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The Mormon Way Stations: Garden Grove and Mt. Pisgah

Leland H. Gentry

INTRODUCTION

The enforced exodus of the Latter-day Saints from Illinois in 1846 was made with great sacrifice and suffering. Although many made adequate preparations for a lengthy journey, others were so anxious to leave they did so without sufficient provisions. In addition, the early evacuees included many aged and infirm who required much assistance. These factors tended to slow the movement.

The first encampment was at Sugar Creek, Iowa, about nine miles from Nauvoo. Prior to the general departure further west, a special company was sent ahead to clear roads, build bridges, and select places for temporary encampments. At these latter locations, the sick and impoverished could pause, recuperate, and replenish needed supplies from nearby settlements before moving on.

It soon became apparent, however, that it would be desirable to set up more permanent camps or way stations where migrants could pause for longer periods of time. Here the exiles could winter or spend the growing season putting in and harvesting crops or laboring in nearby settlements to obtain cash for needed purchases. Garden Grove and Mt. Pisgah were two such encampments. This article will examine the rationale behind their establishment and describe their growth and development.

JOURNEY FROM NAUVOO

The Mormon exodus was a move of major proportions. According to John Taylor, it involved moving “(as near as we could estimate) about fifteen thousand Saints, three thousand wagons, and thirty thousand head of cattle . . . a great number of horses and mules . . . [and] an immense number of sheep.”¹ It began on 5 February 1846, and

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¹John Taylor, “Address to the Saints in Great Britain,” *Millennial Star* 8 (15 November 1846): 114.

by 1 March more than five thousand exiles were encamped at Sugar Creek. Conditions were anything but ideal. As Willard Richards, camp historian, recorded on 19 February 1846:

The wind blew steadily from the northwest accompanied by snow which fell to the depth of seven or eight inches, but much thawed as it fell, the storm was unceasing, and the evening was very cold, which caused much suffering in the camp, for there were many who had no tents or any comfortable place to lodge: many tents were blown down, some of them were unfinished and had no ends.²

From this point on, every hardship imaginable, including death, beset the Saints. Day after day, the thermometer registered below zero (Fahrenheit). The Saints, lodged as they were in tents, suffered severely, while the cold weather made an immediate move from Sugar Creek impossible.³

On 1 March, however, the camp began its move. "Only too soon did they find every hollow to be a mud hole, in which the wagons would sink to the axle." Incessant rain added to the problems, wetting even the sick and feeble riding in the wagons.⁴ Writing in his journal for Thursday, 5 March 1846, Orson Pratt reported:

The roads in many places are almost impassable on account of the mud. Some teams are unable to draw their loads in bad places without assistance. Some wagons were broken. A portion of the camp was forced to stop on account of the roads.⁵

Mud was so bad that the travelers had to double, triple, and quadruple teams in order to get through it. Under such conditions the camp soon became strung out. Those in front consequently had to wait as long as two or three weeks for those behind to catch up.⁶ As George A. Smith recorded on 9 April 1846:

About noon it began to rain in torrents and every driver soon got wet to the hide. It seemed as though the bottom of the road had now fallen

²Willard Richards Camp Journal, as cited in B. H. Roberts, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—Period II*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1932–1951), 7:593 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

³*History of the Church*, 7:598–99.

⁴John R. Young, *Memoirs of John R. Young, Utah Pioneer, 1847* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1920), pp. 16–17.

⁵Elden J. Watson, comp., *The Orson Pratt Journals* (Salt Lake City: Published by Compiler, 1975), p. 323 (hereafter cited as *Orson Pratt Journals*). Some of the men were able to move more quickly than others, thus increasing the tendency for the camp to "string itself out." Several of those who refused to slow down and wait for stragglers were called to account before Church courts to answer charges of disregarding priesthood counsel. (Eliza R. Snow, "Pioneer Diary," *Improvement Era* 46 [March 1943]: 191.)

