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Brigham Young's Family

PART I 1824-1845

Dean C. Jessee

Historical studies of Brigham Young have generally measured his success in terms of well-known public accomplishments as colonizer, governor, businessman, and prophet. On the basis of his leadership in settling some 100,000 people in more than 300 communities in the American West, and establishing schools, factories, churches, and other institutions for their benefit and improvement, historians have placed the Mormon leader "among the most successful commonwealth builders of the English speaking world"; they have also lauded him as a man who exercised "powers of leadership that rivaled those of history's heroes."¹ And with respect to his religious contributions, his followers have held him on a plane with the biblical prophets. "I do not suppose there was ever a man breathed a breath of life who, in the short space of forty-five years, has done so much towards the establishment of the government and kingdom of God, as our beloved president Brigham Young," Wilford Woodruff said shortly after Brigham's death in 1877.²

In addition to his public accomplishments, Brigham Young deserves notice as the head of one of the largest families in Mormonism, where his position as husband and father touched the lives of many wives and fifty-seven children. Indeed, he measured a significant part of his personal success in terms of how well he fulfilled his domestic role. He was convinced that the quality of his performance at home would determine his happiness in this world and in the world to come. He once remarked that he would "rather be annihilated," than be deprived of his family in

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¹Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 2:309; and Ray A. Billington, *The Far Western Frontier* (New York: Harper, 1956), p. 195.

²Wilford Woodruff as cited in Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 5:516.

eternity.³ A daughter wrote that her father "was great in his handling of large affairs, in his infinite power to mold men and measures"; but that "if he had failed, as he himself once said, in his duties as husband and father, he would have waked up in the morning of the first resurrection to find that he had failed in everything."⁴

The general historical sources that show the public lives of prominent men form an essential part of the biographical record, but more private sources that document their home lives, where actions and behavior are hidden from public view and thus perhaps less restrained, may also provide invaluable insights into the lives of such men. So it is with Brigham.

By concentrating only upon the extensive sources of Brigham Young's public life, the writer glimpses but the tip of the iceberg as far as Brigham's personal struggles in life are concerned, because these public sources indicate little of the depth of his effort to care for his family. This was intentional on Brigham's part. Living in an era when curious minds were constantly seeking a glimpse of his private affairs, he told the Church Historian that he wanted but few details of his family life included in the public record.⁵ While these conditions were necessary, they combined to close the door on the magnitude of his personal burdens in the pages of his public records. To ascribe to Brigham Young gigantic proportions on the basis of his public achievements, while failing to uncover the personal struggles that made his accomplishments even more heroic, is to laud him for courage without measuring its extent or defining the difficulties that made him what he was.⁶

An important contribution to the study of Brigham Young's family life has been the recent organization of his voluminous papers in the archives of the LDS Church in Salt Lake City and the identification of pertinent sources in other depositories. While the records that specifically document this phase of his life are not extensive, and at some points totally lacking, enough have been preserved to sketch a fair outline of his domestic experience and assess his personality on the basis of how he performed there.⁷

³Diary of Willard Richards, 16 February 1847, MS, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter cited as Church Historical Department).

⁴Susa Young Gates and Leah D. Widtsoe, *The Life Story of Brigham Young* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 340.

⁵Historian's Office Journal, 31 January 1857, MS, Church Historical Department.

⁶At Garden Grove, Iowa, during the Mormon Exodus of 1846, Willard Richards reported Brigham Young as saying, "I am reduced in flesh so that my coat that would scarce meet around me last winter, now laps over 12 inches. It is with much ado that I can keep from lying down and sleeping to wait the resurrection" (Diary of Willard Richards, 3 May 1846).

⁷A product of the frontier, Brigham Young had little formal schooling and would probably never have taken a public office had he not been converted to Mormonism. But his religious con-

For purposes of this study Brigham Young's family life has been divided into three segments: 1) the years of instability, 1824–1845, which cover the time from his first marriage until the exodus from Nauvoo—years that were characterized by frequent and in some cases extensive absences from his family, and the difficulties of providing for them during the movement of the Latter-day Saints from New York to Illinois; 2) the years of transition from 1846–1848, during which Brigham Young moved his family from Nauvoo to the Salt Lake Valley, a task complicated by a significant increase in the size of his family and his being the responsible leader of the Mormon exodus; and 3) the years of consolidation, 1849–1877, which saw Brigham establish his family on a permanent setting in the Salt Lake Valley. The first period will be treated in this issue. Subsequent articles will treat the second and third periods.

YEARS OF INSTABILITY, 1824–1845

On 8 October 1824, seven years after leaving his father's home to begin providing for himself, Brigham Young married Miriam Angeline Works in Aurelius, New York, where he had been working as a joiner, painter, and glazier. To this union was born a daughter, Elizabeth, in 1825. Four years later Brigham moved to Mendon, New York, where he built his family a comfortable four-room, colonial-style home and where a second daughter, Vilate, was born in 1830. Brigham Young would probably have lived out his life there among family and friends had he not responded to the message of two Mormon missionaries who came to town in the fall of 1831. His formal acceptance of the new religion in the waters of baptism the following April was to have a far-reaching effect upon himself and his family.

