A Matter of Faith?

Examining Convert Departures from the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies

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DEDICATION

To my wife who never stopped supporting and encouraging me, despite many long hours, and whose love and dedication to faith and family motivate me and keep me going. To my children, whose love and excitement for life and faith inspire me to constantly be the best version of myself.

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Most importantly, to my wife, children, and family, whose lives and faith inspire me, and remind me of the Latter-day Saints I write about; enduring trial and difficulty, but firm and undaunted in their steadfast pursuit of the covenant path.

Abstract

Members of the Willie and Martin handcart companies were part of a new religion, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whose followers were driven west by a desire to escape persecution and practice their religious beliefs as they saw fit. Many wanted to leave the United States to establish Zion, a place where they could live peacefully. This essay addresses the role that faith played in their decisions to move westward, halt their journey along the way, or return home, and how the unique experiences of the second wave of migrants affected their ability to endure hardship.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Among all the companies of travelers that headed west during the era of westward expansion and Manifest Destiny, few came close to the level of disaster that two Latter-day Saint Handcart companies experienced in the fall of 1856. The Willie and the Martin handcart companies included over 1,100 recently converted immigrants, hailing from throughout Northern Europe, mainly the British Isles and Scandinavia.[1] The companies comprised families seeking to travel together to their Salt Lake Zion to build a new life with their newfound faith. Their late departure and subsequent catastrophic death tolls in the extreme Wyoming winter—which necessitated a rescue from other Mormons in Salt Lake City—produced a disaster that is well known among the annals of overland travel. However, the catastrophe is not the only event associated with these two companies. Amid all the personal writings and reports of winter weather and death from members of the Willie and Martin handcart companies can also be found numerous accounts and records of families who abandoned the companies or later returned to the east from their Salt Lake Zion. These departing Latter-day Saints constitute an often-untold aspect of Latter-day Saint overland travel. This new narrative contradicts in many ways the traditional east-to-west narrative of overland travel and the contention that these migrants were steadfast in their faith. A great deal can be gleaned from the personal writings and accounts, even though many provided minimal notation regarding personal motivation. Despite many Latter-day Saint converts leaving the emigration trail to their Salt Lake Zion or leaving the city itself, most departures do not demonstrate a lack of faithfulness but rather indicate devoutness by embracing

[1] Douglas James Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8.

the core tenet of the eternal nature of families, as espoused and taught by their Mormon Scripture.

Through their recently adopted faith, Latter-day Saints found new hope and direction and demonstrated this by a commitment to leave their homes to answer the call for all to gather in Zion. In this paper I argue that, although many Latter-day Saint converts departed the trail to Salt Lake City or the city itself, these departures do not constitute an abandonment of their faith, rather, these Saints left to maintain family cohesion which was an embodiment of the vital tenant of eternal families held by their religion. This section of my paper will briefly introduce the Latter-day Saint faith and explain that one of its central tenets—the eternal nature of the family unit—was vital to its structure. The paper will then outline the Latter-day Saint's need to travel westward. It will also briefly define the three eras of Latter-day Saint migration, show the need for handcarts, and introduce the circumstances surrounding the departure of the Willie and Martin handcart companies from Iowa City, Iowa. The last portion of this section will examine the subsequent chapters in this paper.

Families constituted a significant part of the conversion to the Latter-day Saint faith. While converts joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, here after referred to as Latter-day Saints, Saints, or Mormons, for a variety of reasons, the teaching that family relationships could continue beyond the grave brought many followers great comfort. In a time when many family members died, and the exact nature of the hereafter was heavily debated among religious ministers and teachers, the Latter-day Saint concept that families could be united forever[2], even after death presented a distinctive attribute. When combined with the comforting Christian primitivistic teachings—that the Latter-day Saints were the same church

[2] Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 166-172.

that Jesus Christ established modernly restored[3]—many flocked to the teachings proffered as Jesus Christ's original teachings, offering a different view and a new type of hope.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints modernly is commonly known as a global church. With as many members outside of the United States as inside, the Latter-day Saint faith is prominent among numerous international organizations. It is often recognized for its relief and humanitarian efforts and its members' unique, service-oriented lives. This globalized faith was not always arrayed in this way, however. The church's origins are in upstate New York in 1820, where the first prophet and founder of the church, Joseph Smith, prayed and alleged a vision seeing God the Father and Jesus Christ. In the vision, he was told that many churches had truth in them and spoke of good things, but none had the complete truth, and none were Jesus Christ's church which he established during his lifetime.[4] The result was that Joseph Smith asserted he needed to restore the original church of Jesus Christ and, in the process, brought forth a new book, which Latter-day Saints claim as scripture, called the book of Mormon. After years of development, the church was officially founded on April 6, 1830, in Fayette, New York, with six members.[5] Over the next 14 years, before Joseph Smith's murder in 1844, the church grew rapidly and was persecuted mercilessly.[6] Consequently, the church and its members were driven

[3] Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 23.

[4] Ibid., 233-234.

[5] Ibid., 8.

[6] Claudia L. Bushman, *Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-Day Saints in Modern America* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 1-3.

to Ohio, various cities in Missouri, and eventually Illinois, leaving homes they had built with their own hands, sometimes only months prior due to persecution.[7]

The Latter-day Saint faith has many unique principles, several of which were considered divergent by contemporary religious ministers and teachers and were often the reasons for the persecution. One was the claim of restoring the original priesthood that Jesus Christ's apostles held through angelic appearances.[8] Another was their claim to be God's only true church on the earth while asserting non-adherents were gentiles that would soon be destroyed.[9] Claims that other churches were false or did not hold proper authority angered the Latter-day Saints' religious neighbors, causing persecution. Further harassment came as the church grew and its theocratic practices clashed with ardently resolute Americans who opposed religious and political union in government, having won the American Revolution just over fifty years prior. One of their more attractive beliefs, and a core tenet of their faith, was that the family unit was eternal in nature. As part of this belief, family relationships continued eternally after death through their temple rituals, which all centered on individual salvation and familial exaltation. This focus on family is what drew many converts from North America. It is what no doubt comforted thousands of converts in Northern Europe who later emigrated from their homes to wherever the Latter-day Saints were living at the time. Consequently, as many heeded the call to gather with the rest of the Latter-day Saints, they recorded their experiences and new lives through journals, diaries, letters, and other personal accounts.

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[7] Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: a History of the Latter-Day Saints*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 44-64.

[8] Terryl L. Givens, *The Latter-Day Saint Experience in America* (Westport , CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 16-17.

[9] Ibid., 73.

After conversion, many left their homes because they were outcast or cut off by their families, others because they were shunned and ostracized by their employers or society.[10] Nevertheless, most set off for Zion full of faith and zeal for their newfound religion. Zion, is seen throughout the personal accounts of the Latter-day Saint travelers, and for them it constituted a promised land by God, where they could worship freely and live their lives according to the teachings of their gospel and church leaders. To them, Zion was more than just a place, however. It was an idea, a promise and ultimately the people themselves.[11] Hundreds of Latter-day Saints documented their travels and experiences as they joined their new church.

The idea of a need for a restoration of an original church, which the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith was doing, resulted in conflict and resentment among many of the other sects and religions of its day. Following its founding, members of the LDS Church were often persecuted and driven from city to city and from state to state. Whether because of their communal living and theocratic form of local governance, or their divergent religious beliefs, Mormons were despised and treated as such, despite their industrious mature.[12] Eventually, after Smith was murdered in 1844, their new prophet, Brigham Young, led them across the plains to establish a new home in 1847 called Salt Lake City, where all Latter-day Saints could be gathered to Zion.[13]

When Brigham Young began the Mormon exodus to the West in 1844, the first wave of Latter-day Saint migration had begun. The idea of multiple waves of Latter-day Saint migration westward will be addressed in detail later in this paper. Historian Matthew Bowman asserted,

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[10] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 193.

[11] Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 119, 143.

[12] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 193.

[13] Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 8, 31.

"By 1852 virtually all of those who had left Nauvoo had reached the Great Basin."[14] Subsequently, between 1852 and 1856, the remainder of the Latter-day Saint church as it existed in Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, and even New York emigrated to their Salt Lake Zion. The result was that most of those who had been part of the church from the start in 1830 or had joined since the time that Joseph Smith had been murdered in 1844 had all relocated by 1856. Over twelve years, nearly the entirety of the existing Latter-day Saint population had relocated west to Zion, along with a smattering of immigrants and converts coming from Northern Europe and the eastern states.[15] These Saints, especially those part of the church before Smith's death, had a much different set of experiences and background than those who emigrated later. The first wave of emigration had been completed, and a different experience lay in store for later travelers.

Before Joseph Smith's death, the Latter-day Saints undertook significant missionary efforts across the Eastern states and in Northern Europe, mainly in the British Isles and Scandinavia.[16] The first wave of Saints primarily consisted of those already part of the church when Joseph Smith died. The immigrants resulting from missionary conversions in Europe primaryly comprised a second wave that crossed starting in 1856. The church faced severe logistical problems getting so many Saints to their Salt Lake Zion. Without the shared experiences of enduring persecution, forced migration, and being present for the death of their prophet, the recently converted immigrants marked a new era of membership for the Church of

[14] Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith*, (New York: Random House, 2012), 108.

[15] Ibid., 108.

[16] Leroy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion: The Story of a Unique Western Migration, 1856-1860*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 17-19, 47.

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As these immigrants traveled to America, new logistical problems appeared that needed adequate and long-term solutions.

One problem with the influx of travelers to Zion was that the supply of wagons heading west could not support the growing number of migrants desiring to go west with their families. Another major problem was that many recently-converted immigrants were destitute, having spent all they had to get to America. Because most of them had brought meager possessions with them, a solution for many of them was handcart system, followed by broader use of the existing Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF) in 1856.[17] The PEF initially was created to aid travelers from Europe who could not purchase ox and wagon teams after purchasing passage to the United States on ships, and the subsequent rail travel to Iowa City. According to church leadership, handcarts were cheaper, easier, and faster to make and could be pushed or pulled by a man.[18] The Latter-day Saint leadership concluded their use would enable far greater numbers to cross the plains, faster and cheaper to all. However, because many people could not pay for the carts, let alone wagons, the PEF was instituted as a form of credit to pay upfront for impoverished immigrants' handcarts, with repayment coming after arrival in the Salt Lake Valley. Many poor travelers took advantage of this opportunity. As the first groups of recently converted immigrants, reached Iowa City, Iowa, where their church had set up an outfitting camp, they aided in manufacturing the carts and collectingother necessary supplies before their departure. The first three companies departed Iowa City between June 9 and June 23, 1856, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley between September 26 and October 2.[19]

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[17] Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 122-123; Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 23-24.

[18] Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 29-30.

[19] Ibid., 193.

The last two companies, having started late from ports in Manchester and Liverpool, England, and their vast number of over 1,100 souls, faced shortages in supplies and delayed departure from the Latter-day Saint outpost and overland travel starting point in Iowa City, Iowa. Consequently, the Willie and the Martin companies did not leave Iowa City until July 15 and 28, respectively. The late start and resultant encounter of extreme winter weather would not take place for another two months. In the meantime, between when the Saints in the Willie and Martin handcart companies left Iowa City and when they encountered their first winter weather, numerous personal accounts note the departures of individuals and many families from their trail.[20] Why these Saints departed and how their faith played a role in these Saints leaving their new faith's path is a vital question surrounding their departures and is the core of what this essay will address.

The second chapter will focus on methodology, including views about faith and family amongst Latter-day Saints, important terminology from personal accounts and as used in the paper, and the impact of the journals, diaries, and other personal histories used. These sources will also be evaluated on potential limitations, biases, why they were used, and the personal accounts' varying perspectives. This section will also assess other theories that address westward expansion, manifest destiny, and Latter-day Saint migration.

The third chapter will address the context of westward expansion and manifest destiny and how Latter-day Saints migration fits into the overall context. In Chapter three, five main topics will be discussed. First the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that resulted from

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[20] James G. Willie, "Emigrating Company journal," 1856, *Pioneer Database,* The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7439/james-g-willie-emigrating-company-journal-1856-may-november-16-53.

westward expansion and practical circumstances. Authors touted Jacksonianism and the empowerment of the individual with minimal government regulation. Individuals and groups sought to break away from the United States and find their own land within this framework. Second, various aspects of westward expansion are pieced together. The third topic is Texas' political and social model for carving out their own home. Fourth, the Latter-day Saint migration is addressed, and how it fit into the broader westward expansion. The fifth topic will be the result of the initial Latter-day Saint migration and subsequent migration of immigrants from Northern Europe. This helps to provide the clear distinction of immigration waves among Latter-day Saint travelers, just as in general westward expansion.

