



10-1-1981

Mormon Foreknowledge of the West

Lewis Clark Christian

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>

Recommended Citation

Christian, Lewis Clark (1981) "Mormon Foreknowledge of the West," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 21 : Iss. 4 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol21/iss4/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Mormon Foreknowledge of the West

Lewis Clark Christian

Among those seeking a new home beyond the Mississippi in 1846 were the Mormons, whose particular brand of religion was obnoxious to their neighbors in Missouri and Illinois. Even though the Mormon migration to the American West was part of the general overland movement of the mid-nineteenth century, it also differed from the broader western migration in some important ways. First, it was a cooperative mass-movement of a whole people, even a whole culture. The Mormons were not gold seekers or hunters or fur trappers. They were home seekers and home builders. Their main purpose was to find a land so remote they could get beyond the reach of their enemies and worship God according to their own pattern and build his kingdom as they had been commanded. Second, by 1846 the Mormon leaders had as extensive a knowledge of the land beyond the Rocky Mountains as was available in the maps and books of the period. Their trek to that region was neither a mere accident nor a sudden inspiration; rather, they had learned all they could about the West prior to their exodus in February 1846.

The forces behind the Mormon interest in and trek to the Great Basin are found in the beginning of Mormon history. The members had moved from New York, where the Church was founded in 1830, to Ohio and Missouri. The impetus for the general westward movements in Mormon history is embodied in two concepts fundamental to Mormonism: that of the establishment of "Zion," which means, in Mormon theology, the place where the righteous Saints will dwell in peace and harmony in the last days; and that of the "gathering," which denotes a general assemblage of all Mormons to "Zion" once it is established. When the Mormons finally realized in late 1845 that they had to abandon the city of Nauvoo because of the pressure from local and state governments in Illinois, they saw this move as the cause of "Zion." This general feeling is seen in a letter written by an early Church leader, Daniel Jones, to Wilford Woodruff. He wrote

Lewis Clark Christian is a seminary principal in St. George, Utah.

that the “banishment of the Saints from Nauvoo, was . . . far from being the downfall of Mormonism and the last of Zion, & the gathering”; rather it was “another nail in the coffins of scoffers, and laying another corner stone in Zion.”¹

The Mormons began to prepare themselves early for the move west, which took place in 1846 and 1847. Many early Mormon journals, newspapers, and letters show that part of that preparation was to learn all they could about the western part of America.

REFERENCES TO THE WESTERN MOVEMENT IN MORMON HISTORY PRIOR TO 1842

Throughout the 1830s and early 1840s, the West—and more specifically the Rocky Mountain region—was mentioned as a future home for the Saints. As early as 1832, the *Evening and Morning Star* reviewed books on the West² and published articles on various expeditions made to the Rocky Mountains.³ W. W. Phelps, the paper’s editor, described the West as the land of “Zion.”⁴

A number of early Church members wrote of an interest in the West. Among these was Paulina E. Phelps Lyman, who had traveled with her family to Jackson County, Missouri, in 1832 in the first migration of the Saints to that area. She said it was there, in the house of Lyman Wight, that Joseph Smith told her in a blessing she would live to go to the Rocky Mountains.⁵

According to Wilford Woodruff, Joseph Smith told of the eventual exodus of the Church to the Rocky Mountains in a speech to a group assembled at Kirtland, Ohio, on 26 April 1834. Joseph Smith is reported to have said, “This people will go into the Rocky Mountains; they will there build Temples to the Most High.”⁶

¹Daniel Jones to Wilford Woodruff, 2 January 1846, Daniel Jones Collection, Library–Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as Church Archives.

²*Evening and Morning Star* (Independence, Missouri), October 1832, p. 6. Ross Cox’s book, *Adventures on the Columbia River, Including the Narrative of a Residence of Six Years on the Western Side of the Rocky Mountains, among Various Tribes of Indians hitherto Unknown: Together with A Journey across the American Continent* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832) was reviewed. The book, which described the Oregon territory and Indian cultures, gave the Saints an early exposure to that region to which their attention would be turned in the early 1840s.

³*Ibid.*, June 1832, p. 6. Special mention was made of Captains Bonneville, Walker, Sublett, Wythe, and Blackwell leading expeditions to the Rocky Mountains.

