



The Saints were forced by mob violence to leave their beloved city of Nauvoo.

Faith in Every Footstep

Preparing to Leave Nauvoo

Leaders of the Church had talked since at least 1834 about moving the Saints west to the Rocky Mountains, where they could live in peace. As the years went by, leaders discussed actual sites with explorers and studied maps to find the right place to settle. By the end of 1845, Church leaders possessed the most up-to-date information available about the West.

As persecutions in Nauvoo intensified, it became apparent that the Saints would have to leave. By November 1845, Nauvoo was bustling with the activities of preparation. Captains of hundreds, fifties, and tens were called to lead the Saints on their exodus. Each group of 100 established one or more wagon shops. Wheelwrights, carpenters, and cabinetmakers worked far into the night preparing timber and constructing wagons. Members were sent east to purchase iron, and blacksmiths constructed materials needed for the journey and farm equipment necessary to colonize a new Zion. Families collected food and housekeeping items and filled storage containers with dried fruits, flour, rice, and medicines. Working together for the common good, the Saints accomplished more than seemed possible in so short a time.

The Trials of a Winter Trek

The evacuation of Nauvoo was originally planned to take place in April 1846. But as a result of threats that the state militia intended to prevent the Saints from going west, the Twelve Apostles and other leading citizens hurriedly met in council on 2 February 1846. They agreed that it was imperative to start west

immediately, and the exodus began on 4 February. Under the direction of Brigham Young, the first group of Saints eagerly began their journey. However, that eagerness faced a great test, for there were many miles to be covered before permanent camps gave them respite from late winter weather and an exceptionally rainy spring.

To seek safety from their persecutors, thousands of Saints first had to cross the wide Mississippi River to Iowa territory. The perils of their journey began early when an ox kicked a hole in a boat carrying a number of Saints and the boat sank. One observer saw the unfortunate passengers hanging on to feather beds, sticks of wood, "lumber or any thing they could get hold of and were tossed and sported on the water at the mercy of the cold and unrelenting waves. . . . Some climbed on the top of the wagon which did not go quite under and were more comfortable while the cows and oxen on board were seen swimming to the shore from whence they came."¹ Finally all the people were pulled onto boats and brought to the other side.

Two weeks after the first crossing, the river froze over for a time. Though the ice was slippery, it supported wagons and teams and made the crossing easier. But the cold weather caused much suffering as the Saints plodded through the snow. In the encampment at Sugar Creek on the other side of the river, a steady wind blew snow that fell to a depth of almost eight inches. Then a thaw caused the ground to become muddy. Around, above, and below, the elements combined to produce a miserable environment for the 2,000 Saints huddled in tents, wagons, and hastily erected shelters while they waited for the command to continue on.

The most difficult part of the journey was this early stage through Iowa. Hosea Stout recorded that he "prepared for the night by erecting a temporary tent out of bed clothes. At this time my wife was hardly able to sit up and my little son was sick with a very high fever and would not even notice any thing that was going on."² Many other Saints also suffered greatly.

All Is Well

The faith, courage, and determination of these Saints carried them through cold, hunger, and the deaths of loved ones. William Clayton was called to be in one of the first groups to leave Nauvoo and left his wife, Diantha, with her parents, only a month away from delivering her first child. Slogging through muddy roads and camping in cold tents wore his nerves thin as he worried about Diantha's well-being. Two months later, he still did not know if she had delivered safely but finally received the joyful word that a "fine fat boy" had been born. Almost as soon as he heard the news, William sat down and wrote a song that not only had special meaning to him but would become an anthem of inspiration and gratitude to Church members for generations. The song was "Come, Come, Ye Saints," and the famous lines expressed his faith and the faith of the thousands of Saints who sang in the midst of adversity: "All is well! All is well!"³ They, like the members who have followed them, found the joy and peace that are the rewards of sacrifice and obedience in the kingdom of God.

Winter Quarters

It took the Saints 131 days to travel the 310 miles from Nauvoo to the settlements in western Iowa where they would pass the winter of 1846–47 and prepare for their trek to the Rocky Mountains. This experience taught them many things about travel that would help them more quickly cross the 1,000 miles of the great American plains, which was done the following year in about 111 days.

