

MORMON WOMEN ON THE 1846 IOWA TRAIL

Bettie McKenzie

"I only lived because I could not die" says Jane Snyder Richards about her experiences as a Mormon in flight across Iowa in 1846. Iowa was just gathering its resources to become a state in the union that year. Settled only on its eastern slopes, it became a temporary home for the fleeing members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—men, women, and children. The Iowa experience was a terrible ordeal for them all.

The Saints, or Mormons as they came to be called, had been driven from Kirtland, Ohio, and then from northwest Missouri in the decade of the 1830s. Each time they sought to found a community in which they could live and prosper in their new faith, their neighbors rose up against them. Settling near the Mississippi River in Nauvoo in 1838 under the leadership of Joseph Smith, the Saints had seen the town grow from about a thousand Missouri refugees to become the largest community in Illinois, the home to perhaps as many as seventeen thousand of the faithful.¹

The tensions between the Latter-day Saints and their neighbors had reached new heights on 27 June 1844 when a mob killed the Mormon prophet, Joseph Smith, and his brother, Hyrum, and wounded a third leader, John Taylor, while the three were being held in the jail in Carthage, Illinois. As trouble continued, the new Mormon leadership under Brigham Young agreed to move the Church and its people west in 1846 in return for the promise of time for peaceful preparation for the journey. All during that winter, Nauvoo became a workshop for building wagons and preparing food and all things essential to take an entire community to a new Zion somewhere in the West. As the party left Nauvoo, the leadership hoped to cross Iowa and move on—perhaps even reaching a point across the mountains in 1846.

During this period of American history, adventurers and pioneering families moved west by riverboat as far as water routes could take them and then went overland by wagon, by horseback, or on foot. The Mormon exodus was unique, however, because it was the moving of an entire people—the rich, the poor, the old and young, men, women and children. All were going together as a group. Many Saints had previous experience in the flights from Kirtland or from Missouri; but, in these situations, families had fled as individuals. On the Iowa trail, they were part of a larger community.

Planning included an organization that would divide the wagons into hundreds and, within that organization, into groups of fifties and tens—each with its own leaders. Each family was to have certain minimum provisions. The Iowa trail put those plans to a test; and, after the first companies departed Nauvoo, the organizations were less and less formal.

Initial plans called for the pioneer party under Brigham Young to leave early in February to be followed later by the main body of Saints. The heightened violence against the Mormons and perhaps the fear of being left behind resulted in a rush to join the pioneer party. Often, families were not well provisioned. Wagons crossed the Mississippi to collect on Sugar Creek in Iowa where the weather turned bitterly cold. Everything seemed to hold back the starting—coping with a fire in the Nauvoo Temple, suffering the miseries of a severe snowstorm, dealing with wagons that had upset on the river, reorganizing the leadership, determining the best trail, and waiting for supplies. Finally, on 1 March, the trek was underway.

In Iowa, the pioneer company met with continued bad weather—snow, rain, mud, and swollen rivers that

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tried even the strongest Saint. The party veered southward to travel nearer the Missouri settlements where hay and other supplies could be bought. Halfway across Iowa, the leaders determined that a resting place must be found. Garden Grove was chosen for its rich meadows and nearby river. A governing body with Samuel Bent in charge was put into place, and a new community was formed. Only a short distance farther north and east, a second resting area named Mt. Pisgah was designated, named Mt. Pisgah. Here, too, a governing council was established, home sites were designated, and rough cabins were built for the weary.

On 21 May at Mt. Pisgah, William Huntington wrote, "I was appointed President over all in both temporal and spiritual affairs. Ezra Benson and C. C. Rich were to act as Presidents with me."² Brigham Young and others in the pioneer party pushed on to the Missouri, which they reached on 14 June. The decision was finally made to make a more permanent situation for the winter on the Missouri rather than to proceed across the western plains. The difficulties of moving so large a party had become apparent. Negotiations about the place for a temporary stay continued over the next several weeks. Alpheus Cutler, one of Young's lieutenants in the pioneer party, located a pleasant valley on the Nebraska side, and an agreement to allow the Mormons to remain for two years was made. As winter approached, a site closer to the river was selected; and the town called "Winter Quarters" was begun. Here, eight hundred "cabins, huts, caves and hovels" were constructed to provide a home for the Saints on their way west.³

All during that year, other groups followed the pioneer party across Iowa. Most of these stayed north of the first trail, going more directly to Mt. Pisgah and on to what is now Council Bluffs. Each party had its own travails. Wind, rain, hail, summer heat, and flies added to the problems already caused by shortages of supplies, sickness, and the inexperience of the migrants. As later parties arrived, the leadership often called for men and wagons to return to bring those still waiting on the Mississippi. Brigham Young was determined that all would be brought and that none would be left to the mercy of their enemies. This lofty goal was not fully achieved. Records do not reveal the exact numbers of those who were not able to go to the West. Many remained behind in Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. Such stories are found in local histories as anecdotal refer-

ences to Mormon families living in these areas in the years after the exodus.

This Mormon flight remains unique in American history—a forced migration of an entire religious community with all its worldly goods to an unknown place. The human toll was enormous. Diaries tell about persons of all ages being sick with the "augh"—probably malaria or fever, body aches, and nausea. Few escaped long periods of illness either en route, at one of the camps in Iowa, or at Winter Quarters. Often, just a few lines in a diary tell of the death of a mother, a father, precious babies, sons, or daughters. No statistics can measure the hardships endured by these pioneer families. The wet and cold during the winters made everything worse. Food was in such short supply that sometimes the women did not know how the next meal was to be prepared. The inevitable—malnutrition and scurvy—followed.