Five months after Brigham Young joined the Latter-day Saints, his wife Miriam died. Suffering from consumption, she had been an invalid during the latter part of her life. During those years Brigham would rise in the morning, get breakfast for his family, dress the children, clean the house, carry his wife to a rocking chair by the fireplace, and go to work, where he earned fifty cents a day. Upon his return in the evening he cooked supper, took care of the children, put his wife to bed and finished the day's housework.⁸ Following Miriam's death, Brigham was invited to live

victions required him to step boldly upon the stage of life, though he never overcame his feelings of inadequacy with language. He was keenly aware that his phonetic spelling was not standard and had his public correspondence corrected by clerks. We present his private documents here as they were originally written so as to preserve their authenticity.

⁸Gates and Widtsoe, *Life Story of Brigham Young*, p. 5.

with his good friend Heber C. Kimball, whose wife Vilate took care of the little girls—one now seven and the other two.

Shortly after Miriam died, Brigham Young traveled twice to Kirtland, Ohio, where he made his initial contact with Joseph Smith, and then settled there, in company with the Kimballs. During the five years he lived in Kirtland he accumulated some \$4,000 worth of property, went on six proselyting missions for the Church, accompanied Zion's Camp to Missouri and back in 1834, was called to the Church's original Quorum of Twelve Apostles, and plied his trade in helping to build prominent Kirtland landmarks, including the temple, printing office, and school. In addition to this, he was able to restore some stability to his family life when he married Mary Ann Angell in February 1834. She "took charge of my children, kept my house, and labored faithfully for the interest of my family and the kingdom," he later wrote.⁹

The early years of Brigham and Mary Ann's marriage were interrupted by frequent assignments that separated him from his family. Less than three months had elapsed, with Mary Ann expecting their first child, when he left with Zion's Camp for Missouri; but he returned in the autumn in time for the birth of his first son, whom they named Joseph Angell Young. After Brigham's call to the Quorum of the Twelve in 1835, he again departed, this time on a five month proselyting mission in the eastern states. In 1836 he was gone half the year on similar service. During this latter absence, while laboring in New England, Brigham wrote the earliest known letter to his wife. This document, with other family correspondence, is invaluable for its insight into personalities and feelings. It also helps to remind us that the schooling of Brigham Young's day (he had only eleven days of schooling) was hardly beyond the stage of phonetic spelling.¹⁰ The letter, sent from Pawlet, Vermont, on 3 June 1836, was addressed to "My whife my Companion in tribulation and in the Kingdom." After expressing his inability "to Convey my mind to you by letter," and reporting that he had "injoied my self verely well," since leaving Kirtland, he continued:

What shal I say to you to comfert your hart. I Pray for you and I feele that the Lord will bles you and keep you from danger and bare you upon the arms of faith. Tell the Children that I remember them in my Prares. I Pray the Lord to giv you streng[t]h and wisdom in all things. Let me say to Elizibeth be a good girl and mind your mother and be good to Vilate and letle Joseph and I [k]now you

⁹"History of Brigham Young," *Deseret News*, 10 February 1858.

¹⁰See Elinor Hughes Partridge, "Nineteenth-Century Spelling: The Rules and the Writers," *Ensign* 5 (August 1975): 75-80.

will be. Vilate be a good girl and mind your Mother and studdy your book. . . . Mary Kiss that lettle son of ours and tell him to make hast[e] and groe so he can goe with me. . . . When I shall see you is unknown to me. If enney [of] the Brethern inquire about me tell them I am doing as well as I can. So Fair Well. The Lord bless you.¹¹

Six weeks later Brigham addressed another letter to Mary Ann; he was then in Providence, Rhode Island. It was now July and he lamented the fact that he had not yet heard from his wife since he left home in April.

Once more I take my pen in hand to right to you. I think this is the fo[u]rth time that I have ritten to you sence I left home, but I have not heard a word from you sence I left. I have som faint hopes that I shall here from you when I get to Boston. . . . I am calculating to return home as so[o]n as Posable after the first of September. I think that I shal be able to return and pay for my house and I want to repare it this fall so that I can feele contented about my famely when I leve them. Mary if you can I wish you wold have Brother A. Bonney get som lumber or timber or ston and if you have a chance to b[u]y enny thing for bilding and when I com home I [will] Pay for it. I [would like] to say agradel [a great deal] but I will not write with pen and enk but I com[e] and see you and speak to you face to face. I want you should write to me as so[o]n as you rec[e]ive this. . . . My Dear Mary I remember you continuly in my Prayrs. My love to all my little children. Be good to your mother and pray for me when I am away. Fairwell. I remane your hosbon and frend.¹²

