

TENSIONS BETWEEN SAINTS AND GENTILES NAUVOO, ILLINOIS

It is said that every story has more than one side. Such is the case of the sojourn of the Mormons in Hancock County, Illinois. Following are four documents, each portraying differing accounts of the conflict between members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the old-time settlers of the area.

The first account is a letter written by a Protestant minister, John H. Bruce, to his relative, the Reverend Joshua Bruce. In this account, the Reverend John Bruce painted the conditions in Nauvoo as he understood them and critically described their "misguided" doctrine.

The second letter was written by a Methodist minister, Samuel A. Prior, printed in the *Times and Seasons*, later reprinted in the *Millennial Star*. While on a self-appointed mission to learn about the Mormon people and their doctrine, he is astonished to find all of his preconceived ideas melt away. Written in the flowery language of his time, Mr. Prior's account of Nauvoo and Joseph Smith is a sharp contrast to that of Reverend Bruce.

The next document is the autobiography of Mary Gibbs Bigelow. Mary and her husband, Nahum Bigelow, and nine children were living outside Nauvoo in Camp Creek. Her account of homes being burned and the saints being abused and driven are in stark contrast to the opinions of Reverend Bruce, who laid the misdeeds at the feet of the Mormons.

The fourth article is one of two letters written by Doctor Thomas L. Barnes in 1897 to his daughter, Mrs. Miranda Haskett, describing his feelings about the Mormons in Illinois. Doctor Barnes was practicing medicine in Carthage, Illinois at the time Joseph and Hyrum Smith were martyred in the Carthage jail, and gave a vivid portrayal of the tragedy, arriving minutes after the carnage. Although he indicated in his letter that he had no respect for the Mormons and their so-called thievery, and called them vipers and the worst set of outlaws that ever congregated together, he nevertheless was repulsed at the mob action taking the lives of Joseph and Hyrum. He accused the guard of collaborating with the mob and shooting over their heads with blank cartridges in a pretense of protecting the prisoners, thus allowing the frenzied crowd to take control of the situation. The doctor also reassures his daughter in this letter that he had taken no part of the killing. Doctor Barnes also was the doctor mentioned in the diary of Mary Gibbs Bigelow. When Nahum Bigelow mistakenly shot Lieutenant Everett, who had been sent to protect the Bigelows, Doctor Barnes was called in to care for the lieutenant. Seeing the situation, the doctor told Nahum "such a man as you ought not to be at large."

Four different individuals and four varying accounts all fit together to paint different shades of the Nauvoo picture for us.