In chapter four, personal accounts will be used to address why Latter-day Saint families and individuals stopped, turned back, or left the trail or their Salt Lake Zion. Also, the circumstances and shared experiences of immigrants in the Willie and Martin handcart companies will be addressed compared to the Saints in the first wave of migration. Analysis determines why these Saints departed the faith they had so recently adopted and whether their own faith contributed to their decisions. Chapter five is the final chapter and will address the arguments, analysis, and conclusions incorporated throughout the paper.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In conducting this research, I used a wide variety of personal accounts from the Latter-day Saints who traveled with the Willie and Martin handcart companies. Several main sources were used, and I note why they were used. First, I used journals and diaries because they provided valuable insight and documentation by their authors who wrote of their experiences while enduring them. Second, I used biographies published from personal notes and autobiographies because, in addition to experienced events, these sources included insight and observation to the Latter-day Saint travelers' experiences. Lastly, I used interviews, reminiscences, articles, and letters, and they came in all varieties and from all times. Some letters documented experiences while on the trail and were written shortly after their journey. Other letters and most reminiscences were penned years later to descendants in efforts to describe some of their experiences. There were also many articles published in local newspapers or magazines, recounting experiences. I used these sources to combine the benefits gained from diaries with the insight and hindsight found in biographies.

Given the number of sources, there were a wealth of personal accounts to review. All of these accounts described the trail, experiences while on the trail, and how the trails affected the travelers. Yet in checking accounts, the ones that became most valuable were the records that included observations of Latter-day Saints departing the trail, leaving the Salt Lake Valley, or records where the author noted their own departure. These accounts provided valuable information not only citing the rarely discussed departures, but also in determining the circumstances and motivations surrounding the Saints who left. Using these documents, I focused on the personal accounts that included mentions of people leaving and occasionally had small indications of why some left. These documents formed the core of my analysis, which

enabled me to focus on answering why Latter-day Saints left their path and whether faith impacted their decision. While there was a great wealth of information from so many individuals' writing, it eventually became evident in the research that acknowledging biases and limitations would be necessary along with understanding the context in which the accounts were written.

Biases came from four major sources in the journals. For some, their bias stemmed from their personal conflicts that resulted from experiences with Latter-day Saint leaders, others had family members die, and their experiences and interactions often led to their writings being bitter or resentful. Yet, for others, their biases resulted from their wealth or their poverty, and correspondingly they often complained about the management and logistics of how leadership roles were fulfilled. However, for most, their commitment and zeal towards their recently found faith led them to form a different bias. In this case, they viewed anyone who departed from their handcart companies or their Salt Lake Zion with abhorrence, regardless of why they were leaving. The result was that many journals labeled departees as “apostates” or their actions as “apostatizing,” even if they and their families were going for good reason. These terms, “apostates” and “apostatizing,” were used by many Latter-day Saints in their personal accounts to describe those who departed from the trail to Salt Lake, or those returning eastward after arriving at Salt Lake. The terms insinuated that those who were departing the trail or leaving Salt Lake were abandoning the faith. It is challenging to determine if the departees actually rejected their beliefs or not, or if they were leaving with their families and had good reason. I argue that many of these departing families maintained their faith and commitment to their church.

Consequently, acknowledging various biases leads to understanding the limitations of personal accounts. The most significant limitation is that many of these journals are written by Latter-day Saints who completed their journeys to their Salt Lake Zion and remained committed

to their new faith and did not leave the trail or Salt Lake. Thus, their accounts are not only observations of others leaving—lacking an understanding of motive or intent for departures—but also harbor the bias and often subsequent dislike of those who left. While a limitation, this perspective does not necessitate the removal of their accounts from analysis or consideration. These records provide valuable data about when and where people departed and can be read carefully to gather context as to why the people left. A second limitation of personal accounts was that many were limited in their scope. While they mentioned their own departures, they lacked a complete record of their lives after departure. They often provided a history of their lives for a short period after they left.

Though the official name of the religion most of the members of the Willie and Martin handcart companies followed is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, many variations are used by its followers and outside observers. Within this paper, the terms Latter-day Saints and Saints are used most often to describe church members, with the moniker "Mormon" being used on occasion and by some personal accounts and contemporary observers. Private accounts used many other terms unique to the period, but two seem to need to be addressed. The first are the terms "apostate," "apostates," and "apostatized." Many Willie and Martin handcart company members noted that some of their traveling companions "apostatized." After the first Mormon prophet, Joseph Smith, was murdered in 1844, many groups split off, or apostatized, from the Latter-day Saint church, with varied short- and long-term success. Historian Robert Mullen observed in his book, *The Latter-Day Saints: The Mormons Yesterday and Today*, that "there were apostates to the North in Wisconsin…, there was another apostate party heading for Texas…, there were even abandoned farms in Missouri just to the south open to any who would

renounce his faith."[21] "Apostate" and its similar terms highlight a vital dilemma among the travelers who use them, one where those leaving may not be apostatizing at all.

The reality of this claim is a matter of perspective. Those people staying with the company and enduring the hardships of the trek accused their associates of departing from the faith and their journey to their Salt Lake Zion. While to the adherents, this was undoubtedly true, as those leaving appeared to be apostates, casting off the faith. Nevertheless, those who departed very well could have maintained their faith and commitment and stopped for any number of reasons. The term "apostatized" served as a label for those who departed from the specified path of the Latter-day Saint faith, including the trek to Zion, or maintaining residence there. Regardless of their reasons, stated or not, those who departed from the Latter-day Saint faith or treks to "Zion' were looked down upon, and the term apostate was used to describe them. Part of the analysis that is undertaken in this paper is looking at the circumstances and context of those decried as apostates, including personal writings, if possible, to determine if they maintained their faith, or to what extent their departures may have been a reflection on their commitment to their church.

The second problematic term is "decoyed," which was used to describe those departees who were distracted away from their journey of faith by individuals or groups with promises of employment or opportunity. The term denotes that many Latter-day Saints viewed any opportunity, work, and offers other than that which was provided in their Salt Lake Zion as something that was enticing them away from their true calling. Any job offers, opportunities, or possibilities the Saints encountered along the trail, to them, was a temptation to lure them away

[21] Robert Mullen, *The Latter-Day Saints: the Mormons Yesterday and Today* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 92.

from their divinely designated path. Although not as common, the term again implies a sense of disdain by those who stayed with handcart companies for those who departed, regardless of whether the opportunities proffered were undeniably better than their current circumstances in Salt Lake or on the trail. It is important to note that personal accounts rarely mention whether the opportunities taken panned out to meet expectations. Both terms, "apostatized" and "decoyed," along with their similar forms, indicate the Saints felt a strong level of resentment about those who left. Consequently, it is noteworthy that the same personal accounts containing accusations of apostatizing or being decoyed rarely included any indication of empathy or any note of what happened to those who left after they departed. As a result, this bias is striking and provides a view into how some Saints felt or thought.

As I examined the Willie Handcart Company and the Martin Handcart Company, I did not focus on all the 1,076 individuals that were traveling with the two companies.[22] Rather, I focused on a small percentage of them. Of the total number of people between the two companies, an estimated sixty-five for the Willie Handcart Company and 135-150 for the Martin Handcart Company died enroute to Salt Lake City, totaling between 202 and 217 combined deaths. [23] That leaves 859 to 874 travelers that started the trek and did not die. From this group, I focused on those who departed their trek before they arrived in their Salt Lake Zion, which totaled about 142 people. The number who departed is just over 13% of the total that started on the trek, and approximately 16 % of those who did not die. Three different journals noted that many people left at or around Florence. Loleta Dixon, James Cantwell, and George

[22] Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 193.

[23] Ibid, 193.

Cunningham[24] all wrote that about 100 Latter-day Saints stayed, while through examining personal accounts I was able to find another forty-two people mentioned, most of them by name, to have departed the trail before arriving in Salt Lake City.[25] My analysis and examination are regarding these 142 people.

Understanding the personal accounts of the travelers is vital, not just to understanding the circumstances that these Latter-day Saint immigrants faced as they arrived in America, crossed the plains, and arrived in Salt Lake City. It also aids in grasping the broader context of westward expansion in which they existed. The Mormons were far from the only group or individuals seeking to travel into the territory west of the United States. As Latter-day Saints moved from

[24] Loleta Wiscombe Dixon, "Willie Handcart Company and William James," n.d., *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7434/dixon-loleta-wiscombe-willie-handcart-company-and-william-james; James Sherlock Cantwell, "Autobiography," n.d., 1-3, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7427/cantwell-james-sherlock-autobiography-reel-3-item-30-1-3; George Cunningham, "journal, 1876, Reminiscences, 1876," 1876, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7431/george-cunningham-journal-1876-1885-august-1886-january-reminiscences-1876-2-5.

[25] Josiah Rogerson, "Martins Handcart Company, 1856," 3 November 1907, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/20889/josiah-rogerson-martins-handcart-company-1856-salt-lake-herald-republican-3-no%E2%80%A6; James G. Willie, "Synopsis of the Fourth Hand Cart Company's Trip from England to G.S.L City in 1856," Ca. 1882, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/70069/synopsis-of-the-fourth-hand-cart-companys-trip-from-england-to-g-s-l-city-in-1856; Willie, "Emigrating Company journal;" James G. Willie, "Emigrating Company journal."

their homes in Illinois, then Missouri, and eventually towards Utah in 1846 and 1847, they were also part of a broader movement of people moving westward, too.

Chapter 3: Westward Expansion and Manifest Destiny & Latter-day Saint Migration West to their Salt Lake Zion and Migration Waves

Jacksonianism was an ideology that focused on the empowerment of the individual. Historian Anders Stephanson asserts that it was the "opportunity and expansion for everyone amid minimal or no government regulation."[26] This idea that opportunities and the potential for expansion existed for everyone with minimal regulation highlights a significant concept regarding the motivations for individuals and families to depart their lives in the east and seek new circumstances on the western frontier. Amid this ideology, many organizations sought to leave the boundaries of the United States and find places where they could live and exist while still espousing American ideals, but without the restrictions of American governance. Under this guise, people who settled Texas or joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints left American borders searching for a haven of their own. Historian Thomas Richards calls these groups "Breakaway Americans" for their intentions to break away from the United States' governed area and establish their own societies still founded on and espousing American ideals and sentiments.

Richards elaborates on this term, "Breakaway Americans," in his book of the same name. Among the many other groups, including those traveling to Canada, Oregon, or California, Richards cites one movement that held particular sway over the minds of Americans, the Texas movement. Richards argues that the Republic of Texas became a model for other groups seeking to leave the United States and establish their own sovereign territories and governments. This "Texas Model" influenced multiple groups to move westward. One such organization was the

[26] Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996), 30.

Latter-day Saints. LDS Church members had experienced years of persecution and wanted to carve out a place of their own. After seeing the eventual outcome of independence of the settlers in the Texas Territory, Mormon's felt they could emulate their success.

The practical reasons many travelers moved west dovetails nicely within the conceptual framework. The average person was not thinking about a heavenly manifest that may have been causing people to move west, nor the economic practices of the time, in their intentions to find and settle new places. Realistically, Manifest Destiny was not the story of all who moved west. Historian Andrew Torget asserted that, many migrants sought better opportunities or left due to economic forces and political policies, not divine destiny.[27] Numerous historians have discussed the multitude of reasons Americans departed the United States in droves. Richards contends that many had their own versions of Manifest Destiny. Not all Americans who left the United States during the early nineteenth century fell under the idea that they felt a divine call. Instead, "they possessed political, social, economic, and ideological goals of their own, which rarely aligned with the wishes of US expansionists. Their destinies were fundamentally personal and thoroughly pragmatic, not national or romantic, and the polities they created were rarely intended as extensions of the United States."[28] Richards asserts that not only did many travelers, or in his case "Breakaway Americans," not feel a Manifest Destiny, but in fact, they were almost an anathema to it. Many Americans left the United States seeking to create their own polities separate and distinct from the United States. They could accomplish their own goals, not craft

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[27] Andrew Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 9-10.

[28] Thomas Richards, *Breakaway Americas: The Unmanifest Future of the Jacksonian United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), 7.

extensions of what already existed. Historian Jay Sexton termed this process as nation-building, where westward expansion gradually formed the United States, but in non-traditional ways.

This process included many social aspects that formed and reformed various societal attributes and civic functions, both regionally and nationally. Sexton contends that "nation building in the United States was a process that lasted throughout the nineteenth century. It entailed political compromise and constitutional adaptation, economic integration and religious awakenings territorial expansion and technological innovation, the destruction of slavery and the development of a racialized, nationalist ideology."[29] The United States was in a constant state of flux as many left, and as the government sought to expand. As Americans left the United States and the territories under the U.S. government's control grew, the focuses of historians and politicians fluctuated between significant questions about the exodus of people. What was happening, who was leaving, why people were leaving, and where they were going all posed vital questions to politicians who sought to maintain unity and cohesion in a nation still less than a century old. Similarly, scholars pursued answers and explanations as well.

The combination of circumstances that comprised westward expansion presents a truly dynamic period in American History. People from all parts of the United States, traveled westward into the organized and unorganized territories that stretched to the Pacific Ocean. Leaving their homes, jobs, stability, and settled territory, multiple waves of Americans headed west, driven by varying motivations to try and find a new life. Not all left to California or Oregon, let alone Utah.[30] Space became more widely available starting in the early 1800s after

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[29] Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2012),9.

[30] Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 258.

Thomas Jefferson made the Louisiana Purchase, which essentially doubled the size of the United States. Hundreds of thousands of square miles of supposedly empty and unused space were available.