Brigham returned to Kirtland in September 1836 and was with his wife in December when she gave birth to twins—a boy and a girl they named Brigham and Mary Ann. The twins were not quite three months old when their father left home again on a “special mission” to the East appointed by the Prophet Joseph Smith. In company with his cousin, Willard Richards, Brigham traveled day and night by stagecoach “over very rough roads” through Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York.¹³ After eleven days he wrote to Mary Ann from Richmond, Massachusetts:

My companion, haveing a fue mineuts I atempt to wright a fue lines to you. Brother Willard and my self are now at his fathers. To morrow we shall start for New York. We found our frends well. They want to com to Kirtland. We had a good journey thou[g]h

¹¹Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell Young, 3 June 1836, MS, Philip Blair Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Utah Library (hereafter cited as U. of U.). As will be evident, an important part of the source material in this article was drawn from this collection and is reproduced here with the generous permission of the University of Utah Library. In adhering to original writing habits, minimal punctuation has been added to facilitating reading.

¹²Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell Young, 21 July 1836, MS, U. of U.

¹³“History of Brigham Young,” *Deseret News*, 10 February 1858.

very much fortuegd [fatigued] riding day and night in the stage. We arrived here yeasterday about 9 A.M. This morning I was sick about one [h]our then got better. . . . I think I shall returne as soon as posable. I can vue my famely with the eye of the mind and desire to be with them as so[o]n as duty will permit. Yet I [pe]n this to comfort my mind that they are not suffering for food and rament. . . . Tell the girls to be good and pray for me and as for my wife I [k]now that she pray[s] for me all ways. Mary I remember you allways in my prayrs. . . . My best love to my wife and then to my house hold. So fair well. I remane yours.¹⁴

Arriving back at Kirtland in May 1837, Brigham was scarcely home a month when he was called on another assignment to the East, evidently connected with the difficulties that had beset the Church at Kirtland. Before he saw his family again the spirit of apostasy at Kirtland began to make such serious inroads upon the faith of the Saints there as to threaten the very existence of the Church. Returning in August, Brigham found feelings of disaffection so strong that "it was difficult for any to see clearly the path to pursue." During this "siege of darkness" he put forth his "utmost energies" to sustain confidence in the Prophet Joseph Smith and "unite the quorums of the Church." In doing this his popularity decreased to the point that he was forced to flee from Kirtland in the night of 22 December to avoid mob violence.¹⁵ Joined by his family some time later, Brigham set out for Missouri. At the time of his departure the twins were a year old, Joseph A. was three, Vilate, eight, and Elizabeth, thirteen.

After suffering many hardships due to inclement weather and poor traveling conditions, Brigham arrived at Far West, Missouri, on 14 March 1838. Here he purchased a small improvement on Mill Creek, and began to fence a farm in the hope of a permanent resting place for his family. But he had no sooner established himself and was able to purchase some additional land than he was again forced to abandon everything in the wake of the difficulties that beset the Latter-day Saints in Missouri—difficulties that eventually forced the entire Mormon population to leave the state. With Joseph Smith in prison, Brigham struggled under the double burden of caring for his family and directing the Mormon exodus from Missouri. To complicate matters, Mary Ann became so ill "that her life was despaired of for a long time." When she was finally able to travel in February 1839, Brigham took what few things he could carry, "leaving my landed property and nearly all my household goods," and with his wife and five children

¹⁴Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell, 24 March 1837, MS, U. of U.

¹⁵"History of Brigham Young," *Deseret News*, 10 February 1858.

made his way to Illinois, where he stopped in Atlas, Pike County, for a few weeks before moving to Quincy.¹⁶

Brigham Young remained in Quincy until after Joseph Smith's return from Missouri and plans were made to establish a settlement at Commerce sixty miles to the north. Then on 16 May he took his family and headed for the new place of settlement. Crossing the Mississippi on the 23rd he established his residence in a room of an old abandoned military barracks at Montrose, Iowa.

His entire family was ill on 14 September 1839, when Brigham arose from his bed to begin his mission to England. He himself was so sick that he was "unable to go thirty rods to the river without assistance," and his wife (who had given birth to their sixth child ten days previous) and other children were unable "to wait upon each other." On 6 April 1840, more than six months after this unpromising start, Brigham arrived in England. While there, in addition to proselyting work, he directed the printing of important Church publications including the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, the *Millennial Star*, and a hymn book.¹⁷

The first known contact with his family after arriving in England is a short letter dated 2 June 1840. The document was sent with John Moon, who had been selected to lead the initial shipload of Saints from England to America. Accompanying the letter was a small box containing a gift. Too busy to write more, Brigham directed his brief message "To my Dearest Mary Ann Young."

