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Getting to Know Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days

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Clark Kelley Price, *Martin Handcart Company—Bitter Creek, Wyoming*, 1856.
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The early years of the Restoration can be better understood and made more meaningful through a review of the martyrdom sacrifices made by members of the Berry family.

Early Latter-day Saint Martyrs: The Jesse Woods and Armela Shanks Berry Family

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On 10 August 1884, three Mormon missionaries, Elders William S. Berry, Henry B. Thompson, and John H. Gibbs, met at the house of James Condor in Cane Creek, Tennessee, for Sunday worship services. They had just finished singing a hymn when a mob rushed up to Condor's front gate. Historian B. H. Roberts described the dramatic scene:

Elder Gibbs had just taken up his Bible . . . when a man disguised—which afterward proved to be David Hinson—came in at the front door, crossed the room, took down a shotgun suspended on hooks over the back door, and then took deliberate aim at Elder Gibbs, who was under considerable excitement. Hinson shot him, the charge entering the body under the arm; he clutched the wound and fell against a bed and expired without saying a word. A gun was now thrust in at the back door leveled at Elder Thompson; Elder Berry grasped it with both hands, but seemed not to struggle as if to wrench it from the one who held it; an instant later someone shot him [Elder Berry], and he fell heavily to the floor, dying without a struggle.¹

This article discusses the martyrdom of members of the Berry family, early converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I have already introduced one Berry martyr: William. There are five others. I will show how

they were true to their Mormon beliefs, even martyrs for the Church, and are representative of early Mormon martyrs. It is my intent to briefly narrate the Berrys' story, thus giving context for my interpretation of their lives.

Martyrs are found in every age, culture, and religion, and all societies honor the sacrifices of their heroes. Everyone agrees that the martyr exists and that certain acts of sacrifice can be called martyrdom. However, martyr as a concept is difficult to define and is used in a variety of ways. Merriam-Webster's definitions are "(1) a person who voluntarily suffers death as the penalty of witnessing to and refusing to renounce his religion; (2) a person who sacrifices something of great value and especially life itself for the sake of the principle; and (3) Victim: especially a great or constant sufferer."² Latter-day Saints speak of "martyrs" in a number of senses. Latter-day Saint scholar Craig Manscill defines martyrs as "(1) believers who are put to death by violent means, . . . and (2) pioneers or immigrants who died after having been driven from their homes."³ Martyrs leave their witnesses of their belief in a cause, especially a religious cause. We will see that each Berry's witness, six in all, exemplifies one of the definitions above.

Tennessee Beginnings (1842–44)

In the spring of 1842, the Berry family joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Dresden, Tennessee. Jesse Woods and Armela (Milly) Shanks Berry married in Lebanon, Tennessee, in 1820,⁴ and became the parents of eleven children: four sons (John Williams, William Shanks, Robert Madison, and Joseph Smith) and seven daughters (Adeline Paton, Sarah Lurana, Martha Elizabeth, Louisa Jane, Armelia Harriet, Cynthia Lovina, and Thirza Malvina), all born between 1821 and 1843.⁵

The 1830 census documents the Berrys living in Lebanon. Jesse had five free black persons working on his property.⁶ He probably employed them to produce a cash crop of either cotton or tobacco, as well as to farm for his family's needs.⁷ By 1840, Jesse had relocated his family to Dresden in northwestern Tennessee.⁸ Perhaps it was to purchase a larger farm where he could also raise livestock and better provide for his growing family.⁹ With each American Indian treaty, newcomers to Tennessee, along with Tennessee residents, moved onto the newly acquired land.¹⁰

While in Dresden, the oldest son, John, heard Mormon missionaries preaching near his home. "Amasa Lyman [a future Apostle] was proselytizing, . . . accompanied by Horace K. Whitney, Adam Lightner, and William[s]

