

*as ever your affectionate Mother*



*Nancy was born in 1816 in Henderson, New York, about 100 miles (160 km) from the Smiths' frame home in Palmyra.*

*In 1832, Nancy heard about the Book of Mormon, which was printed in nearby Palmyra, New York.*



*Nancy was present at the organization of the Relief Society in 1842.*

HENDERSON, NY

PALMYRA, NY

KIRTLAND, OH

TO SALT LAKE VALLEY.  
THE TRACYS SETTLED  
IN MARRIOTT, UT.

NAUVOO, IL

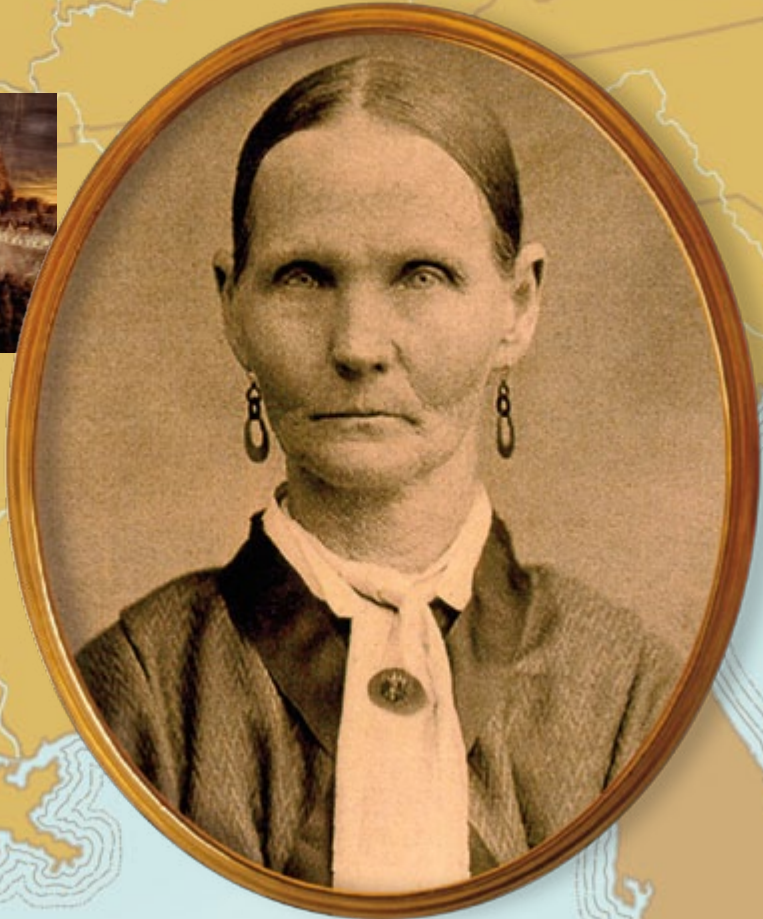
FAR WEST, MO

*After the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1844, Nancy and her family were forced to flee Nauvoo with the Saints.*

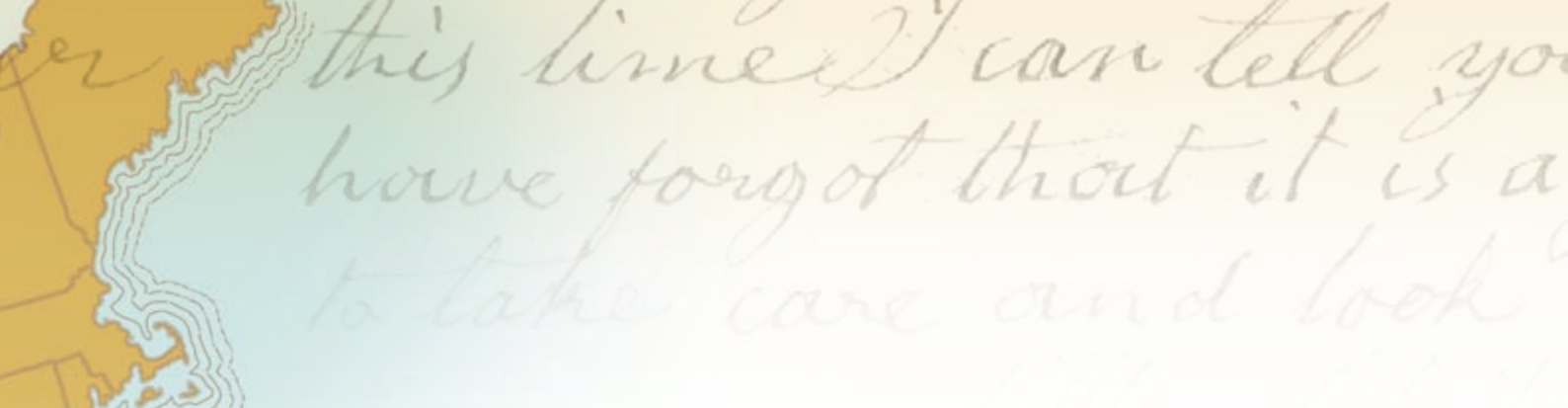


*Nancy was baptized in 1834. She attended the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in 1836.*