You will find a small key in this Letter which will enable you to unlock a little work Box. There you will [find] 2 letters. Read No. one first then No. two. Then look at the little presents. I have no more time to wright to you at present so I sub[s]cribe my self you[r] husben and companion in life. So fare well. Yours in the Bonds of mattromony, Brigham Young.¹⁸

Ten days later from Manchester where he and Parley P. Pratt were working on the publication of the hymn book, Brigham found time to address his family at greater length. A highlight of the letter is his recounting of "a visit" he had made to them in a dream the night before:

To my Dearest Mary. I now take my pen to wright a fue words to you. I have ben verry desirus to here from you. I get a little knews ecasenely [occasionally] by the Br[ether]in that recive letters from there wifes. Gratley to my sa[t]esfaction last night I paid you a visit in that contry. I first saw Elizabeth. I shoke her by the hand. Enquired

¹⁶Ibid., 17 February 1858.

¹⁷Ibid., 24 February 1858.

¹⁸Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell Young, 2 June 1840, MS, U. of U.

whare you was. She said you was about the house. Still I thaught we ware out of dores, but you soon came along whare I was. I shok you hartley by the hand and kist you two or three times and said to you whare is my Dear Children. You and Elizabeth boath spoke and said they ware at [s]chool and are all well. I says is Violate at [s]chol? Yeas you boath said. You then replied the children feele verry well suited with there situation and was verry fond of there Books. I wanted to see Violate and my little Jode Boy or Joseph and Mary and Brigham but did not. All this I saw in the night vision.¹⁹ And I also saw much more concerning the Church which I shall not relate. One thing more I thought that I had got to takere [take care] of my own famely fore the Church would not be able to doe much for our famelies. Before you get this you will probable see Sister Moon. I sent som little presents by her. There was one thing I did not menshen in my letter for I had sealed it up. Jest before the compnia started, Brother Henery Moon baught you and Violate Kimball, a butiful calico frock patte[r]n, thred to make them up, one yeard of factory for each, 9 and 1/2 yards. . . . I would like to see you ware that frock when I com home, but I doe not know when that will be at present. . . .

Unable to finish his letter on the twelfth, Brigham continued "to wright a fue lines more" a week later:

Saterdy the 20. . . . I asteam [esteem] it a grate privelege that I can converce with you with my pen. . . . As to my enjoyments I am as happy in this contry as I could be in enny place in the world whare I had got to be deprived of the sociity of my famely. They [the people of England] are as loving a set of people as ever I saw in my life, y[e]a thay are more so in their aperance then the Americans. But my soul says sweet home sweet home, my blesed famely, yea my kind and loving family, how sweet is home. You might think that I am verry anxious to get home, but it [is] not so. . . . but when the time has fully com, and the Lord says goe home my hart then will leap for joy. . . . If we get 5000 copes of the Book of Mormon spread in Urop [Europe] and Brother Pratt gets his famely here so he can attend to the paper and keep it agoing, I shall feele perty well satesfyde to com home and see you and the children and my Brotheren that I love in the Bonds of truth. . . .

Again interrupted, Brigham finally completed his letter in Liverpool, where he had traveled to supervise work on the Book of Mormon:

¹⁹On 11 June 1840 Brigham recorded the account of his dream in his diary: "Thursday 11. Went to visit a garden. It was rane y and unplesant. Came home. I was rejoiced because I had a comfortable home. After Br. P. P. Pratt and myself talked som[e] time about the nesity of the Elders having the power of God with them. I fell asleep and dremed a dreme. I first dremed of being at home in the Stat[e]s. I first saw Elizabeth. I asked her whare her mother was. She said she was about the house. She soon came in. I shook hands [with] her hart[i]ly as I had don with Elizabeth. I imbraced her in my arms and kissed [her] 2 or 3 times and asked hir whare my dear children was. She and Elizabeth boath ansard [answered] and said they ware at [s]chool and they ware well and enjoyed the [s]chool and loved there Books. My wife says we feele well but you must provide for your own families for the Church are not able to doe [it]for them" (Diary of Brigham Young, 1837-1845, MS, Church Historical Department).

I am about to finish my letter and send it. . . . Br. [John] Taylor has jest received a letter from his wife, so I get a little knews from you or about you. . . . I understand you are agoing to have a house built and som of the rest of the Sisters. I reculect what Br. Joseph said to us, if we would leve our famelies and goe to Englan on our mision that our famelies should want for nothing. This he said in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I beleve it. I have felt satesfied and contented about my famely ever sence I left them. And I had rather you would stay there then to goe to the east as things are at present. For when I com home I shall want to be with the Broth-erin [of] the first Presedency.

If you get a house built have it built whare it will suite you there. I have not anide [an idea] of injoying a house and home long at a time till the ancent of days comes and sets and Judgment and power is given to the saints of the most high God. Then and not till then doe I expect to have peace on the Earth long at a time, I think I shall com home and enjoy a season of [peace] with my family ecaisonly [occasionally].