⁶As quoted in Andrew Jenson, *The Historical Record* (Salt Lake City: Published by Author, 1889), 5:878. Orson Pratt reported "that it was with the greatest difficulty that we could preserve our animals from actual starvation." Men sent to nearby settlements to buy grain and other provisions often returned empty-handed. As a last resort, the animals were turned loose at night and allowed to forage for themselves. Bushes and the bark of trees were often their only form of sustenance. (See *Orson Pratt Journals*, pp. 334–36.)

out, for wagons sunk in the mud up to their beds and the women and the children had to get out in the rain so that their teams might pull the wagons through the mud. Frequently we had to put eight or ten yoke of oxen to a wagon to get the wagons out of the mud-holes. We are now in the middle of a twelve mile prairie. We continued our journey in this way for about two miles; it then began to grow late. We discovered to our right a point of timbers about a mile long. I left my wagon and rode on my horse to find a camping place. I now left two of my wagons on the prairie and put the teams on the other three to draw them through. After I had found a place to camp I drove in and put up for the night. Many of the wagons with families in them stayed on the prairie over night, and wet and cold they were, having no fire or any material with which to build one. Myself and family were wet and cold, having no fire.⁷

DECISIONS TO ESTABLISH WAY STATIONS

When it was decided that the journey to the Rocky Mountains could not be accomplished in one season, Brigham Young met in council with Elders Orson Pratt, John Taylor, and Willard Richards and decided to write to the governor of Iowa to “ascertain his views about the Saints stopping on the public land in Iowa to raise a crop this season.”⁸ That letter was dispatched 28 February. Explaining the plight of their people in being expelled from their homes without sufficient time to dispose of their property, the Mormon leaders wrote:

We, the Presiding Authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as a committee in behalf of several thousand suffering exiles, humbly ask your Excellency to shield and protect us in our constitutional rights, while we are passing through the territory over which you have jurisdiction. And should any of the exiles be under the necessity of stopping in this territory for a time, either in the settled or unsettled parts, for the purpose of raising crops, by renting farms or upon the public lands, or to make the necessary preparations for their exile in any lawful way, we humbly petition your Excellency to use any influence and power in our behalf: and thus preserve thousands of American citizens, together with their wives and children from intense sufferings, starvation and death.⁹

⁷George A. Smith Journal, as quoted in Preston Nibley, *Exodus to Greatness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1947), pp. 148–49. Orson Pratt reported the ground was so wet from rain that sleeping could only be accommodated by cutting free limbs and strewing them on the ground beneath the sleepers “to keep ourselves from sinking in the mire” (*Orson Pratt Journals*, p. 336).

⁸Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 28 February 1846, Library–Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Church Archives).

⁹*History of the Church*, 7:600–601.

Pending a positive answer to the petition, they laid plans in early April to implement the idea. On Sunday, 12 April, a meeting was held at Heber C. Kimball's camp to discuss the matter. William Clayton recorded the meeting's outcome:

It was decided to change our route and take a more northern one to avoid the settlements. We will go to Grand River and there enclose a space of land about two miles square and put up some twenty log houses for a resting place for the companies. A company starts out in a day or two to seek out the location amongst whom are the President [i.e., Brigham Young], Heber, and others of the twelve.¹⁰

This settlement, said Orson Pratt, was to be started "on a tract of land which had been purchased by the general government of the Indians and just vacated by them."¹¹ In setting forth the rationale behind the establishment of Garden Grove and its sister settlement, Mt. Pisgah, Erastus Snow wrote in later years:

In these places such families were left on for want of sufficient teams and provisions, unable to continue their journey. These settlements were on the tract of country owned by the Potawattamie Indians, and from thirty to fifty miles south there were settlements in Missouri from which they could obtain certain provisions to sustain them until they could raise a crop. Instructions were left in these places for such as were obliged to leave Nauvoo without a sufficient outfit, to locate and sustain themselves in these places until a further door opened unto them, or until a permanent location should be found for the Church and provisions raised to sustain them.¹²

SETTLEMENT OF GARDEN GROVE

The Mormon leaders were searching for a location approximately halfway between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Such a location was Garden Grove. Situated 145 miles from Nauvoo on the Mississippi and 157 from Council Bluffs on the Missouri, the settlement was near essential natural resources: virgin soil, timber, and water.¹³

The location was chosen 24 April 1846 by Brigham Young and Henry G. Sherwood. As Orson Pratt reported:

Friday, 24th—Yesterday we traveled about eight miles, to-day, six miles. We came to a place which we named Garden Grove. At this point we determined to form a small settlement and open farms for the

¹⁰William Clayton, *William Clayton's Journal* (Salt Lake City: The Clayton Family Association, 1921), p. 17. The scouting party was composed of Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, John Taylor, Orson Pratt, George A. Smith, Henry G. Sherwood, William L. Cutler, and Joshua S. Holman (*History of the Church*, 7:609).

