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2003-01-01

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Original Publication Citation

Fred E. Woods, "From Liverpool to Keokuk: The Mormon Maritime Migration Experience of 1853," *Mormon Historical Studies* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2003: 3-24).

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Woods, Fred E., "From Liverpool to Keokuk: The Mormon Maritime Migration Experience of 1853" (2003). *All Faculty Publications*. 1061.

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From Liverpool to Keokuk: The Mormon Maritime Migration Experience of 1853

Fred E. Woods

In January, Fifty-three, we left our English home,
Determined for the Gospel's sake, to Zion's land to come.
Our family was very small, its members numbered three,
Yet strong in faith of Israel's God, and full of hope were we.
'Twas not to us an easy task to bid old friends adieu,
To take a long farewell of those who always had been true,
To leave for aye, the cozy home we made but just before,
And take a last fond look of things we should behold no more;
The wind blew keen, as out we went into the cold gray dawn,
But keener far the chill we felt within our hearts that morn.
The stars were shining over us, but brighter in our breast
Was the star of hope that lured us on to the distant West.¹

So wrote Hannah Cornaby, who made the transatlantic voyage to New Orleans with a company of 332 Saints aboard the square-rigged *Ellen Maria*. The *Ellen Maria* was one of eight sailing vessels that carried Latter-day Saint converts to Zion in 1853. During the month of March, when several Mormon companies disembarked at New Orleans and stepped onto the shores of the promised land, Franklin D. Pierce was inaugurated the fourteenth president of the United States, and America was anticipating a bright future.²

Hope soon dimmed in New Orleans as a yellow fever epidemic killed 7,848 people in 1853 alone.³ By this same year, thirty thousand miles of railroad track had been laid across America, although the rail had not yet

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replaced steamboat travel, which was enjoying its golden era.⁴ For the time being, the Saints would take their chances and ply the waters of the Mississippi.⁵ In 1853, over twenty-five hundred Saints embarked from Liverpool, and after disembarking at the “Crescent City” (New Orleans), they steamed up “Old Man River” to Keokuk, Iowa.⁶

Keokuk was designated the frontier outfitting post for the 1853 season because Kanesville, Iowa, a temporary gathering place for the Saints, had been closed the previous year. In 1852, Brigham Young had instructed all Church members in the Kanesville region to do their best to gather to the Salt Lake Valley. Furthermore, the gentile merchants who remained in Kanesville (now called Council Bluffs) chose to inflate prices for passing migrants, and so a new outfitting post was needed. Church officials decided to avoid both the inflated prices at Kanesville as well as the treacherous, rising waters of the Missouri.⁷

In the previous year, a number of Latter-day Saint emigrants had been victims of what some would later call the worst maritime disaster on the Missouri River. More than two dozen Saints were killed when the boiler of the steamboat *Saluda* exploded.⁸ The 1853 migration plan was to send the Saints straight up the Mississippi, avoiding the Missouri, and disembark at Keokuk, which lay just twelve miles south of Nauvoo.⁹

British artist Frederick Piercy, who sketched various portions of the journey from England to the Salt Lake Valley, wrote, “At St. Louis I learned that the Emigrants to G.S.L. Valley, instead of going up the dangerous Missouri in steam-boats would, this year [1853], start from Keokuk and cross the State of Iowa to Kanesville.”¹⁰ Consequently, the Saints avoided the treacherous river travel on the Missouri but had to traverse an extra three hundred miles across Iowa, with the additional cost of oxen and cattle to be considered. Keokuk served but one year as the frontier outfitting post, and then Kansas City, Missouri, became the designated emigration season post for 1854.¹¹

Lusty Liverpool

Liverpool was the primary location for Latter-day Saint embarkation throughout most of the nineteenth century.¹² It was the headquarters of the British mission; and, by 1840, Liverpool was the most active international port of emigration in the world, boasting a population of two hundred thousand. Much to the sailors’ delight, it was generously sprinkled with two thousand pubs.

In 1840, the Saints commenced from the docks of Liverpool for America. The choice of location was based on three primary factors. First, the Mersey River was easier to navigate than was the Thames in London.

Second, railroad lines coursed like arteries to the heart of the Liverpool docks. Third, and most important, the British Mission was located there.¹³

In 1853, the famous New England writer Nathaniel Hawthorne was appointed to serve as an American consul for four years.¹⁴ His first-person accounts of this maritime city present a dismal view of the wretchedness encountered by passing migrants and certainly evidence the need for Latter-day Saint supervision of emigration matters. In perhaps his most descriptive portrayal of Liverpool, Hawthorne notes, "The people are as numerous as maggots in cheese; you behold them, disgusting, and all moving about, as when you raise a plank or log that has long lain on the ground, and find many vivacious bugs and insects beneath it."¹⁵ While the mariners loved the lusty streets of Liverpool, naive emigrants had to be continuously on their guard to avoid thieves and scoundrels who lay in wait to take advantage of them at Liverpool:

Before the emigrants even got on board ship they had to have dealings with ship brokers, otherwise known as emigration agents or recruiters; with runners, otherwise called crimps, touts, and man-catchers; with boarding-house keepers, who overcharged them and delayed them as long as they had money to pay for more lodging; and the keepers of spirit vaults and provision stores, who sold them bad food and drink at high prices. Runners were almost always boarding-house keepers, and boarding-house keepers often ran spirit vaults or food shops on the side. It was all confused and disorderly, and almost always a racket. Each man took his cut, and the first and biggest cut went to the broker. . . . As a policeman put it, there was a general impression that the emigrants were defrauded from the day they started from their houses. There was no remedy.¹⁶

Supervision of Emigration at Liverpool

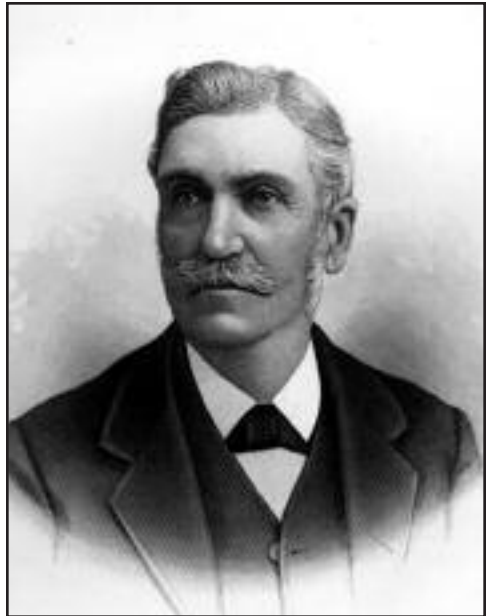
Although such depictions of the conditions may have been true for emigrants in general, the Latter-day Saints provided a remedy. Upon arrival in Liverpool, the Saints were directed to the British Mission office. There, Church leaders advised the emigrants regarding provisions and lodgings and counseled them concerning the Atlantic crossing.