Camp. . . . Apostle Lyman Wight joined them."¹¹ John listened to their message and "wanted to learn more, but when he inquired he found the missionaries had gone to another area twenty miles away, so he walked the twenty miles to hear their message. So impressed was he with the new religion that he asked the elders to come to his father's home and explain the wonderful truths of the Gospel to his people."¹² All were converted except the oldest daughter, Adeline, "who was bitter toward the elders and the new religion,"¹³ and a young daughter, Sarah, who died and was buried in Lebanon.¹⁴

There was fierce opposition to missionaries preaching in Tennessee, and any who joined the Church were intensely persecuted. "When Mormon elders held a conference in Dresden on May 26, 1844, a large congregation assembled. But a mob interrupted their proceedings. . . . [Consequently, a] few weeks after this conference and confrontation, the Berrys moved to Nauvoo."¹⁵

Berrys in Nauvoo (1844–46)

In 1839, Joseph Smith established Nauvoo as the gathering place for the people of Zion. It was a place where the Saints could "flee from wicked Babylon"¹⁶ and receive temple ordinances.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the Berrys arrived six days after the Prophet Joseph Smith was martyred.¹⁸ In addition to the trauma and confusion they found in Nauvoo, Jesse became sick the day they arrived and died four and a half weeks later, on 3 August 1844; he was fifty-three years and six months old.¹⁹ Jesse's daughter Cynthia wrote, "This was the first serious sickness he ever had. Of course his death was a terrible blow to all of us."²⁰

Jesse became the first martyr in the Berry family. By following the commandment to gather with the Saints to Nauvoo, Jesse moved 386 miles from Tennessee to Illinois with his wife, their nine children, their household belongings, and their cattle. As the father and leader of the family, Jesse was responsible for the group. Weakened from the stress of leadership and exhausted from the physical labor caused by travel at his advanced age,²¹ he became ill with lung fever as soon as they arrived. This being Jesse's first serious sickness demonstrates that persecution, the fierce opposition to Mormons in Dresden, and exhaustion from the forced exodus from Dresden were the contributing factors to his contracting a disease which resulted in the untimely sacrifice of his life.²² As previously mentioned, Craig Manscill noted that Saints "who died after having been driven from their homes [qualify as martyrs]."²³ Elder McConkie explained in *Mormon Doctrine*, "Men, women, and

children, young and old, weak and strong, sick and well, were driven by the thousands from Missouri and Illinois, many to early and untimely deaths as a direct result of the persecution and diseases thus heaped upon them.”²⁴

Lung fever is an infectious disease that was prevalent in Nauvoo. In 1844 thirty-nine deaths were reported, with 50 percent of the casualties being males.²⁵ Jesse became one of the “hundreds of Saints [who] died in Nauvoo . . . from disease.”²⁶ Jesse’s obedience to Church authority resulted in the sacrifice of his life. Not all martyrs are victims of violence, as in Jesse’s case. Evan L. Ivie and Douglas C. Heiner demonstrate in their article that “there were many more martyrs for the cause than those shot by the mobs.”²⁷ McConkie asks, “Is a saint any less a martyr who is driven [to] a sick bed . . . and die[s] than he would have been had an assassin’s bullet brought merciful death in a brief destroying moment?”²⁸

Jesse’s death left Milly a forty-year-old widow with small children. But she believed in the Church’s message. With the help of her oldest son, Milly kept her family together. For two years they lived in tumultuous Nauvoo. Cynthia’s record states, “At first we rented a Room in Foster’s Row but soon bought a farm of Benjamin Clapp.”²⁹ Milly’s daughter Martha married polygamist John D. Lee in 1845.³⁰ John Berry “joined Nauvoo’s Masonic lodge. He became a seventy, . . . belonging to the ninth quorum.”³¹ Cynthia, twelve, and Armelia, fifteen, were baptized in the Mississippi River.³² Milly received the opportunity to be endowed in the Nauvoo Temple on 22 January 1846.³³

Trek across the Plains (1846–49)