Regardless of the exact dates for the commencement or conclusion of westward expansion, vast numbers of people crossed the plains and settled the frontier in the nineteenth century. The motivations for this mass emigration were often as varied as the people emigrating. Torget discussed this migration resulting from the new territory acquired, concluding that ultimately many left to seek wealth with their own industriousness and thrifty capability, as those were skills that fostered success on the frontier.[31] Conversely, Stephanson noted the empowerment of the individual in contemporary American Society leading up to the mass exodus of people, writing that many people just wanted freedom.[32] With the tenets of Jacksonianism gripping the minds of many—combined with the appearance of marginal, if any, government regulation—hundreds, then thousands of people attempted to carve out their own place to live.

Freedom to live as one chose loomed large in the minds of many western settlers. Stephanson emphasized those constitutional ideas and claimed that amid this "…era of minimal government, emphasizing the individual right to do whatever, and move wherever, one might please. Commonality, then, lay in the presumed equalization of opportunity."[33] While people's migrations from civilization stemmed from an assortment of intentions, Stephanson claims their

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[31] Torget, *Seeds of Empire*, 2.

[32] Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, 30.

[33] Ibid., 31.

commonalities lay in their equal opportunities for success despite their differences in station or motivation. Correspondingly, given the space available, the success of others settling in the frontier, and the lack of significant regulatory powers, many individuals left to find new lives. Not all who moved westward were on their own, however. Most of those who emigrated to the frontier brought their families, with whom they hoped to start fresh and, ideally, prosperous lives.

Westward expansion was decidedly family-driven. Historian Julie Jeffrey wrote that, "migration was a family affair."[34] Jeffrey elaborated on the experiences of the females involved in migration. These women often filled traditional gender roles for the time and took on vital responsibilities on farms and other frontier residences, which fostered tremendous success for their families. Furthermore, many women filled roles outside of their traditional gender roles as well. Life on the frontier was deadly. Settlers across the frontier, especially men, died from attacks by Native Americans or bandits, were crippled from traveling or farming accidents, or succumbed to any number of diseases. Consequently, women needed to fill major roles that enabled their families to survive, let alone prosper. Women farmed, hunted, drove ox and wagon teams, and protected their homes and properties, all in addition to traditional gender roles.

As families traveled and sought their own successful futures, clashing of cultures and peoples was inevitable. Both settlers and the land's current inhabitants, the Native Americans, interacted and not always amicably. Constantly, people with different backgrounds, cultures, and values encountered one another, and faced resistance as conflicting claims were staked.[35] The

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[34] Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West?, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998), 6.

[35] Ibid., *7.*

result was that frontier life often presented a variety of dangers. Some came from weather and natural circumstances, and others were from predatory settlers. In contrast, some threats came from Native Americans whose ancestral land was being taken and settled on with minimal, if any, notice or permission. Despite the dangers, emigrants pressed forward, moving to various locations.

Americans moved west to make a better life for themselves. As the mass exodus from the east grew, the Oregon, California, and New Mexico territories presented environments ripe for settlement. Also, during the explosion of population in these new spaces came the recognition of the vitality of the terrain not only as a resource but as an avenue to resources like farmland, ports, or gold that were found in the west. This recognition played a vital role in the presence of American and later Union and Confederate troops throughout the frontier.[36] With an expanded military presence, aiding in providing security for thriving settlements, many people pressed westwards with greater confidence. Some went on their own seeking gold, individual opportunity, or some form of success.

The Republic of Texas was founded after a war with Mexico, and subsequently, large groups, not just individual families, began moving west. Between 1810 and 1860, Morrison asserts that "the average population growth of the Old Northwest and the Southwest doubled every 10 years."[37] Some migrants sought, rather than wealth or success in individual opportunities, new political circumstances. After Texas gained its independence and became an independent republic, many assert it became a model for other groups to do the same.

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[36] Megan Kate Nelson, *The Three-Cornered War: The Union, the Confederacy, and Native Peoples in the Fight for the West* (New York: Scribner, 2021), XV.

[37] Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 4.

The "Texas Model" is the idea that the Republic of Texas served as a political model for groups trying to maintain American values and constitutional principles, but beyond the regulation of the United States of America. Texas was initially a conglomerate of people living in the borderlands in the New Mexico Territory. At the invitation of Mexico, which sought to stabilize the region against constant Comanche raids, settlers of all backgrounds and nationalities were attracted to promises of cheap land and minimal oversight and regulation. Following years of growth and establishing regional governing structures, the Republic of Texas fought for and won its independence from Mexico. After doing so, it became a beacon for many desiring to make their own independent polities.[38] As a different form of government and separate from the United States, Texas, with its large population of Americans, represented a unique standard that many groups and organizations attempted to emulate.

Texas represented a model of freedom, opportunity, and land, even if it was not successful in the long run. It showed that claiming unclaimed land between California and the western border states was possible and had benefits and that one could do so while still holding to American ideals. It also demonstrated that being an American had changing definitions. For example, Texas settlers saw themselves as both Texan and American. Although what it meant to be an American changed and was undoubtedly based on time, place, and perspective. In the 1800s, it almost always applied to people of Anglo-Saxon descent. Finally, government action and inaction both played critical roles in developing settlements and the departures of Americans to Texas and other locations. Among the groups that sought to emulate the "Texas Model" was the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a group labeled by Richards as "Breakaway Americans." Richards wrote regarding the significance of the "Texas Model," "Thus, in a

[38] Richards, *Breakaway Americas*, 6.

seemingly counterintuitive phenomenon, breakaway Americans believed they could be more American by leaving US borders, for beyond the borders they could perfect their own Americanness."[39] Latter-day Saints fit this mold, although when they began moving to Utah in 1847, they were not necessarily seeking to "perfect their own Americanness." Nonetheless, they wanted to retain many American ideals and constitutional principles. Specifically, they wanted to practice their religion free from the harassment and persecution they had faced from their religion's foundation in 1830.

Joseph Smith, the church's founder and first prophet, had been no stranger to persecution and ridicule even before the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was officially established as a religion on April 6, 1830. He was murdered by an angry mob while in prison. In February of 1846, the Latter-day Saint church under the new leadership of Brigham Young began to leave Nauvoo, Illinois. After traveling over 300 miles and arriving at the Missouri River near the Nebraska and Iowa border, the Latter-day Saints established a town called Winter Quarters, attempting to survive the winter of 1846-1847. In the spring of 1847, the Latter-day Saints left Winter Quarters for the Great Basin, eventually founding Salt Lake City that same year and issuing a call to gather the remainder of the church to their new Salt Lake Zion. This trek brought thousands of families across the frontier over just a couple of months, and there are four main reasons for their departure. First, they desired to escape persecution. Second, they wanted to maintain religious freedom. Third, they sought to establish their own Zion and an associated political theocracy. Finally, Latter-day Saints removed themselves from the United States partly because of their experiences with state and federal governments.

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[39] Richards, *Breakaway Americas,* 11.

First, Latter-day Saints had experienced devastating persecution. Starting in Fayette, New York, in 1830, Latter-day Saints eventually moved to Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831 and established a settlement in Independence, Missouri. Ultimately, the Latter-day Saints were driven to another city in Missouri before being forced from the state altogether in 1838 and heading to Nauvoo, Illinois. In the sixteen years between 1830 and 1846—1846 was when Mormons were forced to leave Nauvoo—hundreds of families and church members had fled their homes in four states and multiple cities. These trials and persecution often arose because of the Latter-day Saint perspective that theirs was the only true church, meaning all others were false, as well as the belief that the Latter-day Saint church was the only church with proper authority. Maltreatment also came because of the church's theocratic tendencies in a democratic America that still poignantly remembered the causes of and, difficulties and freedoms resulting from the American Revolution.[40] Matthew Bowman wrote of their final exodus that the Latter-day Saints were "driven past the edges of America's prairie and found a place that nobody else wanted."[41] Many Saints felt they were not wanted anywhere they lived, so they found a place where they could settle, where they thought no one would follow. "Relocated in the remote and arid Great Basin, the Mormons could escape persecution by a kind of spiritual quarantine; the dimensions of the continent itself would guard them."[42] Having endured thousands of miles of travel both before and after their 1847 exodus many Saints felt they could finally live and worship without persecution.

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[40] Givens, *The Latter-Day Saint Experience in America*, 73; Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 44-64.

[41] Bowman, *The Mormon People*, 111.

[42] Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), 282.

A second reason the Latter-day Saints fled westward was to maintain their constitutional right to worship freely. Many of themwanted to be left alone, having survived for years amid hateful neighbors, as well as restrictive local and state governments. Each time the Mormons settled in a location, they built homes and cities from scratch, and each time Mormons were driven from their homes they brought only what could be carried in a wagon. Latter-day Saints believed their faith would be tried and believed they would need to find a place that God had prepared for them. Furthermore, "Mormons' theological basis for migration and their stunning ambitions, both geopolitical and theological…the Mormons sought migration both as a result of and in order to fulfill their unique religious beliefs."[43] Latter-day Saints moved not just because they believed it was part of finding and building Zion. Many families in the Latter-day Saint church and their leaders shared the sentiment that they needed not only to live peacefully, but they also needed to live according to God's law, which had become increasingly difficult given their persecution and the infringements on their religious liberty. Correspondingly they believed they need to move to find a better space to establish a separate political structure with a religious foundation.

The third reason Latter-day Saints traveled westward was to build their own Zion and establish a theocracy based on the teachings of their faith. "From the beginning, the Mormon settlements were governed ecclesiastically."[44] This practice of placing religious leaders in political leadership positions was not often received well. To begin with, there was tension and a "poor fit between American territorial government and LDS theocracy…."[45] Wherever the

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[43] Richards, *Breakaway Americas*, 84.

[44] Bowman, *The Mormon People*, 112.

[45] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 284.

church settled, its political leadership stemmed from its religious leadership. With little distinction between religion and state functions in Mormon settlements, non-Mormon community members or those in adjacent towns often felt uneasy about the lack of religious protection that came constitutional provisions. The ensuing persecution helped Latter-day Saints create their own unique identity. Latter-day Saints envisioned themselves like biblical Israelites, chosen by God to leave their current residences and find a promised land. Accordingly, relocation fit perfectly into Mormons' religious identity, undergoing persecution and rewarded with refuge establishing a 'North American Zion.'[46] For many leaders, when looking at maps and the geographical landscape and political borders, "from a religious viewpoint, it was obvious that God had laid out the landscape with some intention in mind."[47] God had, according to Latter-day Saint beliefs, prepared that land for them. Given their struggles with regional and federal governments, most Saints rejoiced at the opportunity for tranquility. Nevertheless, political discord still presented a challenge to get there.

The fourth and final reason Latter-day Saints left for the Great Basin came from their years of persecution without response from state or federal governments, let alone redress. Despite pleas to various local, state, and federal officials, even to the President of the United States in one case, persecutions continued and Latter-day Saints were powerless to stop them. From the time that Joseph Smith first saw his vision in 1820, to the church founding in 1830, and up until Smith's murder in 1844, persecution, migration from hostile environments, and even death were a part of the lives of members of the LDS church.[48] When the church left Nauvoo in

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[46] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest,* 282-283.

[47] Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny,* 43.

[48] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience,* 44-64.

1846, no doubt many felt relief rather than sadness. To some, "the 'boasted land of liberty and equal rights' had become a farce. Within two years …thousands of other Mormons started the journey west from the US Borders to the Salt Lake Valley … as they abandoned the new-fallen United States for good."[49] Although not all Mormons shared these sentiments, the feelings of betrayal lingered for many Latter-day Saints, especially those who migrated to Utah between 1846 and 1856. Several of these members had endured being driven out of their homes, watched their temples be destroyed, and saw their prophet murdered, all with minimal protection or response from local, state, or federal officials.

Even before Joseph Smith was murdered, he and other leaders of the Mormon faith noted the rising tensions and acknowledged the need for a larger and more permanent settlement. Having endured multiple relocations, church leaders had no desire to continue their previous experiences. Correspondingly, they made every effort to find safe and hospitable havens to establish Zion and their theocratic form of government. Interestingly, Latter-day Saints not only sought to gain religious, political, and military relationships with Native Americans,[50] but they also sent missionaries to Native Americans, which impacted their willingness to move westward rather than have an aversion to it.[51] This action also affected political perspectives, as Latter-day Saints sought Native American alliances and cooperation, which was unlike the hatred that many other pioneers harbored.[52] Knowing that the LDS church had cordial relations with Native

[49] Richards, *Breakaway Americas*, 2.

[50] Ibid., 103.

[51] Ibid., 101.

[52] Ibid., 101.

Americans, helped its members cross the frontier with more peace of mind. Additionally, there was an equally positive result among Native Americans, as they were amenable to a Latter-day Saint alliance, potentially against the United States. As Mormon church leaders worked to find pathways through dangerous territories, other leaders sought out locations where they might settle.

Joseph Smith and Brigham Young sent leaders to many territories to determine potential viability for the relocation of the entirety of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Some leaders were sent into the unorganized territories in the Great Basin and the Rocky Mountains to explore and communicate with local trappers and traders. Other leaders sent to the Oregon and California territory determined they were too close to foreign rule and influence and felt they could eventually experience similar restrictions in those places. Leaders were also sent to Wisconsin and Texas. Brigham Young determined Wisconsin was not the place to settle, and negotiations to live in Texas progressed but stalled. Not long after the negotiations with Texas foundered, the Republic of Texas was annexed into the United States, halting further consideration of the area. Texas was now a new state in the union that the Latter-day Saints sought to leave.