Both in Nauvoo and on the trail, the Latter-day Saints had one government that was both temporal and spiritual. After the death of Joseph Smith, authority was organized under Brigham Young, the senior member of the Council of Twelve Apostles. At every level in the Mormon hierarchy, men were the leaders, the planners, and the organizers. Thus, the undertaking to set out for the West was the decision of the men. Nonetheless, Mormon women, who were strong in their faith and devoted to their families, were an integral part of the community on wheels.

Many men and women kept dairies; later, thoughtful historians recorded the memories of those who survived to settle in Utah. Women's stories differed from those of the men. Women seldom mention the route planning or deal with such problems as the difficult negotiations that Young was undertaking to clear the obstacles with the Iowa government, with the federal government, or with the Indian agents. The day-to-day life of the families and their sustenance and well being were the responsibilities of the sisters.

The women, in most cases, were from families who were in trades, small businesses, or farming in the rural areas of the eastern United States. Before conversion, most had histories of religious faith in the predominant Protestant denominations of the time, such as the Presbyterian or Congregational groups. These women

were not experienced in providing and caring for a family on the move in an undeveloped frontier. They had to learn "on the job." The hostility often expressed against the Latter-day Saints by non-Mormons was an additional trial. The Iowa trail provided the learning experience for these pioneers, one that perhaps prepared them for the second leg of the journey west of the Missouri River and settlement in the wilderness of Utah.

One other situation that was new to the women as they started across Iowa was the open acknowledgment among themselves of the practice of polygamy. Polygamy was a doctrine that had been secretly taught in Nauvoo, first by Joseph Smith and later by other leaders. As the Saints prepared to leave Nauvoo and as the temple was being completed, the marriage rites, or "sealings" as they were called, could be performed in the temple. Marriages of long standing were "sealed," and also the plural marriages now being undertaken and legitimized by the brethren were also "sealed." For the first time, women felt they could publicly share this experience; and, for some, a welcome release resulted. Eliza R. Snow, at this time one of Brigham Young's plural wives, notes in one of her first diary entries on the trail: "We felt as tho' we could breath more freely and speak one with another upon those things where in God had made us free with less carefulness that we had hitherto done."⁴

Zina Huntington Jacobs, who was also involved at that time in a unique plural marriage, notes:

We there (in Iowa) first saw who were the brave, the good, the self-sacrificing. Here we had now openly the first examples of noble-minded virtuous women, bravely commencing to go live in the newly-revealed order of celestial marriage.⁵

LOUISA BARNES PRATT kept a diary that she used in later reporting of the Iowa events. At forty-four years of age and with four young daughters, she was uneasy about undertaking the Iowa trek. She called it a "fearful more than dreaded journey." Louisa's husband, Addison, was on a mission to the South Pacific, having departed in June 1843.⁶ When one of the elders came to see her before she left Nauvoo, she inquired if he could divine the reason why those who had sent her husband to the ends of the earth did not call to inquire whether she could prepare herself for such a perilous journey. His

reply was, "Sister Pratt, they expect you to be smart enough to go yourself without help, and even to assist others." When she hesitated at the final step, President Young sent her a message: "Tell Sister Pratt to come on, the ox team salvation is the safest way. Brother Pratt will meet us in the wilderness where we locate and will be sorely disappointed if his family is not with us." So she set off with her four daughters and a driver.

This spirit of independence seemed to stay with her as she set out from Nauvoo on 28 May. She says that on 31 May:

The brethren met by themselves, organized and chose a president without the aid or counsel of the women. This evening the sisters proposed to organize themselves into a distinct body to prove to the men that we are competent to govern ourselves. If they set the example of separate interests, we must help carry it out.

On 7 June, she wrote:

Last evening the ladies met to organize. Mrs. Isaac Chase was called to chair. She was also appointed President by a unanimous vote. Mrs. L. B. Pratt counselor and scribe. Several resolutions were adopted: 1st Resolved: that when the brethren call on us to attend prayers, get engaged in conversation and forget what they called us for, that the sisters retire to some convenient place, pray by themselves and go about their business. 2nd. If the men wish to hold control over women let them be on the alert. We believe in equal rights. Meeting adjourned.

The trip started out with pleasant activities. "We were compelled to create our own amusements," she wrote. "When we camped near a level spot of earth where water had been standing and dried away, the young men proposed a dance. The older ones feeling the absolute need of diversion would accede, as it would cost nothing and would cheer and enliven us on our wearisome journey." And another time, "We have large campfires around which we all gather, sing songs, both spiritual and comic, then all unite in prayer."

Louisa Pratt often rode horseback to help with the

cattle, and she noted that she and a fellow sister had a long ride on horseback while taking a view of the country and admiring it. On 12 June, she wrote: "Last evening there was great sport in our camp. The young man we call Captain Eph. Hands, dressed in women's attire danced to amuse us."

Louisa's diary became more serious at Mt. Pisgah where she wrote:

June 15th. The tents are scattered everywhere. Poor people here; they are in the sun without houses. On the Bluffs is a beautiful grove of oak trees, beneath the towering branches we can pitch our tents and be sheltered from the sun's scorching rays.

June 18th. A pleasant family by the name of Hallet are very near. the man has gone with the Pioneers and the woman is sick.

July 16th. Last evening I called on Sister Markham, Eliza R. Snow and Dana. They all seem resigned to the times and circumstances. I wish I could. I pray earnestly for submission.

July 29. A sorry time it is, many are sick. Sister Hallet is very low. I have had charge of her babe, seven months old.

Louisa's diary records that Sister Hallet died after a few days; later, Brother Hallet, on his return to Mt. Pisgah, their twelve-year-old daughter, and the baby all followed Sister Hallet in death.