A number of settlements of Saints stretched along both sides of the Missouri River. The largest settlement, Winter Quarters, was on the west side, in Nebraska. It quickly became home to approximately 3,500 Church members, who lived in houses of logs and in dugouts of willows and dirt. As many as 2,500 Saints also lived in and around what was called Kaneshville on the Iowa side of the Missouri River. Life in these settlements was almost as challenging as it had been on the trail. In the summer they suffered from malarial fever. When winter came and fresh food was no longer

available, they suffered from cholera epidemics, scurvy, tooth-aches, night blindness, and severe diarrhea. Hundreds of people died.

Yet life went on. The women spent their days cleaning, ironing, washing, quilting, writing letters, preparing their few provisions for meals, and caring for their families, according to Mary Richards, whose husband, Samuel, was on a mission in Scotland. She cheerfully recorded the comings and goings of the Saints at Winter Quarters, including such activities as theological discussions, dances, Church meetings, parties, and frontier revivals.

The men worked together and met often to discuss travel plans and the future site for the settlement of the Saints. They regularly cooperated in rounding up the herds that foraged on the prairie at the outskirts of the camp. They worked in the fields, guarded the perimeters of the settlement, constructed and operated a flour mill, and readied wagons for travel, often suffering from exhaustion and illness. Some of their work was an unselfish labor of love as they prepared fields and planted crops to be harvested by the Saints who would follow them.

Brigham Young's son John called Winter Quarters "the Valley Forge of Mormondom." He lived near the burial grounds there and witnessed the "small mournful-looking trains that so often passed our door." He recalled "how poor and same-like" his family's diet of corn bread, salt bacon, and a little milk seemed. He said mush and bacon became so nauseating that eating was like taking medicine and he had difficulty swallowing.⁴ Only the faith and dedication of the Saints carried them through this trying time.

Mormon Battalion

While the Saints were in Iowa, United States army recruiters asked Church leaders to provide a contingent of men to serve in the Mexican War, which had begun in May 1846. The men, who came to be called the Mormon Battalion, were to march across the

southern part of the nation to California and would receive pay, clothing, and rations. Brigham Young encouraged men to participate as a way to raise money to gather the poor from Nauvoo and to aid individual soldiers' families. Cooperating with the government in this endeavor would also show the loyalty of Church members to their country and give them a justifiable reason to camp temporarily on public and Indian lands. Eventually, 541 men accepted their leaders' counsel and joined the battalion. They were accompanied by 33 women and 42 children.

The ordeal of going to war was compounded for battalion members by the sorrow of leaving their wives and children alone at a difficult time. William Hyde reflected:

"The thoughts of leaving my family at this critical time are indescribable. They were far from the land of their nativity, situated upon a lonely prairie with no dwelling but a wagon, the scorching sun beating upon them, with the prospect of the cold winds of December finding them in the same bleak, dreary place.

"My family consisted of a wife and two small children, who were left in company with an aged father and mother and a brother. The most of the Battalion left families. . . . When we were to meet with them again, God only knew. Nevertheless, we did not feel to murmur."⁵

The battalion marched 2,030 miles southwest to California, suffering from lack of food and water, insufficient rest and medical care, and the rapid pace of the march. They served as occupation troops in San Diego, San Luis Rey, and Los Angeles. At the end of their year's enlistment, they were discharged and allowed to rejoin their families. Their efforts and loyalty to the United States government gained the respect of those who led them.

After their discharge, many of the battalion members remained in California to work for a season. A number of them found their way north to the American River and were employed at John Sutter's sawmill when gold was discovered there in 1848, precipitating the famous California Gold Rush. But the Latter-day Saint brethren did not stay in California to capitalize on this opportunity

for fortune. Their hearts were with their brothers and sisters struggling westward across the American plains to the Rocky Mountains. One of their number, James S. Brown, explained:

“I have never seen that rich spot of earth since; nor do I regret it, for there always has been a higher object before me than gold. . . . Some may think we were blind to our own interests; but after more than forty years we look back without regrets, although we did see fortunes in the land, and had many inducements to stay. People said, ‘Here is gold on the bedrock, gold on the hills, gold in the rills, gold everywhere, . . . and soon you can make an independent fortune.’ We could realize all that. Still duty called, our honor was at stake, we had covenanted with each other, there was a principle involved; for with us it was God and His kingdom first. We had friends and relatives in the wilderness, yea, in an untried, desert land, and who knew their condition? We did not. So it was duty before pleasure, before wealth, and with this prompting we rolled out.”⁶ These brethren knew clearly that the kingdom of God was of far greater worth than any material things of this world and chose their course accordingly.