The experiences of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during the church's first quarter-century were unique and unlike those of many other religious organizations. Matthew Bowman and historian Patricia Limerick both assert that numerous scholars call "Mormonism the quintessential American faith,"[53] While Limerick adds qualifiers asserting that the churches ideals, like "faith in progress, commitment to hard work, devotion to

[53] Bowman, *The Mormon People*, XV.

the family, careful attention to material prosperity,"[54] further cemented Mormonism as an American faith. The experiences of the intrepid members of the Latter-day Saint faith and their personal accounts confirm Limerick's assertions. Many church members traveling across the plains between 1846 and 1856 had left homes they had built with their hands on multiple occasions and would do so again when they arrived in "Zion." They constantly remained committed to their families, which, according to church doctrine, were eternal in nature—meaning families would live together forever, even after death. Their faith and commitment to their church, Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton wrote, is a "remarkable case study of the growth and development of a new religion—the only major religion with American roots."[55] Another unique aspect of the growth and development of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was not just its organization, rank and structure, or the individual lives of its members. The collective society that Latter-day Saints created is far different from many other religious organizations.

As a result of being driven from city to city and state to state, the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints not only formede a more unified religion, but they became a people distinct from their surroundings. Limerick contrasted members of the Latter-day Saints with their contemporary Christian counterparts, declaring:

> Against the backdrop of sects and denominations, Mormonism offered its converts certainty and community. In Mormon doctrine, earthly labors carried a direct connection to spiritual progress; one's exertions in the material world directly reflected one's spiritual standing…In their first decade, Mormons were already on their way to becoming a new ethnic group, something new under the American sun.[56]

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[54] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 286.

[55] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, XIII.

[56] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 281-282.

The community, certainty, and progress found in Latter-day Saint settlements, however, were unique among religions and the frontier. Wherever Mormons settled, they carried with them the same principles. Thus, in a wild west with little organization, structure, or governance, the stability of Latter-day Saint settlements presented a distinct practice to what many encountered in the frontier. These everyday experiences had a further impact as well.

In addition to a new sort of ethnic group as Limerick wrote, Bowman argued that "the Mormons' abandonment of the United States and trek to the Salt Lake Valley made them more than a denomination; it made them a 'faith tradition,' rooted in common faith but encompassing as well a shared language, history, culture, and folkways. In response to the persecution they faced in the United States the Mormons made of themselves a people."[57] Limerick and Bowmans' assertions help outline a vital attribute of Latter-day Saint westward migration. While this ethnic group and people formed among the Latter-day Saints who had experienced so much leading up to their trek to their Salt Lake Zion, the converts that later came from Europe, especially after 1856, did not have the same shared experiences. Consequently, Latter-day Saint migration occurred in waves, just as general westward expansion migration did.

Latter-day Saint migration westward to their Salt Lake Zion had multiple waves. The first wave started from Nauvoo in 1846. Groups gradually departed Winter Quarters in the spring of 1847 and arrived in the Salt Lake Valley throughout the summer of 1847. This wave concluded with the arrival of the last wagon companies of 1855. Those in this first wave had different shared experiences from later pioneers. Matthew Bowman writes:

> If the Mormons saw themselves as a new Israel, the trek west was inevitably their Exodus. For generations of Mormons, including the one that walked across the

[57] Bowman, *The Mormon People*, XIX.

> prairies, what mattered more than the destination was the act of the journey. It was a collective rite of passage that thousands of Mormons endured, as they had learned to endure all suffering: the death of their prophet, their flight from Ohio and Missouri, and their march across the plains all were taken as divinely set education, clarifying and refining, testing the bonds that the temple ordinances had created, and they saw God's hand in every bush of blueberries.[58]

This statement only applies to the first wave of travelers. Most converts that followed after 1855 did not have these shared experiences. Although they had often sold all they had to get to America and endured great hardship simply to get to the beginning of their overland travel journey, many may not have had the same foundation of faith or experience that the other Latter-day Saints who were part of the first wave of migration did. Bowman, interestingly, notes bonds created by temple ordinances. Within the Latter-day Saint faith, the focus on ordinances, from the beginning, has been constant. From baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost to other sacred ceremonies, Latter-day Saints have always utilized ordinances and ceremonies in their religion. One of the faith's core teachings is that families are eternal in nature and that familial relationship can be perpetuated beyond the grave through temple ordinances. In other words, through sacred temple ceremonies, families could be united and bound together, enabling them to live as a family unit forever.

The Saints had built a temple in Nauvoo, finishing it in October of 1845. From its completion, and even a little before, up through their departure from the city in February 1846, hundreds of families participated in these ordinances, with nearly 5,000 individual ceremonies being performed.[59] Following their 1846 departure, the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of

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[58] Bowman, *The Mormon People*, 96.

[59] John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 141.

Latter-day Saints, whether emigrating converts or previously departed, would not have access to another temple and the revered ordinances until 1877. Even then, the first three temples, completed in 1877, 1884, and 1888, were all outside Salt Lake City, with a temple being completed there in 1893.[60] Although not tangible, the lack of availability of a temple ceremony to bind families together for subsequent Latter-day Saints no doubt weighed heavily on their souls. Personal accounts of some of the travelers noted their longing for temple blessings. They hoped that someday they would be able to attend to assure for their families and themselves the promises of eternal life.[61]

The collective experiences of the first wave of Latter-day Saint travelers knit them together as a people, and spiritual body. "Persecution … served to unify the Saints, not to break them; persecution was clearly crucial in the formation of their emerging ethnic identity."[62] Whether the persecution, fleeing homes, the death of their prophet, or their access to temple ceremonies, the first wave of Mormon migration had a completely different set of experiences than those who came later. Furthermore, they had endured these struggles, some of them, for decades. Jeffrey asserted that "…almost twenty years of persecution and suffering contributed to a strong group identity, encouraged Mormons to accept forceful church leadership and planning. United by memorable common experiences, organized by their leaders for common goals, and committed to the new order by peculiar social arrangements as well as by the promise of

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[60] Bushman, *Contemporary Mormonism*, 78.

[61] Matthew J. Grow, Jed L. Woodworth, Scott A. Hales and Lisa O. Tait, eds. *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days. Volume 2.* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, 2020), 22; Ibid., 13-14; Ibid., 22-36.

[62] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 287.

salvation."[63] Latter-day Saints forged amongst themselves a new culture and society, and established themselves as a people. As they left the United States, heading for their Salt Lake Zion, not all traveled in one large body, however. Instead, they gradually crossed the plains between 1847 and 1855.

As the first wave progressively left the United States, "by 1852 virtually all of those who had left Nauvoo had reached the Great Basin, but they were not the only ones."[64] Handfuls of converts from various parts of the United States traveled to their Salt Lake Zion as physically able or as financially capable. Additionally, wealthier converts from Northern Europe also made their way to Zion, although not nearly the same number as in later years. These early convert emigrants could pay for passage to New York from the major ports of Liverpool and Manchester, the subsequent rail fares to Iowa City, and the outfitting costs to procure an ox and wagon team along with the necessary supplies to travel to Salt Lake. In contrast, many of the later travelers were unable to do so.

Between 1847 and 1855, roughly 20,000 Latter-day Saints traveled to the Salt Lake Valley. A vanguard of Saints traveled in 1847 to the Great Basin to find the final location for their "Zion." Arrington notes that after the initial party of about 200 arrived in 1847, ten more companies totaling 1,700 followed that summer, forming the "nucleus of the Mormon domain in the West."[65] He further asserted, that the "Salt Lake Valley was, within three months of its settlement, home to nearly two thousand people and was well organized for trade and

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[63] Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 185.

[64] Bowman, *The Mormon People*, 108.

[65] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 101.

government."[66] Migration continued, though not through the winter months. Latter-day Saints would take the most direct route possible. Some would travel up the Mississippi River, while others would take the train to its end in Iowa City. In the winter of 1847 to 1848, five more companies were organized and departed in the summer of 1848 with more than 2,500 Latter-day Saint travelers.[67] Over five years between 1847 and 1852, more than six thousand Mormons emigrated, many of them European converts, and founded the city of Salt Lake, their new "Zion." Between 1853 and 1855, just under ten thousand European converts and existing members traveled the Salt Lake Valley. When considering the historians Leroy Hafen and Ann Hafens' observation that, "From 1849 to 1855 some 16,000 European emigrants had been transported to Utah,"[68] factoring in the two initial groups in 1847 and 1848, the first wave of Latter-day Saint migration brought approximately 20,000 Latter-day Saints to Salt Lake City. Hafen and Hafen contend, "it was no small project for twenty thousand people, many of them destitute through the forced sale of their homes, to trek fifteen hundred miles across plains and mountains, and with bare hands in a barren land, create a new home."[69] A corresponding footnote to this comment observed that moving the entire church membership from Illinois and Iowa to the Great Basin took several years.[70] The increased flow of migrants from Northern Europe began in 1848 but reached epic proportions years later. This first wave of Latter-day Saint migration finished in 1855, with 1856 marking a landmark year and a shift in practice for

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[66] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 101.

[67] Ibid., 101-104.

[68] Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 27.

[69] Ibid., 21.

[70] Ibid., 21.

how Mormons crossed the plains as thousands of migrants from Northern Europe sought to find a way to Zion.

The second wave of Latter-day Saint overland travel began in 1856 and lasted until 1868. The next wave's commencement became apparent as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints implemented measures designed to accommodate larger numbers crossing the plains and aid in reducing the cost of travel as many poor European converts arrived in the United States. The result was that a previously established Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF) would provide funds not only to Latter-day Saints in Europe to reach America and Zion, but it would also provide funding for supplies to cross the plains. A new traveling mechanism was introduced as a part of this adjustment, the handcart. This cart was set forth as the primary method of travel for those impoverished travelers needing the PEF. Handcarts had been used for years in European cities to push or pull goods and were not uncommon in American cities.

Handcarts were generally uniform in size, with wheels about five feet tall. A box about four long and four feet wide, and sat on a wooden axle connecting the two wheels. Two shafts about seven feet long ran the cart's length and extended towards the front of the cart, where they were joined by a three-foot crossbar that was used to push the cart. The leadership of the LDS Church felt that, in addition to being much cheaper to produce and maintain, the handcarts would also prove to be easier to move and a faster mode of travel. Additionally, without the cumbersome livestock that often-accompanied wagon teams, handcarts would be able to travel to Zion without delay. What on paper looked practical and efficient was not always so in practice for the handcart pioneers. In rushes to make up for delays or shortages, unseasoned wood, and hasty construction often led to a constant need for repairs. Despite delays, supply shortages, or poor materials and construction, the Saints pushed onwards with their handcarts towards their

Salt Lake Zion, opening the second wave of migration in June 1856. Their experiences changed overland travel and the Latter-day Saint Church forever due to the tragedies they later faced.

The second wave of migration had their own shared experiences and developmental crises, and in three ways had their own formatives experiences. First, many of the converts were not financially capable of funding their own travels and many sacrificed nearly all they owned to travel to their Salt Lake Zion. Some sold all they could and only kept what possessions they could carry to gain passage on the ships to America and the subsequent rail travel from New York to Iowa City, Iowa, where the rail line ended. Upon arrival in Iowa City, hundreds lacked the remaining funds to purchase traveling supplies. Other, more impoverished converts, required even more assistance, struggling to gather funds even to leave England or Scandinavia.

One way these migrants forged a foundation of faith and shared experience was through the persecution and difficulties they experienced. Many converts were ostracized and mocked in their home countries. Others lost their jobs or homes. While paling in comparison to the first wave's trials, converts also experienced hardship as they traveled from New York City to their starting point in Iowa City. Due to their travels and trying to quick arrive at the handcart outpost in Iowa City, these migrants were rarely in one city or town for longer than a night. It often did not take long for word to spread of their arrival, however, and for locals to accost, harass, threaten, and degrade the Latter-day Saint converts.

Another shared experience was through the trek to Zion itself. Arrington asserted, "The trek added migration to the process of conversion, gathering, and persecution in the Mormon panoply of formative experiences."[71] A few of the wagon and handcart companies traveled from

[71] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 96.

Iowa City to the Salt Lake Valley with relatively uneventful journeys. At the same time, some endured severe hardships. Still, others' experiences' fell somewhere between the two extremes. Although challenging, the experiences of those who were part of the second wave of migration were nowhere near the same level of intensity as those from the first wave. Comparing lives and personal experiences always requires acknowledging varying perspectives and interpretations of those experiences; however, the second wave of migrants did not have the same collective experience as the first wave. While they still experienced persecution, trials associated with migration, and endured great sacrifice, the extent of their experiences did not lead to the same formation of a collective people, yet. Additionally, when combined with the lack of an opportunity to have the highly valued and sought after temple ordinances, many of the Latter-day Saints of the second wave lacked the same level of mental, emotional, and spiritual preparation, commitment, or resilience—not necessarily conversion, however—that the first wave had.