As early as 1841, Church leaders appointed agents to oversee emigration at Liverpool under the direction of the president of the British Mission. In an article appearing in *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, April 1841, the Twelve provided several reasons why converts should follow the counsel of the newly appointed Latter-day Saint emigration agent:

We have found that there are so many "pick pockets," and so many that will take every possible advantage of strangers, in Liverpool, that we have appointed Elder Amos Fielding, as the agent of the church, to superintend the fitting out of the

Saints from Liverpool to America. Whatever information the Saints may want about the preparations for a voyage, they are advised to call on Elder Fielding, at Liverpool, as their first movement, when they arrive there as emigrants. There are some brethren who have felt themselves competent to do their own business in these matters, and rather despising the counsel of their friends, have been robbed and cheated out of nearly all they had. A word of caution to the wise is sufficient. It is also a great saving to go in companies, instead of going individually. First, a company can charter a vessel, so as to make the passage much cheaper than otherwise. Secondly, provisions can be purchased at wholesale for a company much cheaper than otherwise. Thirdly, this will avoid bad company on the passage. Fourthly, when a company arrives in New Orleans they can charter a steam-boat so as to reduce the passage near one-half. This measure will save some hundreds of pounds on each ship load. Fifthly, a man of experience can go as leader of each company, who will know how to avoid rogues and knaves.¹⁷

This successful pattern continued to be followed for the next dozen years. By the fall of 1852, Samuel W. Richards was overseeing emigration from Liverpool, acting in his role as the president of the British Mission. However, Brigham Young corresponded with Richards and others appointed to preside over the British Mission and oversaw all aspects of emigration to Utah. For example, in a letter to Richards dated 30 September 1852, President Young sent a list of names of those whose way was paid to the Salt Lake Valley. He also specified that the LDS emigrants should land at St. Louis and noted that the Mormon emigration agent



Samuel Whitney Richards.
Courtesy Church Archives, Church of Jesus
Christ of Latter-day Saints.

John Brown would meet them in New Orleans and that Horace L. Eldredge would be on hand to assist them as the agent in St. Louis. He concluded his letter using the title, "President, Perpetual Emigrating Fund Co."¹⁸

As the 1853 emigration season dawned, Richards implemented President Young's counsel and continued to make use of the *Millennial Star* to offer practical advice to Latter-day Saint emigrants. For example, in the

late fall of 1852, the following article was published, titled “Notice to Intending Emigrants:”

We beg to inform the Saints intending to emigrate that we are now prepared to receive their applications for berths. Every application should be accompanied by the names, age, occupation, country where born, and £1 deposit for each one named, except for children under one year old. Although children under one year old have their passage free to New Orleans, their names and ages are required by us equally as much as other passengers’. The dietary scale may be expected in our next.

Passengers must furnish their own beds and bedding, their cooking utensils, provision boxes, &c.

Every person applying for a berth or berths should be careful to give their address very distinct, in order to insure the delivery of our answer to them by letter carriers.

By reference to STAR no. 32, it will be seen that £10 each was named as the lowest sum upon which single persons or families could be encouraged by us to emigrate from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake City; therefore persons not having that amount should apply for passage to New Orleans, as we do not purpose to ship any Saints but those who are prepared to go through to the Valley without detention.

Our first vessel will sail in the fore part of January 1853; and as soon as our arrangements are complete, the passengers for that ship will be notified when to be in Liverpool, and receive all further necessary information; the same routine will be observed in reference to the succeeding ship.

Deposits may be forwarded until the close of the year, or later, as may hereafter be noticed.¹⁹

This advice was also communicated to Scandinavian converts, who first gathered at Copenhagen where they received emigration instructions from the Scandinavian Mission President Willard Snow.²⁰ In 1853, the first large Scandinavian company of Saints, led by John Forsgren, established a general pattern of transmigration that would be followed by subsequent companies of Scandinavian Saints. After their arrival at Copenhagen, they traveled to Kiel, Germany, where they took a train to Hamburg. From Hamburg, they steamed down the Elbe River and crossed the North Sea to Liverpool, via the port of Hull.²¹ On the North Sea aboard the



*Willard Snow.
Courtesy International Daughters
of Utah Pioneers.*

Lion, they encountered the most difficult part of their journey when they ran into a terrible winter storm. After finally arriving in Hull on 28 December,

one writer noted, “We had come through a storm the like of which the captain of the ship said he had never been out in. Some of the ship’s cargo was ruined, and the wind was so strong that our clothes were nearly blown overboard. The Lord helped and strengthened all of us both in body and soul so that we could continue our journey without delay.”²²

To avoid the unpleasanties of Liverpool, the British Mission staff made short-term arrangements for the newly arrived European converts. When possible, the British Mission office made arrangements for the emigrants to sleep on the vessel before departure because it was much safer and less expensive for them.²³ Others, however, were consigned to temporary lodgings. For example, Hannah



John Forsgren.
Courtesy International
Daughters of Utah Pioneers.