¹¹*Orson Pratt Journals*, p. 338.

¹²Andrew Karl Larson, *Erastus Snow* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971), p. 110.

¹³Journal History, 27 April 1846.

benefit of the poor, and such as were unable at present to pursue their journey further, and also for the benefit of the poor who were yet behind.¹⁴

Three days later the full selecting committee approved the choice of this elevated piece of ground.

Development of Garden Grove began at once. Shortly after arriving, Brigham Young put 359 able-bodied men to work building the site. Orson Pratt stated that work commenced on 27 April:

This morning the horn sounded for all the men to assemble themselves together to be organized for labour. One hundred men were appointed for cutting trees, splitting rails, and making fence; forty-eight to cutting logs, for the building of log houses; several were appointed to build a bridge, a number more for the digging of wells, some to make the wood for our ploughs; several more to watch our flocks and keep them from straying; while others were sent several days' journey into the Missouri settlements to exchange horses, feather beds, and other property, for cows, provisions, etc., and finally, the whole camp were to be occupied about something. During this council for organization, we were well drenched in rain.¹⁵

By 1 May Orson Pratt was able to report that "an immense sight of work has been done in the several departments of business" assigned. Nine days later, he recorded:

A large amount of labour has been done since arriving in this grove; indeed the whole camp are very industrious. Many houses have been built, wells dug, extensive farms fenced, and the whole place assumes the appearance of having been occupied for years, and clearly shows what can be accomplished by union, industry, and preserverance [*sic*].¹⁶

Other writers presented similar accounts. John R. Young recorded that all personnel "were thus employed, and the camp became presently like a hive of bees."¹⁷ Hosea Stout, who arrived a few days after the work began, reported that "the farm" grew so quickly that it appeared to be a "Magic City of the Woods."¹⁸ The location held great promise of yielding bountifully, and much labor was expended

¹⁴As quoted in Jenson, *Historical Record*, 5:880. See also Orson Pratt, "Interesting Items Concerning the Journeying of the Latter-Day Saints from the City of Nauvoo, until Their Location in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake," *Millennial Star* 12 (1 January 1850): 2.

¹⁵Orson Pratt, "Interesting Items," p. 2.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷John R. Young (*Memoirs*, pp. 18–19) reported that 715 acres were placed under cultivation, while Heman C. Smith ("Early Settlements of Garden Grove," *Journal of History* [Lamoni, Iowa: Board of Publications of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1900], 2:102) claimed that two farms, one of a thousand acres and the other of five hundred, were fenced and placed under cultivation.

¹⁸Hosea Stout, *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1861*, ed. Juanita Brooks, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964), 1:156–57 (hereafter cited as *Diary of Hosea Stout*).

to make it do so. Evidence shows that the Saints were not disappointed in their expectations. Within a month of its founding, several hundred settlers were encamped at the new location.¹⁹

On 10 May 1846, Garden Grove was organized into a branch of the Church. Samuel Bent was chosen as president,²⁰ with David Fullmer and Aaron Johnson as counselors.²¹ President Bent's duty, outlined in a 12 May letter, was to preside over both temporal and spiritual matters; he was specifically directed to divide the land according to need, to receive tithes and offerings, and to distribute the same among the poor and needy. He was also to see that none of the community's goods were wasted or lost.²² The following day Brigham Young left to go farther west.

It was at this time that Brigham Young's land policy, later so famous in the West, first came into play. A man, he taught, might have as much land as he could properly care for, consistent with his family size. Should a landholder prove slack in his care of the land or fail to work it at all, it was to be taken from him and given to another. Every man was to earn his bread with toil, early and late, and only the infirm and incapacitated were excused from manual labor of some sort.²³ The policy appears to have been rigidly enforced in the Iowa settlements of Garden Grove and Mt. Pisgah.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES AT GARDEN GROVE

Conditions at Garden Grove were very fluid, even from the beginning. Few incoming travelers ever stayed very long. Eager to push ahead and journey with the leaders of the Church, many stopped only long enough to replenish supplies, rest, and make needed repairs. This constant flow of traffic served to keep the more permanent part of the encampment lean of goods and short of field hands to do the work. Those who remained did so because they could not do otherwise, but they often found the community unable to supply even their most basic needs.