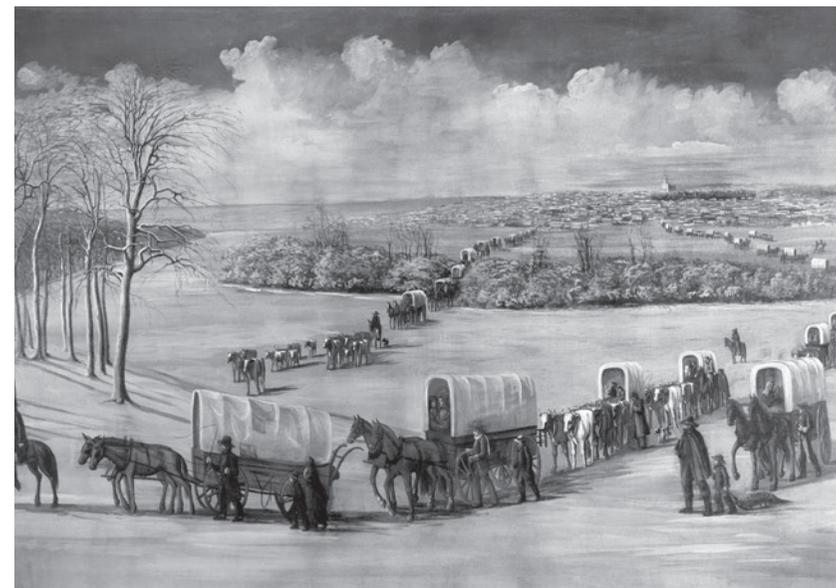
As in previous locations, the Latter-day Saint religion was not tolerated in Illinois. “Church leaders, reacting to anti-Mormon rhetoric, widespread arson, and assaults in September 1845, decided the Saints must vacate Illinois the following spring.”³⁴ On 4 February 1846,³⁵ the leadership of the Church (Brigham Young and other members of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles) and their families and some Saints ready to make the trek early began leaving. It was intended that the Camp of Israel would establish temporary farming settlements for the main body of Saints, who would soon follow.

During the second exodus in the spring of 1846, the Berry family arrived at the settlement of Mount Pisgah. Like most Mormons leaving Nauvoo, it is likely that John, as head of the family after his father’s death, would have made sure their wagon was in good repair. He also must have sold or abandoned most of their personal items and cattle, as they crossed the plains with

few possessions.³⁶ John probably tried to sell their farm, but with little success, because “the people surrounding Nauvoo saw no need of purchasing that which inevitably must become theirs.”³⁷

After spending the winter of 1846–47 at Mount Pisgah, in the spring of 1847 the Berrys traveled to Winter Quarters. Church records indicate two of Milly’s daughters married in Winter Quarters: Louisa married widower Daniel Allen on 22 June 1847,³⁸ and Armelia married, as a second wife, Samuel Mulliner on 15 April 1848.³⁹

While living in Winter Quarters, the Berry family was well situated to witness several momentous events in Kanesville. The First Presidency was reorganized “on 5 December 1847 at Orson Hyde’s home.”⁴⁰ The general membership was eager to sustain the First Presidency, resulting in two hundred men constructing, in three weeks, a specially built tabernacle for meetings held 23–27 December, giving ample space for the Berrys to attend and sustain the new First Presidency. Second, “during the Jubilee celebrations of January 1848, [Mormons participated in the local elections, and] 1,805 males sign[ed] a petition for a Kanesville post office and a similar number for a county organization.”⁴¹ The Berrys likely participated in the celebrations, and John probably cast his vote in the elections. Third, Oliver Cowdery was



C. C. A. Christensen, *Crossing the Mississippi on the Ice*, Wikimedia Commons.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie asks, “Is a saint any less a martyr who is driven [to] a sick bed . . . and die[s] than he would have been had an assassin’s bullet brought merciful death in a brief destroying moment?”

rebaptized. “Orson Hyde baptized Cowdery in Indian Creek outside the tabernacle on 5 November 1848.”⁴²

After Winter Quarters was abandoned in early 1848, the Berrys moved to the Kaneshville area for the winter of 1848–49. “By July 1848 they had settled in the McOlney Branch a few miles north of Kaneshville. . . . Branch membership records that year list John as an ordained teacher age 26, who ‘moved to the valley 1849,’ and . . . [Milly] Berry, age 44, along with Cynthia 15, Thirza 11, William 10, Robert 7, and Joseph 4. These records also report that a meeting was held at Brother John Berrys [*sic*] by Elder Stoddard. At the Meeting Brother Matthew Caldwell was appointed Bishop of the Branch and was carried by vote of all that was present.”⁴³