I think much about you having the c[are o]f such a large famely upon your hands and no one to see to or doe enything for them but your self. Your task must be grate. I shall endeavor to Send to your assistence as often as I can. I have sent a little present by sister Moon to you that I think will cheere your hart. You may expect to here from me agan this fall. . . . I have no more to wright that I want to wright at present. To Elizabeth may the Lord bles you and keep you humbel and Violate, be good girles and pray for me that the Lord will enable me to doe his will. I sub[s]cribe myself yours in the Bonds of love matromony and the everlasting covenant.²⁰

By November Brigham Young was in Manchester again. Parley P. Pratt had returned to America to get his family and Brigham had been confined to the office for several months working on the publication of the Book of Mormon, the hymn book, and the *Millennial Star*, in addition to directing the proselyting work of the elders in the European mission. On the twelfth Brigham again wrote his wife: "Once more Mary I wright to you for fere that you have not recived the letters that I have latley sent to you. I sent you one this weak, one weak before last, and now there is som going to America and I feel to say a little more to you." Having heard of hardship in his family, he responded:

I understand you have had hard worke to get enny thing for your self and famely to make you comfortable. This I doe not here from you but from others. You may well think that my hart feeles tender toards you, when I relise your patiants and willingness to suffer in poverty and doe everything you can for my children and for me to goe and due the thing the Lord requires of me. I pray the Lord to bless you in all things and my children and help us all to be faithful to him and our Bretherin. This will bring [honor] to the name of

²⁰Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell Young, 12, 20, and 24 June 1840, MS, U. of U.

our Redemer on the Earth also upon our heds and the best of all is we shall have eternal life.²¹

The last known communication of Brigham Young to his family from England is dated 15 January 1841, at Liverpool, three months before he left to return home:

I am now seated to wright a fue lines to you. I feele thankful that I can communicate to you my thoughts and feelings, thou[g]h far from you. I am injoying tolarble good he[l]th for me. I have rec[e]ived a long letter from you which was a blesing to mee to have knews from your own hand. I felt sorry to here [hear] that you had ben sick. I am aware that your worke is to[o] hard for you, even if you ware all well; I pray for you and the children continuly. It is all I can due. I can not help you about your daly work. . . . You said in your letter you wanted to know about the time I should come home. I can tel you what I think about it at present. On the 6 day of Apriel 1841 we hold a Councel of the twelve with the officers of the church for the purpos of arangen [arranging] the affares of the church so that we can leve. I think we shall start for home then, and make our way as fast as we can. I beleve this is the feelings of all the twelve. This is all I can say upon the subject, the will of the Lord be don. If we due start by the middle of April we shall be home in June. . . .

As to my feelings I injoy my self as well as I ever did in my life though my labor is verry hard. But the grace of god is saficiant for me. I feele a grate desire for my famely, but I feele they are in the hands of the Lord God of Isreal. . . . I am aware the time seems longer to you and the children that I am gon then [than] it do[e]s to me for you onley have one seene [scene] of things before you. It is not so with me and the fact is my buisness or mision is so hevey upon me that I have but little time for enny thing elce. If I would give up my mind to think of my famely it would destract me and I should not be fit for the work the Lord has set me about. You said you hoped I would not charge you with ingratitude. I due not know that I have. If I have, I have don it ignerently for it has not ben in my hart to due it nether is it now in my hart to due it. I desire to ad[d] to your comfort and hapiness. I have nothing to say to you upon this point, for I think you have. . . . [n]ever had enny thing elce in your hart toards me but to make me happy and comfortable. . . .

Elder [Lorenzo] Snow is in Birmingham. He braugh[t] me your letter. I recived it as a presious morsel. There was one word in it that I did or due not understand. It is this [hold it to the fire and you can read].²² I recived the other letter you speak of. I have not wreten as often as I should like to have don. Latley I have had so much to talk about and due that I could not verry well. . . . You say in your letter little Mary Ann cried the other night and did not want to goe to Bed till she had kneled down and praid for Father;

²¹Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell Young, 12 November 1840, MS, U. of U.

²²The brackets are in the original.

bless the little creater. How I want to see hir. After you recive this letter you nead not write to [me] agan.

Mary, if you can helpe Br. Truman Angel to enny little thing do so, for I ow[e] him. To my children Elizabeth be a good girl take good care of your helth and of the children be humble and pray for me. Vilate be a good girl and be kind to the little ons. Pray for your self and for your Father and Mother and for the children and teach the littl ons to pray. You mus studday your book and lern the children to read. My little son Joseph be a good Boy. Mind your mother. Help hir bring wood and water for hir. When I com home I mean to bring you and Brigham a nise little wagon, so you can draw wood and goe to [the] mil for your mother. Little Brigham how I due want to see him. Be a good Boy and I will com home soon to see you and the rest of the children. My little daughter Emma²³ she dos not know eny thing a bout me. But Mary remembers me and I am glad of it.

I hope you have got what I sent to you by Br. Turley. He will pay you thirty dallars when ever you want. You said in your letter I might think you was rich know [now] but I did not nether due now think you are. But I think one thing, glory to God in [the] highest for his goodness to me in putting it in to my power to help my poor wife and children to a little to b[u]y them a morsel of bread. It is not me but the Lord that has don it . . . th[r]ough me. If the Lord bleses me so I can I shall send you a little by Br. Hiram Clark who will get there in Apriel. . . . I should like to have you b[u]y a nother first rate Cow so we can have plenty of milk and butter when I get home so we can feed the poor, for I shall have a grate menny to visit me. (I am your for ever) Brigham Young.