¹⁹James A. Little, "Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 14 (Winter 1946): 75-76.

²⁰Samuel Bent, because of his benevolence, was familiarly known as "Father Bent." He had formerly served as president of the High Council in Nauvoo. During the trek from Nauvoo to Garden Grove, he had served as a captain of a hundred in the Camp of Israel.

²¹*William Clayton's Journal*, pp. 30-31. Originally Ezra Taft Benson was called as a counselor; however, this was rescinded within two days. Two months later Brother Benson was called to be one of the Twelve Apostles.

²²Edward Stevenson Journal, p. 79, Church Archives. This is an unpublished account of Stevenson's crossing of the plains to Utah and thereafter. Helen Mar Whitney ("Our Travels beyond the Mississippi," *Woman's Exponent* 12 [1 February 1884]: 135) reported that about twelve thousand rails left over from fencing and cabin building were set aside for future use.

²³Journal History, 10 May 1846, p. 1.

Problems of poverty were compounded by the fact that the poor and destitute from Nauvoo always stopped first at Garden Grove. These exiles often required much care and assistance before they could journey on. The last evacuees from Nauvoo left with little more than the clothes on their backs and were thrust upon the mercy of the local Saints. In speaking of these impoverished migrants, one Iowa writer said: "They comprised a miserable remnant of about seven hundred people, physically unfit and poorly equipped, and they lay huddled at a camp north of Montrose until wagons arrived for them from Garden Grove and Mt. Pisgah in October."²⁴ Since the last Saints vacated Nauvoo by 9 October 1846, their arrival at Garden Grove a month or so later rendered conditions during the winter exceedingly precarious. Those who had, had to share with those who had not, and nothing was in plentiful supply.

Of course, poverty was no new thing to the Saints. Driven from their homes in Ohio, Missouri, and now Illinois, they understood the value of economizing. Shortly after Garden Grove was settled, Brigham Young urged the Saints to sell or exchange anything that they could easily do without: feather beds, silk dresses, earrings, finger rings, chains, brooches, pocket watches, etc. By this means, they could have money to buy flour, oxen, harnesses, saddles, wagons, sheep, and other necessities to sustain them in their daily lives.²⁵ This counsel proved to be a blessing during the winter of 1846.

Even these supplies, however, could not last forever. The young men and boys of the community had to visit the more established settlements in southern Iowa and northern Missouri to search for work. An example is a letter from Roger Farrer to his son William. Writing from Garden Grove under date of 15 December 1846, he reported that his other sons, from whom he had not heard in some time, were working somewhere in Iowa. Nearly destitute himself, he added, "I have been sick for nearly five months, . . . and we have suffered for want of provisions on account of my not being able to go to work." As were many others, he was still trying to sell his home in Nauvoo.²⁶

Matters worsened greatly at Garden Grove during 1847. Destitution drove some to the point of theft, and numerous complaints were lodged with the authorities at Winter Quarters. In a letter from

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Journal History, 2 May 1846. One week earlier the Council of the Twelve had met and discussed the advisability of selling the Nauvoo Temple to raise funds to aid the poor in their removal from Illinois. A vote taken by the Saints in Garden Grove proved unanimous in the affirmative. (*Orson Pratt Journals*, pp. 342-43.)

²⁶Roger Farrer to William Farrer, 15 December 1846, Church Archives.