On 4 June 1849, the Berry family started for the Rocky Mountains. They traveled to the Great Basin in the Samuel Gully and Orson Spencer company. Orson Adams was subcaptain over a division of ten, which included the John Berry family; John’s brother-in-law Daniel Allen and his family; Samuel Gully’s family; four other families; a company of California-bound gold miners who cheerfully agreed to abide by the rules; and two merchants, Livingston and Kinkead, who had two wagons filled with \$30,000 worth of dry goods bound for Great Salt Lake.⁴⁴ Milly and her daughter Louisa Allen probably found comfort traveling together, as Louisa had one stepson, three stepdaughters, and a baby daughter to care for—their ages ranging from three months to fourteen years.⁴⁵ Milly’s oldest daughter, Martha, was already in the valley with Martha’s husband, John D. Lee. Milly’s third daughter, Armelia, was back in Kaneshville awaiting the arrival of her first child, and she would come in November.⁴⁶

During the trek west, the Berrys were involved in several incidents. While waiting for the waters to recede at one of the river crossings, a mule threw John, causing him to “put his arm out of place.”⁴⁷ In spite of the injury, the next day he helped the members in his company cross the river. Cholera was also a danger, and it took several lives, including Captain Gully’s.⁴⁸ Milly most likely helped Mrs. Gully nurse her husband. Another incident involved an American Indian chief. Cynthia wrote, “Out riding horses one day with some of the other girls, I attracted an Indian chief who wanted to buy me. When he found out I couldn’t be bought for blankets or horses, he became angry and followed the company for some time, forcing the camp to be guarded for several nights.”⁴⁹

Great Salt Lake City and California Gold Rush (1849–51)

The wagon train started straggling into Great Salt Lake City between 22 and 25 September 1849.⁵⁰ The Berrys settled southeast of the city in the Cottonwood area, where Milly’s oldest daughter, Martha Lee, lived with her family. Milly and her younger children remained there for the next two years.

John had been in the Salt Lake Valley about seven to ten days when he joined a packtrain bound for California. James M. Flake was captain, with “seventeen non-Mormons and thirty Mormons, including new LDS apostle Charles C. Rich, and gold [discoverer] Henry Bigler and George Q. Cannon and a dozen or more others.”⁵¹ Once in California and panning for gold, John became acquainted with another gold missionary, Albert Thurber. While mining the Middle Fork of the American River east of Sacramento, Thurber wrote in his diary, “John W. Berry was very sick at this place.”⁵²

By 1850 the gold mines had been exhaustively explored. Most of the gold missionaries were tired and disillusioned. Thurber left for the valley in the fall. John asked Thurber to take one of his mules to John’s mother. A few months later, John also returned to Utah. His adventure did not produce gold but two successful marriages: his youngest sister, Thirza, married Albert Thurber,⁵³ and John married Jane Thomas,⁵⁴ sister to Mat Thomas. Both Albert and Mat were John’s friends from the gold mines. That same year, Milly’s daughter Cynthia became a second wife of Robert Gardner Jr.⁵⁵

Berrys Colonize Spanish Fork (1852–62)

As soon as the Saints entered the valley, Brigham Young started fanning them out over the land with the intent to make self-sufficient settlements. In April 1849, the Provo River Valley opened for settlement and became the nucleus for other small towns. By the fall of 1851, the Berry, Thurber, and Thomas families realized there was not as much farming and pasture land available in the Salt Lake Valley as they needed. Both John and Albert had passed through the Provo area on their way to the gold mines; they knew it was a favorable location.