⁴*Ibid.*, October 1832, p. 7. The Far West was described as the “section of country from the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains.”

⁵Affidavit sworn before James Jack, Salt Lake City, 31 July 1902, Church Archives. This 1832 blessing is the earliest evidence located of using the term *Rocky Mountains* to refer to an intended home for the Saints.

⁶Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, 8 April 1898, p. 57. One of the problems associated with an interpretation of Mormon history is the value of recollections of an event, such as President Woodruff’s speech in 1898, some sixty-four years after the event. The speech is used here since it does support on-the-spot accounts of Erastus Snow, Lorenzo Dow Young, and Sarah Studevant Leavitt.

In April 1836 Erastus Snow, prior to his leaving for a mission, was given a blessing, which predicted “that he should yet be employed in the ministry west of the Rocky Mountains, and should there perform a good work in teaching and leading the Lamanites west of the Rocky Mountains.”⁷ In the same year Hyrum Smith gave a blessing to Lorenzo Dow Young, who lay near death. Lorenzo Young recorded that “the spirit rested mightily upon him [Hyrum] and he was full of blessing and prophecy. He said that I should regain my health, live to go with the Saints into the bosom of the Rocky Mountains to build up a place there.”⁸

Sarah Studevant Leavitt, who left Nauvoo with the general exodus in the spring of 1846, recorded in her history that “I had known for ten years [since 1836] that we had got to go and I was glad we had got started.”⁹

While Joseph Smith was still in Missouri, Orson Pratt spoke of an intended exodus. Later, in a public meeting held during the exodus, he stated:

It is eight years today [1838–1846] since we all came out of Mo—before that time Jos the Prophet had this move in contemplation & always said that we would send a Co of young men to explore the country & return before the Families can go over the mountain & it is decidedly in my mind to do so.¹⁰

Lyman Wight in an 1857 letter to Wilford Woodruff substantiated Orson Pratt’s statement, noting that “such a mission was even talked of while in [Liberty] jail.”¹¹

Oliver B. Huntington said he was present in his father’s home in Nauvoo when they were visited by Joseph Smith, Sr., in 1840. After stressing it was not to be made public, the father of Joseph Smith told the Huntington family that “the Lord had told Joseph (his son the Prophet) that we would stay there just 7 years and that when we left

⁷As quoted in Joseph W. Olsen, “Biography of Erastus Snow” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1935), p. 19.

⁸James Amasa Little, “Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young,” *Utah State Historical Quarterly* 14 (1946): 46.

⁹“History of Sarah Studevant Leavitt,” n.d., p. 28, Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City.

¹⁰John D. Lee Diary, 26 April 1846, typescript, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; hereafter cited as Special Collections. See also Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 26 April 1846, p. 153, Church Archives.

¹¹Lyman Wight to Wilford Woodruff, 24 August 1857, Church Archives. Joseph Smith and several leaders of the Church were confined in Liberty Jail in Missouri during the winter of 1838. Heber C. Kimball expressed to his family in 1839 and 1840 that he felt their stay in Nauvoo would be short (see *Woman’s Exponent* 9 [July 1880]: 18).

there we would go right into the midst of the indians in the Rocky Mountains, as this country, Utah, was then called.”¹²

A number of individuals who knew Joseph Smith recorded that on occasions prior to 1842 he had drawn a route the Saints would follow in making their westward journey to the Rocky Mountains. According to George H. Goddard, Joseph Smith mapped on the floor of the Masonic Lodge in Nauvoo the course they would follow across the continent.¹³ Oliver B. Huntington recorded hearing Hopkins C. Pendar, “an old Nauvoo Mormon,” state that “Joseph Smith just before he was killed, made a sketch of the future home of the saints in the Rocky Mountains and their route or road to that country as he had seen in a vision; a map [*sic*] or drawing of it.”¹⁴ Oliver Huntington stated further that Levi Hancock drew a copy of the map, and four other copies were made from it. One was supposedly given to Brigham Young, and “one was carried by the Mormon Battalion by which they knew where to find the church, or, Salt Lake Valley.”¹⁵ Mosiah Hancock, son of Levi, recorded further that Joseph Smith visited his father’s house some time before the Martyrdom, and

stopped in our carpenter shop and stood by the turning lathe. I went and got my map for him. “Now”, he said, “I will show you the travels of this people”. He then showed our travels through Iowa, and said, “Here you will make a place for the winter; and here you will travel west until you come to the valley of the Great Salt Lake! You will build cities to the North and to the South, and to the East and to the West; and you will become a great and wealthy people in that land.”¹⁶