. . . if you get a garden planted this seson I will try to be there to fence it. If you can get your house finished by the time I come home I shall be glad. But due not truble your self if it is not convenient.²⁴

Something of the difficulties that faced Mary Ann Young at Nauvoo in her husband's absence is seen in the only known letter written by her to Brigham while he was in England. The letter was begun on 15 April and completed on 30 April. It was directed to a New York address. Brigham left England on 19 April, so obviously received the letter after his arrival in America:

Agreeable to your request I Attempt to communicate a few lines to you. I have red your kind letters. They have been a great comfort to me. . . . I long to see you att home once more. I pray my Heavenly Father in the worthey name of Jesus that he will protect you from all evil and prosper you on your way home. . . . I hope you will for-

²³According to Nauvoo sealing records, the full name of this child, born 4 September 1839, was Roxy Emma Alice Young. While this letter and the one of Mary Ann to Brigham dated 1841 indicate the use of the name Emma in her early years, by 1847 Alice was being used and is the name that appears on subsequent family genealogy lists.

²⁴Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell Young, 15 January 1841, MS, U. of U.

give me for not writing to you. . . . I feel in hopes I shall be able to get work and fire wood along this Spring. I am glad to hear the work of the Lord is prospering in England. It gives me much joy. I feel to give glory to God for his mercy to the children of men in the last days. . . .

Mary Ann continued her letter two days later:

Saturday the 17. Br. [Hiram] Clark . . . called the next morning after his arrival and gave me the two letters from you and the litle Box undisturbed as it was from your hand. I feel the Lord is good. I think we have learned quite a lesson since you left home. That is to trust in the Lord. Alas, that is a great thing. They that trust in the Lord shall not be confounded worlds without end. Amen. I long to see you at home once more My Dear Husband. May that God whose servents we are protect and speed you on your way in safety with our dear Breatheren.

I think you would hardly know the children. They have grown so much larger since you left home. The girls did not recover from their sickness until January. There was four or five months my family was helpless nearly on my hands. But through the mercy of my heavenly Father we are all in good health at present. But I can truly say I am ashamed of my writing. I have no Sickness upon me yet I am constantly fatagued when I can get time to sit down to write in the day time: and I cannot write by candle light as I have with the rest of the family . . . had very sore eyes. Litle Emmas eyes have been so very sore she could not open them nor bare the light for some time.

I feel that it is through the mercy of God that we enjoy the Blessing of health at the present. . . . I am thankful for all the Blessings I hav received. I should be glad if I had a better house to recieve into. But it has been so differcult to obtain work that what I had done is not done as I wanted itt. But I am thankful for a comfortable shelter from the Storm. I have done the best I could so I will thank my hevenly Father for all the blessings I recieve and pray the Lord to continue his mercys with us. The litle Boys talk much about their litle wagon that Father is a going to bring them. Joseph [says] tell Father I send my best love to him. E[lizabeth] says she wants some Light plain silk to make her a Bonnet of, [also a] Belt & Slide. She would like some litle white artificial flowers. She says you may do as [you have] a mind about geting them. . . . I am as ever yours M.A. Young.

The letter was finally finished on 30 April with these lines about the children:

Litle Brigham says tell Father to come home. Mary says I want to see Father and Emma says yes. I think she will go to you as you Dreamed when you come home. I Bid you farewell for a litle Season.²⁵

²⁵Mary Ann Angell Young to Brigham Young, 15, 17, and 30 April 1841, MS, Church Historical Department.

After an absence from his family of twenty-two months, Brigham Young arrived back in Nauvoo on 1 July 1841. He found Mary and his six children living "in a small unfinished log cabin, situated on a low wet lot, so swampy that when the first attempt was made to plow it the oxen mired."²⁶ Since joining the Latter-day Saints in 1832 Brigham had been away from his family on proselyting missions or other Church assignments nearly half of his time. A few days after his return from Nauvoo Joseph Smith called to see him and in the course of his visit conveyed a revelation that addressed the subject of his absence from his family:

Dear and well-beloved brother, Brigham Young, verily thus saith the Lord unto you: My servant Brigham, it is no more required at your hand to leave your family as in times past, for your offering is acceptable to me.

I have seen your labor and toil in journeyings for my name.

I therefore command you to send my word abroad, and take especial care of your family from this time, henceforth and forever. Amen. (D&C 126)

While these must have been comforting lines to Brigham and Mary Ann, they neither relieved the heavy demands upon his time, nor completely discontinued his "journeyings abroad." Within a month of his return from England, the burden of Church business in Nauvoo was placed upon the Quorum of Twelve. Brigham Young as president of the Quorum spent most of his time regulating missionary work and the settlement of immigrating Saints upon Church lands, attending quorum meetings, visiting nearby congregations, and meeting as a city councilor of Nauvoo. Beyond this, he did find a little time to improve the conditions of his family.