After arriving at the Spanish Fork River in the spring of 1852, Albert wrote the following in his diary: “[We] pitched our tent and took off our wagon beds. Went on the creek, cut two loads of house logs and laid them up by moonlight. We soon had some houses, though very rough ones.”⁵⁶

Milly’s children continued to grow and prosper during the years they were in Spanish Fork. On 4 January 1852, her daughter Thirza Thurber,

recently turned sixteen, delivered the first white child born in the settlement.⁵⁷ Thirza's entire life was devoted to her family and in supporting her busy husband, who was involved in the Church (bishopsrics for fourteen years, stake president, and mission to England), in the community (mayor, councilman), in military leadership (Utah War and Black Hawk War), and in "entertaining visiting church leaders, conference visitors, friends and relatives."⁵⁸

When William was seventeen, Robert fourteen, and Joseph twelve, Utah had a severe infestation of grasshoppers. A Spanish Fork girl, Becky Beck, recorded "living on bran bread and milk as a meager existence."⁵⁹ No doubt the teenaged Berry boys were just as hungry as Becky that year. Two months shy of twenty-three, William married Rebecca (Becky) Beck, who turned eighteen just five days after her wedding.⁶⁰

Robert and Joseph were ten and eight when the Berrys first settled Spanish Fork. Nothing is recorded of their specific experiences, but they would have attended school and church and helped in the farming and cattle raising alongside their older brothers. They grew to be tall, handsome, strong men. The Berrys were tall people, including the women.

While in Spanish Fork, John was called as a bishop's counselor. Apostle George A. Smith ordained him a high priest on 6 August 1852.⁶¹ John was also a civic leader and helped organize a water company on 15 March 1852.⁶² He served as a city councilman to two mayors.⁶³ He led militias in both the Walker War of 1853 and the Tintic War of 1856.⁶⁴

During his participation in the Walker War, John was wounded. Historian Orson F. Whitney recorded that John Berry left Manti with Clark Roberts of Provo in the afternoon of 23 July 1853 to deliver a message to General Daniel H. Wells in Salt Lake. The next morning they were in Santaquin. The place was deserted, as the Mormons had fled to Payson for safety. "As the messengers rode through the town[,] they were fired upon by Indians concealed in some of the houses. Berry was shot in the left wrist, and Roberts through the shoulders."⁶⁵ Descendant Louine Berry Hunter added some detail; "Berry [was shot] through the left wrist, cutting the main artery. The wounded men traveled eight miles before John lost consciousness due to the loss of blood."⁶⁶ He recovered but carried the bullet in his wrist for the remainder of his life.

During the 1856 pioneer immigration season, John, as a leader in the Spanish Fork militia, was called to help rescue the stranded handcart Saints.⁶⁷ Nothing has been recorded of John's specific assignments; however, all the

rescuers suffered the same hardships of extreme cold, hunger, and fatigue as the pioneers they were sent to rescue.

In 1857, John was called to serve a mission to England. This was his third crossing of the plains. On Sunday, 9 August, John arrived in Liverpool. He served for almost three months under the direction of the president of the European mission, Apostle Orson Pratt.⁶⁸ In late October 1857, word came from Salt Lake City calling all missionaries home to help defend Utah during the Utah War. John boarded the *Empire* with sixty-four Saints bound for New York City, and after "a remarkably swift and pleasant passage, the voyage being made in twenty-eight days," they arrived 19 March 1858.⁶⁹ Continuing their journey to the West, "the missionaries arrived at Florence, Nebraska, where they, together with other returning elders from different parts of the world, were organized for crossing the plains."⁷⁰

John had already distinguished himself as a leader both in his family and in the Church—now he was voted as the leader of 113 missionaries, with twenty wagons and ninety-three animals. After two months on the plains and detouring several times to avoid confrontation with the federal army, John and his company "descended Emigration Canyon . . . [and] entered a nearly vacant Salt Lake City [21 June 1858,] as most of the inhabitants had fled south. Two days later the company arrived in Provo, temporary headquarters of the Church; there it disbanded."⁷¹

John married three times. He married Nancy Jane Bass, a Tennessee native, in 1842. They had one son, Jesse David Berry, who died soon after birth. Nancy did not go west with John.⁷² He married Jane Thomas in 1851; they raised a large family of ten children: six sons and four daughters. He became a polygamist in 1858 when he married Julia Ardena Hales. Julia could not have children; however, they raised two adopted children.⁷³