The different shared experiences of the first wave of Latter-day Saints compared to the second wave is significant. For decades, the traditional historical narrative of the Latter-day Saint church regarding the westward migration of its people to Salt Lake City has documented east-to-west movement to a final divinely appointed location as well as hardship and trial overcome through faith. The encounters that some of the handcart companies endured and the personal experiences of many travelers in 1856 sharply conflict with the east-to-west movement and overcoming trials through faith narratives. Two handcart companies that traveled in 1856 survived incredibly difficult circumstances and conditions. While many continued their travel to Zion, the crucible was too difficult to bear for others. The Willie and Martin handcart companies were the last two companies, out of five, to leave from Iowa City in 1856. This late departure would have significant ramifications for all those traveling with these two companies. Having

endured delays at every stage of the journey, they started in late July and left Florence, Nebraska, dangerously close to the fall in late August. Consequently, those who went with the companies from Florence encountered winter storms early, which many residents in the region considered the worst winter in years. The result was that the journals, diaries, and other personal accounts from people in the Willie and Martin handcart companies noted travelers were leaving the companies after they left Iowa City and all along their journey to Salt Lake City. Others also wrote about encountering Latter-day Saints leaving Zion and returning eastward, and some even back to England.[72]

The experiences of many of these Latter-day Saints who departed bring into sharp relief a contrast with the traditional historical narrative of the westward migration of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While these counter-narratives may not be mentioned out of a desire to focus on more inspirational or faith-building stories, which certainly exist among the Willie and Martin handcart companies, these untold stories of departing pioneers need to be addressed. Many of the personal accounts of these hardy travelers document resilience, determination, and commitment, but others note that friends or families left the trek, often questioning their motives. Understanding why these Latter-day Saints left their trek—or Zion,—whether their faith impacted their decisions to depart, and how potentially being part of the second wave of migration will all prove vital in answer to determine the significance of these departures.

[72]James G. Willie, "Synopsis of the Fourth Hand Cart Company's Trip from England to G.S.L City in 1856."

Chapter 4: Why they Left

The Latter-day Saints traveling to their Salt Lake Zion with handcarts had many commonalities, the foremost of which was their status as immigrants. Additionally, many were destitute and had previously sold all they had to gain passage to America. While some—ostracized and outcast—left their families, most traveled with their families, seeking the promise made by their faith of life with their family forever. The Willie and Martin handcart companies were unique. They were part of the second wave of migration to Salt Lake City and they had a very different set of circumstances than the previous three companies who departed earlier in the summer of 1856. These two companies were larger and left later than any other hand cart company that ever crossed the plains. The lateness of their departure had severe ramifications. The Willie and Martin handcart companies provide essential insight into the unique experiences of the Latter-day Saint immigrants that were part of the second wave of migration.

The traditional narrative of Latter-day Saint overland travel documents families enduring, tribulation, but overcoming all through faith. While some Latter-day Saint immigrants died along the way, most arrived safely at their Salt Lake Zion. However, the personal writings of members of the Willie and Martin handcart companies paint a drastically different picture. Throughout the personal accounts, individual travelers note that people stopped along the way, turned back, or left Salt Lake City after arrival despite their initial demonstrations of faith and willingness to sacrifice all they had to emigrate to America and "Zion."These departures manifest in an often-untold story of Mormon migration.

For those people who undertook this overland trek to their Salt Lake Zion, most began their journeys across the Atlantic Ocean in Liverpool and Manchester on ships. For some, they started even further away, setting out from the English and Welsh countryside, or Scandinavia.

Their arrival in Iowa City marked the end of the rail line and the beginning of the second part of their journey. In the first segment of their travel, immigrants experienced relative comfort, especially compared to the rigors they would face on the plains. Latter-day saints traveled about 3,300 miles to New York from Manchester or Liverpool by boat, then 1,500 miles by train to Iowa City. They had traveled nearly 5,000 miles by the time they arrived in Iowa City, and such travel could take its physical and mental toll. Most of the immigrants were unprepared for their circumstances and the difficulty associated with a westward journey across the plains. Some contemporary Latter-day Saint church leaders expressed caution, explaining that many immigrants had lived in urban centers, and had no experience in the conditions they would encounter on the American frontier.[73] The next 300 miles from Iowa City, Iowa, to Florence, Nebraska, served as a small taste of what the remainder of their journey would be like. Understanding why they left aids in illuminating the impact of their faith on their decisions.

The reasons these people turned back fall into five categories. The first was dissatisfaction, which included conflicts with leadership, experiences in the Mormon Reformation, discontent, and expectations not being met. Many saints were also notably frustrated with how the Latter-day Saint church ran some of its programs, including the PEF and the logistics of the entire migration movement from England to Utah. Second, many travelers noted they were left behind for various reasons. A third was a more significant reason, a sense of prudence that many Latter-day Saints exhibited in their travels and westward trek. Fourth and also substantial was an evaluation of opportunity cost. Many travelers looked at unclaimed farmland, better jobs or living conditions, enticing offers, military service, or in some cases anything besides the trail, as better than their current circumstances. Finally, the challenges of

[73] Turner, *Brigham Young,* 251.

trail life drove some to settle or turn back before arriving at their intended destination. In discussing these reasons, it is vital to acknowledge two things. Many of these accounts mention the circumstances under which travelers left. Subsequently, some of the reasons people departed are gleaned through corroboration, analysis, and synthesis of the individual accounts. Other accounts have observations regarding the actions of others, and some accounts write of personal experiences, actions, or interactions with the departees. At the core, while many reasons are noted in journals and other personal writings, some people no doubt departed for more than just one of these reasons.

The specific causes for the dissatisfaction were leadership conflicts, the Mormon Reformation, and general discontent or failure to meet expectations. Many Saints were also dissatisfied because they lacked adequate food, supplies, and logistical support. Much of the discontent stemmed from the administration of church policies and organizations, whether on the trail—including the Perpetual Emigrating Fund and handcart program—or in Salt Lake City.

Leadership

Disputes with leadership were general reasons Latter-day Saints departed. Most left from Salt Lake City, but not all. Arrington and Bitton argued that some Mormons left as they felt "the rigors of travel and [Brigham] Young's strong hand on the march west unbearable." They then "filtered back from Iowa or beyond to seek out old homes and comfortable ways. They sought shelter from the conflicts that had convulsed the preceding years of Mormon history."[74] Many Latter-day Saint immigrants chose to follow a path of resistance to change rather than assimilate to a new religion and capitulate to an overbearing leader. Analyzing their actions seems to reflect

[74] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 91.

both a lack of conversion and commitment to the faith they had just gained; however, many who departed left little account of their reasoning for doing so.

However, their escape from what some perceived as oppressive rule was not isolated to early arrivals. When the PEF was instituted in 1856 as a form of credit to pay for impoverished immigrants' handcarts upfront, with repayment coming after arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, many poor travelers took advantage of the opportunity. Years later, after the Saints had arrived and settled in their new Zion, debts remained unpaid. Brigham Young had threatened to take the property, and anything owned from Latter-day Saints who had crossed using the PEF and had not paid or face eviction. Young even threatened expulsion from the region. "Those who wanted to leave the territory found that Young's statement was not an empty threat."[75] The heavy-handed nature of the Latter-day Saint theocracy provided a further example of what might have alienated arriving immigrants, the strict nature of the combined rule of church and state in Salt Lake City. None of this helped when in conjunction with the poor circumstances in which residents of the Salt Lake Valley survived.

Others developed a distrust for leadership because of their experiences while on the trail to their Salt Lake Zion. For example, John Ahmanson had strong feelings about George Kimball, which he asserted were widespread. He claimed, "the resentment toward him was quite general; I myself was simple-minded enough to threaten him that I would present a complaint against him to Brigham Young!...The prophet laughed right in my face. It was no longer necessary for him to

[75] Will Bagley, "'One Long Funeral March': A Revisionist's View of the Mormon Handcart Disasters," *Journal of Mormon History* 35, no. 1, (2009): 55-56, accessed October 26, 2021, https://login.proxy181.nclive.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=44069665&site=ehost-live.

wear the mask of his counterfeit holiness. Through the Mormon sheep's fleece the wolf's claws were beginning to show."[76] Ahmanson's complaint came from how the handcart system was run and the logistical shortcomings, and he notes that not only did he feel that the church leader was lacking in the requisite piety, he also asserted that resentment for the leader was widespread.

While Ahmanson may have felt resentment due to the administration of the handcart companies, Brigham Young appeared to be aware of the deficiencies as well. Young was somewhat more calloused towards the Willie and Martin handcart company's experiences, but "at the same time, he publicly denounced his subordinates. In an early November sermon, he chastised Franklin Richards and his assistant Daniel Spencer,"[77] regarding their roles in sending the companies across the plains so late. However, for some Latter-day Saint immigrants, public rebuking was not enough. Upon the arrival of handcart pioneers in Salt Lake City, the Latter-day Saints already in the city took weary travelers into their homes gave them food, shelter, and medical care with no expectation of repayment. Yet, despite the kind and compassionate reception in Zion and the public chastisement of leaders, John Chislett "could not bring himself ever again to trust the wisdom of the prophet and his elders. He resigned his membership in the church."[78] For some, the crucible of their trial on the trail and the failure of their leadership

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[76] John Ahmanson, "Secret History: A translation of Vor Tid Muhamed," 1984, *Pioneer Database*. The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7422/john-ahmanson-secret-history-a-translation-of-vor-tid-muhamed-translated-by-gleas%E2%80%A6.

[77] Turner, *Brigham Young*, 253.

[78] Nancy M. Peterson, "A DIVINE PLAN with a Hitch! THE WILLIE COMPANY HANDCARTS," *Wild West* 18, no. 1 (2005): 45, accessed October 26, 2021, https://login.proxy181.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/divine-plan-with-hitch-willie-company-handcarts/docview/201479394/se-2?accountid=13153.

adding to their difficulties was far too great an obstacle to overcome to remain in their Salt Lake Zion, or perhaps even to continue their membership. Although many left the movement, it is difficult to determine if they rejected their faith or if they maintained it but needed to remove themselves from an atmosphere where they clashed with their leaders.

Mormon Reformation

Although some Latter-day Saints left because of conflicts, disputes, or distrust of church leadership, others departed because of the atmosphere that existed as a consequence of the Mormon Reformation in late 1855 and throughout 1856 as handcart companies arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. To contextualize the situation, there had been crop failures and famine. In the mid-1850s, Brigham Young became dissatisfied with the state of Latter-day Saint spirituality, and a reformation of sorts followed. As the struggles continued, "Young sensed a spiritual lethargy among his people, perhaps because of their decade-long focus on pioneering but also because of the growing number of apostates and dissenters. Many immigrants to Zion were proving to be indigestible chaff."[79] The recently published *Saints* asserts that the church's acute focus on pioneering and overland travel had left its adherents lacking foundation faith and commitment.

Consequently, rather than institute doctrinal or structural change, Turner wrote, "Mormon leaders demanded repentance and rebaptism. While the reformation left some church members with a greater sense of spiritual assurance and exhilaration, its chilling and bloody rhetoric also bred fear and disaffection."[80] Multiple issues with discipline, violence, and disunity existed in the

[79] Grow et al., *Saints,* 245.

[80] Turner, *Brigham Young,* 254.

newly founded Zion.[81] Everything was not perfect in Zion. They still lived in a wild west of sorts. Thus, a more intense form of religious accountability was deemed necessary by Mormon leaders as many leaders perceived their economic plight as the result of unrighteousness. Subsequently, the church made every effort to provide structure, organization, and harmony, not just religiously but also socially, economically, and politically. While some of "the saints took the reformation preaching of their leaders to heart,"[82] others did not approve of the new style, and their responses varied from disaffection, disassociation, and even relocation

In March 1856 fiery sermons began, many of which contended that "sinners could choose between repentance and flight,"[83] They continued into the winter months after the Willie and Martin companies arrived. These sermons further alienated many recent arrivals. Once the final handcart companies entered the Salt Lake Valley in late 1856, many weary immigrants and recent converts noticed the turbulent atmosphere. The authors of *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1846-1893, No Unhallowed Hand* wrote that "problems had arisen during the reformation. Leaders had spoken harshly of apostates and locals who were not members of the Church. Feeling intimidated, some people left the territory."[84] Travelers among the Willie and Martin handcart companies in late 1856 corroborated this. Five different journals mentioned encountering approximately one hundred apostates, two cited a large number of people that had left the Salt Lake Valley on or around September 28 near Fort Laramie,

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[81] Turner, *Brigham Young,* 258-260.

[82] Ibid., 257.

[83] Ibid., 255.

[84] Grow, et al., *Saints,* 245.

Wyoming. Given the timing, the location, and the circumstances, those "apostates" certainly included many who left because of the Mormon Reformation. The personal writings of members of the handcart companies confirmed this and indicated that many of these travelers cited the biggest reason for their departures as some form of dissatisfaction. Others wrote that the destinations of those people in this large group leaving their Salt Lake Zion ranged from the Eastern states for some and back to England for others.