*Nancy's husband was present at the Battle of Crooked River near Elmira, Missouri—one of many trials for the early Saints.*



*Valiant in the face of hardship and persecution, Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy lived the way we all hope to live: faithful and full of hope.*



# Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy:

## FAITHFUL PIONEER

By Rachel Cope

In her 80th year, 19th-century convert Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy wrote an account of her life's history "for the benefit of [her] posterity."<sup>1</sup> Although her autobiography describes the "hardships, poverty, and persecutions" she faced after embracing the gospel in 1834, it also provides an example of conversion as a lifelong process rather than a single event. Nancy's story makes it clear that she understood the importance of recognizing and then remaining committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### Her Early Years

Nancy was born on May 14, 1816, in Henderson, New York, USA (about 100 miles [160 km] northeast of Palmyra, New York). This area has become known for the frequent religious revivals that occurred there in the early 19th century. The denominational diversity that resulted from such movements certainly influenced Nancy's family. Her mother was a Baptist and her father a Universalist. Her aunt and uncle joined the Presbyterian church, and her maternal grandmother, with whom she lived following her father's passing, was a devout Methodist. Consequently, Nancy attended meetings at a variety of churches from a young age.

In early 19th-century America, young women were particularly prone to religious seeking and its accompanying revival attendance. Consequently, there were an estimated

three female converts for every two male converts within Protestantism.<sup>2</sup> Like so many of her friends and peers, Nancy had a strong interest in religion that was piqued as a result of camp meetings held by the Methodist church in an area near her grandparents' home in Herkimer County, New York. She attended expecting to experience conversion.

Although Nancy participated actively in various revival meetings and longed to find religion, she was disappointed in her search. "I wanted with all my heart to be good," she wrote, "but I could feel no different."

Because the messages she heard did not satisfy her, Nancy continued to seek. Her consistent desire to experience conversion and her commitment to revival attendance, combined with her belief that she, too, could experience the Spirit's presence in her daily life, played an important role in preparing her to recognize the restored gospel.

At the age of 16, Nancy felt prompted to return to Henderson, New York, so she could be near her mother. Upon her return home, she resumed her education and soon became acquainted with a young man named Moses Tracy. They were married on July 15, 1832, after a brief courtship.

### Finally Finding the True Gospel

During the summer of 1832, Nancy heard "rumblings about a gold bible" that "made quite an excitement." Shortly thereafter, traveling preachers who called

MAP BY THOMAS CHIDD; PHOTOGRAPH OF NANCY NAOMI ALEXANDER TRACY COURTESY OF JULIE JOHNSON; LETTER TO SON, H. H. TRACY, COURTESY OF JACAVIN H. WESTERGARD; FRAME PHOTOGRAPH BY MAREN MECHAM; PAINTING, COME LET US REJOICE, BY WALTER RANE, COURTESY OF THE CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM; PAINTING, THE BATTLE OF CROOKED RIVER, BY C. A. CHRISTENSEN, COURTESY OF THE BYU MUSEUM OF ART; PAINTING, THE END OF PARLEY'S STREET, BY GLEN S. HOPKINSON; PHOTOGRAPH OF KIRTLAND TEMPLE COURTESY OF THE CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM; PHOTOGRAPH OF GRANDIN PRESS BY NORMAN MAYES



themselves Mormon missionaries entered the area. Nancy decided to attend one of their meetings out of curiosity that had risen due to the various rumors she had heard about them. As she listened to a missionary named David Patten deliver the message, she experienced something that “was better felt than described.”

She explained further, “I well remember his powerful sermon on the first principles of the Gospel as taught by the

Savior and his apostles. O how plain and beautiful and easy to understand. I believed with my whole soul and I could see that I had been preserved from uniting with other creeds . . . [I] told the folks that for the first time I had heard the true Gospel preached by David Patten who had been chosen as an Apostle, ordained and set apart to teach the pure doctrine of our Savior. They laughed at me and cried, ‘Delusion, false prophets,’ and so on. But the seed had taken root.”

Nancy had discovered what she had been searching for; she recognized and accepted the restored gospel immediately. She finally “felt different.”

Like many women converts in 19th-century America, Nancy would lead her husband to church. She shared her experience with him and encouraged him to “hear and investigate” for himself. They awaited the return of missionaries. Eventually, Parley P. Pratt visited their neighborhood. Moses attended a meeting with Nancy, “and his eyes began to be opened.” He read the Bible and contemplated the messages he had heard. On May 10, 1834, Nancy and Moses were baptized and confirmed members of the Church.

### **Commitment to the Restored Gospel**

The remainder of Nancy’s life illustrates how conversion requires more than belief, baptism, and confirmation; it necessitates the daily decision to remain committed to the gospel despite temptations and trials. The seed that had



*In her later years, Nancy lived in Marriott, Utah, where despite continued hardship, she remained faithful.*

taken root when she recognized gospel truths required constant cultivation.