Another early Church member recorded hearing a Father McBride speak “of Joseph Smith marking out the way the saints would travel to the Rocky Mountains.” Joseph reportedly marked “the Route with his cane in the Sand. [*sic*] they would take.”¹⁷

Therefore, the West—more specifically the Rocky Mountains—was mentioned as a future home for the Saints as early as 1832; and, although there were some hearsay and remembering after the event, early Church members recorded that Joseph Smith planned and mapped such a movement prior to his death.

¹²Oliver B. Huntington Journal, 24 February 1883, typescript of journal in Special Collections, Lee Library.

¹³Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 26 July 1897, p. 2, microfilm copy in Special Collections, Lee Library. This is a recollection of George H. Goddard, one of the pioneers of 1847.

¹⁴Huntington Journal, 27 September 1897. One of the problems with Huntington’s journal is that it was written in the 1880s and 1890s, some forty years after the event. It does, however, appear to support contemporary accounts of Charles L. Walker and Mosiah Hancock.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶“The Life Story of Mosiah Lyman Hancock,” typescript, p. 28, Special Collections, Lee Library.

¹⁷Charles Walker Diary, typescript, 2 vols., 2:41, 42, Special Collections, Lee Library.

MORMON STUDY OF THE WEST— 1842–1844

From the very beginning of the organization of their church, the Mormons studied and contemplated a westward movement. From 1842 through the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, there were numerous instances when members of the Church recorded that Joseph prophesied a removal to the Rocky Mountains. Research in the writings from this period reveals the year 1842 marked the beginning of an intensified study of the western regions that eventually brought the first pioneers into the Great Basin in 1847.

Joseph Smith's most detailed prophecy on the removal west was given on the occasion of the installation of certain officers of the Rising Sun Lodge of the Masonic Order. The *History of the Church* states that on 6 August 1842 he prophesied "that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be driven to the Rocky Mountains."¹⁸ Other Church members recorded this prophecy in their journals and letters.¹⁹

Oliver S. Olney's journal entries and letters are significant because they were recorded shortly before and after Joseph Smith made his Rocky Mountain prophecy. He wrote to a friend sometime between July and October 1842 that as early as that summer there was talk in Nauvoo of organizing an expedition for the West as far as the Oregon territory, that the expedition was to leave as soon as possible, that there was to be a lead group of a "few" or "fifty" who would do the initial colonizing, and that it was to be an organized effort.²⁰

The talked-of move to the mountains that Oliver Olney recorded did not materialize at that time because of changing conditions in Nauvoo. During 1843, the persecution against the Mormons began to subside somewhat and the need was not so great as Joseph Smith had said "to get up into the mountains, where the devil cannot dig

¹⁸Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1932–1951), 5:85. This work will be cited hereafter as *History of the Church*.

¹⁹For other accounts of this prophecy see Mary Ann Weston Maughn Journal, bk. 1, p. 20, Utah State Historical Society Library; John R. Young, *Memoirs of John R. Young, Utah Pioneer* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1920), p. 53; Kate B. Carter, comp., "The Mormon Battalion," in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 20 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958–1977), 11:385; Joseph Smith Letter File, Miscellaneous Papers, Utah State Historical Society Library; Anson Call Journal, p. 20, Utah State Historical Society Library. For a detailed discussion of Call's statement on the prophecy and related evidence, see Lewis Clark Christian, "A Study of Mormon Knowledge of the American Far West prior to the Exodus (1830–February, 1846)" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972), pp. 72–74.

