iowa to the federal government and move on to northeast Kansas. At almost that same time LDS refugees were entering southwest Iowa en route to the Great Salt Lake Valley.

Chiefs of the federated tribe returned to Iowa. Sale of the land to the government was formalized at tribal meetings in southwest Iowa in June and July of 1846. The relationship between the Mormons and the Indians of southwest Iowa is fairly represented by Thomas L. Kane in his 1850 address to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Kane said of the Pottawattamie/Ottawa/Chippewa:

They were pleased with the Mormons. They would have been as pleased with any whites who would not cheat them, nor sell them whiskey, nor whip them for their poor gipsy habits, nor bear themselves indecently toward their women, many of whom among the Pottawatamies, especially those of nearly unmixed French descent, are singularly comely, and some of them educated. . .

Their hospitality was sincere, almost delicate. Fanny Le Clerc, the spoiled child of the great brave, Pied Riche, interpreter of the Nation, would have the pale face Miss Devine learn duetts (cq) with her to the guitar; and the daughter of substantial Joseph La Framboise, the interpreter of the United States,--she died of the fever that summer,--welcomed all the nicest

young Mormon Kitties and Lizzies, and Jennies and Susans, to a coffee feast at her father's house, which was probably the best cabin in the river village. They made the Mormons at home, there and elsewhere. Upon all their lands they formally gave them leave to tarry just so long as should suit their own good pleasure.

Most of the approximately 2250 Pottawattamie/Ottawa/Chippewa Indians removed in 1847 to a reservation in northeast Kansas.

On the west side of the Missouri River were the Oto/Missouri and the Omaha Indian Tribes. They, too, were friendly with the Mormons. That may have been somewhat due to the fact that the highly organized and obviously well-armed Mormons grossly outnumbered them. The Oto/Missouri, combined, numbered only about 930. Whiskey fights and family feuds had split the Oto/Missouri. Roughly half lived in three villages just south of the Platte River, spaced about five miles apart. The other half lived in one village north of the Platte. It was about eight miles southwest of Bellevue in Nebraska territory.

The Omaha Indians, numbering about 1300 and living atop an oak-knolled hill about three miles west of Bellevue, had only arrived in 1845. They had fled there from about 50 miles up the Elkhorn Valley to escape marauding bands of Dakota Sioux who lived in what today is South Dakota.

Annual U.S. Indian Agency reports from Bellevue and from the little French village, Point aux poules, east across the Missouri from Bellevue, suggested great harmony between more than 80 LDS communities and about 10 Indian villages occupying the same land.

There were, of course, some untoward incidents. Hungry young Indians killed a good many cattle owned by the LDS, in spite of cautions against that from tribal chiefs. Indian chiefs governed their people by moral suasion, not by order. And it had been Indian law in Indian country for untold generations that wandering animals were fair game to the hunter.

The only reported violence occurred when two LDS men were leaving Winter Quarters by horse for the Utah Valley. They were stopped by three or four Indians with guns who demanded the horses. The LDS would not

give them up and one of the LDS was killed struggling to keep possession of his horse. The Indians fled. LDS officials demanded justice from the tribe and from the U.S. Indian Agent, but were ignored. No further violences were reported.

Another facet of LDS history in the Middle Missouri Valley which shocks Iowans is the great number of LDS in the 1846/1853 exodus, and the relatively few who fell away or dropped out of the migration. They have heard otherwise for generations from non-LDS historians.

Illinois and Utah Census figures for 1845 and 1850, compared with reports of pioneer church leaders and estimates of Thomas L. Kane, suggest the LDS migration through Iowa 1846/1853 was about 30,000. That reasonably matches the migration figures assembled between the 1890s and the 1920s by Asst. church Historian Andrew Jenson. He cautioned readers that available migration statistics did not include the many who traveled to the Great Basin with covered wagon freighting trains. Jenson estimated migration as: 2000 in 1847; 4000/1848; 3000/1849; 5000 each in 1850 and 1851; 10,000/1852; and 2600/1853. Those 31,600 were not all LDS at the beginning of the exodus. Some traveled with or were caught up with the migration and were baptized along the way. A few did not pass through Iowa, but traveled through Kansas and Colorado to join the Mormon Trail in Wyoming.