The next year in Winter Quarters, on 26 September 1847, Louisa took up her writing again. "A long time has elapsed since I have written in my journal. A crowd of cares caused by extreme sickness in my family has prevented me." In this account, she tells of the many who she knew had died. She explains:

The shaking ague fastened deathless fangs upon me. I shook till it appeared my very bones were pulverized. I wept, I prayed, I besought the Lord to have mercy on me . . . I was in my wagon my children all sick in the tent except the youngest daughter six years who escaped and was able to wait upon the others, which she did

to the admiration of all who knew how faithful she was.

Louisa continued to have ill health. Her family was living in a dugout when the chimney failed. She also suffered from scurvy. After a fall from a carriage, she had swollen limbs and "went about on crutches." Cold rain made the cabin so wet she slept in her wagon. In the spring, her health improved; and she was able to move into a home left by some who had gone on to Utah. The daughters assisted her by helping in a school she ran to earn money, by making the garden, and by taking care of the cows. "Sometimes," she wrote, "when charity was cold [her daughter] chopped the wood."⁷

Louisa Pratt and her husband lived apart most of the remainder of her life because he traveled in his missionary work. She was independent and self-sustaining in later years, just as she was in Iowa. She became an active supporter of women's suffrage and was a devoted missionary for Mormonism throughout her long life.⁸

ELIZABETH PRATT, a wife of the missionary Parley Pratt, traveled in the pioneer company in Iowa and suffered the miserable weather and terrible traveling conditions. When Parley was suddenly again sent on a mission from the Missouri River camp, she wrote:

We were left camping in our wagons and tents and as our best men were called away to Mexico that made the labor harder on the men left in camp. We were fifteen in family, we had our teamster with us to do all the work. Parley Jr. was only nine years and four months old and not very strong. We had a log room built to cook in and crowd into in the daytime, we had to sleep in our wagons all winter.⁹

On the trail was EMILY D. P. YOUNG, then a plural wife of Brigham Young and previously a wife of Joseph Smith. She and her family stayed for the winter at Mt. Pisgah. Her stepfather, William Huntington, and her mother had remained at Mt. Pisgah when the camp was first founded in May. William Huntington was placed in charge of the settlement; however, not many weeks elapsed before he became ill, as did so many others, and he died on 19 August 1846.¹⁰

Emily was without an immediate family to provide

for her and her children, and she later wrote about her experiences at Mt. Pisgah:

We had considerable sickness that summer, some times all but me were on the bed sick. But as the weather began to get cooler we improved in health. Our neighbors began to move away some went on to Winter Quarters and others moved into the timber on the bottom where fuel was plenty and it was much warmer for their cattle. The weather began to be extremely cold and we were left quite alone and the howling of the wolves, as they prowled around at night, made us feel very desolate and unprotected. We made a fire in one end of the room but there was not much wood women could pick up. It was at Mt. Pisgah that I cut down my first and last tree. It certainly looked very much as though we should perish now, but the Lord was still mindful of us.

After the brethren had got their families comfortably settled in the timber, they joined together and built us a small hut and moved us into it. They then hauled and chopped wood enough to last us all winter, they also divided their corn fodder with us so that we had food for our milk cow. So after all was spent a very comfortable and pleasant winter.¹¹

Also on the Iowa trail was ELIZA MARIA PARTRIDGE LYMAN, a sister of Emily D. P. Young. Emily and Eliza had both become plural wives of Joseph Smith in 1843. After Joseph's death, Eliza became a plural wife of Amasa Lyman, as did her sister Caroline. They started west with the pioneer group in February in the company of their mother (then wife of William Huntington) and their sisters, Caroline, Lydia, and Dionita W. Lyman, another of Amasa Lyman's wives. Eliza reports day-to-day activities, such as making mince pies. She comments, "twisted some thread for mother," "finished a dress for Mother Tanner" (their hosts at the first Iowa stop), "wind and snow blowing in every direction," and "I am almost frozen, so I shall go into a wagon and make my bed and get into it as that is that only way I can get warm." At Sugar Creek, "the ice was running in the river so that it was impossible to cross that night."

On 8 February, she visited friends at another camp and, on returning home, found the "brass band assembled

around our fire, making some very good music." The following days, she noted that she washed, ironed, baked, and wrote of the arrival of Priscilla Turley, another of the wives of her husband. One day, Brother Lyman brought a rabbit, and others killed eight prairie hens that she said "will make us a very comfortable meal." She later comments about the "shoetop mud," her "washing and ironing," and her cooking of other game. Then, a child of her camp, James Monroe, died and was buried. Days later, Brother Edwin Little also died.

In March, the weather produced hail and snow that covered the ground. The men were working at rail splitting and bringing home corn and pork in trade. March 30 was her husband's thirtieth birthday. As they crossed the Chariton River, they used seven yoke of oxen to get the rest of the way through the mud to the camp. They came across Zina Huntington Jacobs, who was sick with a babe only a few days old; her husband Henry was the only one to care for her. The rain continued day after day, and they struggled to get through the mud. Nights found them sleeping in wet clothes in wagons and on boxes or chairs.

On 26 April, she observed her twenty-sixth birthday. Her husband became ill and for several days was unable to dress himself or leave the wagon. She reported that they were well supplied by the men in their party with game to cook. Brother William Edwards also became sick and, unlike Amasa Lyman, did not recover but died on 13 May. On 26 May, they came to Mt. Pisgah "where some of the families were to stop and raise crops during the summer."