John's martyrdom experience was due to his belief in the practice of polygamy. B. H. Roberts explained: "The Saints did not accept into their faith and practice the plural wife system with the idea that it increased the comfort, or added to the ease of anyone. From the first it was known that it would involve sacrifice, to make a large demand upon the faith, patience, hope, and charity of all who would attempt to carry out its requirements. Its introduction was not a call to ease or pleasure, but to religious duty; it was not an invitation to self-indulgence, but to self-conquest; its purpose was not earthly happiness but earth-life discipline."⁷⁴

All, husbands and wives and children, were affected by the demands of polygamy and it was a challenge. Men and women “first wrestled with the prospect and then embraced the principle only after receiving personal spiritual confirmation that they should do so. . . . [They] saw it as religious duty.”⁷⁵

For thirty-one years, John lived a polygamist’s life. He “entered the higher order of marriage for the sake of a fuller family life. . . . [However, prosecution and persecution] had denied him that.”⁷⁶ Although John was not sent to prison, “in consideration of his old age”⁷⁷ (he was sixty-six), he sacrificed on many levels “for Conscience’ sake.”⁷⁸ He suffered emotional trauma at an advanced age, enduring his arrest and trial, which lasted most of the month of May 1889. And he also lost a large sum of money due to the fines of the court.

John sacrificed the ease of a monogamous family life while risking life and liberty for his faith in the Lord and his Prophet. “The Utah Commission lamented the fact that . . . those who are convicted . . . invariably regard themselves and are regarded by the Church, as martyrs.”⁷⁹

Colonizing Southern Utah (1862 and 1866)

In the 1860s, President Young began expanding his settlements farther south into Utah’s Dixie. It was in “the Fall of 1862, [that he] called the Berry family to . . . Southern Utah.”⁸⁰ This was their eighth move since joining the Church. Milly, four sons, three daughters, and their families moved south at once and founded the little town of Middleton. The Berrys were farmers and livestock men and had gathered large herds of cattle and horses. Soon Middleton was not big enough to hold them all. “The four husky, rugged Berry boys . . . found more . . . opportunities in Long Valley. . . . The brothers had a large range almost all to themselves [that they called Berryville]. Their livestock were increasing rapidly; they were claiming good farms, building homes and the family was prospering there. . . . Mother Berry had a genius to hold her sons together, but it took three houses now to shelter them and their families.”⁸¹

While living in Berryville, the longest and most serious conflict erupted between American Indians and white settlers in Utah’s history: Utah’s Black Hawk War of 1865–72. A “brilliant Indian leader named Antonga (called Black Hawk by the whites) [led Northern Utes and their allies] in a series of intense and successful raids on livestock owned by the Mormon settlers,” all in an effort to feed themselves.⁸² “From the Utes’ point of view, the Black Hawk War was largely fought to resist displacement and removal to the

Uintah Reservation and the Mormon expansion that had caused such exigencies in the first place.”⁸³

After the harvest of 1865, and in spite of the dangers of the Black Hawk War, “Mother Berry and her sons Joseph . . . and Robert and his wife [Isabella] went to spend the winter with relatives in Spanish Fork, also, to purchase seed grain” and to be sealed in the Salt Lake Temple.⁸⁴ While there, “there was an epidemic of diphtheria, and Robert’s . . . little girl died.”⁸⁵ In late March, after baby Harriet was buried, “Joseph, Robert and his wife started for home leaving Mother Berry still visiting with her married daughters. Because of the illness and death of Robert’s child, they were delayed in departing with the company with whom they had intended to travel; consequently, they made the trip alone.”⁸⁶