Orson Hyde, dated 19 July 1847, the Saints in Garden Grove were warned that all stealing proved by unimpeachable evidence would result in the guilty parties' being either disfellowshipped or excommunicated. At least some of the accusations were shown to be unfounded when the leaders of the branch visited Winter Quarters and made a full report that cleared the air.²⁷

As conditions continued to grow more difficult, however, the Saints were forced to beg. On 8 October 1847, Luman A. Shurtliff and a Brother Hunt were sent throughout the Iowa settlements in behalf of their people to plead for assistance. The philanthropy of the Iowa settlers brought hundreds of dollars' worth of goods and foodstuffs which were distributed among the poor at Garden Grove. There seems little doubt the lives of some were saved through the generosity of the Saints' non-Mormon Iowa neighbors.²⁸

At least one problem was never conquered by the Saints in Garden Grove—death. This ever-present spectre struck the camp soon after the settlement was laid and never let up before the town was abandoned in 1852. The Stout family was struck particularly hard, losing three sons while crossing Iowa. In speaking of the loss of his son Hyrum at Garden Grove, Hosea Stout recorded on 8 May 1846:

He died in my arms about four o'clock. This was the second child which I had lost both dying in my arms. He died with the hooping cough & black canker. . . . My wife is yet unable to go about & little Hosea, my only son [left] now is wearing down with the same complaint. . . . We are truly desolate and afflicted and entirely destitute of anything even to eat, much less to nourish the sick & [I am] just able to go about myself. Arrangements were made to bury him this evening.²⁹

Death continued to plague the Saints throughout the spring and summer of 1846. Much sadness came with the passing on 16 August 1846 of President Samuel Bent, president of the Garden Grove Branch. He quite literally worked himself into the grave trying to provide for the needs of his people. In the end, insufficient food, lack of proper shelter, and no skilled attention to his own medical needs made President Bent's recovery impossible. In notifying the Twelve Apostles of his death, David Fullmer and Aaron Johnson, his counselors, wrote:

Garden Grove is left without a president, and a large circle of relatives and friends are bereft of an affectionate companion and friend, and the

²⁷Journal History, 7 August 1847, pp. 12–13.

²⁸Ibid., 18 October 1847, pp. 2–3.

²⁹Diary of Hosea Stout, 1:160.

Church has sustained the loss of an undeviating friend to truth and righteousness. The glory of his death is that he died in the full triumphs of faith and a knowledge of the truths of our holy religion, exhorting his friends to be faithful, having three days previous [to his death] received intimations of his approaching end by three holy messengers from on high.³⁰

ESTABLISHMENT OF MT. PISGAH

When Garden Grove was established, it became apparent that it would not be large or productive enough to sustain all the migrating Illinois Saints. Less than a week after Garden Grove was established, Orson Pratt reported:

We are expecting to form another settlement about 35 or 40 miles north of this, and put in some spring crops and also another on the Big Platte river 100 miles or more west of the Missouri. According to the information which we receive several hundred wagons are now on their way from Nauvoo, being strung along the road for more than 100 miles from that city.³¹

Ten days later, Parley P. Pratt was assigned the task of choosing a second location for settlement. It was agreed that he would move north and west of Garden Grove onto a fertile expanse of uninhabited prairie land generally acknowledged as belonging to the Potawatomi Indians. On 16 May, after having crossed numerous streams swollen by recent rains, Parley separated himself from his company and rode ahead in search of the main fork of the Grand River. He recorded:

Riding about three or four miles through beautiful prairies, I came suddenly to some round and sloping hills, grassy and crowned with beautiful groves of timber; while alternate open groves and forests seemed blended in all the beauty and harmony of an English park. While beneath and beyond, on the West, rolled a main branch of Grand River, with its rich bottoms of alternate forest and prairie. As I approached this lovely scenery several deer and wolves, being startled at the sight of me, abandoned the place and bounded away till lost from my sight amid the groves.

Being pleased and excited at the varied beauty before me, I cried out, "this is Mount Pisgah". I returned to my camp, with the report of having found the long sought river, and we soon moved on and encamped under the shade of these beautiful groves.³²

³⁰Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saints Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Published by Author, 1922), 1:367-68.

³¹Orson Pratt *Journals*, p. 344.

³²Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938), pp. 342-43.