Cornaby, who would voyage on the *Ellen Maria*, recalled in rhyme her stay in Liverpool at a “Temperance Hotel.”²⁴ James Farmer, who was also to be a member of the *Ellen Maria* company, recorded on 7 January 1853, “Arrived in Liverpool about 3 o’clock P.M. procured good lodgings at Robinsons Temperance Hotel No. 3 Manchester St.,” which is most likely the hotel Cornaby referred to.²⁵ Sarah Birch Waters, who later crossed the Atlantic on the *Elwira Owen*, remembered, “We were taken to a comfortable hotel by one of the elders, where we remained for a few days.”²⁶

The Latter-day Saints had done such an excellent job of emigration from Liverpool that the British House of Commons interviewed Richards the following year to determine how the Mormons were so successful in their emigration procedures. Richards notes that he was asked “several hundred questions” which were “plied with a zest and zeal that I had never before encountered in my experience.” Richards also wrote that the committee had found the Latter-day Saint maritime migration procedures to be “superior to anything that had ever been contemplated in law.” Finally, he noted, “There is one thing which, in the opinion of the emigration committee of the House of Commons, they [the Mormons] can do, viz., teach Christian shipowners how to send poor people decently, cheaply and healthfully across the Atlantic.”²⁷

The Departure and the Cost

As he was getting ready for the 1853 emigration season to commence at Liverpool, Samuel W. Richards published a letter in *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* to give direction to European Saints contemplating the call to gather to Zion:

The season of Emigration for the Saints is fast approaching; many are exerting themselves in preparing to leave their homes, their kindred and their native land, to join those who are more dear to them, in a far distant region. The invitation of the First Presidency of the Church is by no means unheeded; the tidings that go forth from Zion seem to carry to every honest soul, the very peace that dwells within her borders: and a desire is kindled that cannot be satisfied until they become dwellers in her habitations, and heirs to an inheritance that shall secure to them her eternal glories.²⁸

The journey to Zion (by land and sea) would not come without a price, and Mormon emigrants who traveled to America in 1853 had one of five choices: Polly Aird explains that the Independent “through” emigrants paid their way and notes that the cost for Mormon travel in 1852 was about twenty British pounds (which was the equivalent of about \$100 in U.S. currency). Second, were those who paid just for their passage, which amounted to “approximately one month’s wage for a skilled worker or two month’s wage for an unskilled one.” Third, LDS converts might be fortunate enough to have their relatives or friends pay their way through the Perpetual Emigrating Fund.²⁹ Fourth, Church members could have their way paid through a revolving fund, the Perpetual Emigrating Fund.³⁰

Aird further notes that a fifth way was suggested by Samuel W. Richards, who reduced rates to a bare minimum and set the cost of ten British pounds (half of what it cost in 1852) as the lowest cost for which a British Saint could travel to Zion in 1853. However, this rate was raised to thirteen British pounds in 1854, and the ten- and thirteen-pound emigrating companies of 1853–54 were soon abandoned, as the reduction in provisions left no room for the unforeseen.³¹ Although Richards reduced the financial costs to a bare minimum, there was another price to be paid. He warned that “the perils of the deep, as well as trials on land, now lie in the path of the Saints as they journey Zion-ward.”³² British convert John Isaac Hart, who voyaged with Cornaby on the *Ellen Maria*, recalls the surge of emotion as the Saints departed Liverpool: “All the Saints on board was up on deck waving their handkerchiefs. We sung the hymn, ‘Yes My Native Land I Love Thee.’”³³ Frenchman Gustave Edward Henriod, who was aboard at the time and had gathered to Liverpool from the port of Le Havre, would not have understood

the words to this British hymn because he was, in his own words, a “thorobred [sic] French boy,” but he would have understood the difficulty of departing from loved ones. When he and his sister Henrietta had bid good-bye to their French homeland and their family, he recalled the “vivid impression at the parting scene, that I should never again look upon my father’s face in this world.”³⁴

While many Saints from Britain and Scandinavia were gathered at Liverpool to begin their voyages across the Atlantic, the *Millennial Star* published an article titled “Gathering,” which captured this unique setting:

The spectacle of hundreds and thousands of persons readily sacrificing from religious motives the claims of the country relationship, and acquaintance, and emigrating to a land to them personally unknown—where they will be comparative strangers, must undoubtedly appear strange and unaccountable to the majority of mankind. But the Saints, who have learned of the things of God in some small degree, whose minds have been opened to an understanding of the economy of salvation, know full well the righteousness and wisdom of the motives that induce them to forsake the land of their nativity, and gather themselves together on another land.³⁵

Embarking from the docks of Liverpool aboard the *Jersey*, English artist Frederick Piercy penned his thoughts as he departed his homeland: “It is impossible to leave the land of one’s birth without regret, or to leave one’s kindred and friends, even for a few months, without a sigh. I wondered whether I should ever see them again, or if my ears would ever again be greeted with gentle words of affection in fond tones from loving lips!”³⁶ Thus, the way of the Saints was at times a path of sacrifice and hardship, but it would also be a journey of adventure and joy.

Life at Sea

Presidents to oversee the Mormon company voyages of 1853 were selected by the British Mission president, Samuel W. Richards, before the companies left Liverpool. Those appointed presidents then selected counselors to help with order and hygiene. Regulations were put in place for the health, safety, and comfort of the passengers. The Saints were also organized into wards with priesthood leaders appointed for each group. The support of these priesthood brethren was very important to the president of each company. This was especially true in the case of Moses Clawson, who was ill during most of the voyage of the *Ellen Maria*, which he was appointed to preside over. Upon reaching New Orleans after a safe transatlantic passage, he wrote to President Richards, “I was nearly the whole of the voyage confined with sickness, but the brethren in the priesthood have diligently cooperated with

me . . . so that all things have moved on harmoniously.”³⁷

Having set sail from Liverpool, President Cornelius Bagnall made arrangements for the Saints on board the *Falcon* to “rise at 6 o’clock and that 7 o’clock he appointed for calling on the Lord in prayer . . . that we hold worship twice on Sabbath. . . . That Elder James Caffall and myself go round the berths and appoint young brethren to carry the meat from the passengers to the cook.” Bagnall later instructed the Saints “not to make a noise after 8 o’clock as the sailors went to bed at that time.” The clerk further noted, “The president of the different wards then counseled together and it was agreed . . . that on Monday a general dinner of rice should be cooked together, and that on Tuesday oatmeal . . . on Wednesday pork and potatoes, and on Thursday rice again and on Friday oatmeal and again on Saturday pork and potatoes and the same order should be observed on the Sabbath.”³⁸



James Leatham.
Courtesy International
Daughters of Utah Pioneers.