From Mt. Pisgah, Caroline and Emily party went on, leaving their mother, sisters Emily and Lydia, and little brother Edward in Mt. Pisgah. As they neared the Missouri, they noted an abundance of ripe strawberries and met parties of Pottawattomie Indians. The weather improved, and they were able to travel across the prairies easier than they had in the earlier months. As the weather warmed, Eliza began to note that mosquitoes gave them trouble. On 14 July, her first child, Don Carlos, was born. (She had not mentioned previously being pregnant. The custom of the time was not to mention an expected birth in a woman's diary, although forthcoming births must have been much on the minds of the women as they traveled.) The party had gone up the river to Brother Miller's camp. She says, "I am very uncomfortably situ-

ated for a sick woman, the scorching sun shining upon the wagon through the day, and the cool air at night is almost too much to be healthy." In August, she wrote:

I have been very sick with child-bed fever. For many days my life seemed near to end, I am now like a skeleton, so much so that those who have not been with me do not know me until I tell who I am. It is a fearful place to be sick with fever in a wagon with no shade over us except the cover . . . but the Lord preserved my life for some purpose, for which I thank him. My babe in consequence of my sickness is very poor.

Eliza moved into a log house in Winter Quarters in October. She described the house as a comfortable one, although it was minus a floor and had a leaking sod roof. On 12 December, after six days when the baby was sick and getting worse, she finally wrote: "The baby is dead and I mourn his loss . . . My sister Caroline and I sat up every night with him and tried to save him from death." Like many other mothers whose babies died, Eliza grieved for his loss and says, "He was buried on the west side of the Missouri, on the second ledge back, the eleventh grave on the second row, being farthest from the river this will be no guide as the place cannot be found after a few years."

The sisters lived at Winter Quarters through 1847. Finally, in June 1848, in a party that included her mother and sister Caroline, Eliza left on the final leg of the trek to Utah. On this section of the journey, she gave birth on 20 August to her second son. She notes: "It was not a pleasant journey for me as I have been very nearly helpless all the way, but it is all right, we are going from the land of our oppressors to where we hope to raise our children in the fear of the Lord where they will never suffer by the hands of our enemies as we have done." On 17 October, they reached their destination.¹²

RACHEL EMMA WOOLLEY SIMMONS was eight years old in the summer of 1846. Her memories of Iowa include the following recollection:

Mother was very severely poisoned, so much so that her face and neck swelled beyond recognition. We were afraid she would die . . . Also it was here that I had my first narrow escape from being bitten by a rattle snake.

There was a family with us in camp by the name of Dewey. I was standing on the log talking with one of the boys when the well-known rattle of the snake was heard. One of the boys said, "Lookout! There is a rattle snake under the log." As I jumped back sure enough there was, but he was soon killed. On another occasion while I was gathering buffalo chips I found they were very thick in a certain place close to the road, which was not often the case, as there were many ahead of us. I thought I was in luck, but I soon found out the cause. I was picking up as fast as I could when all at once I heard the rattle of a snake . . . [and] there he was in a hole almost at my feet. I did not stop for any more chips at that time.¹³

With her husband Henry, ZINA HUNTINGTON JACOBS set out with the pioneer company. At Mt. Pisgah, after the birth of her baby on the Iowa trail, her husband left her. Later in the year, she joined the family of Brigham Young. In her reminiscences, she says:

So on the 9th of February 1846, on a clear cold day, we left our home at Nauvoo. All that we possessed was now in our wagon. Many of our things remained in the house, unsold, for most of our neighbors were, like ourselves, on the wing.

On the bank of the Chariton an incident occurred ever eventful in the life of woman. I had been told in the temple that I should acknowledge God even in a miracle in my deliverance in woman's hour of trouble, which hour had now come. We had traveled one morning about five miles, when I called for a halt in our march. There was but one person with me—Mother Lyman, the aunt of George A. Smith; and there on the bank of the Chariton I was delivered of a fine son. On the morning of the 23rd, Mother Lyman gave me a cup of coffee and a biscuit. What a luxury for special remembrance. Occasionally the wagon had to be stopped, that I might take breath. Thus I journeyed on. But I did not mind the hardship of my situation, for my life had been preserved and my baby seemed so beautiful. . . .

We reached Mt. Pisgah in May. I was now with my father who had been appointed to pre-

side over this temporary settlement of the Saints . . . I had only my father to look after me now; for I had parted from my husband; my eldest brother, Dimick Huntington, with his family had gone into the battalion and every man who could be spared was also enlisted. It was impossible for me to go on to Winter Quarters, so I tarried at Mt. Pisgah . . . Sickness came upon us and deaths so frequent that enough help could not be had to make coffins, and many of the dead were wrapped in their grave-clothes and buried with split logs at the bottom of the grave and brush at the sides . . . My father was taken sick and in eighteen days he died . . . for like my dear mother, who died in the expulsion from Missouri, he died in the expulsion from Nauvoo. I alone of all his children was there to mourn.¹⁴

JANE SNYDER RICHARDS, like Zina Huntington Jacobs, gave birth to a child on the trail in Iowa. Jane was the twenty-five-year-old wife of Franklin Richards, who was a member of one of Mormonism's leading families. With Jane pregnant with their second child in February 1846, Franklin had married a second wife, sixteen-year-old Elizabeth McFate. Franklin, with his brother Samuel, was to go on a mission to England rather than undertake the journey west; but before departing, he made the preparation for Jane, their two-year-old daughter, Wealthy Lovisa, and Elizabeth to set out across Iowa. Their teamster was their young friend Philo Farnsworth. Samuel's wife, Mary, left before Jane, in April. But Franklin's family was delayed as Franklin sold their home, trained the oxen for their team, and carried out his duties to the Church in the absence of the leading apostles.

Finally, on 1 July, the women set out but were not far along the trail on 23 July when Jane gave birth to a son, Isaac. A "Gentile" (non-Mormon) midwife had been summoned to assist with the birth. The midwife uncharitably took one of Jane's blankets as payment and made a prediction that Jane would not live long enough to use it. The baby Isaac Phinehas died immediately. Frightened and ill, Jane was not willing to part with her baby; and she carried him with her through Iowa's July heat and storms as the wagons proceeded to Mt. Pisgah.

