

Exodus from Nauvoo, February–May 1846

Brigham Young had arranged with local authorities for the Saints to leave Nauvoo in the spring of 1846. The Saints were told to have enough supplies for their families for 18 months before starting off.

Because there were warrants for the arrest of Church leaders, the leaders left sooner. Their departure, coupled with rumors that federal troops would stop the Saints from leaving, made the rest of the Saints nervous. Afraid of being left behind, many Saints left the comfort of Nauvoo without adequate food and clothing.

Wednesday, February 4, 1846: Charles Shumway was the first to ferry across the Mississippi River. Within a few days, under the direction of Hosea Stout and the Nauvoo Police, the Saints were crossing night and day on any available craft.

Monday, February 9, 1846: The wind was quite high and the river very rough. As a man and two boys came from one of the river's islands with a load of wood, their skiff began to fill with water and the boys became frightened and screamed loudly.

A ferryboat loaded with wagons and oxen approached, and the three were picked up safely. Unfortunately, someone on the ferry spit tobacco or whiskey in an ox's eye, and in the ensuing commotion, some bottom planks of the boat were kicked out.

Hosea Stout recorded in his journal that as the boat sank, people grabbed on to anything they could—sticks, lumber, beds—and were tossed about at the

mercy of the cold waves. Some climbed on top of a wagon that had not gone under. The cows and oxen swam back to shore. Finally an empty boat that was crossing the river picked up the people. No one was lost, but some were so cold and exhausted they could not speak.

That same afternoon the temple caught fire. Women carried water, but a 12-foot hole was burned before the fire could be put out.

Sunday, February 15, 1846: Brigham Young and most of the Twelve crossed the Mississippi, but Brigham and other brethren returned on the 18th to transact business.

Thursday, February 19, 1846: William Clayton recorded that the ground was covered with snow and that it was windy. No one could cross the river, and it continued to snow all day. In fact, Clayton spent the whole week waiting and did not cross until February 27.

Tuesday, February 24, 1846: The river froze over, something it usually did not do, and the next morning Charles C. Rich walked across. Although the cold brought much suffering to the Saints, the frozen river simplified their crossing.

Some days later the ice began to break up and the Saints had to wait while the ice was removed from the channel. Then the ferrying began again and continued until summer.

Summary

Under the leadership of Brigham Young, the Saints planned to leave their homes in Nauvoo, Illinois, and head west in the spring of 1846. However, when reports came of threats to them and their leaders, many decided to leave earlier. The first Saints left Nauvoo on February 4, 1846. Getting their wagons, animals, and supplies across the wide Mississippi River by

ferry or small boat was difficult and dangerous. The river miraculously froze over for a short time, allowing some to cross on the ice. More than 3,000 Saints crossed the Mississippi River during February, beginning the remarkable western migration of the Mormon pioneers.

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Artist, C. C. A. Christensen

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