James Leatham, who was an emigrant aboard the *Falcon*, provides a further glimpse of the activities of these sea-going Saints, noting on 14 April that he was already making preparations for crossing the plains, as he was “on deck & sewed a piece of the tent cover.”³⁹ On 10 May, he wrote, “Many of the brethren went into the sea to bathe & in the afternoon I went in also.” That the Saints enjoyed a balance of recreation can also be surmised from Leatham’s diary, which recorded just two days later, “This day was appointed for the concert to come off as had been before agreed to, so all the names was taken that could sing or recite, and we came together on deck about 7 p.m. and there enjoyed ourselves in singing &c till 11. The evening was very calm.”⁴⁰

Apparently, the sea became too calm for the liking of Captain Day, master of the *Camillus*, carrying a cargo of 228 Saints across the Atlantic. On 6 May 1853, James Lee Newton recorded an unusual occurrence on their voyage: “Captain Day came to our Brethren and said he would give us three dollars rather than three hundred dollars if we would pray for good wind to drive the ship 7 miles a[n] hour in a half an hour the wind drove the ship 4 miles an hour.”⁴¹ During such lulls, the Saints would recreate. Jacob Gates, a passenger on the *Golconda* wrote on 15 February 1853, “The Saints are amusing themselves some in one way & some another. Some sewing some playing



Jacob Gates.
Courtesy Church Archives.

checkers &c, &c. A dull time to be in the middle of the ocean.”⁴²

Excessive free time was a temptation to the Saints. Frederick Piercy described some of the regulations given to maintain order while he took passage on the *Jersey*. Referring to sleeping arrangements, he explained that “the married men and women . . . [were] placed in the centre of the ship, and the unmarried portion at the two extremities—the males at the bow and the females at the stern.” He also noted that “the whole of the passengers were divided into districts of equal numbers, with a president and two counselors to each district. These had to see that the ship was cleaned out every morning, that all lights except ship lights were put out at eight o’clock at night.”⁴³

On Mormon voyages, priesthood brethren were appointed as watchmen to look for problems of a temporal or spiritual kind. For example, aboard the *Falcon*, President Bagnall assigned two elders to keep watch all night, “as they would have lamps burning all the time, and that he wished them to see that the Saints kept their beds and that decency and decorum was observed amongst them.”⁴⁴ Marriages frequently took place on Mormon company voyages as the immigrants (especially those engaged) were encouraged to be wed to ensure that morality would be kept at a proper standard.

Dangers on the Deep

As one emigrant left his native shores of England, he wrote about the uncertainty on the deep: “I thought of perils on sea—tempest, fire, and disease.”⁴⁵ Several voyages would encounter this triad of trials before they would reach the land of promise. Frederick Piercy remembered playing chess on the *Jersey* when he heard the cry of fire; thankfully, buckets of water were able to conquer barrels of turpentine that had ignited.⁴⁶

On the voyage of the *Elvira Owen*, the clerk of the Joseph W. Young Emigrating Company, Henry Pugh wrote, “We have the smallpox on board. Four sick with it. . . . It was brought on board by a child.”⁴⁷ James Pett remembered, “The smallpox broke out through a child that was passed by

the health inspector at Liverpool. . . . Captain Owen told Captain Joseph Young that if we had been any other people than Latter-day Saints, one-half would have died under similar conditions, and I must confess it was a miracle to me.”⁴⁸

John R. Winder remembered:

When about ten days out from Liverpool, I was taken down with smallpox, having caught it from a child who brought it on board. . . . Soon, however, five others were found to have the disease. A small house was built on deck and we were all quarantined. . . . A few days later . . . Brother William Jones, a young man lying next to me died, and in a short time the sailors took him and cast him into the sea. As I lay there pondering the situation, I heard the sailors say, “we will have him next,” meaning me. I did not believe what they said. I had a living faith that I would recover and get to Zion. There were only five [six, including William Jones] cases on board and only one death.⁴⁹

Storms were a constant threat for those crossing the Atlantic. On the last day of March, James Ririe wrote:

Thursday the 31st, a strong gale last night. A complete storm. The trunks were rolling, trumbling, breaking. The ship was cracking, children and women crying. I never was in such a scene. I was very sick. The ship rolled fearfully. I thought we would go down to the bottom. . . . In the excitement I asked the Lord if we should be saved or not. I got a manifestation of the Spirit that we would all be saved and that the storm would abate in two or three days and then general fair weather would ensue after that.⁵⁰

Peter McIntyre, who was in this same storm, explained: “At 6 p.m. it blew a gale, all the tin dishes, and many chests broke loose, the ship rolled and pitched exceedingly, chests, pots, pans, goblets, and etc., dashed from starboard to larboard; the few who could sit or hold up their heads gazed motionless upon the scene.” But McIntyre was going to Zion. With faith and determination, he wrote that he “proceeded . . . bound for New Orleans . . . thence to Salt Lake City, Utah, the city of refuge where the house of the Lord is to be built on top of the mountains, according to the ancient prophecies: where all the seed of Abraham will be gathered, to fulfill the promise of God to our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”⁵¹

John Isaac Hart, a Mormon immigrant on the *Ellen Maria*, recalled that during the voyage, the Saints found themselves in a “very dangerous place where we had only 1 foot and a half of water under the bottom of the vessel.” He added, “We then called up the God of Israel and we felt he would hear us as we had left our home and kindred friends to obey the commandments of God. Therefore, God heard our prayers so that [we] got over the dangerous place safe.”⁵²

Moses Clawson, the president of the Saints on this voyage aboard the *Ellen Maria*, elaborated on the deliverance this company experienced in a letter to Samuel W. Richards in Liverpool upon their arrival at New Orleans: “Our passage across the ocean was rough and stormy at times. We have been in very strange places, and unless the God of Israel had stretched out his arm to our deliverance, our position would have been hopeless.” Clawson added that there had been “five births, two marriages and five deaths on board.”⁵³ His letter to the British Mission office in Liverpool followed the general pattern expected of all presidents of Mormon-chartered companies—that of writing a brief summation of their voyages across the Atlantic—which was subsequently published in the *Millennial Star*.