One of the sources of dissatisfaction was that some claimed they could not find work. On the frontier, especially in Utah, multiple opportunities for employment and earning a living existed. Accordingly, the assertion of a lack of work seems a peculiar accusation, especially among the reputed industrious Latter-day Saints. Brigham Young repeatedly encouraged Saints in Utah to "grow their own food, make homespun clothes, and build mills, factories, and foundries."[85] One Salt Lake resident, James Bleak, said of his experience in Salt Lake City, "I believe this to be about the worst place for idle or lazy people to come to,"[86] which conflicts with sentiments of no work. On the contrary, many different forms of work were available to those who wished to work hard. Personal accounts did not reveal why those departing claimed there was no work. However, as a part of the theocratic structure in the area, many trades commonly had by individuals had been co-opted, which took the self-directing of some livelihoods from numerous Saints and non-Mormons alike. Many businesses were conglomerates run by the church, which eventually suffocated outsiders either out of business or into capitulation.[87]

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[85] Grow, et al., *Saints*, 339.

[86] James G. Bleak, "Letter to John Moore, 3 Dec. 1856," n.d., *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021,https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7557/bleak-james-g-to-john-moore-3-dec-1856-in-moore-family-papers-1846-1876-item-3.

[87] Grow, et al., *Saints*, 217, 339.

Others noted a lack of food, verified in the many crop failures and famines between 1854 and 1856 in Salt Lake. A lack of food likely led many to depart Salt Lake for another location. Some converts were simply dissatisfied with leaders. John Ahmanson had significant disagreements with George Kimball and claimed others did as well, as was mentioned previously. Often those who apostatized sought to bring others with them, and Benjamin Platt and Samuel Openshaw both confirmed this, noting in their diaries that the apostates who they met around Laramie made attempts to convince them to leave their handcart companies and return east.[88]The specifics of the efforts made to recruit Platt and Openshaw were not included in their diaries. It is important to note that those residents leaving likely, felt a sense of duty to inform those traveling that their Salt Lake Zion was not what it was made out to be and that stopping where they were or turning around represented better prospects than completing their journey. Although people likely left their Salt Lake Zion or the trail feeling intimidated, few records indicate whether they removed their names from membership records and left the Mormon faith or if they were faithful to their beliefs but left the region.

Discontent and Expectations

The authors of *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1846-1893, No Unhallowed Hand*, an official LDS Church publication, stated it best as they wrote of immigrants' arrival into their Salt Lake Zion being different from expected Zion. They remarked

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[88] Benjamin Platt, "reminiscences," n.d., *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7562/benjamin-platt-reminiscences-1899-1905-2-5; Samuel Openshaw, "diary,"1856, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7559/samuel-openshaw-diary-1856-may-november-3-10.

of the immigrants, "They traveled the last few miles full of hope, eager to see the place they had heard so much about. But as they entered the valley, they did not see a Garden of Eden. They found a drought-stricken basin covered in sagebrush, bone-white salt beds, and grasshoppers as far as the eye could see."[89] They continued, "By the October 1855 general conference, Brigham Young knew the Saints in the Utah Territory were in trouble. Grasshoppers had ravaged many of their gardens and fields, and the drought had destroyed what the grasshoppers had not. Dust clouds blew across the valleys, and wildfires burned through the dry canyons, destroying fodder for cattle."[90] Latter-day Saints were leaving Salt Lake City in great numbers, concerned their leaders. Many who left were attempting to coerce others to depart with them, or trying to convince exhausted travelers not yet arrived that their destination to stop. The Salt Lake Zion of purity, peace, and joy, at least from the outside, seemed a barren wasteland, and some migrants who attempted to settle there ended up leaving or continuing on elsewhere.

The next way Mormons left the trails is that many Latter-day Saints were left behind as the companies sought to arrive at their Salt Lake Zion before winter and avoid winter snows, despite their extremely late start. Some of these Saints did not remain with companies long enough to experience enough difficulty. In contrast, others were left because they had begun to experience an overabundance of it, like Josiah Rhead, Aaron Barnet Giles, Joseph Beecroft, or Mary Thomas.

Due to sickness, Josiah Rhead's family stayed in Newton, Iowa—one of many small towns along the trail between Iowa City and Florence—and later moved to Des Moines, Iowa.

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[89] Grow, et al., *Saints*, 214-215.

[90] Ibid., 216.

Rhead, part of the Martin Company, wrote, "It was our good fortune to be, detained in Iowa through sickness, after traveling with the company in the neighborhood of one hundred miles, we stopped at a small Town called Newton in Iowa, that fall in winter. The following spring we moved thirty five miles farther west to Fort Des. Moines Iowa, where we lived until 1861…*(sic)*"[91] Rhead's positive attitude about staying in Newton and later moving to Des Moines is noteworthy, as he indicated no resentment at being left, nor wrote any indication he was leaving his faith. Similarly, Rhead does not show animosity towards his involvement with the Handcart Company or the Mormon church. All of these things are indicative of those who were "left behind," actually leaving under chosen circumstances and not desiring to reject their faith. While at the same time, the entire family decided to stop, rather than only those members were sick. These people who stayed back did not leave because they wanted to abandon their faith, they left to take care of their families, and to keep their families together.

While some stopped along the way between Iowa City and Florence, others stopped when they arrived in Florence. Joseph Beecroft also stopped due to sickness. He wrote that while traveling to Florence, he became so sick that he was immobile and that the handcart company continued on. Beecroft wrote in his journal on August 13, 1856, "yesterday morn some Brethren came Camp with a hand cart they left our goods at a post Office about 4 miles off{.} My wife told them, I could not be moved{.} they left their blessing and departed. *(sic)*"[92] Again, Beecroft

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[91] Josiah Rhead, "Excerpts from Record Book," n.d., *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/9307/rhead-josiah-excerpts-from-record-book-in-edward-h-rhead-journal-and-record-boo%E2%80%A6.

[92] Joseph Beecroft, "Journals 1844-1883," 1856, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7522/joseph-beecroft-journals-1844-1882-volume-6-1856-march-1859-april.

does not indicate resentment at the Latter-day Saint Church, handcart companies, being left, or his faith, and like Rhead, appears to have been content with his choice. Beecroft's entire family chose to stop, too, in order to heal and stay together, when his wife and children easily could have continued on.

Joseph Lewis indicated that with multiple sick children, his family rented a home in Council Bluffs, near Florence. Lewis wrote, "hungry and worn out we reached Florence on 11, August, 1856. My daughter was taken sick with the fever, and the rest of the children all had the scurvy so badly that we were unable to proceed farther with the company. After a stay of two weeks we however moved on to Council Bluffs, where I rented a small house and obtained a little work at shoe-making. I had not a cent in the world and the family was completely destitute of clothing and other necessities of life, ..."[93] Unlike Rhead and Beecroft, Lewis's entire family appears to be sick, and their being left behind also indicates a personal choice. However, Rhead, Beecroft, and Lewis all made decisions to stop where they were not only to improve their own health but to stay with their families and maintain some semblance of family unity.

Not all departures, however, happened along the trail between Iowa City and Florence. Aaron Barnet Giles recounts his own experience in a letter to his parents of falling extremely ill and being left behind as no one could care for him. He wrote, "I could not walk no farther and thay would not let me ride in the Waggon so I was oblidged [obliged] to stop so I was so sick that I feel asleep by the roadside. *(sic)*" He was later awoken by "a Waggon Master of a

[93] Joseph Lewis, "Reminiscence," n.d., *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/103751/lewis-joseph-reminiscence-in-jennie-s-crane-biography-of-joseph-lewis-sr.

Company of soldiers going to Laramie with the pay Master…*(sic)*"[94] After staying at Fort Laramie for a time, he was asked if he would "like to stop with them to Fort Laramie for the L[ie]utenant of that company said that he will take care of me and feed me and clothe me and give me money and keep me as his own son," so rather than die as he expected, he explained that "I went on to Fort Laramie with the Company" and eventually to Fort Leavenworth where he wrote the letter to his parents recounting his experiences.[95] Interestingly, in Giles's account, although he is shocked and frustrated at being left behind, he, too, mentions no bitterness towards the Latter-day Saint church or his faith. Subsequently, although he departed the trail and handcart company, his positivity and later communication to his family could be interpreted as a continued commitment, at least in part, to the principle of the family as a core tenet of the Latter-day Saint religion.

Rhead, Beecroft, Lewis, and Giles all fell ill, with Lewis's family falling ill as well and were left behind. Thomas was kicked out and left. They all may have desired to continue. Giles and Beecroft, however, indicated in their personal writings that they were too sick to move, while Lewis and Rhead chose to stop. The handcart companies had left them all in an effort to continue to Zion at the best possible speed, and despite their efforts to beat winter storms, they failed to evade them.

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[94] Aaron Barnet Giles, "Letter to Barnet Moses Giles," December 3, 1856, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/16476/giles-aaron-barnet-to-barnet-moses-giles-3-dec-1856-in-brigham-young-office-files%E2%80%A6.

[95] Ibid., "Letter to Barnet Moses Giles."

In a unique incident only mentioned in one account, a traveler was removed from the handcart company. James Bleak wrote that on "Monday 25th A woman named Mary Thomas was cut off for adultery."[96] The implications of this are startling. Not only was Mary Thomas removed from the company, but she was also left at their current location, which appeared to be Florence, Nebraska. While there were undoubtedly more merciful and more dire punishments, this event demonstrated the commitment of Latter-day Saints to their beliefs and principles. However, this commitment by Latter-day Saint leadership, while endearing to some, drove many away.

Many emigrating Latter-day Saints found themselves in unforeseen circumstances, falling ill on the trail with minimal aid and no time to stop, rest, and recover. The result was that many Latter-Day Saints chose to stop along the way rather than fight through their illness and continue on their journey. It is crucial to note the probable causes of illness in these handcart companies. Although not scientific in origin, the common acceptance of the following is general. First, nearly all those traveling in the Willie and Martin companies were immigrants, new to the United States, and exposed to new sicknesses not typical to their homelands.[97] Second, during their travels, they had been on ships and trains for weeks. Their bodies were undoubtedly fatigued from their travels and constantly changing surroundings[98]. Third, the change in climate from the British Isles and Scandinavia to the extreme humidity and heat of summer in the Midwest

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[96] James G. Bleak, "Journal 1854 February-1860 February," n.d., *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7523/james-g-bleak-journal-1854-february-1860-february.

[97] Turner, *Brigham Young*, 251.

[98] Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 46-56.

presents a stark contrast for bodies to adjust to. Finally, most immigrants were not used to the consistency or level of effort required to push and pull their handcarts, especially after months of travel by ship and train from their homes.[99] With the high likelihood of immigrants being fatigued, the common mention among journals of people departing the handcart companies relating to illness is not surprising.[100] Like Aaron Barnet Giles, who ended up in Fort Leavenworth, many Latter-day Saint immigrants in the Willie and Martin handcart companies left their travels, not necessarily because they were leaving their faith, but because they could not see a safe or feasible way to get their whole family to Zion.

Third, and potentially one of the most significant causes of departures from the Willie and Martin handcart companies, was a sense of prudence regarding sickness and safety. Patience Loader's brother cited staying behind out of concern for his pregnant wife's safety, and Joseph Beecroft noted his sick family. Many journals and diaries mentioned how people continued on, despite sickness or disability. In comparison, some arrived safely or were believed to be miraculously healed, just as many noted multiple deaths after a prolonged illness. However, not all who stopped before the point of origination at Florence were sick. Words of one leader regarding the rigors of the trail that the Willie Handcart Company would face certainly influenced many members to stop and stay in Florence until the following year, whether out of fear or caution, both come down to a sense of prudence. For some, their leaders had a significant impact on their actions to leave, but for others, their decisions and departures were all their own.

Patience Archer Loader recounted that her brother stayed in Iowa with his family, writing, "My Eldest brother John remained in Iowa also his wife and young son Harrey Loader

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[99] Turner, *Brigham Young*, 251.

[100] Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 68, 105, 131.

by name[.] My brother did not want to continue the Journey that year as his wife was nearing her confindment and he thought the journey would be to hard for her and he said that he did not want to pull a hand cart so he got employment in Iowa and remained there for Many Years before coming to Utah…*(sic).*"[101] Archer's older brother John not only recognized the fact that his wife was pregnant but the effects that such an overland travel journey would have on her, his son, and his unborn child. Another immigrant, Elizabeth Whittear Sermon, wrote to her children from San Francisco later in life that their "father hesitated much about leaving Florence, consequently we remained on the camp grounds while four companies were formed and started West."[102] Whittear's father's fateful delay, although out of prudent intentions, had drastic consequences as his family endured great hardships on their trek. While some Latter-day Saints delayed but eventually left Florence in 1865 with a company, others did not.

When the Willie Handcart Company left Iowa City, it traveled with 500 people. Still, of that large number, many journals noted that many immigrants left the company in Florence. Loleta Dixon, James Cantwell, and George Cunningham[103] all wrote that about 100 Latter-day Saints stayed in Florence. The corroboration is clear among numerous other journals, diaries, and

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[101] Patience L. Archer, "reminiscences," n.d., *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7519/patience-l-archer-reminiscences-undated-57-92.

[102] Elizabeth Whittear Sermon Camm, "Letter, San Francisco, California, to My Dear Children," March 16, 1892, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7527/elizabeth-w-sermon-camm-letter-san-francisco-california-to-my-dear-children-1892-march-16.