On 2 August, the party arrived to be met by Jane's

father-in-law, Phinehas Richards. The baby was buried in the Mt. Pisgah cemetery. Jane did not recover her strength on the Iowa trail. Elizabeth was consumptive and not strong as the trip began. She and little Wealthy Lovisa both became very ill as they made haste to join the pioneer party in western Iowa.



Jane Snyder Richards

When Jane's wagon came into the camp near the Missouri River, they were met by Mary Richards, who cared for Jane through the next months. Wealthy Lovisa lived until 19 September when she died in the wagon by Jane's side. During the difficult winter, beset with malnutrition and the bitter cold, Elizabeth McFate also died leaving Jane, alone, the single survivor of the little family.

In the spring of 1848, Franklin and Samuel returned to Winter Quarters from their mission and joined their wives. Both families proceeded to Utah where other children were born and where the brothers took other wives.

Jane Snyder Richards survived the ordeal of the Iowa journey to become a leader of the Ogden, Utah, Women's Relief Society. With her daughter and husband, she traveled east in the 1880s to meet the nation's leading women leaders in support of women's suffrage and

again in the 1890s to establish Mormon women's participation in the National Council of Women. In her public statements, she made an eloquent defense of polygamy in the 1880s. During this time, Jane also wrote of her memories in Iowa and says, "I lived because I could not die."¹⁵

BATHSHEBA W. SMITH, the first of six wives of George Smith and the mother of two children in 1846, also wrote about her Iowa journey. On polygamy, she says:

I heard the prophet give instruction concerning plural marriage; he counseled the sisters not to trouble themselves in consequence of it, that all would be right and the result would be for their glory and exaltation.

Being thoroughly convinced, as well as my husband, that the doctrine of plurality of wives was from God and having a fixed determination to attain to celestial glory, I felt to embrace the whole gospel and believing that it was for my husband's exaltation that he should obey the revelation on celestial marriage, that he might attain to kingdoms, thrones, principalities and powers, firmly believing that I should participate with him in all his blessings, glory and honor, accordingly within the last year, like Sarah of old, I had given to my husband five wives, good, virtuous, honorable young women. They all had their home with us; I being proud of my husband, and loving him very much, knowing him to be a man of God and believing he would not love them less because he loved me more for doing this. I have joy in having a testimony that what I had done was acceptable to my Father in Heaven.

On the 9th of February, 1846, in company with many others my husband took me and my two children and some of the other members of his family, (the remainder to follow as soon as the weather would permit), and we crossed the Mississippi, to seek a home in the wilderness . . . I will not try to describe how we traveled through storms of snow, wind and rain—how roads had to be made, bridges built, and rafts constructed—how our poor animals had to drag on, day after day, with scanty feed—or how our camps suffered from poverty, sickness and

death.

At Winter Quarters, the camp having been deprived of vegetable food the past year, many were attacked with scurvy, the exposure, together with the want of necessary comforts, caused fevers and ague and affections of the lungs.

One of her husband's other wives, Nancy Clement, and her baby died that winter. In April 1847, Bathsheba gave birth prematurely to a son named John. He lived only four hours. Afterwards, she was desperately ill; and though she recovered, she never again bore children.¹⁶

In the spring of 1848, the Smith family moved to the Iowa side of the river where they had two log cabins and were more comfortable. She says:

The situation was a romantic one, surrounded as we were on three sides by hills. We were favored with an abundance of wild plums and raspberries . . . We raised wheat, Indian corn, buckwheat, potatoes and other vegetables; and we gathered from the woods, hazel and hickory nuts, white and black walnuts, and in addition to the wild plums and raspberries before mentioned we gathered elderberries and made elderberry and raspberry wine. We also preserved plums and berries. By these supplies we were better furnished than we had been since leaving our homes.¹⁷

Finally, in June 1849, the Smith family proceeded to Utah.

Bathsheba Smith in her home in Utah lived to be eighty-eight years old, was a devoted family member, became a general president of the Relief Society, and lived and practiced the doctrine of polygamy. The difficulties of her experiences in Iowa and elsewhere seem only to have strengthened her faith.

ELIZABETH H. HYDE, wife of William Hyde, was among those who left Nauvoo in the spring of 1846. She recalled in her 1905 memoirs that they arrived in Council Bluffs 12 July and that her husband enlisted in the Mormon Battalion on 16 July. (The Mormon Battalion was a volunteer group of five hundred men requested by the U.S. Government to join the army and to go to California as a part of the United States defense in the

Mexican War. The battalion was recruited during May and June 1846 with the full backing of Brigham Young. Although many Mormons were unhappy at the loss of five hundred of their able men, the wages earned by the battalion provided the badly needed funds that helped the Church survive that winter on the Missouri River.)

Elizabeth says, "My husband enlisted in the Mormon Battalion and on the 20th took up the line of march, leaving me with two small children and in a delicate state of health living in a wagon in an Indian country." Elizabeth and her family lived that winter in one room in her father-in-law's house, where she gave birth in January 1847 to a baby boy. Her husband returned after one year and five months. The family then lived in Council Bluffs where, in 1848, a daughter was born. In 1849, their three year old died and was buried at Council Point "under a lone tree, this affliction seemed almost more than I could endure." Later in the year, they joined others going on west to Utah.¹⁸

URSALIA B. HASCALL traveled from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters in a party that included her young son, Thales, her daughter, Irene, Irene's husband, Francis M. Pomeroy, and the Pomeroy's daughter, Francelle. Members of the family were recent converts who were not leaders in the Mormon hierarchy. Her report of the Iowa journey was written in letters to family members in the East.