The captain and most of the crew of the International were baptized, due to the example and teaching of the Saints on board.

Photo courtesy Church Archives.

Conversions at Sea

Of the eight Mormon companies that disembarked from Liverpool, none was as captivating as the voyage of the *International*. True to its name, this vessel carried a cargo of 425 Saints from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Just two weeks after leaving Liverpool, this square-rigger also confronted an angry storm, which sent many prayers to heaven. Experiencing

exhaustion from fighting the storm, Captain David Brown had an unusual dream “that himself, mates, and crew were all baptized in the Mormon faith, and when he awoke he found himself at prayer.”⁵⁴ Shortly thereafter, the mariners began to be converted.

On 6 April 1853, a lively celebration was held on board the *International* as the Saints celebrated the twenty-third anniversary of the establishment of the Church. On this memorable day, Henry Maiben wrote a song for the occasion, to be sung to the tune of “Yankee Doodle.” This song, ten verses in all, begins with the following verse and chorus:

On board the *International*
 All joyful and lighthearted
 Bound Zionward, four hundred Saints
 From Liverpool we started
 We’re English, Irish, Scotch and Welsh
 Assembled here together
 Resolved to do the will of God
 What’er the wind and weather
 Chorus
 Then, sing aloud, ye Saints of God,
 In one united chorus;
 Old Babylon we’ll leave behind,
 For, Zion is before us.⁵⁵

By the time they reached New Orleans, following a five-thousand-mile Atlantic voyage in fifty-four days, others also desired to flee Babylon (meaning the world) and gather with the Saints in Zion. Upon arrival in New Orleans, Mormon company leader Christopher Arthur reported to the British Mission president, Samuel W. Richards, who was stationed at the British Mission in Liverpool, the following: “I am now glad to inform you, that we have baptized all on board, except three persons. We can number the captain, first and second mates, eighteen of the crew, most of whom intend going right through to the Valley. . . . The others baptized were friends of the brethren. The number baptized in all is forty-eight since we left our native shores.”⁵⁶



Christopher Arthur.
 Photo courtesy Church Archives.

New Orleans

Most sailing Saints were able to successfully pass through the dangers of storm, fire, or disease as they crossed the Atlantic. However, when these converts disembarked at New Orleans in 1853, they found a city that faced disease of epidemic proportions. Nearly 10 percent of the city's inhabitants were dead from yellow fever by the end of that year. The Saints escaped the yellow fever, but apparently some fell victim to another kind of disease. For example, Peter McIntyre noted that on 21 May, a brother of the Church



*John Brown.
Photo courtesy International
Daughters of Utah Pioneers.*

who had recently arrived at the wharf had drowned because of drunkenness.⁵⁷ Regardless of the effects of yellow fever or alcoholism, this metropolis did not slow down; it continued to move at a rapid pace. By 1840, New Orleans had already become the second most active port in the United States and certainly one of the most wealthy. Nearly eighteen thousand immigrating Saints passed through the "Crescent City" between 1840 and 1855. During this period, it was also the fourth-ranking port in the world.⁵⁸

In 1853, the Mormon emigration agent stationed at New Orleans was John Brown, a native of Tennessee. He met incoming Atlantic vessels and made arrangements for travel

by steamboat upriver to St. Louis.⁵⁹ One emigrant described the need for assistance as he disembarked:

Just before we got to New Orleans, we were told to look out for thieves in the shape of runners, and although we could not keep them off the ship, we made up our minds they should not go below. We therefore stationed four men at each hatchway, with instructions to allow none but passengers to go down. We soon found the benefit of this arrangement, as it was as much as the guards could do to keep the black-guards on deck. They swore that they had friends below, and when asked for their

names, they generally gave some of the commonest Irish ones. . . . Here the emigrants were met by Elder James Brown, the agent appointed by the Church authorities to receive and forward them to St. Louis. This gentleman rendered every assistance to the passengers in disembarking, &c., and acted in concert with the president of the company over the sea . . . in giving service to the emigrants, and protecting them from depredation.⁶⁰

Migrant Memories of the Mississippi River

Mormon maritime historian Conway B. Sonne wrote that if emigrants thought the dangers of water travel were over once they landed at New Orleans, they were certainly mistaken. He noted, "Between 1810 and 1850 more than 4,000 people were killed or injured in steamboat disasters, and 576 boats were lost on the western rivers. More accidents were attributed to striking snags than any other cause. Fire, collision, ice, and explosion took their toll."⁶¹ Yet the Saints who steamed up the Mississippi in 1853 would somehow avoid these dangers.

During their voyage up "Old Man River," they described the countryside, and some compared England to what they beheld in America. Peter McIntyre, who crossed the Atlantic on the *Falcon*, wrote of his experience on the Mississippi 22 May 1853:

Stemming the current of this great river, beholding the luxuriant trees and foliage on the right and left of the great Mississippi; the huts of the slaves and a few neat cottages possessed by slave holders. We consider ourselves in a new world, but know Great Britain is the seat of slavery, that one white slave works more in one day than 4 black slaves, with less to support his body, as his wages there will not afford, because I know that I wrought many days upon bread and water, doing the work of 5 black slaves and traveled 5 miles, to work for 1/8 per day, to support my family of eight.