The Brooklyn Saints

While most Saints moved to the Rocky Mountains by traveling overland from Nauvoo, a group of Saints from the eastern United States traveled a sea route. On 4 February 1846, 70 men, 68 women, and 100 children boarded the ship *Brooklyn* and sailed from New York harbor on a 17,000-mile journey to the coast of California. During their voyage two children were born, named Atlantic and Pacific, and 12 people died.

The six-month trip was very difficult. The passengers were closely crowded in the heat of the tropics, and they had only bad food and water. After rounding Cape Horn, they stopped on the island of Juan Fernandez to rest for five days. Caroline Augusta Perkins recalled that “the sight of and tread upon terra firma once more was such a relief from the ship life, that we gratefully realized and enjoyed it.” They bathed and washed their clothing in

the fresh water, gathered fruit and potatoes, caught fish and eels, and rambled about the island exploring a “Robinson Crusoe cave.”⁷

On 31 July 1846, after a voyage marked by severe storms, dwindling food, and long days of sailing, they arrived at San Francisco. Some stayed and established a colony called New Hope, while others traveled east over the mountains to join with the Saints in the Great Basin.

The Gathering Continues

From all parts of America and from many nations, by many kinds of conveyances, on horseback or on foot, faithful converts left their homes and birthplaces to join with the Saints and begin the long journey to the Rocky Mountains.

In January 1847, President Brigham Young issued the inspired “Word and Will of the Lord concerning the Camp of Israel” (D&C 136:1), which became the constitution governing the pioneers’ westward movement. Companies were organized and charged to care for the widows and fatherless in their midst. Relations with other people were to be free from evil, covetousness, and contention. The people were to be happy and show their gratitude in music, prayer, and dance. Through President Young, the Lord told the Saints, “Go thy way and do as I have told you, and fear not thine enemies” (D&C 136:17).

As the first pioneer company prepared to leave Winter Quarters, Parley P. Pratt returned from his mission to England and reported that John Taylor was following with a gift from the English Saints. The next day Brother Taylor arrived with tithing money sent by these members to aid the travelers, an evidence of their love and faith. He also brought scientific instruments that proved invaluable in charting the pioneers’ journey and helping them learn about their surroundings. On 15 April 1847 the first company, led by Brigham Young, moved out. Over the next two decades, approximately 62,000 Saints would follow them across the prairies in wagons and handcarts to gather to Zion.

Wonderful sights as well as hardships awaited these travelers on their journey. Joseph Moenor recalled having “a hard time” in getting to the Salt Lake Valley. But he saw things he had never before seen—great herds of buffalo and big cedar trees on the hills.⁸ Others remembered seeing vast expanses of sunflowers in bloom.

The Saints also had faith-promoting experiences that lightened the physical demands on their bodies. After a long day of travel and a meal cooked over open fires, men and women gathered in groups to discuss the day’s activities. They talked about gospel principles, sang songs, danced, and prayed together.

Death frequently visited the Saints as they slowly made their way west. On 23 June 1850 the Crandall family numbered fifteen. By the week’s end seven had died of the dreaded plague of cholera. In the next few days five more family members died. Then on 30 June Sister Crandall died in childbirth along with her newborn baby.

Although the Saints suffered much on their journey to the Salt Lake Valley, a spirit of unity, cooperation, and optimism prevailed. Bound together by their faith and commitment to the Lord, they found joy in the midst of their trials.

This Is the Right Place

On 21 July 1847, Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow of the first pioneer company preceded the emigrants into the Salt Lake Valley. They saw grass so deep that a person could wade through it, promising land for farming, and several creeks that wandered through the valley. Three days later, President Brigham Young, who was ill with mountain fever, was driven in his carriage to the mouth of a canyon that opened onto the valley. As President Young looked over the scene, he gave his prophetic benediction to their travels: “It is enough. This is the right place.”