²⁰Oliver H. Olney Notes, 20, 22 July, 6 October 1842, Coe Collection, Yale University Library, New Haven, Conn. For reproductions of the notes, and an explanation of their significance, see Christian, "Mormon Knowledge of the Far West," pp. 75–77, 294–98. See also David E. Miller, "Westward Migration of the Mormons with Special Emphasis on the History of Nauvoo," report submitted to the National Park Service, 1963, p. 235.

us out, and live in a healthful climate, where we can live as old as we have a mind to.”²¹

The premature death of Joseph Smith on 27 June 1844 prevented his witnessing a fulfillment of his 1842 prophecy. Although, on 23 June 1844, just four days prior to his death, he and some of his closest friends had actually started on horseback for the Great Basin, they had been turned back by the insistence of some of the Saints.²² He had, however, laid an important foundation for future Church movements. During February 1844 the Prophet had organized an exploring company called the “Oregon and California exploring Expedition,” organized for the express purpose of “‘hunting out a good location where we can remove to after the temple is completed.’”²³ He had also organized in the spring of 1844 a special Council of Fifty, which eventually took a leading role in effecting the exodus in 1846.²⁴

Also, during 1843 and 1844, the Saints sought assistance from the nation’s leaders relative to a western removal, but such aid was not then available. Orson Hyde was sent to Washington at that time to solicit aid from Congress. He carried with him a memorial asking Congress to authorize Joseph Smith to raise one hundred thousand armed volunteers to police “the intermountain and pacific coast west from Oregon to Texas.” However, Orson Hyde wrote back that Congress would not authorize such a move since it would be regarded as an infraction of the treaty with England.²⁵ While in Washington, he forwarded to Church leaders at Nauvoo valuable insights and information about the West, particularly Texas and Oregon, including a John C. Fremont map of his 1842–1843 exploring expedition to the Rocky Mountains.²⁶ When he learned that Congress would not assist

²¹*History of the Church*, 6:22.

²²*Ibid.*, 6:548–50.

²³*Ibid.*, 6:222, 224. Beginning on 20 February 1844 and running through 30 March 1844, meetings were held almost every day to discuss the move to the West. Such details as supplies, weapons, and route to be traveled were spelled out for those selected to make the initial trip. For a discussion of this exploring company and results, see Christian, “Mormon Knowledge of the Far West,” pp. 78–81.

²⁴Christian, “Mormon Knowledge of the Far West,” pp. 81–87. For a fuller treatment on the role of the Council of Fifty, see D. Michael Quinn, “The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 20 (Winter 1980): 163–97. At this particular time the limits of California and Oregon had not been defined. According to Hubert Howe Bancroft, “It was not uncommon, nor indeed incorrect, to apply that term [California] to territory east of the sierra” (*History of Utah* [San Francisco: History Company Publishers, 1890], p. 238n). B. H. Roberts said also that “the great western Rocky Mountain plateau was for many years and especially in Mormon literature called ‘Upper California’ ” (*A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1930], 3:60–61).

²⁵See Orson Hyde to Council at Nauvoo, 25 April 1844; Orson Hyde to Council at Nauvoo, 26 April 1844; Orson Hyde to Council at Nauvoo, 30 April 1844, Orson Hyde Collection, Church Archives.

²⁶*Ibid.* Hyde’s information included a description of the territories and a detailed route to travel. Knowledge of and interest in Texas was an important part of the Mormons’ foreknowledge of the West. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Christian, “Mormon Knowledge of the Far West,” pp. 160–84.

the Saints in their removal west, Joseph Smith felt it was necessary that he run for the United States presidency.²⁷ A special group of men called the "lectioneering missionaries" were selected and sent to the various branches of the Church to inform them of the Mormon Prophet's candidacy and to give information to the general Church membership about the Western Mission.²⁸

MORMONS STUDY THE WEST— 1844–SUMMER 1845

With the Church again stabilized under the leadership of Brigham Young after the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, the Mormon leaders began an intensified study of the West. From 1844 to the time of their departure in 1846, they studied the available maps and published works to determine the best sites for settlement in the West. Their attention had been focused by Joseph Smith on the Rocky Mountain region and specifically the Great Basin area.