The following day he wrote, "Take in wood morning and evening." On 25 May, McIntyre recorded, "Sailing upon the river, the landscape is beautiful and pleasant."⁶²

James Farmer, who steamed up the Mississippi with Saints who had disembarked from the *Ellen Maria*, described his experience at Cairo, Illinois. He recorded on 17 March 1853: "This village is very near the mouth of the Missouri River which empties into the Mississippi. It appeared a nice place. Here we bought some provisions. We were surrounded at this time with trees on each side, the river again reminded us of our own land." The following day, as this company of Saints neared St. Louis, Farmer wrote, "We stayed at a place about 4 miles from the city and the doctor came on board. Many of the Saints were concealed because there were too many on board according

to law as we had about 300 Saints. . . . We paid about 27 dollars from New Orleans to St. Louis.”⁶³

Scenes at St. Louis

St. Louis thrived in the mid-nineteenth century, which by 1850 had a population of 82,744. By 1853, St. Louis contained thirty-five churches and was exporting goods estimated at fifty million dollars per year. River travel brought a great deal of revenue, with 266 steamboats being launched from this inland port. *Conclin’s New River Guide* (published in 1853) told of the international makeup of the city and its unique position for commerce: “The population is made of emigrants from all parts of the world. There is no town in the western country more favorably situated, as the seat of an immense trade. It is nearly in the center of the Mississippi valley, commanding the trade of the Missouri, the upper Mississippi and the Illinois.”⁶⁴

A portion of the city was made up of Latter-day Saints. A widely read newspaper, the *Missouri Republican*, ran an article on 8 May 1851, which stated:

Although we have no Mormon Church in St. Louis, and though these people have no other class or permanent possession of permanent interest, yet their numerical strength here is greater than may be imagined. Our city is the greatest recruiting point for Mormon emigrants from England and the Eastern States, and the former especially, whose funds generally become exhausted by the time they reach it, generally stop here for several months, and not infrequently remain among us for a year or two pending the resumption of their journey to Salt Lake. . . . There are at this time in St. Louis about three thousand English Mormons, nearly all of whom are masters of some trade.⁶⁵

With thousands of migrant Saints in St. Louis, by 1854, St. Louis became a church stake.⁶⁶ The following year, the LDS periodical *St. Louis Luminary* published an article explaining that “this city has been an asylum for our people from fifteen to twenty years. . . . There is probably no city in the world where the Latter-day Saints are more respected.”⁶⁷ Here the Saints would disembark after a journey up the Mississippi from New Orleans, which usually lasted about ten to twelve days.

Although the general plan during the mid-nineteenth century was to move the converts west across the plains to the Salt Lake Valley as soon as possible, some were delayed in St. Louis for days, weeks, months, or even years, largely because of financial problems. Although most Saints emigrating in 1853 stayed in St. Louis for a day or two before heading up the Mississippi to Keokuk, William Bown (Bowen), who crossed the Atlantic in

the *Ellen Maria* company, was delayed at St. Louis for “about five weeks to prepare for the next leg of the journey—another steamboat trip to Keokuk.”⁶⁸ James Farmer, who was in the same company, wrote on 19 March 1853, “At 10 o’clock Elders Haight, Eldridge [Eldredge] and Gibson came and took a very active part in procuring places for the comfort of the Saints. I and Brother Palmer went into the town to procure a room. . . . The house was a very nice one at 10 dollars per month.”⁶⁹

In St. Louis, a Church emigrating agent would meet Mormon migrants to arrange for lodging and transportation for the next segment of the journey. He could also be consulted with regard to financial needs and employment opportunities. In 1853, the appointed Mormon emigration agent at St. Louis was Horace S. Eldredge. On 21 April 1853, he reported to Church President Brigham Young of Eldredge’s intense schedule, consumed with the business of arranging for hundreds of emigrating Saints whom he sent on steamers up the Mississippi to Keokuk: “We are getting along well with the Emigration from the Old Country there have been five ship loads Passed up to Keokuk & three more expected averaging 300 to 425 besides a great many coming from the east. It is a very busy time with us here at Present & I am in great haste for there are several waiting on me at this time to attend to Business.”⁷⁰



*Horace Eldredge.
Courtesy International
Daughters of Utah Pioneers.*

Arrival at Keokuk

As the Latter-day Saint emigrants arrived at the Keokuk wharf, they spent their first night beneath various kinds of shelter. One migrant wrote, “Had to stay in the depot all night.” Peter McIntyre wrote that he had to sleep in “a large stone house.” Still another Mormon convert explained, “Arrived at Keokuk about 7 p.m., got our things landed in the shed about 11 o’clock. Stopped in the shed through the night.” Three Mormon sisters recalled temporarily staying in a warehouse. One was Hannah Cornaby, who described her experience by simply stating that she stayed “in a warehouse on the levee without any accommodation but that afforded luggage.”

These converts were aided by their fellow Church members who had arrived earlier. Together they brought the immigrants' goods to the Mormon encampment, which lay on a hill overlooking the Mississippi. One grateful emigrant remembered, "Brother Locke and others brought their teams and [helped] the Saints to bring their luggage to the camp of Israel. A sight which gladdened my heart to behold." Here at the Mormon encampment, these migrating Saints were placed under the direction of Isaac C. Haight and his assistant, Vincent Shurtliff, who arranged for arrivals and made plans for overland travel from Keokuk. When the emigration season ended, about twenty-five hundred Saints in ten companies and 360 wagons had departed from Keokuk for the Salt Lake Valley.⁷¹

Conclusion

Having braved the storms of the Atlantic and bypassing the raging scourge of yellow fever and the dangers of the Mississippi, most Saints who embarked from Europe in 1853 sailed the Atlantic and steamed safely into port at Keokuk. From here they continued their journey by land, which culminated in their entrance into the Salt Lake Valley. By the fall of 1853, the vast majority had safely entered the peaceful valley of their Zion in the West.

Notes

1. Hannah L. Cornaby, "Crossing the Atlantic Ocean: A Reminiscence," *Autobiography and Poems* (Salt Lake City: J. C. Graham & Co., 1881), 65.

2. Neville Williams, *Chronology of World History 1776–1900 The Changing World*, 4 vols. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 3:268.

3. James Trager, *The People's Chronology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992), 462.

4. Williams, *Chronology of World History 1776–1900 The Changing World*, 3:269.

5. Commencing in 1840, the LDS Church had sent thousands of converts up the Mississippi. However, primarily because of the threat of disease, the Saints subsequently chose not to disembark at New Orleans. In a letter dated 2 August 1854, Brigham Young counseled British Mission President Franklin D. Richards, who oversaw emigration matters at Liverpool, as follows: "You are aware of the sickness liable to assail our unacclimated brethren on the Mississippi river, hence I wish you no more to ship to New Orleans, but ship to Philadelphia, Boston or New York, giving preference to the order named." (Cited from "Foreign Correspondence," *Millennial Star* 16 [28 October 1854]:684.) Another factor may have been President Young's knowledge of the advancement of the eastern rails, which would soon overtake steamboat travel as a more effective means of transportation. For more information on this topic, see John F. Stover, *Iron Road to the West: American Railroads in the 1850s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 176–85; and Louis Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 481–519.