[103] Loleta Wiscombe Dixon, "Willie Handcart Company and William James;" James Sherlock Cantwell, "Autobiography;" George Cunningham, "journal, 1876, Reminiscences, 1876."

other personal accounts. Many left the companies between Iowa City and Florence. Lyndia Carter in "Handcarts Across Iowa: Trial Runs for the Willie, Haven, and Martin Handcart Companies" asserts that "about a fifth of the Willie company either dropped out in Iowa or chose to stay at Florence."[104] When these people had left England only four months prior, they had been full of zeal and vigor in their desires to weather every trial and storm to arrive in their Salt Lake Zion. Now after the first 300 miles of handcart traveling, an enormous portion of the company had departed. Identifying a catalyst for departures is essential given the significance of fifteen to twenty percent of a company leaving. Among many other journals, James Cantwell and George Cunningham note the profound impact one individual may have had in Florence.

Cantwell and Cunningham both recount the power behind one of the leaders of the Willie Handcart Company, Levi Savage. While refitting in Florence, the company had a camp meeting where Savage was invited to speak. Cantwell noted the vigor and convincing way Levi Savage spoke about the dangers the company would face if they continued on from Florence.[105] George Cunningham called Levi Savage's words—which foretold high death tolls, significant snow, poor weather, and great difficulty for all—a prophecy. Once he reached Salt Lake City, Cunningham wrote that "every word of Brother Savage's prophecy was fulfilled."[106] Given the impact Savage's words had on these two men, their observations regarding the departures of

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[104] Lyndia McDowell Carter, "Handcarts Across Iowa: Trial Runs for the Willie, Haven, and Martin Handcart Companies." *Annals of Iowa* 65, no 2/3 (2006): 223, accessed October 26, 2021, https://login.proxy181.nclive.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=45651475&site=ehost-live.

[105] James Sherlock Cantwell, "Autobiography."

[106] George Cunningham, "journal, 1876, Reminiscences, 1876."

Saints in Florence directly correlate in at least some ways to Savage's remarks. Julie Roy Jeffrey, in her book *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880* documented personal writings of these immigrants, specifically women, observing that "recollections emphasized the hardships and privations of frontier life. Had they known what lay in store, some admitted, they would not have set out so lightheartedly."[107] The departures of so many members of the Willie Handcart Company between Iowa City and Florence indicate that many did take the frontier life seriously and, whether knowingly or luckily, surmised the danger they would face if they continued traveling. This may not have been the case for all, however. While some may have stopped out of concern for personal or family safety, others indeed did so for the allure of their surroundings.

The fourth and other major cause of departures was opportunity cost compared to immediate opportunity. From the beginning of the trek in Iowa City, Latter-day Saint immigrants traveled through bountiful and unclaimed farmland for hundreds of miles, and many stopped or turned back for the opportunity to claim farmland.[108] Others were "decoyed" by tempting offers, whether of jobs, quick wealth, or stability, and it is unknown whether these opportunities were successful or not. Still, others enlisted in military service, taking advantage of the promises of stability with pay, housing, and work. With enlistments, two main questions can be raised. First, were the enlistments at Fort Laramie because of the dire circumstances of the handcart companies? Second, would the enlistments have occurred if the companies had been passing through under better conditions? It is impossible to determine what might have been. Some immigrants left the companies at Fort Laramie for other reasons, including housing, supplies, and promises of warmth and safety. When continuation on the path to their Salt Lake Zion may have

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[107] Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 242.

[108] Mullen, *The Latter-Day Saints*, 92.

seemed like a wintery maw swirling with wind, snow, and frigid temperatures, the comforts that lay at an isolated fort likely seemed beyond compare.

Many immigrants abandoned their handcart company before departure from Florence. between Iowa City and Florence.[109] Additionally, the later synopsis of the James G. Willie Company journal notes that six people left the company "for the leeks and onions," [110] alluding to the bountiful farmland that the companies passed through as they traveled the first 300 miles to Florence. Leroy and Ann Hafen, in their seminal work on Latter-day Saint handcart traveling, *Handcarts to Zion: The Story of a Unique Western Migration, 1856-1860,* noted that "a few dropped out en route, to await more propitious traveling, or to forsake the project entirely."[111] This observation is vital as some travelers simply did not wish to travel by handcart and waited to secure better traveling methods. Company-member John Jaques wrote that, on "the way from Iowa City to Florence several persons left the company."[112] Carter concluded that "once undertaken, the Iowa portion of the trek would prove to be a time of weeding out the sick, the weak, and the fainthearted."[113] While better traveling methods are understandable, and illness or weakness have been addressed, fear has not and does not seem to be discussed commonly in the

[109] Willie, "Emigrating Company journal."

[110] Willie, "Synopsis of the Fourth Hand Cart Company's Trip from England to G.S.L City in 1856.".

[111] Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 94.

[112] John Jaques, "Some Reminiscences," 29 December 1878, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7746/john-jaques-some-reminiscences-salt-lake-herald-republican-29-december-1878-1.

[113] Carter, "Handcarts Across Iowa," 191.

personal writings of many travelers. However, Samuel Openshaw provides a different, more compelling, explanation as to why many stopped along the way, mentioning the "onions and leeks" Company Captain James G. Willie referenced.

Samuel Openshaw observed multiple settlements between Iowa City and Florence. On August 7, ten days after leaving Iowa City, he wrote, " Yet, all this good land lying dormant, except for the prairie grass to grow and decay, which if men would spread themselves and obey the commandment of God to replenish the earth, instead of thronging together in cities and towns and causing the air to be tainted with stinks and giving rise to disease, what a blessing it would be for men."[114] Openshaw's statement provides valuable insight into his mind and potentially the minds of other immigrants. As they passed through this good land, unclaimed and ready to be worked, Openshaw felt the divine call to replenish the earth and to claim and make use of this land. In perhaps one of the only references to a divine destiny different than the Latter-day Saint's Salt Lake Zion, Samuel Openshaw highlights that many Saints and their families may have felt individual callings to stop where they were, despite the general proclamation to gather to Zion. This calling may not have been limited to farming but simply to better opportunities anywhere.

Part of understanding why Latter-day Saint immigrants left Utah after the fall of 1856 is understanding why they were leaving during the spring and summer of 1856 and in late 1855. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, in their book *The Mormon Experience: a History of the Latter-Day Saints*, observed that "the settlers had yet to reap a decent harvest. As reports of the gold strike in California trickled in, even the most loyal Saints began to wonder at their leaders'

[114] Samuel Openshaw, "diary."

wisdom in choosing the inhospitable Great Basin for settlement. A few departed for the gold fields; others returned to the east."[115] Aside from the lure of gold in California and challenging economic circumstances and food shortages in Zion, the political, social, and religious climate also served as an unexpected and unwanted surprise, contrary to expectations. This included southern areas in the New Mexico territory with more farmland or northern regions like the Oregon Territory that offered better living conditions and a more civilized and settled atmosphere.

Immigrants experienced many surprises as they traveled from their homes with their families that would have caused them to question the merits of their chosen path. In Iowa City, the Willie and Martin handcart companies did not have enough supplies to make all the necessary handcarts. They had to endure costly delays waiting for the required supplies and building the carts. The rigors of trail life challenged Latter-day Saint recent converts and handcart company members. The Saints endured shortages of food, the need to leave family treasures to save space and weight, as well as the later abandonment of heavy coats and bedding, because they could not be carried due to weight. All of these further aggravated many travelers. Arrington and Bitton further commented that upon the Latter-day Saint handcart immigrant's arrival in their Salt Lake Zion, their church leaders were "demanding of the immigrant strict obedience and continuing economic sacrifice, it offered in return a home in one of the least inviting regions in the hemisphere."[116] In short, not only was there little food or material wealth, but temptations of quick riches existed, and the requirement of strict obedience to religious

[115] Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 105.

[116] Ibid., 129.

teachings in an inhospitable desert led many to depart Salt Lake City full of disappointment for an overhyped dream.

For Latter-day Saints, upon arrival in the United States, they encountered no small amounts of jeering or mocking at the hands of those whom they passed on the way to their Salt Lake Zion. However, others were less critical and more opportunistic in their interactions with the immigrants. Many outside observers saw the Latter-day Saint immigrants as gullible and having easily swayed minds, ripe for use in any number of schemes. In contrast, others envisioned the hard-working Mormons and saw great service for them in other areas. To the Latter-day Saints, all these attempts to lure them away from their trek to Zion were "Decoys," and those who fell victim were "Decoyed" away from the truth. Joseph Beecroft wrote of one son of "Bro Robinson" named George, who was decoyed by a wealthy man with a large machine, observing, "Bro Robinson being from morning on the march after his son George who yesterday while we were taking our rest by the side of a creek he was decoyed away, by a rich man who dwells away west and who was taking a large machine with them him. *(sic)*"[117] Beecroft's observation is vague, lacking further details of where or why George left, indicating he likely only saw the incident from a distance. Emily Woodmansee noted that various efforts were undertaken, written or verbal, to convince people to stop as they began their trek across Iowa. She stated in her journal, "Anonymous letters, and warnings from sympathizing outsiders were mysteriously conveyed to us, setting forth the hardships and impossibilities of such a journey, and offering us inducements to stay. Many who started out with us backed out in a few

[117] Joseph Beecroft, "Journals 1844-1883."

days."[118] Samuel Openshaw further corroborated her observation. He noted that everywhere the handcart companies stopped, people tried to decoy the Latter-day Saints into leaving the company, but claimed "few" adhered to their advice. He wrote, "every place we came through we were admired by the people very much. Some looked upon us as if we were deceived; others who were old apostates came with all the subtilty of the devil, and all the cunning they have gained by their own experience, trying to turn the saints to the right hand or to the left, but thank[s] be to God, but few or none adhered to their advice. *(sic)*"[119] Latter-day Saints were challenged as they endeavored to hold to their path and commitments when among settled areas, as no shortage of detractors or agitators existed. The reference to apostates is not without further importance, as apostatizing originated long before the trek to Zion began.

After the first Mormon prophet, Joseph Smith, was murdered in 1844, many groups split off, or apostatized, from the Latter-day Saint church, with varied short- and long-term success. Historian Robert Mullen observed in his book, *The Latter-Day Saints: the Mormons Yesterday and Today*, that attempts were made from a distance as well as closer to the path of the trek to "decoy" faithful Latter-day Saints from their desired destination. Mullen wrote, "there were apostates to the North in Wisconsin sending messages asking friends to drop out. There was another apostate party heading for Texas. There were even abandoned farms in Missouri just to the south open to any who would renounce his faith. Certainly the temptations raged."[120] The

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[118] Emily Hill Woodmansee, "Autobiography," 1884, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7465/woodmansee-emily-hill-autobiography-in-augusta-joyce-crocheron-comp-representative-women-of-deseret-1884-85-86.

[119] Samuel Openshaw, "diary."

[120] Mullen, *The Latter-Day Saints* 92.

results from the Willie company were staggering. Numerous Willie Handcart Company journals indicated that close to 500 members began the trek in Iowa City. Still, only about 425 continued on from the point of origination at Florence, Nebraska, the last point of civilization before hundreds of miles of unsettled land. Attrition of fifteen percent of the company is a considerable loss before the start of the trek. The leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was not unaware of these departures and others, especially in their Zion of Salt Lake City.

In the recently published *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1846-1893, No Unhallowed Hand*, published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, church leaders' awareness in 1856 of departures was apparent. Within Salt Lake City, in September 1856, church leaders worried about the faithfulness of members. “They worried as well about the influence of those in the territory who did not belong to the church, the weak faith and commitment among some of the immigrants, and those who had left the church and now fought against it.”[121] However, for all the worries for reasons for departures that Latter-day Saint leaders held in 1856, many decisions by members to leave appeared to be out of prudence or opportunistic in nature. Joseph Beecroft’s story of a young man who left with a rich man and large machine are uncommon, while accounts like those of Emily Woodmansee and Samuel Openshaw highlight the previously mentioned views about those who “apostatized.” However, far more common are stories and experiences like Rhead, Beecroft, and Lewis, who stopped out of necessity, kept their families close, and made the best decisions they could in the circumstances they found themselves in.

[121] Grow, et al., *Saints*, 226.

Aside from Aaron Barnet Giles, who was previously mentioned to join a company of the military in Fort Laramie, others also stopped when the companies arrived at this major supply cache and military fort. John Jeaques wrote that "two women staid at the fort, one of who quickly got married,"[122] while the Willie Company Journal records that two women and two men left at Fort Laramie.[123] It is no surprise that some travelers opted for the stability of military service or marriage into it in the most trying of circumstances with knee-deep snow and low supplies. The military had a constant presence in the unclaimed lands west of Florence, Nebraska. Not only was the territory home to many Native Americans that attacked travelers crossing their lands, but the Army also sought to lend an element of stability and law enforcement in lawless areas. The subsequent impact was that for some travelers, joining the Army presented a better option, especially for families, than traveling to an unknown location with unknown circumstances. It was easy to criticize the reasons for departures as doubt, lack of commitment, or apostatizing to those not leaving. The reality may not be known, and a combination of opportunism and some doubt or lack of commitment drove these departures. In addition to the two men that the James G. Willie Company Journal[124] noted leaving at Fort Laramie, Josiah Rogerson, a member of the Martin Company, mentioned five men enlisted in military service at Fort Laramie, one brought a woman from the company, one left a wife and children, two were single, one a 22-year-old cripple (who many justified in leaving), and one man who went and brought a woman and married her at the fort while enlisting.[125] Such a large

[122] John Jaques, "Some Reminiscences," 29 December 1878.