Better outfitted than many of the travelers, their party participated in a journey that was more comfortable than that of many others. In September at Winter Quarters, Ursalia wrote:

We started from Nauvoo the 30th of May, had as good wagon as any of them; three yoke of oxen with flour enough to last us one year, ham sausages, dry fish, lard, two can hundred pounds of sugar, 16 of coffee, 10 of raisen, rice with all the other items we wish to use in cooking The waggon is long enough for both our beds made on the flour barrels, chests and other things. (Thales and I sleep in the back end and F. and Irene at the forward end. While we were travelling if we camped too late to pitch our tent.) It is painted red. It has eight bows eighteen inches apart; a hen coop on the end with four hens. We had two webs of thick

drilling. We put on one cover of that, then three breadths of stout sheeting over that and then painted it, the heaviest showers and storms does not beat through, only a few drops now and then. Our tent is made of drilling sixteen breadths in the shape of an umbrella. A cord three feet long on the end of every seam and a pinon that to drive into the ground. The pole in the middle that holds it up carries it three feet from the ground, then a breadth of sheeting put on the edge to let down in cool weather and fasten with loops and pins in the ground.

In her letter, Ursalia tells of the early days of their travels:

Never slept better. In the morning made a fire. had a good cup of coffee, went eight miles, found a camp of fifty wagons and tents (and) stopped for several days waiting for others It was not many days before we bid adieu to the last house we expected to see until we had them of our own. We traveled for hours and saw nothing but the wide expanse of heaven and the waveing prairie grass. Not a tree or bush. Then we came to timber and water and camped for the night; do our cooking and washing, all that wish to started the next day [and] take wood and water enough to make coffee for breakfast and hastepudding and milk for dinner. We always found wood and water as often as once in twentyfour hours but not always at the right time The company we were in killed several fat calves [and] they always gave us some. We had the old fashioned soups with a light crust. We have had everything on the way to make us more comfortable than anyone could possibly expect, and in this way we travelled until we came to Council Bluffs on the missouri river.¹⁹

The daughter of Mormon Apostle Heber Kimball, HELEN MAR WHITNEY had been recently married to Horace Whitney as she left Nauvoo in the pioneer company. She was among the many women who gave birth to babies in difficult circumstances only to lose them. Helen wrote:

On the morning of May 6th I was delivered of a beautiful and healthy girl baby, which died

at birth. Thus the only bright star, to which my doting heart had clung was snatched away and through it seemed a needless bereavement and most cruel in the eyes of all who behold it, their sympathies were such that by their united faith and prayers, they seemed to buoy me up Three weeks of suffering followed, when I was dressed one day, but I took cold and was again prostrated, and lay in a critical state for another three weeks. Before I was able to sit up the scurvy laid hold of me, commencing at the tips of the finger of my left hand with black streaks running up the nails, with inflammation and the most intense pain, which increased till it had reached my shoulders.

Helen Whitney survived her stay at Winter Quarters; and the next year (1847) on the trail to Utah, a second child, a son, was born but died five days later.²⁰

LEONORA CANNON TAYLOR was wife of the Mormon leader John Taylor. Taylor, along with Parley Pratt, spent much of 1846 and 1847 on missions to England.²¹ Leonora Cannon Taylor crossed the Mississippi on 15 February with the pioneer company and started from Sugar Creek on 2 March. She included references to some of the camp life as well as the misery when she wrote her memoirs.

Her diary comments of the first weeks note the snow, the rain, and more snow until 1 April when she finally wrote "a warm day." During the next month, the company struggled through mud, and the carriage broke down. The horses were bitten by snakes, and more and more rain fell during April as they slogged along—sometimes making seven or eight miles in a day. Finally, on 8 May, Leonora wrote: "A fine moonlight night, a violin playing and a dance by General Rich's tent. This place is called Garden Grove and lovely place it is." She had sprained her knee getting out of the carriage at Garden Grove, and her leg pained her so much during the next two weeks that she was sick with the pain and tried many remedies for it as the company continued to travel.

By 8 June, Leonora was able to write about the prairie, "excellent road . . . covered with beautyfull flowers." Again, on 11 June, she wrote:

Country was really lovely gently rolling

and [divided] in long ridges & those on each side and markd like Quarters of and Orange, [they] appear like little chanel to convey the water into the long ones & those into large and deeper all covered with rich grass and lovely Flowers every few Miles there is a creek and a little Grove of Trees.

These comments were made before the company reached the Nishnabotna and the Indian village, so the events probably took place in Adair and Cass Counties.

On 17 June, she reached the Bluffs and enjoyed the delights of wild strawberries. According to her diary, "the Children came to know if [they] might go for Strawberryes and S.Y. Family M.S. & Annie went & brought us back some delightfull berryes" Later, "[the Strawberryes] were more plentyfull there than any place I ever saw [they] gathered them by Bushels."

On 20 June, she says:

The Girls to a concert at the Trading Village number of the Bretherin went down the Band went with them. we had a very pleasant time indeed about seventy persons dined at Major Marshals [they] had quite a dance there was a number of half breed Squaws dressed very well indeed [H]ad some songs from Br. Kay and a deal of Musick upon the whole we spent a very plessant day"

In July, she also says, "still Musick, Voluntering. dancing evry Evg."