6. *Deseret News 1997–98 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City, The Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996 [the almanac was published in advance of the 1997–98 years]), 161, notes the eight vessels destined for New Orleans, listed in order of embarkation: *Forest Monarch*, *Ellen Maria*, *Golconda*, *Jersey*, *Elvira Owen*, *International*, *Falcon*, and the *Camillus*. The total number of Latter-day Saint passengers aboard these vessels was 2,586. They left Liverpool between 6 January and 6 April 1853 and arrived in New Orleans sometime between 6 March and 7 June 1853. Terry Coleman, *Going to America* (New York: Pantheon Book, Random House, 1971), 295, notes that about 231,000 people emigrated from the United Kingdom to the United States in 1835. Thus, the Mormon migration for 1853 represents only about 1 percent of the total number of emigrants who left their British homeland during this year.

7. Fred E. Woods and Douglas Atterberg, “The 1853 Mormon Migration through Keokuk,” *The Annals of Iowa* 6, no 1 (winter 2002): 3–4. See also the article under the same title in this issue of *Mormon Historical Studies*.

8. For more information on the compelling story of this steamboat disaster, see William G. Hartley and Fred E. Woods, *Explosion of the Steamboat Saluda* (Salt Lake City: Millennial Press, 2002).

9. Woods and Atterberg, “The 1853 Mormon Migration through Keokuk,” 3–4.

10. Frederick Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley: illustrated with steel engravings and woodcuts from sketches made by Frederick Piercy . . . : together with a geographical and historical description of Utah, and a map of the overland routes to that territory from the Missouri River: also an authentic history of the Latter-Day Saints’ emigration from Europe from the commencement up to the close of 1855, with statistics*, ed. James Linforth (Liverpool, published by Franklin D. Richards; London: Latter-Day Saints’ Book Depot, 1855), 58.

11. Woods and Atterberg, “The 1853 Mormon Migration through Keokuk,” 4–5, 22.

12. Over 80 percent of all Latter-day Saint immigrant voyages to America in the nineteenth century embarked from Liverpool.

13. Conway B. Sonne, “Liverpool and the Mormon Emigration,” paper presented at the Mormon History Association Conference, Liverpool, England, 10 July 1987.

14. Terry Coleman, *Passage to America: A History of Emigrants from Great Britain and Ireland to America in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1972), 65, explains that Hawthorne received his appointment from President Franklin Pierce, for whom he wrote a campaign biography. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The English Notebooks*, ed. Randall Stewart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), ix–x, explains that during these four years, the only literary work he was engaged in was his journal.

15. Hawthorne, *English Notebooks*, 18.

16. Coleman, *Going to America*, 68, 67.

17. “Epistle of the Twelve,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 1, no. 12 (April 1841): 311.

18. Letter from Brigham Young in Great Salt Lake City to Samuel W. Richards in Liverpool, 30 September 1852, Brigham Young Correspondence, LDS Church Archives, Family and Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. The following month, Brigham Young sent another letter to Richards dated 29 October 1852 in which he rejoices in the “spread of the Gospel in the British Isles.” President Young also stresses the responsibility for all Saints to help in the gathering “to let the captive go free, that Israel may be gathered from all Nations.” He concludes this letter with the hope that through gathering Israel there may be “joy in the work we have performed.” Finally, he states in an intimate way, “Bro Samuel, may this be our happy lot, and let our prayers and supplications in unison ascend to our Father in Heaven . . . that we may be throughly furnished with wisdom to discharge and perform

every duty that is our may be devolved upon us. Praying God my Heavenly Father continually in your behalf, and the behalf of all faithful Saints. I remain, faithfully and sincerely your Brother in the Gospel of Christ." Brigham Young Correspondence, LDS Church Archives.

19. "Notice to Intending Emigrants," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 14, no. 39 (20 November 1852): 618.

20. Andrew Jenson, *History of the Scandinavian Mission* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927), 54.

21. Fred E. Woods and Nicholas J. Evans, "Latter-day Saint Scandinavian Migration through Hull, England, 1852–1894," *Brigham Young University Studies* 41, no. 4 (2002), 81–83.

22. Manuscript History of the John H. Forsgren Emigrating Company, 1, LDS Church Archives.

23. For example, Benjamin T. Clark noted that he and his family slept on board the *Golconda* while awaiting embarkation. See Benjamin T. Clark, *Diary*, 21 January 1853, LDS Church Archives.

24. Cornaby, "Crossing the Atlantic Ocean: A Reminiscence," 66.

25. James Farmer, *Journal*, typescript, 7 January 1853, LDS Church Archives.

26. "Sarah Birch Waters," in Kate B. Carter, ed., *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 20 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958–1977), 11 (1968):164.

27. Samuel W. Richards, "Missionary Experience," *The Contributor* 11, no. 4 (February 1890): 155–59.

28. Samuel W. Richards, "Emigration," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 14, no.32 (2 October 1852): 497. Less than two months later, Richards wrote another letter titled "Gathering," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 14, no. 39 (20 November 1852): 617, in which he acknowledges that while most Saints were trying their best to gather to Zion, some were not willing to make the effort. Richards explains, "They are engaged in business, and say they cannot wind it up, or they are partners in a firm, and cannot dissolve their partnership, or they are afraid when they get to Zion they will not obtain the social, literary, and scientific temporal luxuries which they enjoy in Babylon, or they cannot sacrifice them for the dangers of a sea voyage, the hardships of a journey over the plains, or the inconveniences of a new country."

29. Brigham Young writing to Samuel W. Richards from the Great Salt Lake City, 30 September 1852, states, "We send enclosed a list of names to be brought out by the Perpetual Emigrating Fund the ensuing season. These are names for whom some arrangement has been made by this office by their friends who are here." Brigham Young Correspondence, LDS Church Archives.