Although I had to spend the principal part of my time, at the call of Bro. Joseph, in the service of the church, the portion of time left me I spent in draining, fencing and cultivating my lot, building a temporary shed for my cow, chinking and otherwise finishing my house; and as the ground was too damp to admit of a cellar underground, I built one with two brick walls about four or six inches apart, arched over with brick.²⁷

Something of the extent of Brigham Young's absence from his family during the first decade following his baptism can be sensed from an isolated entry in his diary dated January 1842: "This evening I am with my wife a lone by my fire side for the first time for years. We injoin it and feele to prase the Lord."²⁸

²⁶"History of Brigham Young," *Deseret News*, 10 March 1858.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Diary of Brigham Young, 1837-1845.

A high point of the year 1842 for Brigham and Mary Ann Young came on 20 August with the birth of their fifth daughter, Luna. The child was less than three weeks old when her father left Nauvoo with Heber C. Kimball on a special mission to the East to help counteract the influence of John C. Bennett's anti-Mormon publications. During this mission Brigham baptized twelve persons.

After returning to his family on 4 November, Brigham was stricken with a severe illness. Years later he remembered it as "the most violent fever" he had ever experienced. Such was its virulence that the skin peeled from his body. Joseph Smith and Willard Richards gave him a special blessing and prophesied that he should recover, but the blessing did not preclude long suffering. During the eighteen days the fever raged, Brigham lay in his log house in an open room that was so cold that an attendant employed to fan the fever-ridden patient, froze his fingers and toes even though he was wearing boots, greatcoat, and mittens.

When the fever left on the eighteenth day, Brigham was propped up in a chair, but was so far gone that his eyes had set in his head and he could not close his eyelids. Suddenly, his chin dropped and he stopped breathing. Mary Ann, seeing this, quickly emptied the contents of a water bucket on him, but with no effect. She then dashed a handful of strong camphor into his face and eyes. Still there was no response. Desperately, she held his nose and placing her mouth over his, blew hard to set his lungs in motion. Finally, he began to breathe again; but recovery was slow. Not until the middle of January 1843 was he able to leave the house for the first time since his illness.²⁹

In addition to his civic and Church responsibilities, Brigham Young found enough time to improve the temporal comforts of his wife and children. On 31 May 1843, nearly two years after his return from England, he completed a new, brick dwelling for his family. "I moved out of my log cabin into my new brick house, which was 22 feet by 16, two stories high, and a good cellar under it, and felt thankful to God for the privilege of having a comfortable, though small habitation."³⁰

About a month after moving into his new home Brigham was called to leave it. In company with Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith, he started on a special assignment to the eastern states to solicit funds for the building of the Nauvoo House. He had been gone about two months when he received a letter from Mary

²⁹"History of Brigham Young," *Deseret News*, 17 March 1858.

³⁰Ibid.

Ann. Written to her "Dear and well Beloved" husband, the epistle brought news of sickness at home. The letter was being written "while our litle family is quietly resting in bed which has been very seldom for four weeks past."

I was taken with enfluensy and Colamorbus [cholera morbus] the first. Brigham was taken with the scarlot feever. Before he recovered the three litle girls were taken. Mary had the Canker so she did not swallow for ten or eleven days eny thing But drink except a little fish flesh once. Vilate was taken very sick one week since with scarlot feever. The Colamorbus took hold of her yesterday in a very severe manner so she appeared nigh unto Death But through mercy of God and the utmost exertion she is quite comfortable. . . .

Hoping that the worst was over and better days were ahead, Mary Ann continued:

The children are all geting Better and I can truly say I feel thankful, for I am much worn down with standing over them By day and By night and hearing their cries with pain and distress oftimes calling for Father to come and lay hands on them. I am shure it peirced my heart with much sorrow. I feel to thank my heavenly Father there is prospect of health returning to us again at presant. There is much sickness in this place. . . . Some children died with the same disease our family has had. There is no change in our temporal affairs for the Better since you let home.

Realizing that the news she had imparted was not calculated to bring comfort, Mary Ann checked herself and apologized; but where her trials had been so severe, her writing reflected her feelings:

I do not want to say things to you to trouble you. You must excuse me for saying so much about the distress we have passed through. I feel somtimes as though I could never get eny thing else on my mind. . . . May the Lord Bless you and make you an instrument of doing much good. You have all our Praises. I am yours in bonds of the everlasting Gospel.³¹

If the break in the clouds seemed to presage better days, in reality it was only the introduction to another trial. Ten days after the date of the above letter, the Young's six year old daughter, Mary Ann, died of what was diagnosed as "dropsy and canker."³² This little girl was the twin of Brigham, Jr.—the lovely "little creater" of an earlier letter, who didn't want to go to bed until she had prayed for her father. Sources do not tell where Brigham Young was or the date when he received news of the death of his daughter.