The early Mormon newspapers carried numerous excerpts on western travel to the Rocky Mountain region during this period. In December 1845 the *Times and Seasons* began extolling the advantages of Oregon and California.²⁹ From the time of its inception in 1843, the *Nauvoo Neighbor* published articles on the West almost every month, giving attention to Texas, California, and Oregon.³⁰

The activities of Lansford W. Hastings were reported in the *Neighbor* and excerpts from his *Emigrants Guide to Oregon and California* were reprinted.³¹ Hastings went on a lecture tour to New York in late spring 1845, at which time he met Samuel Brannan, editor of a Mormon area newspaper called the *New York Messenger*. Sam Brannan was impressed with Hastings's reports and from 12 July to 6 September 1845, he published extracts from Hastings's *Guide* in his newspaper. It was these extracts which were published in the *Neighbor* during the same period of time.

²⁷For a discussion of the proposal of Joseph Smith for the United States presidency as it related to the westward movement, see Christian, "Mormon Knowledge of the Far West," pp. 87–92.

²⁸Two of the missionaries, Heber C. Kimball and Lyman Wight, traveled to Wilmington, Delaware, where they held a conference. While there they took a vote of the members present "to know whether they would go whithersoever the Presidency, Patriarch and Twelve went, should it be to Oregon, Texas, or California." According to Wight, the congregation, numbering one hundred, rose to their feet and consented to go. (See Lyman Wight Letter Collection, Church Archives.)

²⁹See *Times and Seasons* 6 (15 December 1845): 1068–1070.

³⁰The following issues in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* contained such information: 24 May, 28 June, 19 July, 16 August, 6 and 20 December in 1843; 13, 20, and 27 March, 10 and 17 April, 18 December in 1844; 15 January, 12 February, 30 April in 1845.

³¹*Ibid.*, 10 April 1844, 13 August 1845; Lansford W. Hastings, *The Emigrants Guide, to Oregon and California* . . . (Cincinnati: George Conclin, 1845). Later, during the winter of 1845, the Mormon leaders studied Hastings's *Guide* rather extensively.

The *Neighbor* followed with interest the summer campaign of Stephen W. Kearny and his regiment of dragoons to the South Pass.³² Captain Charles Wilkes's expedition along the western sea coast and inland to Oregon and California received extensive coverage.³³

But it was the expedition of John C. Fremont that received the fullest coverage in the *Neighbor*. Beginning on 25 October 1843, the publication of a "Report of an Expedition to the Country lying between the Missouri and the Rocky Mountains on the line of the Kansas and the great Platte River" was announced, and a brief portion of the report describing in detail Fremont's trip from the North Fork of the Platte to Fort Laramie was included.³⁴ In 1844 considerable space was given to Fremont's second expedition west. On 29 January 1845 the *Neighbor* extracted portions of that report, with emphasis on the Salt Lake region.³⁵ On 19 March 1845 it was announced that the report of the second expedition contained a map of the survey of the Great Salt Lake.³⁶ Again, on 17 September 1845 Salt Lake was singled out by the *Neighbor*. The paper reported that "The Great Salt Lake . . . is for the first time revealed to our view; by one who has surveyed its shores and navigated its waters.—The Bear River Valley . . . is for the first time described."³⁷ Then Fremont's accounts of these areas followed.

AN INTEREST IN THE WEST REVIVED— SUMMER 1845

The Mormon leaders knew by the summer of 1845 that Nauvoo would have to be abandoned. The city's charter had been repealed, and there were increased rumors of mob action. Therefore, during the summer, the Saints directed all their efforts toward the completion of the Nauvoo Temple in anticipation of a removal in the immediate future.³⁸ As fall approached, they sensed the urgency of beginning to lay definite departure plans and studying and selecting sites of settlement. Oregon, Upper California, Lower California,

³²Ibid., 23 July 1845.

³³Ibid., 10 July 1844, 19 February 1845.

³⁴Ibid., 25 October 1843.

³⁵Ibid., 29 January 1845.

³⁶Ibid., 19 March 1845.

³⁷Ibid., 17 September 1845. The *Neighbor* published extracts from the report of Fremont's expedition also on 10 and 24 September 1845. The *LDS Millennial Star*, the Church publication in England, reprinted in 1846 portions of Fremont's 1844 expedition.

³⁸For an excellent summary of events during the summer of 1845 and the emphasis that was placed on building the temple as first priority, see Brigham Young to Wilford Woodruff, 27 June 1845, Brigham Young Letter Collection, Church Archives. See also *History of the Church*, 7:430–32.