A few days later, Brigham Young and other members of the Twelve arrived at the location selected by Parley Pratt. Orson Pratt, Parley's brother, described the 19 May firsthand inspection of the proposed settlement:

The twelve, with some others, went out several miles into the regions round about, to view the country. We found the same very broken and hilly, although well adapted to farming. We concluded to form another settlement here, for the benefit of the poor, and such as were unable, for the want of teams, to proceed further. Accordingly, the camp commenced building houses, ploughing, planting, and fencing in farms, and immense quantity of labour was performed in a very few days. And the place in a short time began to assume the appearance of an old settlement. The ground being more hilly and elevated than the prairies over which we had passed, we concluded to call the place Mount Pisgah.³³

Early residents of Mt. Pisgah were favorably impressed with its picturesque setting. John Taylor, writing from "the Camp of Israel, Mount Pisgah, Middle Fork of the Grand River, May 30, 1846," reported "the place . . . is beautifully situated, [with an] abundance of wood and water being convenient."³⁴ Hosea Stout saw it similarly. Writing at a later time, he recalled the site as "a beautiful grove of small hickory" and a "delightful place."³⁵ Wilford Woodruff, arriving about a month after the settlement began, described his initial view of the camp:

I stopped my carriage on the top of a hill in the midst of a rolling prairie where I had an extended view of all about me. I beheld the Saints coming in all directions from hills and dales, groves and prairies, with their wagons, flocks, and herds, by the thousands. It looked like the movement of a nation.³⁶

Likewise impressed, Ezra T. Benson spoke of Mt. Pisgah as "the first place that I felt willing in my heart to stay since I left Nauvoo."³⁷

³³Orson Pratt, "Interesting Items," p. 3. Prior to a final decision to settle on Potawatomi lands, the need to secure the Indians' permission was discussed and agreed upon. Henry G. Sherwood "was sent to a portion of the tribe encamped about 50 miles northwest of the site." There he obtained the necessary permission. (See *Orson Pratt Journals*, p. 349.)

³⁴John Taylor to "Brother Cain," 30 May 1846, *Millennial Star* 8 (1 August 1846): 31.

³⁵*Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:165.

³⁶Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), p. 250.

³⁷As quoted in Lynn Robert Webb, "The Contributions of the Temporary Settlements of Garden Grove, Mount Pisgah, and Kanessville, Iowa, to Mormon Emigration, 1846-1852" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1954), p. 51.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS AT MT. PISGAH

It seldom took the Saints long to effect an organizational structure in their western settlements. Recognition of priesthood authority under proper appointment appears to have presented no real problems either. Shortly after a survey of the land had been made, Brigham Young and the other Apostles organized Mt. Pisgah in much the same way they had Garden Grove. William D. Huntington reported:

Thursday, May 21, 1846, the camp was called together and organized. A council of Presidency was appointed over which I was to preside . . . over both spiritual and temporal affairs with Brother Ezra T. Benson and Charles C. Rich to act as presidents with me. Started immediately to organize for the plowing, fencing, and other matters pertaining to their stopping there.³⁸

The following day, the newly appointed leaders made the decision to open up a farm similar to that at Garden Grove. Later the same afternoon, Brigham Young called the Saints together and requested all present who were unable to proceed further at that time to separate themselves from the congregation. A majority did so. A motion was then made and passed for those who remained to farm "the field" and share the profits and produce according to need. In the same manner, migrants yet to arrive were to share also, providing they were willing to work. Plowing began the next day.³⁹ "The scenes of Garden Grove were reenacted" and a "farm of 'several thousand acres,' was enclosed and planted, and the place became a permanent settlement."⁴⁰

The work of overseeing the needs of hundreds of dispossessed persons appears to have been taxing in the extreme. Samuel Bent, as observed, died soon after his appointment as president at Garden Grove. President Huntington died three days later on 19 August 1846.⁴¹ Charles C. Rich was immediately chosen to fill the vacancy. President Rich was replaced a few months later by Lorenzo Snow.

³⁸William D. Huntington Diary, 21 May 1846, Church Archives. President Huntington reported that shortly after he and his counselors had been called, they "pitched a tent" some two or three miles from camp, dressed in their temple clothes, and "held a prayer meeting" at which they sought God's help "for the things the people would need." The journal account reveals a man deeply committed to the task of blessing the lives of those for whom he had responsibility. (See William D. Huntington Diary, 31 May 1846.)

³⁹Journal History, 22 May 1846.

⁴⁰B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 3:55. It is not known how many acres were placed under cultivation at Mount Pisgah.

⁴¹Charles C. Rich Journal, 2:11, Church Archives.