Nancy’s first major test of faith came when Moses and she felt that they should gather with the Saints in Kirtland, Ohio. Although saddened by the thought of leaving the home she loved in New York, and fearful that she might never see family members and friends again, she chose to trust the guidance of a prophet and the whisperings of the

Spirit. Heartbreak was tempered by the confirmation that she was doing the Lord’s will.

In March 1836, Nancy and Moses had the privilege of attending the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. She described the Pentecost-like event as “two of the happiest days of my life.” This experience prepared Nancy spiritually for the sacrifices ahead.

At the time, the Saints living in Missouri were experiencing significant challenges. Nonetheless, Nancy and Moses were asked to make the long and arduous trek to Far West, Missouri. With a testimony built on a foundation of faith, they moved to Missouri despite their concerns.

Upon arrival Nancy discovered that Church members in Far West were living in destitute conditions. Likewise, her family’s clothing and shoes were worn out, and they had little money and no shelter. Nancy and Moses built a cabin and pieced their temporal lives back together. Conditions improved slowly, and Nancy believed they had finally “found a permanent resting place.”

But such was not to be. Nancy’s husband, Moses, volunteered to fight in what became known as the Battle of Crooked River. This was a skirmish between Latter-day Saints and a unit of the Missouri Militia in 1838; it was followed by the conflict known as the Missouri Mormon War and the issuance of the governor’s infamous extermination order, which ordered the removal of all Latter-day

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have forgot that it is a

Saints from the state. In the Battle of Crooked River, Elder David Patten, the missionary who had introduced Nancy to the gospel, was killed. Problems in Missouri continued to mount. As a result, yet another move became inevitable, this time to Nauvoo, Illinois.

“Well, here we were again,” Nancy wrote, “to start anew to make another home with nothing but our hands and brains to begin with. We were not conquered in spirit but determined to live our religion and stand by the principles of the Gospel and help to build up the kingdom of God on the earth.”

### Joys of Nauvoo

During the 19th century, many women in the United States and Great Britain established benevolent societies so they could formally engage in reform and charitable work. In Nauvoo, a small group of LDS women decided to form such a society of their own. They shared their plan with the Prophet Joseph Smith, who explained that he would help them establish something even better than a benevolent society. On March 17, 1842, the prophet officially organized the Relief Society “under the priesthood after the pattern of the priesthood.”<sup>3</sup> The sisters were to not only give temporal aid but also engage in the work of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

By attending Relief Society and other Church meetings, and by studying and pondering upon gospel truths, Nancy nurtured her testimony and continued to develop her relationship with God. She took advantage of opportunities to receive instruction from the Prophet Joseph, particularly when he addressed the Relief Society sisters. Of one such experience she recalled, “He opened the meeting by prayer. He was so full of the Spirit of the Holy Ghost that his frame shook and his face shone and looked almost transparent.” Such moments became imprinted on her heart and mind and encouraged her to remain committed as further trials unfolded.

### Moving Again

By the early 1840s, enemies from both within and without the Church turned against the Prophet Joseph Smith. In describing such conditions, Nancy wrote:

“The clouds had begun to gather. It was not all sunshine now in Nauvoo. The opposing element was at work. The prophet was harassed with false brethren and apostates trying to prefer charges against him and bring him before the courts, but they could not prove anything against him. And for what reason was this tirade against him? It was because he was a prophet of the living God and because he had chosen to lay the foundation of the kingdom of God on the earth in this last dispensation. This has been the case in every age of the world when there has been a prophet to lead the people of God. They have been persecuted in like manner, and this is still another testimony of the divinity of this work.”

The Tracys were out of town when Joseph Smith was martyred on June 27, 1844. “When we got back,” Nancy recalled, “we received the heart rending news that our prophet was slain in Carthage jail. We were horror stricken.”

Soon the Saints had to move again. Before departing for the Rocky Mountains, Nancy received her endowment in the Nauvoo Temple. This decision certainly provided spiritual fortification as she embarked upon the journey west. After arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, she and Moses established a home in Marriott, near Ogden. Nancy remained faithful until her death in 1902 at the age of 86.

Nancy Tracy, like many early converts to the Church, suffered extreme hardships while continually being uprooted from her home and chased away by those who opposed her faith. Nevertheless, she bore a subtle yet powerful testimony of the importance of conversion—not just the initial moment in which one recognizes truth, or the experience of entering into baptismal covenants, but also the journeys that lead to and follow those sacred experiences. Nancy testified that God had actively blessed her throughout her life, and her memoirs remind us of the importance of remaining engaged in the conversion process. ■

#### NOTES

1. Except as noted, all quotes and biographical information are from Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy, autobiographical writings, 1880–1899, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
2. Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Women’s Sphere” in New England, 1780–1835* (1997), 132.
3. *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 12.
4. See *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (2011), 9–25.