After the pleasant spring and summer interlude for Leonora Taylor, the season at Winter Quarters when her husband was gone proved harsh; and she struggled to get a house, a stove, and food supplies. Many were sick, and she wrote of friends who died. She noted she had a family of fifteen to provide for while her husband was away. Amidst the reporting of "the Canker, stolen cattle and horses that were shot" [by Indians quarreling], she also was able to let the children go to dancing school and to attend "preaching" and fellowship meetings. In June 1847, her husband was home; and together they left Winter Quarters and started their journey to Utah.²² (Taylor and Parley Pratt had been sent on a mission to England in July 1846. They arrived at Winter Quarters in

April 1847 just as Brigham Young was preparing for the final part of the westward journey.)²³

At the age of eight, AURELIA SPENCER ROGERS began her trip through Iowa with her family that included both her mother, Catherine Curtis, and her father, Orson; but soon she was left in the care of others. She first tells of the work the women did preparing the food for the Iowa journey:

Corn was parched and ground; and rusk was made of light bread, by putting it into a moderate oven, and letting it remain until it was thoroughly dried and toasted a light brown. This was put into sacks and packed away, to be pounded in mortars when needed. Bread so prepared will keep good any length of time, if not exposed to the damp, and is very wholesome and palatable with milk, as we used to eat it . . .

My mother had scarcely recovered from a spell of sickness, which followed the death of little Chloe [a daughter], and was ill prepared to stand the cold weather and rough roads we had to travel over in the fore part of the journey. She therefore gradually sank and from the effects of a severe cold and soon died. As we had only traveled a distance of thirty miles, her body was taken back to Nauvoo and buried.

The death of Aurelia's mother left six children thirteen years and under to continue the journey with their father.

The company traveled on until they came to Garden Grove, where they stopped a few weeks to rest and recruit their teams. Her uncle died outside of Garden Grove, leaving a widow and ten children.

Aurelia Rogers' father was called on a mission to England shortly after they arrived at Winter Quarters. He put up a log cabin that had no floor or door, and she says:

[O]ur father bade us farewell and started on a three years' mission leaving us in charge of a good man and his wife who looked after our interest the same as their own. They also had a family of children.

The door of Brother Bullock's cabin faced our's and was only a few feet from it, so if any-

thing went wrong they could hear us. We kept by ourselves Ellen acting the part of a little mother. She had just turned fourteen and was small for her age, but had the judgment of one older.

We got through the first part of the winter pretty well as father had provided for our wants. We went to school to Sister Addison Pratt . . . When the weather was cold or stormy so we could not go out, the game of mumblepeg was introduced, which was all the rage among the children at that time . . . In the evening Brother Bullock's children sometimes came in, when we would have a spelling school or sit around the fire telling riddles and stories until bed time.

Our family had escaped having this horrible disease [scurvy] but in the spring we all took the measles, myself being the first to come down with it.

The winter having been uncommon in its severity, our horse and all our cows but one had died, therefore we had no milk nor butter, our provisions had also nearly given out, so that in the spring and summer following, we really suffered for something to eat; part of the time having nothing but corn-meal which was stirred up with water and baked on a griddle. Many a night I have gone to bed without supper having to wait until I was hungry enough to eat our poor fare.²⁴

THOMAS KANE, a politically well-connected friend of the Mormons, negotiated for and defended the Mormons as they were making their move to the West. His observations of the conditions of the camps and the work of the women are some of the most detailed on record. Helen Mar Whitney quoted Thomas Kane's remarks about camp life as follows:

After the sorrowful word was given out to halt, and make preparations for winter, a chief labor became the making of hay; and with every day dawn brigades of mowers would take up the march to their positions in chosen meadows—a prettier sight than a charge of cavalry—as they laid their swaths, whole companies of scythes abreast.

When they set about building their winter houses, too, the Mormons went into quite con-

siderable timbering operations, and performed desperate feats of carpentry It was wonderful to notice the readiness with which they turned their hands to woodcrafts some of them, though I believe these had generally been bred carpenters, wheelwrights, or more particularly boat builders, quite outdoing the most notable voyageurs in the use of the ax. One of these would fell a tree, strip of its bark, cut and split up the trunk in piles of planks, scantling, or shingles, make posts and pins, and poles—everything almost of the branches, and treat toil, from first to last, with more sportive flourish than a schoolboy whittling his shingle.

Inside the camp the chief labors were confined to the women. From the moment, when after the halt, the lines had been laid, the springs were dug out and the ovens and fireplaces built, though the men still assumed to set the guards and enforce the regulations of police, the empire of the tented town was with the better sex. They were the chief comforters of the severest sufferers, the kind nurses who gave them in their sickness those dear attentions with which pauperism is hardly poor, and which the greatest wealth often fails to buy. And they were a nation of wonderful managers, they could hardly be called housewives in etymological strictness, but it was plain they had once been such, and most distinguished ones. Their art availed them in their changed affairs. With almost their entire culinary materials limited to the milk of their cows, some store of meal or flour and a very few condiments, they brought their thousand and one recipes into play with a success that outdid for their families the miracle of the Hebrew woman's curse.

Helen Whitney continues:

As he says we could "make butter on a march by the dashing of the wagon, and so nicely to calculate the working of harm into the jolting heats, that as soon after the camping as the fires could be prepared the well kneaded loaf was ready for the bake kettle or reflector, which commodities were well suited to the wants and necessities during our camp life."

Thomas Kane says:

The first duty of the Mormon woman was, through all changes of place and fortune to keep alive the altar fire of home. Whatever their manifold labors for the day, it was their effort to complete them against the sacred hour of evening fall. For by that time all the outworkers, scouts, ferrymen or abridgemen, roadmakers, herdsmen or haymakers had finished their tasks and come into their rest But every day closed as every day began with an invocation of the Divine labor; without which indeed no Mormon seemed to dare to lay him down to rest.²⁵

Sister Saints were very much aware that many outside their community were critical of every aspect of Mormon life. Clearly, the sisters made every effort to keep their troubles to themselves. About one incident with Thomas Kane, Helen Whitney wrote:

The first time we met Col Kane was on the 5th of August, just after our wagons were formed in a circle so as to make an enclosure for horses. The meeting was somewhat peculiar.