Vancouver Island, Texas, the headwaters of the Colorado, and the Great Basin had all been spoken of in general terms.³⁹

A careful study of Mormon writings toward the end of the summer of 1845 reveals that the idea began to unfold that there would be many areas of settlement in the West, with a central “Zion” headquarters located somewhere within the Great Basin of the Rocky Mountains. This plan was suggested by Brigham Young in a letter to Wilford Woodruff, then on a mission in England. Brigham wrote to inform Elder Woodruff that “within one year many of our brethren will be planted on the coast of the Pacific, or near by ready to receive their friends from the islands.”⁴⁰ On 27 August 1845 the Apostles discussed possible sites in Oregon for those Saints who would colonize that area.⁴¹ Then on 28 August 1845 the leaders decided “that 3,000 able-bodied men should be selected to prepare themselves to start in the spring to Upper California, taking their families with them.”⁴² On that same date, a significant letter was written to Addison Pratt, then serving a mission in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). This letter is valuable since it brings into focus more clearly the plans of colonization and describes a more specific “Zion” headquarters. After giving Elder Pratt specific instructions concerning the operation of the mission, the letter indicates:

If any of the brethren of the islands wish to emigrate to the continent, have them come to the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon, or the Gulph of Monterry [*sic*] or St. Francisco, as we shall commence forming a settlement in that region during next season and make arrangements with agents in each of those places so emigrants will be enabled to get all necessary directions, and provisions for going to the settlements. The [*main*] settlement will probably be in the neighborhood of Lake Tampanagos [*sic*, Utah Lake] as that is represented as a most delightful district and no settlement near there.⁴³

It appears that in August of 1845 the Mormon leaders were formulating plans to colonize the Pacific Coast, Oregon, Vancouver Island, and other proposed sites for “stakes of Zion” but that the center would probably be somewhere near the Great Salt Lake.⁴⁴

³⁹The term *California* referred to the area west of the Rocky Mountains and south of the 42nd parallel. When the Mormons spoke of going to California, they generally meant the western Rocky Mountain plateau. (See Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 3:60–61.)

⁴⁰Brigham Young to Wilford Woodruff, 21 August 1845, Brigham Young Letter Collection, Church Archives. See also *LDS Millennial Star* 6 (1 October 1845): 124 for a reproduction of the letter.

⁴¹Heber C. Kimball Journal, 27 August 1845, Church Archives.

⁴²Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 28 August 1845, p. 16, Church Archives. See also Heber C. Kimball and John Taylor journals of same date, Church Archives.

⁴³Council to Addison Pratt, 28 August 1845, Brigham Young Letter Collection, Church Archives.

⁴⁴The *Nauvoo Neighbor* had in August and September 1845 published new extracts from Fremont’s visit to the Great Salt Lake. This probably accounts for part of the sudden interest in this area.

This settlement plan was explained in a letter from Parley P. Pratt to Isaac Rogers, residing in New Jersey. After describing how rapidly things were progressing in Nauvoo, Parley relayed the latest plans of the Church relative to settlement in California. He indicated those plans included the decision (made on 28 August 1845) to send three thousand men to California the next spring with all the provisions necessary to begin settlements. He pointed out specifically that it was the intention of the Church to “maintain and build up Nauvoo, and settle other places too.” Concerning a main settlement site, he wrote further he expected the Church would “stop near the Rocky Mountains about 800 miles nearer than the coast. Say 1500 miles from here and there make a stand until we are able to enlarge and to extend to the coast.”⁴⁵

In light of the foregoing evidence, an isolated reference in the *History of the Church* takes on added meaning. On 9 September 1845 the General Council “Resolved that a company of 1500 men be selected to go to Great Salt Lake valley.”⁴⁶ Thus the Salt Lake Valley of the Great Basin had been singled out by this date as being the *probable* site of the initial location west of the Rocky Mountains. However, due to increased mob action in the Nauvoo region, the company of fifteen hundred men never left. Instead a committee of five men was appointed to gather information relative to emigration. On 4 October 1845 the committee made a full and detailed report of all the provisions necessary for outfitting the Saints on their projected journey.⁴⁷ This and other reports indicate efforts continued throughout the fall and winter of 1845 for an evacuation of Nauvoo in the spring of 1846.