On Monday, 2 April 1866, only two miles from the road that leads to Berryville, the Berrys were attacked by Paiutes. In a letter from William Maxwell to Apostle George A. Smith, Maxwell wrote, “It appears that the Indians were secreted in the cedars on each side of the road and fired on them unawares. I believe that Joseph Berry’s thigh was broke in the first round. . . . [The Berrys tried to outrun them. When they reached the Kanab road, the Indians] commenced the second attack. I think that they wounded one of the horses, so they could not run and they were surrounded and killed; they were shot with guns and arrows. It appears that the woman was the last to suffer; she was abused all they wanted and then shot with a gun and arrows.”⁸⁷

Robert’s and Joseph’s deaths were the first in the family since their father died twenty-two years earlier. Brigham Young had issued a call to the Berrys to settle southern Utah, an area known “to be a very hard country to live in.”⁸⁸ The land and water were difficult to tame, and there was continual conflict with American Indians. Nevertheless, knowing they were putting themselves in an arduous and dangerous situation, Robert and Joseph did not question the call but answered it faithfully, thus signifying their acceptance of death for the sake of their religion if the situation ever presented itself.

Reflecting on the decision to travel alone, one might conclude their deaths were the result of poor judgment and foolishness; therefore, they do not deserve a martyr’s crown. However, it is important to understand that traveling alone was their only choice because of the death of baby Harriet. They had a home, crops to raise, and livestock to care for during the summer in Berryville. Knowing that Robert and Joseph were *husky and rugged* grown men accustomed to fighting American Indians (William was fighting

them at thirteen)⁸⁹ and that they were well prepared to fight off any attack with guns and ammunition helps us understand they were not as foolish as it first appears. Therefore, Robert and Joseph reflect Merriam-Webster's first definition of *martyr*: a person who voluntarily suffers death as the penalty of witnessing to and refusing to renounce his religion. It is not necessary to lay down your weapons as a sign of voluntary death; you can go kicking and screaming, running and shooting.

William Maxwell's letter describes the violent manner in which the Berrys were killed. Another letter, by Nephi Johnson, indicated "their bodies were completely perforated with arrows."⁹⁰ Two witnesses to the conditions of the bodies verify that Robert, Joseph, and Isabella endured a violent death. As highlighted earlier, Craig Manscill defined LDS martyrs as "believers who are put to death by violent means." He clarified his definition by pointing out that "many . . . men, women and children . . . died in a form of martyrdom as a result of persecution and conflict, particularly in the early days of the church."⁹¹ In the case of Robert, Joseph, and Isabella Berry, it was conflict rather than persecution that caused their deaths.

After the deaths of, Robert and Joseph, Brigham Young advised the remaining Berry family—Milly, John, William, and their families—to resettle in Kanarra. Once more John and William built homes, this time brick homes on city lots. They also built a schoolhouse and a church. Before "long it became a thriving little city with a post office and telegraph office."⁹² They planted crops and orchards. In the mountains east of Kanarra, "they had a summer cabin where some of them lived most of the summer [herding cattle and sheep. To help with expenses, the] women made cheese and butter which they sold."⁹³ Here Milly "became a mid-wife, and had many friends. She brought many babies into the world and helped the sick. She was loved by everyone."⁹⁴ The Berry men and Milly remained in Kanarra for the remainder of their lives.

William's Mission (1884)

In early spring 1884, William was called to serve a mission; he was forty-six years old. A descendant, Louine Berry Hunter, said, "The call was a significant one to all the Berrys."⁹⁵ It was to the Southern States Mission, with his specific assignment to Tennessee. William had relatives in Tennessee, on his mother's side, he had not seen in forty-two years.

William arrived at the mission home in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on Sunday, 13 April. For the next two and a half months he preached in Humphreys and Hickman counties.⁹⁶

William's wife Lovinia recorded years later, "He had not been gone long when he wrote home. His letter seemed sad. He had had a dream he didn't like and was afraid something was going to happen at home. He said to tell the girls to keep off the horses."⁹⁷ B. H. Roberts, acting mission president while President John Morgan was in Utah, also "felt quite uneasy for the welfare of the Elders. This feeling he expressed from time to time in letters to President Morgan, though no causes for such were apparent."⁹⁸ The following are paraphrased excerpts from William's diary:

2 July—Elder Berry and his companion, Elder Thompson, walked to Nashville and spent three days sightseeing. He had his picture taken with four other missionaries.