As the Saints who followed emerged from the mountains, they, too, gazed at their promised land! This valley with its salty lake gleaming in the western sun was the object of vision and

prophecy, the land of which they and thousands after them dreamed. This was their land of refuge, where they would become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains.

Several years later, a convert from England, Jean Rio Griffiths Baker, recorded her feelings as she viewed Salt Lake City for the first time. "The city . . . is laid out in squares or blocks as they call them here; each containing ten acres and divided into eight lots, each lot having one house. I stood and looked, I can hardly analyze my feelings, but I think my prevailing ones were joy and gratitude for the protecting care had over me and mine during our long and perilous journey."⁹

Handcart Pioneers

In the 1850s Church leaders decided to form handcart companies as a way to reduce expenses so that financial aid could be extended to the greatest number of emigrants. Saints who traveled this way put only 100 pounds of flour and a limited quantity of provisions and belongings into a cart and then pulled the cart across the plains. Between 1856 and 1860, ten handcart companies traveled to Utah. Eight of the companies reached the Salt Lake Valley successfully, but two of them, the Martin and Willie handcart companies, were caught in an early winter and many Saints among them perished.

Nellie Pucell, a pioneer in one of these ill-fated companies, turned ten years old on the plains. Both her parents died during the journey. As the group neared the mountains, the weather was bitter cold, the rations were depleted, and the Saints were too weak from hunger to continue on. Nellie and her sister collapsed. When they had almost given up hope, the leader of the company came to them in a wagon. He placed Nellie in the wagon and told Maggie to walk along beside it, holding on to steady herself. Maggie was fortunate because the forced movement saved her from frostbite.

When they reached Salt Lake City and Nellie's shoes and stockings, which she had worn across the plains, were removed,

the skin came off with them as a result of frostbite. This brave girl's feet were painfully amputated and she walked on her knees the rest of her life. She later married and gave birth to six children, keeping up her own house and raising a fine posterity.¹⁰ Her determination in spite of her situation and the kindness of those who cared for her exemplify the faith and willingness to sacrifice of these early Church members. Their example is a legacy of faith to all Saints who follow them.

A man who crossed the plains in the Martin handcart company lived in Utah for many years. One day he was in a group of people who began sharply criticizing the Church leaders for ever allowing the Saints to cross the plains with no more supplies or protection than a handcart company provided. The old man listened until he could stand no more; then he arose and said with great emotion:

"I was in that company and my wife was in it. . . . We suffered beyond anything you can imagine and many died of exposure and starvation, but did you ever hear a survivor of that company utter a word of criticism? . . . [We] came through with the absolute knowledge that God lives for we became acquainted with him in our extremities.

"I have pulled my handcart when I was so weak and weary from illness and lack of food that I could hardly put one foot ahead of the other. I have looked ahead and seen a patch of sand or a hill slope and I have said, I can go only that far and there I must give up, for I cannot pull the load through it. . . . I have gone on to that sand and when I reached it, the cart began pushing me. I have looked back many times to see who was pushing my cart, but my eyes saw no one. I knew then that the angels of God were there.

"Was I sorry that I chose to come by handcart? No. Neither then nor any minute of my life since. *The price we paid to become acquainted with God was a privilege to pay, and I am thankful that I was privileged to come in the Martin Handcart Company.*"¹¹

Our hymnbook contains a song about the early Church members who courageously accepted the gospel and traveled far to live on the outposts of civilization:

They, the builders of the nation,
Blazing trails along the way;
Stepping-stones for generations
Were their deeds of ev'ry day.
Building new and firm foundations,
Pushing on the wild frontier,
Forging onward, ever onward,
Blessed, honored Pioneer!

Their example teaches us how to live with more faith and
courage in our own countries:

Service ever was their watchcry;
Love became their guiding star;
Courage, their unfailing beacon,
Radiating near and far.
Ev'ry day some burden lifted,
Ev'ry day some heart to cheer,
Ev'ry day some hope the brighter,
Blessed, honored Pioneer!¹²