My sister-in-law and I being more than weary that day with the sun beating down and not a shade of any kind to screen us from its scorching rays, we were considerably out of sorts, and were just giving expression to some of our thoughts and feelings, in consequence of the unpleasant circumstances to which we were subjected, through the heartlessness of those who were allowed to wrong and oppress the weak, etc. and wondering when those trials would cease or where our lots were to be cast, etc. We were going on in this strain while washing the dust from our hands and faces preparatory to getting dinner. But our conversation came to a sudden stop, for as I went to the tent door to dash out some water, who should I see but a young stranger standing in a listening attitude by the side of his carriage, which stood hardly a yard away from our tent. He looked up as I threw out the water, and I felt my cheeks crimson as our eyes met; and I made a hasty retreat wondering who he was and what I had said that he could take advantage of if so dis-

posed.²⁶

Many sisters made the difficult trip across Iowa without husbands and were often in the general care of the men of the party. Such situations represented uneasy times for the women as well as for the men into whose care the sisters found themselves. Occasionally, a moving diary entry or letter gives expression to the loneliness the women felt in the absence of their husbands.

Mary Richards was newly married when her husband, Samuel, went on his mission to England and she parted from him to go to the West. She had no children and was in a party with her husband's parents, Phinehas and Wealthy Dewey Richards. At the beginning of her journey in May 1846, she wrote:

To part with him to whome alone I look for protection & comfort. & who alone is the most dear to my heart. to wander for hundereds of miles in dreary wilderness wile he is traveling for thousands of miles in another direction is a trial beyound description.

On another day, she says, "[I] felt very unhappy through the day. went into the woods twice sat down under an oak tree. Offerd up a prayer to the lord. weept about an houre & returned." Later in the month, she wrote several times that she "felt very lonely all the day."²⁷

The moving letters written by Bathsheba Smith to her husband George from Winter Quarters include many references to her feelings in his absence. She wrote on 9 June 1847:

My Dear husband we are well as usual I have missed the Chills two days feel quite well, we want to see you cannot hardly wait . . . [I]t siemes to me I shall have no one to go to but my Heavenly Father and I believe he is my friend and will bless me I need not say pray for me for I now you do, it seems to me I would give any thing to have a letter from you, but we cannot no any thing about you only what the Spirit teaches us . . . [M]y prayer is continually that you may not suffer for food nor rament I was in hope to have a line from you, I want to send you somthing I guess it will be some Beans, excuse

this and look ove[r] all my imperfections, and come home soon as ever yours.²⁸

In 1851, Brigham Young issued a final call to all Latter-day Saints who had remained in Iowa telling them the time had come for them to make the journey to Salt Lake City. Orson Hyde, who had been charged with care of the Kaneville congregations, departed in 1852. In 1853, the last group of twenty-six hundred set out for the Great Basin.²⁹ Some few were allowed to stay in Council Bluffs to assist new immigrants. In the years between 1846 and 1853, many had become permanent settlers and did not respond to President Young's call; but most who started for Utah found their way there. In the 1850s, other parties of immigrants continued to travel by way of the Missouri River and by handcart trails across Iowa. But the journey westward began in 1846, and that beginning sorely tried the Saints as they made their way from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters. The well-remembered Iowa trail is a testament to the Saints' spirit and faith.

NOTES

1. Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846-52* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 14.
2. William Huntington, *Autobiography of William Huntington*, courtesy of Oa Jacobs Cannon, Brigham Young University Library.
3. Bennett, 81.
4. Journal of Eliza R. Snow, February 1846, LDS Church Archives.
5. Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom*, 1975 reprint (New York: Tullidge and Crandall, 1877), 327. See also *Mormon Polygamy: A History* by Richard S. Van Wagoner, 123.
6. Vicky Burgess-Olson, "Louisa B. Pratt: Missionary Wife, Missionary Mother, Missionary," *Sister Saints* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 43.
7. Kate B. Carter, *HeartThrobs of the West*, chap. VI (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1947).

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8. *Sister Saints*, 43.
 9. *Women's Exponent*, vol. 14, 15 August 1885.
 10. Huntington.
 11. *Women's Exponent*, vol. 14, 15 August 1885.
 12. Melvin A. Lyman, *Amasa Mason Lyman Family History*, vol. II, Delta, Utah, 1969.
 13. Kate B. Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1947), "Journal of Rachel Emma Woolley Simmons," vol. 11.
 14. Tullidge, chap. 33 and chap. 34.
 15. Jane Snyder Richard's story is told in a number of collections, including Vicky Burgess-Olson, *Sister Saints* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1978). Original sources include *Reminiscences of Mrs. F. D. Richards*, Bancroft Library, University of California, San Francisco, 1880 (microfilm); Franklin West, *Life of Franklin D. Richards*, 1924; and Maurine Carr Ward, *Diaries of Mary Haskin Parker Richards*.
 16. *Sister Saints*, Barbara Flckiger Watt, "Bathsheba B Smith Woman of Faith and Courage," 203.
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. *Women's Exponent*, vol. 19, 1 December 1890.
 19. Huntington.
 20. *Women's Exponent*, vol. 14, 15 October 1885.
 21. Bennett, 65.
 22. Lenora Taylor Diary, 1846-47, transcript of Maureen U. Beecher, KMB BYU, Provo, Utah, LDS Archives.
 23. Bennett, 161.
 24. Aurelia Spencer Rogers, *Life Sketches of Orson Spencer and Others*, chap. 4 (n.p.: Geo. Q. Cannon & Sons Company, 1898).
 25. *Women's Exponent*, vol. 13, 1 September 1884.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. Ward, 27.
 28. Bathsheba Bigler Smith to George A. Smith; typescript from manuscript sources courtesy of Maureen Beecher.
 29. Gail Geo. Holmes, "Weighing the Impact of the 1846-1953 LDS Migration Through Iowa, unpublished papers, 1994.