³¹Mary Ann Angell Young to Brigham Young, 16 and 17 August 1843, MS, Church Historical Department.

p ³²"Record of Deaths in the City of Nauvoo," MS, Church Historical Department.

On the same day that Mary Ann finished her letter, Brigham ("thankful to have the oppertun[it]y") also wrote one. The theme of his letter was the same as his wife's—illness.

I have ben verry sick with my old complaint. Feele some better to day. . . . When I was so sick I thought if I could only be at home, I should be thankful. There is no place like home to me. I due not value leveing home and all that is deare to me for the sake of the gospel if I could onley injoy my helth. You and I must take som masurs to recover our helth or we shall not last a grate meny years; and I want that we should live meny years yet and due much good on the earth. . . .

After explaining his travels in some detail, Brigham pinpointed the nature of his ill health:

took the rales cares [rail cars] for New York. Arived a[t] 6 P.M. It commenced raining in the after noon. We had a grate flood in this place. My teth commenced aking about the time it commencd raining. I was sick and destresed about 4 day[s] and nights. Hardley got enny sleep. I sufferd much. . . . I took some pill[s], was anointed. Had hands laid on me thursday night. My destres continued till a bout 12 o c[lock]. I laid down went to sleep. Had a good nights' rest. Have been perty well ever sence.³³

Two months later, on 22 October 1843, Brigham returned to his family at Nauvoo.

The following spring Brigham Young again undertook a special assignment to the East—this time to solicit support for the candidacy of Joseph Smith as President of the United States. In company with Heber C. Kimball and Lyman Wight, he left Nauvoo on 21 May. While waiting for a boat at Fairport, Ohio, on Lake Erie he started a letter to Mary Ann: "I feele lonsom. O that I had you with me this somer I think I should be happy. Well I am now because I am in my cauling and duing my duty, but [the] older I grow the more I desire to stay at my own home insted of traveling." Continuing the letter some time later from Albany, New York, Brigham wrote that he had not had much sleep and was "perty well tired out."

Last night I felt for sometime as though I had got to get a new const[it]ution or [I would] not last long. How I due want to see you and [the children]. Kiss them for me and kiss Luny [Luna] twice or mor. Tel hir it is for me. Give my love to all the famely. I nead not mension names. . . . Dont you want for eney thing. You can borrow monney to get what you want. . . . After taking a grate share of my love to your self then deal it out to others as you plese.³⁴

³³Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell Young, 17 August 1843, MS, original at Yale University Library.

³⁴Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell Young, 12 June 1844, MS, original in possession of Dr. Wade Stephens, Bradenton, Florida.

Brigham told Mary Ann that he would travel to New York, and Vermont, and then attend a Boston conference before returning home. On 9 July he heard the first rumors of the death of Joseph and Hyrum Smith—news that was confirmed one week later “while at Br. Bement’s house in Peterboro” in a letter one of the church members had received from Nauvoo.³⁵ A letter from Mary Ann dated 30 June confirmed the sorrowful news:

My Dear Companion. I set down to communicate a few lines to you at this time. My heart is full. I know not what to write to comfort you at this time. We have had great afflictions in this place since you left home. . . . You have now been gone allmost six weeks. I have not had a line from you since you left home. I have not time to write much now. We are in great affliction at this time. Our Dear Br. Joseph Smith and Hiram has fell victiams to a verocious mob. The great God of the creation only knows whithe[r] the rest shall be preserved in safety or not. We are in tolable good health at presant. I have been Blessed to keep my feelings quite calm through all the storm. I hope you will be careful on your way hom and not expose yourself to those that will endanger your Life. Yours in hast[e]. If we meet no more in this world may we meet where parting is no more. Farewell.³⁶

One attraction that drew Brigham Young to the East that summer of 1844 was his daughter, Vilate, who at the time was attending school in Salem, Massachusetts while living with Church member friends. Brigham visited her on 18 June. And shortly after his return to Nauvoo he wrote her expressing uncertainty that he would see her again that year. He counseled her “to be steady to your school and practis on the Pianna. Get all you can while you have an opertunity.” He told of the desire of the other children to see her, and concluded: “You must be a good girl and pray for me and the rest of us that we may live long on the Earth to due good. Take the council of Br. and Sister Felt, and see sister Cobb as often as you can and harken to hir instruction. I beleve she is a good woman and would not council you wrong for the world knowenly.”³⁷

A letter to Vilate dated 28 August 1844 in which Brigham wrote that he did not know when he would travel east again, because “the Church are not willing to have Br. Kimball or my self go from this place a tall,” is the last known personal communication between Brigham Young and members of his family prior to the 1846 exodus from Nauvoo.³⁸

³⁵“History of Brigham Young,” *Deseret News*, 24 March 1858.

³⁶Mary Ann Angell Young to Brigham Young, 30 June 1844, MS, Church Historical Department.

³⁷Brigham Young to Vilate Young, 11 August 1844, MS, Church Historical Department.

³⁸Brigham Young to Vilate Young, 28 August 1844, MS, Church Historical Department.