Although the 1845 Illinois Census reported only 11,057 residents in Nauvoo, historian Glen M. Leonard said the added year's growth and those living in the environs of Nauvoo would have increased the number to about 15,000 when the exodus began in 1846.

There seem to be no good figures available for the number of LDS living in southeast Iowa, or the number of those who might have joined there with the exodus from Illinois. It seems most likely that some good members of the Church hurried to Nauvoo from nearby states to join in the migration west. A measure of such movement seems unavailable.

We do believe, however, that something on the order of 3000 to 5000 Saints from other parts of the United States and Canada joined the exodus at the Missouri River. About 9000 more came by contract ships from the British Isles to New Orleans. More than 8000 of them came up the Mississippi/Missouri by steamboat to

Emigrant Landing just south of Council Point. From there many fanned out to scattered LDS communities to raise supplies, teams, wagons and equipment to go on to the Great Salt Lake Valley. Less than 1000 went by steamboat from New Orleans to Keokuk, Iowa and came across Iowa by wagon train to join the migration at the Missouri.

A spot check on the accuracy of Andrew Jenson's migration figures is available to us with the 1850 Utah Census. Keep in mind that the census was as of June 1, 1850. Therefore, the 5000 estimated migration of Saints from the Missouri Valley would almost all be missing from the Pottawattamie County, Iowa Census. But they would not have arrived in Utah to be counted in that census report either.

Jenson's migration figures for 1847, 1848 and 1849 total 9000. The Utah Census as of June 1, 1850 totaled over 11,000.

Some of those may have been of the 1846 Mormon Battalion and trailing families filtering in from Colorado and California. Some may have been from Samuel Brannon's California colony. Others may have been non-LDS drop-outs or stay-overs from the California Gold Rush or freighters caught in the census.

Working the census check against Pottawattamie County gives Jenson a better score, the 1850 Federal Census of Pottawattamie County, Iowa reported 7828 residents. Assuming about 5000 had left southwest Iowa before June 1, 1850, you would have a total of nearly 13,000 residents in Pottawattamie County early in the year. If you add to that figure to 9000 who migrated in 1847, 1848 and 1849 you have a grand total of nearly 22,000 funneling into and through the Missouri Valley communities as of 1850. Immigration to southwest Iowa did not stop. By 1853, according to Andrew Jenson's figures, we have another 17,600 going on to the Salt Lake Valley.

It is hard to justify inflated figures of how many might have dropped out of the exodus, or returned to Iowa from Utah. With totally inadequate documentation, it might be claimed that something on the order of 400 to 700 LDS dropped out of the great migration to Utah, or returned to the Missouri Valley, of a gross movement of more than 30,000 Saints. How else could the Utah immigration figures sharply out-pace the Iowa migration figures?

Closer to home, we raise once more a challenge to the claim, foot-noted in Thomas L. Kane's 1850 address to the historical Society of Pennsylvania, that 600 died in the winter of 1846/1847, at Winter Quarters. Kane wrote:

This camp was moved by the beginning of October to winter quarters on the river, where also, there was considerable sickness before the cold weather. I am furnished with something over 600 as the number of burials in the graveyard there.

There have been several unsupported elaborations used with Kane's footnote to justify that 600 figure. The geography of Winter Quarters has been expanded to include southwest Iowa. The time frame has been expanded from the winter of 1848/1849 to a greater period. It has been said that burials in the Winter Quarters Cemetery were too expensive for many, who then buried their dead elsewhere. None of these explanations properly fit Kane's quotation and the historical circumstances.