30. Polly Aird, "Bound for Zion: The Ten- and Thirteen-Pound Emigrating Companies, 1853–54," *Utah Historical Society* 70, no. 4 (fall 2002): 302–4.

31. Aird, "Bound for Zion," 306–25.

32. Richards, "Emigration," 497.

33. John Isaac Hart, *Autobiography*, 13, LDS Church Archives.

34. Gustave Edward Henroid, *Autobiography*, 3, LDS Church Archives.

35. "Gathering," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 15, no. 3 (January 15, 1853):33. The next day, 297 Scandinavians left Liverpool on the *Forest Monarch*. The day following, 332 British Saints embarked from this same port on the *Ellen Maria*. See *Deseret News 1997–1998 Church Almanac*, 161.

36. Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*, 24.

37. "Arrival of the *Ellen Maria*, at New Orleans," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 15, no.16 (16 April 1853): 253. The narrative is an extract of a letter from Moses

Clawson to Samuel W. Richards.

38. Cornelius Bagnall Emigrating Company, 4, 13, 19, LDS Church Archives.
39. James Leatham, Diary, 14 April 1853, LDS Church Archives. Apparently, this was an activity engaged by Saints aboard various vessels during this period. For example, Jacob Gates, a passenger on the *Golconda*, recorded on 24 January 1853, "I also receipted 17,000 yards of twilled cotton for wagon covers to be dealt out on the passage but a small part of the cloth was sent on board & was left to be sent by the next ship." See Jacob Gates, Journal, 24 January 1853, LDS Church Archives.
40. Leatham, Diary, 10 May and 12 May 1853.
41. James Lee Newton, Journal, 6 May 1853, LDS Church Archives.
42. Gates, Journal, 15 February 1853.
43. Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*, 24.
44. Cornelius Bagnall Emigrating Company, 29 March 1853.
45. Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*, 24.
46. Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*, 24.
47. Journal of the Joseph W. Young Emigrating Company, LDS Church Archives, 20–21.
48. James Pett, Autobiography, in *Mormon Marbles: Roots and Branches*, comp. Glen B. Marble (n.p.: 1979), 69.
49. "John Rex Winder," in *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History, 1901–1936), 1:244. Company clerk on the voyage, Henry Pugh, recalled that it was "a mournful sight to consign a brother to the silent deep at the dead of night." See Journal of Joseph W. Young Emigrating Company, 24.
50. "James Ririe, 1827–1905," in Kate B. Carter, ed., *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 20 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958–1977), 9 (1966): 354.
51. Peter McIntyre, Autobiography, 28–29, LDS Church Archives.
52. Hart, Autobiography, 14.
53. "Arrival of the *Ellen Maria*, at New Orleans," 253.
54. John Lyon, *Diary of a Voyage from Liverpool to New Orleans on Board the International . . .* (Keokuk, 1853), 2. This eight-page account highlights various aspects of the voyage and is located in LDS Church Archives.
55. Lyon, *Diary of a Voyage*, 7–8. All ten verses of this hymn are published in Fred E. Woods, "On board the *International*, All Joyful and Lighthearted," *The Log of Mystic Seaport* 51, no. 1 (summer 1999): 23–25.
56. "Arrival of the *International*, at New Orleans," letter from Elder Christopher Arthur to President S. W. Richards, *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, 15, no.23, (4 June 1853), 359. For several overviews of this intriguing story, see Woods, "On board the *International*, All Joyful and Lighthearted," 23–25; William G. Hartley, "Voyage on the Ship *International*," *New Era* 3, no. 9 (September 1973): 6–9; William Mulder, "April 6, 1853: A Mid-Atlantic Celebration," *The Improvement Era* 50, no.4 (April 1947): 216, 254.
57. McIntyre, Autobiography, 35.
58. Conway B. Sonne, *Saints on the Seas* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), 91.
59. David Buice, "When the Saints Came Marching In: The Mormon Experience in Antebellum New Orleans, 1840–1855," *Louisiana History* 23, no. 13 (winter 1982), 232. This article (pp. 221–37), provides an excellent overview of Mormon emigration during this period.

60. Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*, 31–32.

61. Sonne, *Saints on the Seas*, 91.

62. McIntyre, *Autobiography*, 34–35.

63. Farmer, *Journal*, 18–19 March 1853. The best way to make sense of the price of \$27 for steamboat travel from New Orleans to St. Louis is to speculate that when Farmer refers to the fact that “we paid about 27 dollars,” he is referring to the fact that this is the cost of about eleven Mormon emigrants, who earlier (7 January 1853) had “left Liecester and Blaby” and met at the train station to travel to Liverpool. This would amount to a very good chartered, company rate, which would break down to about \$2.50 per passenger.

64. *Conclin’s New River Guide: A Gazetteer of All the Towns on the Western Waters* (Cincinnati: J. A. & U. P. James, 1853), 80–81.

65. *Missouri Republican* (8 May 1851), cited in Stanley B. Kimball, “The Saints and St. Louis, 1831–1857,” *Brigham Young University Studies*, 13, no. 4 (summer 1973): 509–10.

66. Kimball, “The Saints and St. Louis, 1831–1857,” 510.

67. *St. Louis Luminary*, 3 February 18

55, cited in Kimball, “The Saints and St. Louis, 1831–1857,” 489

68. William Bown, *Journal*, in *William Bown Senior, His Children, His Ancestors*, Ann Marie Bown, comp. (n.p.: 1978), 1.

69. Farmer, *Journal*, 19 March 1853.

70. Horace S. Eldredge to Brigham Young, 21 April 1853, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives.

71. Woods and Atterberg, “The 1853 Mormon Migration through Keokuk,” 13–14, 21–22. In a letter written by Isaac C. Haight from Council Bluffs, Iowa, to Brigham Young in Great Salt Lake City, dated 1 July 1853, Haight indicates that the last companies had started from Keokuk by 23 June 1853. He wrote, “The Emmigration [sic] is very late in consequence of the Season being so very wet and the long distance from the Mississippi the two last companies Started as soon as they could fix themselves in their wagons as I had them and their teams all waiting for them after getting them all Started I left them on the 23rd ultimo and arrived her yesterday.”