THE CHURCH STUDIES THE WEST— DECEMBER 1845

One of the major activities of the Church after the members knew they would have to leave Nauvoo was completion of the Nauvoo Temple. It was far enough along in construction that in October 1845 they could hold meetings in the lower story. It was their intention to continue working on the temple throughout the winter and spring and to dedicate it to the Lord before they left.⁴⁸ The month of

⁴⁵Parley P. Pratt to Isaac Rogers, 6 September 1845, Parley P. Pratt Letter Collection, Church Archives.

⁴⁶*History of the Church*, 7:439. See also Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 9 September 1845, pp. 19–20.

⁴⁷*History of the Church*, 7:454–55.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 7:456–57. The Heber C. Kimball Journal is extremely important during this period of time for the information it contains concerning the temple work and other activities in the temple. It becomes the often spoken of “Nauvoo Temple Minutes.” See also *LDS Millennial Star* 6 (1 December 1845): 178.

December found all efforts concentrated on completing it sufficiently to begin giving the anticipated “endowments.” On 10 December 1845 the first persons received that temple ordinance.⁴⁹ The temple then became an extremely important site to the members. It was a refuge from the outside world and a place where the leaders made an extensive study of the West in the latter part of December 1845.

The Heber C. Kimball journal records on 11 December 1845 that they were busy decorating the various rooms of the Nauvoo Temple. Concerning the items hung on the walls, it states: “There are also a number of maps. A large map of the world hangs on the north side wall, and three maps of the United States . . . hangs [*sic*] on the west partition. On the south wall hangs another large map of the United States.”⁵⁰ At least one of the purposes served by the maps is clear. On 31 December 1845 Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball examined “maps with reference to selecting a location for the Saints west of the Rocky Mountains and reading the various works which have been written by travelers.”⁵¹

On 20 December 1845 Brigham Young and a few of the Council members listened to Franklin D. Richards read in the temple from Fremont’s journal concerning Fremont’s trip to California.⁵² The Heber C. Kimball journal reveals additional details concerning the reading of Fremont’s journal.

Pres. Young having slept in the Temple last night was early at his post, and after dictating in relation to the business of the day, and arranging the workmen in order &c. &c. after which he listened to a reading from Capt Fremont’s Journal by Franklin D. Richards in the east room. . . .

Amasa Lyman came in during the reading, also Elder H. C. Kimball, at a quarter to 10. The reading was finished at 10 o’clock.⁵³

On 25 December 1845 the Council was again in the temple with Brigham Young holding “considerable conversation about the western country.”⁵⁴ On 27 December all the Council took part in a general conversation on California, and Parley P. Pratt read from Lansford W. Hastings’s *Emigrants Guide*.⁵⁵ On 29 December extracts of Fremont’s narrative were again read.⁵⁶ The Heber C.

⁴⁹*History of the Church*, 7:542–44. See also Kimball Journal, 10 December 1845.

⁵⁰Kimball Journal, 11 December 1845. On 5 December 1845 the Kimball Journal records that hooks were put up to hang “looking-glasses, portraits and Maps” (see Kimball Journal for that date).

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 31 December 1845.

⁵²*History of the Church*, 7:548; Kimball Journal, 20 December 1845. This was the 1844 account of Fremont’s trip to California, first published in March 1845.

⁵³Kimball Journal, 20 December 1845.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 25 December 1845. See also *History of the Church*, 7:552.

⁵⁵Kimball Journal, 27 December 1845. See also *History of the Church*, 7:555.

⁵⁶Kimball Journal, 29 December 1845. See also *History of the Church*, 7:556.