The sexton of the cemetery at Winter Quarters recorded both the Cutler's Park and the Winter Quarters deaths and burials. His hand-written report shows a total of 365 burial in the two cemeteries, which we discover are either adjacent or the same cemetery.

There is no evidence offered to support the idea that some families were forced by poverty to bury at private locations. A careful reading of journal suggests that Church leaders have not changed in spirit or empathy. When the poverty-stricken were out of food, the provident shared even when it threatened future hunger for themselves. It is not likely officers of the Church would insist on payment from the poor for burial of their dead.

The sexton's record of deaths and burials is detailed with name, age, family relationship, cause of death, place and date of birth. Not all those elements were recorded for every burial. In fact, there were 14 burials for which there is not one item entered. It is possible some families were too embarrassed to ask for a free burial and managed it themselves in the Winter Quarters Cemetery. Those lonely mounds were numbered but not recorded by the sexton.

It should be noted that the 365 recorded and unrecorded burials date from September 1846 to May of

1848. The number who died at Winter Quarters in the winter of 1846/1847 was either 67 or 70, depending on whether spring commenced March 20 or 21.

The great number of deaths supposed to have occurred among LDS living in their new southwest Iowa communities is strangely missing in available records. Certainly, there were cemeteries. There were reports of deaths, just as there were in the length and breadth of other American states and territories in 1846/1847. There is not, however, evidence of undue death and tragedy either at Winter Quarters or in southwest Iowa.

We have been so comfortable with the old death and disaster history of Winter Quarters that we have failed to trust primary documents over secondary documents.

The reputation of Brigham Young and that of the priesthood of the Church have been sacrificed as the price for pity. And public pity has availed little. Think of the unending meetings of the Twelve, devising ways of transporting, feeding and housing the 30,000. Think of the thinly clad fathers and sons who drove drafty wagons to Missouri to work or trade for food and then to coax a load of wheat, corn and salt pork back against the prevailing and sometimes sub-zero winds of Iowa and Nebraska.

If there was not an inordinate number of deaths in the Missouri Valley communities--and primary documents don't allow us to claim great numbers--we are wrong to assume the priesthood did not properly care for that mass of refugees.

Likewise, we have failed to consider the successes of the LDS in the Missouri Valley. Take the rough Mormon wagon roads mapped by federal surveyors in 1851 and 1852 and lay them down beside the mapped roads of southwest Iowa today. You find great segments of LDS roads remain after almost a century and a half.

Some city and county officials today are beginning to accept evidences that their governments were

organized by Mormon refugees almost 150 years ago. The dialogue is opened, on friendly terms. More formal steps are now being prepared.

Two non-profit organizations have been created: Pottawattamie County Mormon Trails Assn. Inc. (PCMTrails) and Kaneshville Restoration Inc. (KRi). The Trails Assn. is composed largely of non-LDS, while KRi is composed mostly of LDS. KRi has received matching grants of \$25,000 and \$100,000 from Block Family Trust in Salt Lake City. Their first objective is to reconstruct the Kaneshville Tabernacle. KRi is a research and fund raising organization. PCMTrails will direct the building, in close concert with KRi research and funding ability.

The president of PCMTrails is also secretary of KRi. Both organizations have the same treasurer. Meetings of the two organizations have been held in succession the same day at the same location.

The primary purpose of the reconstructed tabernacle is to house a family history library and to display the history of Middle Missouri Valley LDS communities, including maps. The library will list any known community businesses, branches of the Church, church officers, families and farm reports.

This will not only be of service to members of the Church today who are striving to discover their Missouri Valley roots. Many residents of the Middle Missouri Valley who are not members of the church are now asking for records of their ancestors in the Missouri Valley a century and a half ago.

Pottawattamie County Genealogical Society has shown great interest in working with or even staffing such a family history library. If that occurs, there could be quite an out-pouring of genealogical and historical information not presently available to the Church.

Thus we see that after almost a century and a half of anti-Mormon history in the old Council Bluff(s) area, doors are opening and there is a bright new spirit.