[123] James G. Willie, "Emigrating Company journal."

[124] Ibid..

[125] Josiah Rogerson, "Martins Handcart Company, 1856."

number of enlistments and departures again begs the question as to why, which returns to the circumstances of the snowbound, hungry, and downtrodden travelers with few supplies. Given their condition, it is reasonable that some of the Latter-day Saints left their companies for guaranteed food, shelter, warmth, and pay. After the handcart companies left Fort Laramie, they eventually became stuck due to winter weather. They were rescued, and their members were transported the remaining distance to Salt Lake City by wagon. Many travelers arrived in their Salt Lake Zion but did not stay.

After Latter-day Saints departed from Florence, their surroundings became gradually bleaker. They left the fertile farmlands of Iowa and eastern Nebraska and journeyed into western Nebraska and Wyoming's deserts and turned north. Company member Isaac Wardle noted that people stopped along the way between Florence and Pacific Springs, a settlement West of Laramie. By the time the company arrived at Pacific Springs, Wyoming from Council Bluffs, near Florence, Nebraska, "our company was much smaller than when we left Council Bluffs, as so many had died some had stopped at different places along the way."[126] This observation is critical, as it demonstrates that departures from the companies not only occurred in Florence, Iowa City, and in between but along the trail in even more sparsely inhabited areas between Florence and Fort Laramie. Seemingly, every settled location along the path to their Salt Lake Zion offered Latter-day Saints a semblance of structure, stability, and opportunity, especially in comparison to the constantly changing circumstances of the trail and their trek westward.

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[126] Isaac John Wardle, "Autobiographical Sketch," n.d., *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/10402/wardle-isaac-john-autobiographical-sketch-n-d-2.

Fifth, and finally, others left their companies precisely because of these constantly changing circumstances or other difficulties they encountered on the trail. For them, the experiences were far more challenging than they expected or could endure. Millen Atwood observed, "The Saints found, however, a wide difference between singing about going to Zion, and actually going. You would almost have thought that they would take wings and fly like doves to their windows, but when they really got into the work, the tune was a little different; but the great majority stuck to it, and those who were good for nothing left us at Florence."[127] Other saints observed similar responses. Albert Jones noted, "The people are getting weary with the work,"[128] highlighting the struggles people had and even the potential loss of hope or desire. John Jaques concluded, "I think that none of the immigrants would be willing to endure another such a journey under any circumstances whatever. One in a lifetime is enough."[129] Jaques referenced the significant emotional and physical distress many endured as they fought to survive, let alone arrive safely in their Salt Lake Zion. Many could not stay among Latter-day

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[127] Millen Atwood, "Account of His Mission," 26 Nov. 1856, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/12047413946132903688-eng/account-of-his-mission-deseret-news-26-november-1856-300-301?firstName=Millen&surname=Atwood.

[128] Albert Jones, "notes," Ca. 1906, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7542/albert-jones-notes-circa-1906.

[129] John Jaques, "Some Reminiscences," 22 Dec. 1878, *Pioneer Database*, The Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 26, 2021, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/overlandtravel/sources/7745/john-jaques-some-reminiscences-salt-lake-herald-republican-22-dec-1878-1.

Saints in Zion after their experiences, in part because of the consequences of their emotional or physical challenges.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Latter-day Saint departures from Salt Lake City or from the trail to their Zion constitute a matter of faith to all parties involved. New stories and varied perspectives are illuminated through examining the convert departures from the Willie and Martin handcart companies, but equally important is the greater clarity about why these Saints stopped, left, or turned back. Douglas Davies concluded that "care is needed when evaluating information like this because of the implicit assumption that if someone leaves a movement its message must be untrue or its messengers insincere. While truth…remains grounded in personal evaluation, as does the question of sincerity, there always remains the question of changing evaluation."[130] The principles behind Davies' assertions are vital in understanding the departures evaluated here. The deviations of Latter-day Saints in the second wave of their church's migration to Utah, while to some may have appeared as abandonment of their faith, the reality is far from that. Many of those who departed the trail or left their Salt Lake Zion did so to maintain their most prized possession, their families. Having been converted to the teachings and doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, these new adherents were aware of the promises from their new church that their families could be joined together forever. For many Latter-day Saint immigrating families, their decisions to embark, stop, continue, or return from their journey were made with family foremost in mind. Therefore, the decision to stop or return was not necessarily a rejection of faith, but perhaps a commitment to it and family and an embodiment of one of the highest expressions of faith to be seen in the Latter-Day Saint community.

Many of the Latter-day Saint travelers were ardent followers of their new faith, and as such, they viewed any who departed with disdain, regardless of their circumstances of reasoning.

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[130] Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism,* 230.

In addressing the terms “apostate” or “apostatized,” this paper noted that many used the words in a derogatory fashion in their personal accounts. Yet, very few actually had any personal contact with those “apostatizing,” let alone knew their reasons for leaving. Additionally, the term “decoyed” had similar implications regarding those who specifically left for job offers or other circumstances that pulled them from the trail. However, when reviewing the accounts from observers about those who left or reports from those who departed, one vital commonality existed, the indication that those who departed did so with their families. The mention of families leaving the trail together supports the assertion that those departing, although leaving their path to Zion, still sought to embody their faith through clinging to their families, hoping for the eternal family the Mormon faith taught. The framework and doctrine of the Latter-day Saint church explained many things and provided a practical foundation for its tenets. Likewise, there were also theoretical frameworks that helped define the broader westward expansion movement as well

Richards’ Breakaway Americas concept and Texas model, along with the widespread ideals of Jacksonianism, is the framework that prompted many to travel west. Migration west was a decidedly family-driven event. Once Texas gained its independence from Mexico and became a nation in its own right, many other groups, including the LDS Church, sought to emulate the model and create polities of their own in the unorganized expanse of land known as the frontier. The Latter-day Saints were not the only ones heading west, nor did they only stay in Utah. The large portion of those trekking settled in a variety of locations, places like California, Oregon, or Texas. Most importantly many brought their families, hoping for a fresh start, land, and wealth. The Mormon migration west nests cleanly within the larger westward expansion. Latter-day Saints had been persecuted for years and sought a place where they could be free from

harassment, worship without restriction, establish their Zion through a theocratic form of government, and finally escape an American government that had failed to protect them for decades. The result was a mass migration of numerous people, primarily comprised of families. In one of the largest organized migrations of people, over the course of several decades the Latter-day Saint church relocated. Significantly however, not all made it to the intended destination.

Once they were again forced from their homes in Nauvoo, Illinois, and traveled westward towards the Great Basin, Mormons eventually found the Great Salt Lake and founded their Zion in the surrounding valley. Once settled, a call went out to the remainder of their people worldwide, primarily in Northern Europe. The result of the initial migration and subsequent migration of immigrants from Northern Europe was the clear distinction of immigration waves among Latter-day Saint travelers, just as in general westward expansion. The first wave, 1847-1855, comprised the majority of the existing body of Latter-day Saints in the United States, who had been persecuted, driven from homes they built across multiple cities and states, and had seen their prophet murdered. This group also participated in temple ordinances in Nauvoo before they left and were the last people to do so for nearly thirty years. Through their shared experiences over years of tribulation, those in the first wave had formed a new people, bound together through the crucible of their experiences. This unity fostered a strong support system, but these experiences had a more profound effect. Each person and family in this wave had endured moving, persecution, and heartbreak because of their faith, yet they continued on. This group, over years of trials, cultivated a foundation of faith, doctrinal understanding, and resiliency, that empowered them to weather their challenges.

The second wave, 1856-1868, began with the families of immigrants leaving Northern Europe, from Scandinavia and the British Isles, and traveling nearly five thousand miles from Manchester and Liverpool to the end of the train line in Iowa City, Iowa. The poor, downtrodden, and mainly urban converts and their families encountered challenges they have never faced and circumstances they physically could not handle. They too experienced trials, harassment, and difficulty, and made great sacrifices. However, even though many sold all they had and endured great personal hardships and sacrifices, their recent conversion left them without a significant foundation of faith, doctrinal understanding, and resilience, especially when compared to the first wave. Despite this, what the second wave lacked they many made up for in zeal and fervor. Nevertheless, the different set of shared experiences and minimal foundation of faith, doctrinal understanding, resilience, and experience set a different context as the Willie and Martin handcart companies left from Iowa City.

Many of these pioneers were not prepared to begin the journey, let alone continue it. This fact was corroborated through the personal accounts of the members of the Willie and Martin handcart companies, as they noted numerous departures. Saints leaving the trail was especially common among the Willie Handcart Company, which notably started with 500 members in Iowa City, but left the point of origination at Florence with near to 400 members.[131] The one hundred or so people who left the company between Iowa City and Florence not only saved their own lives, but likely numerous other travelers who continued with the company.

[131] Loleta Wiscombe Dixon, "Willie Handcart Company and William James;" James Sherlock Cantwell, "Autobiography;" George Cunningham, "journal, 1876, Reminiscences, 1876;" Lyndia McDowell Carter, "Handcarts Across Iowa: Trial Runs for the Willie, Haven, and Martin Handcart Companies."

Given the deaths that the Willie Company encountered due to starvation and overexposure, those numbers would have increased had there been more people to take from the food supply.

Through my analysis and synthesis, I developed an understanding of the many perspectives within the personal accounts, and the reality is that many Latter-day Saints not only left the trail but did so and maintained their faith rather than abandoning it. Through the combined analysis and synthesis of the various perspectives, one vital commonality existed, the indication that those who departed did so almost always with their families if they had them. The mention of families leaving the trail together supports the assertion that those departing, although leaving their path to Zion, still sought to embody their faith through clinging to their families, hoping for the eternal family the Mormon faith taught. Furthermore, those who departed are clearly and consistently documented among the travelers' personal accounts of this sample of the second wave; consequently, the significantly different shared experiences of this wave also impacted their travel to "Zion."

The reality among those who left, turned back, or stopped along the way was that very few left any mention as to their faith and its influence on their decision to depart. While many are noted to be bitter or resentful—and maybe conclusions can be drawn because they encouraged others to leave with them—the large portion of departures indicate a level of prudence, caution, and, one could interpret, a desire to maintain some level of family unity and cohesion. Immigrants in a strange land, ostracized and often scorned and rejected when they left their homes, these Latter-day Saint converts and immigrants were isolated and alone except for their families, the meager possessions they brought, and their newfound faith. Latter-day Saint departees' dissatisfaction, getting left behind, prudence, judgments of opportunity cost, or struggles to continue through difficulty all played significant roles in their decisions to leave the

path their recently adopted faith outlined. Potentially confused at the direction they should go and having a scanty foundation of doctrinal knowledge, the most feasible assessment of the reasons for these departures was that the new converts simply tried to do the best they could with the knowledge they had, relying on their faith in some of the most trying and challenging circumstances they had ever faced.

Those who had families noted that they had stopped and stayed with their families or children, while those without children or families often stopped for opportunity and stability. Jeffrey claimed that "migration was a family affair,"[132] which notes an important distinction that Latter-day Saint handcart companies had compared to many other cross-country travelers; the fact that most in their companies were families with women and children. In discussing the role of the religious identity of the Mormon faith, Patricia Limerick asserted that "in many ways… Mormonism was quintessentially American. Faith in progress, commitment to hard work, devotion to the family, careful attention to material prosperity—in all these qualities, Mormons could not have been more American."[133] If these Latter-day Saint departees stopped in order to maintain family cohesion and unity, they were fulfilling one of the core tenets of their faith. Even though their personal writings mention little of their faith's role in their decisions to depart their chosen path, the fact they sold all they had to travel to the United States and made an effort to cross the plains pushing or pulling handcarts demonstrates an unparalleled level of commitment and devotion, rarely seen in the era of westward migration.

To these hardy travelers, their families were part of their faith, and stopping to maintain their family's health and stability demonstrates continued commitment to the ideals they adopted

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[132] Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 5.

[133] Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 286.

when they started their journey of faith, even if they never made it to their Salt Lake Zion. The stories told of Latter-day Saints who crossed the plains with handcarts are built on a bedrock of faith that guided these pioneers through unimaginable difficulties. The Latter-day Saints who departed from the trail are genuinely an untold story in the narrative of Mormon handcart pioneers. Regardless of where they left, their stories should be added to those of their handcart brethren and sisters. The Saints who departed were often harshly judged, poorly treated, and callously rejected when they left. Still, they stayed committed to their families and exemplified a commitment to the new faith they had found. Through seeking to preserve their families by stopping, leaving, or turning back, the stories of these often-overlooked Latter-day Saints represent the embodiment of a faith that consistently asked everything of its followers. Rather than discard these experiences as dross from the "refiner's fire" of faith, they should be included as stories of those whose faith was refined and tested in a different way. To the Latter-day Saints who departed from their Salt Lake Zion or the trail to Zion, they left because of their faith and their desires to live their family's ties to that faith, and for them, it made all the difference.

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