Kimball journal records that after the reading on 29 December Brigham Young spent nearly an hour reading Fremont's narrative, after which he retired for the night.⁵⁷ On 30 December Parley P. Pratt was working on a "schedule for a Pioneer Company of 1000 men to preceed [*sic*] the body of emigrants, find a proper location, & put in seed early in the summer."⁵⁸

There are other indications the Saints were looking to the West. For example, the song "Upper California," composed by John Taylor and approved in Council of Fifty meetings on 11 and 17 April 1845,⁵⁹ was sung on numerous occasions by Church leaders in December 1845. Phineas Young sang the song for his brother Brigham and for Heber C. Kimball on 5 December.⁶⁰ Erastus Snow sang it in the temple on 30 December.⁶¹ Thomas Atkin later remembered "singing . . . Upper California oh thats the land for me it lies between the mountains and the great pacific sea" while residing in England during this period.⁶²

By the end of December 1845 the leaders of the Church had a wealth of information on the American Far West. They had some of the most recent journals, guides, and maps of those who had visited the far west regions, and they were using these materials in selecting locations for settlements. Furthermore, they were psychologically preparing themselves through song for the migration west.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE EXODUS CONTINUE— JANUARY–FEBRUARY 1846

As the year 1846 opened, information came to Brigham Young and others that the government of the United States intended to interfere in the exodus of the Mormon church. Consequently, the Saints were forced to cross the Mississippi River earlier than they had expected.⁶³ Even as the body of the Saints was moving across the river and camping at Sugar Creek, they recorded in their journals and letters how they felt about leaving their homes in Illinois and where they expected to settle in the West. The general Church membership did

⁵⁷Kimball Journal, 29 December 1845. Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball had beds in the temple and often slept there if they completed their work late at night, as was the case on this date.

⁵⁸Ibid., 30 December 1845. See also *History of the Church*, 7:557. It would appear Parley Pratt used Fremont's narrative and Hastings's *Guide* in preparing his schedule.

⁵⁹Andrew F. Ehat, "'It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth': Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God," *Brigham Young University Studies* 20 (Spring 1980): 271. The full text of John Taylor's hymn is published in Ehat's article, p. 280.

⁶⁰Kimball Journal, 5 December 1845.

⁶¹Ibid., 30 December 1845. See also *History of the Church*, 7:557.

⁶²"Biography of Thomas Atkin," p. 10, Church Archives.

⁶³For a discussion of that potential government interference, its possible origin, and its effect on the exodus, see Christian, "Mormon Knowledge of the Far West," pp. 136–40.

not know where they were going, except that it would be beyond the Rocky Mountains.⁶⁴ The letters and journals of Church leaders reveal that it was not definitely settled within their minds which sites the Saints would settle in the West. It appears that those in authority had decided Oregon, Vancouver Island, and the California coast would be unfavorable for the main headquarters of the Church. Due to Fremont's report and other information gathered prior to the removal from Nauvoo, the attention of the Church leaders was directed toward a site in the midst of the Rocky Mountains, most probably in the region of the Great Salt Lake.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

The Mormons had an extensive knowledge of the West prior to their exodus from Nauvoo, and they relied heavily on that knowledge as they studied possible sites for settlement prior to their departure. They learned all they could about the West. It was continually on the minds of Joseph Smith and other Church members before the expulsion from Nauvoo. Even after the death of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young continued to point "Israel's needle" toward the West. The Mormons firmly believed that God was directing and guiding their plans for the exodus. Yet, in addition to divine direction, they continued to study and gain all the knowledge they could. The Mormons believed that only after they had made a thorough search and study of possible settlement sites would God lend his hand by either confirming or rejecting their decision. Brigham Young followed this principle closely as he prepared the Church to cross the Mississippi in February 1846. Even as the exodus was in progress, Brigham Young continued to study and learn about the West.

⁶⁴For excerpts from letters and diaries indicating the general unawareness of the Church members as to their final location, see *ibid.*, pp. 144–45.

⁶⁵In December 1845 the Church leaders spent many hours reading the reports of Fremont and Hastings (see *ibid.*, pp. 132–35). It is the feeling of the author that the decision to settle around the Great Salt Lake region made in August and September 1845 was only a *tentative* one. The leaders continued to study the whole region during December 1845. The decision that the Salt Lake Valley would be the *definite* site of the initial settlement would be partially confirmed in the spring of 1846:

Pres. Young said . . . we must divide and arrange the camp [Sugar Creek] so that part might cross the Mountain to the Great Basin soon enough to plant wheat this spring . . . that 300 men were wanted for the expedition.

(Diaries and Records of John D. Lee, 8 March 1846, typescript, Special Collections, Lee Library. As the exodus began, John D. Lee had been selected as a private clerk to Brigham Young.)