5 July—Elders Berry and Thompson took the train to Lebanon to call on William's mother's family. The two visited Elder Berry's relatives for most of the month of July. While visiting, William renewed acquaintances, explained the faith his branch of the family had followed, and left them feeling a spirit of goodwill.

27 July—the elders started for Lewis County.

Between 28 July and 4 August—they walked and preached and held meetings, with a full house in one place, until they reached the Cane Creek area.

7 August—Elder Berry met up with Elders John H. Gibbs and W. H. Jones.

William's last entry in his missionary diary dated 8 August—"I walked the last three days 8 miles. Cane Creek is partly in Lewis County and partly in Hickman County, Tennessee."⁹⁹

William was killed two days later.

It had been eighteen years since Robert and Joseph were killed. A martyr is someone who voluntarily suffers death, and an article from the *Latter Day Saints Southern Star* details just how *voluntary* Elder Berry's witness was. "Meanwhile a gun was presented at Elder Thompson, but Elder Berry, who was nearby, grasped it firmly and turned it from the body of his companion. Thus left free Elder Thompson escaped through the back door. As he left he saw two other guns leveled at Elder Berry, who seemed to sense the coming fate; he meekly bowed his head and received the shots about the waist; without a groan he fell, without protestation he offered his martyred blood that it might be seed for the church."¹⁰⁰

Armela (Milly) Shanks Berry

Milly was the last martyr in the Berry family. Her first sacrifice for the Church was joining it. The consequence was that her oldest daughter, Adeline, was very bitter towards her. When the family left for Nauvoo in 1844, “Adeline refused to go with them . . . and Armelia [Armela] never saw Adeline again. It was a big sorrow to her.”¹⁰¹

Milly’s second sacrifice was the death of her normally healthy husband a month after they arrived in Nauvoo. Jesse’s death left Milly a forty-year-old widow with small children. She could not go back to Dresden because of her testimony, even though what lay ahead was a precarious future.

Milly’s greatest sorrow, perhaps, was the hostile and cruel deaths of three sons and a pregnant daughter-in-law. When Robert, Joseph, and Isabella were killed during Utah’s Black Hawk War, a descendant later wrote, “This was such a tragedy . . . that her throat swelled even with her chin in sorrow.”¹⁰² More suffering came into her life when William was killed while on a mission for the Church. Milly’s granddaughter Mina Berry Platt wrote, “At the news of the death of her son, grandmother couldn’t cry. [Again, her] throat swelled up even with her chin and she couldn’t make a sound.”¹⁰³

When Milly died, her obituary reported, “She is the mother of 11 children, 83 grandchildren, 188 great-grandchildren, and 5 great-great-grandchildren, a total of 289, of which number 68 are dead.”¹⁰⁴ Burying sixty-eight descendants did not make Milly a martyr, but it does emphasize the *constant suffering* she endured as a Latter-day Saint. Her obituary continues: “She bore up under the many trials she was called to pass through remarkably well, was a great counselor and advisor among all whom she associated with. She lived and died a faithful Latter-day Saint, and bore a faithful testimony of the truthfulness of the Gospel, in her last hours.”¹⁰⁵ Milly suffered much as a result of choosing to join the Church. She qualifies as a martyr for enduring fifty-one years of continual suffering because of the persecution that was heaped upon her and her family.

Conclusion

The Berrys’ story is one of an ordinary American family whose experiences were typical of those living in rural Tennessee in the early nineteenth century. Joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints changed their lives forever and more than just spiritually. Each family member’s testimony was

secure and steadfast, allowing him or her to fully participate and shape the important events in early Church history.

A twentieth-century southern Utah author and historian said of the Berry family, “Berry blood is martyr blood.”¹⁰⁶ Though the family is not well known today as martyrs in the Church, they were, nevertheless, a great and important family, as six of them sacrificed their lives in a variety of circumstances for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The early years of the Restoration can be better understood and made more meaningful through a review of the martyrdom sacrifices made by members of the Berry family. **RE**

Notes

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