The year 1847 saw efforts made to perfect Mt. Pisgah along spiritual as well as temporal lines: whiskey drinking and thievery were roundly denounced, while payment of tithes and offerings was firmly advocated.⁴² By the time Jonathan Wright arrived in February 1848, he was able to report to Brigham Young: "I found the brethren united and well instructed in the principles of the Gospel by their president, Lorenzo Snow, and seemed as much disposed to abide council [*sic*] as any saints I ever saw, generally speaking."⁴³

FARMING AND CONSTRUCTION EFFORTS AT MT. PISGAH

The Saints lost no time in making Mt. Pisgah something of a carbon copy of Garden Grove. Charles C. Rich, who arrived at Pisgah on 22 May 1846, only four days after the advance company, found that his predecessors had already "plowed a thousand acres of land, fenced it, and put it to seed."⁴⁴ Hosea Stout was likewise lavish in his praise. Arriving a few days after Elder Rich, he described Pisgah as "a delightful place," the main settlement of which "was situated on a long ridge running north and south. To the west was a large, deep valley or bottom land . . . being plowed and planted." Men, he said, were at work everywhere, "improving and planting," while the whole woods and prairies seemed "alive to business."⁴⁵

A little-known settlement, Mt. Moriah, was located on the west side of the Grand River about two and a half miles from Pisgah. Although never rivaling its sister town, this small settlement also went by the name "Big Field." Over one thousand acres of land were broken up and planted next to it. "It was enclosed on the north and east sides with a good fence of rails and poles, while the west and south portions were protected by the Grand River which was its boundary."⁴⁶

As was done at Garden Grove, the land at Pisgah was divided into five-, ten-, and twenty-acre plots. By casting lots, these in turn

⁴²Journal History, 6 January 1848.

⁴³Ibid., 11 February 1848.

⁴⁴John Henry Evans, *Charles Coulson Rich: Pioneer Builder of the West* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1936), p. 121.

⁴⁵*Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:165. If it be wondered why the bottom soil rather than that of the prairie was ploughed, one writer reports that the Saints found the prairie sod too compact to break up with their light teams, "composed mostly of cows." Hence the workers went into the timber on Grand River, girdled the trees and thus deadened hundreds of acres of the best timber to be found there, pulled out the trees, and "ploughed the light bottom soil for their crops." The trees were then used for fencing the land or constructing cabins. (See Alfred Theodore Andreas, *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Iowa* [Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1875].) The reason cows were used as draft animals was that most of the oxen and horses were employed in moving families to Council Bluffs.

⁴⁶*The Biographical and Historical Record of Ringgold and Union Counties, Iowa* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1887), pp. 659-60.

were given to individual families for their personal care.⁴⁷ Although the land was privately farmed, the work was regarded as a cooperative enterprise. On 31 May 1846, a few days before his departure for Council Bluffs, Brigham Young called a special meeting and emphasized the spirit of cooperation.⁴⁸ The Apostles and other leaders

were busy counseling and directing the labors of the saints in forming a settlement. Councils and meetings were held at which it was decided that the Twelve Apostles, Bishop Whitney, and the records of other church property should journey westward. Those who did not have a sufficient outfit to proceed through were counseled to remain there. . . . Those who were going on shared with those who were remaining. Though selfishness was not entirely overcome yet, there was a general disposition among the faithful to labor for each other's good. It was a day of sacrifice.⁴⁹

Industry became the community's middle name. Pisgah was literally a city on the move. Immigration was so rapid and sustained that "the whole woods and prairies seemed alive to business and a continual stream of emigration [*sic*] pouring in daily . . . looked like the entire country would be inhabited as a city in a short time."⁵⁰ Jesse Crosby noted that "here are many people camped in every direction, many are plowing and planting."⁵¹ As a result, 1846 was a bumper year for crops at Pisgah. Peas, cucumbers, and beans produced plentifully, and corn and buckwheat were in abundance, as were pumpkins and squash. Wild turkey from the fields and fish from the nearby river also made their way to pioneer tables.⁵²

Construction at Mt. Pisgah was a matter of major interest. Lorenzo Snow recorded his involvement in "chopping and setting up Brother [Parley P.] Pratt's house of logs."⁵³ A non-Mormon source reported that the Saints

built two log churches [where they] held regular services; there being no mills, they first built small horse mills for cracking, but soon erected a log water-mill on Grand River, the burrs being made from common boulders such as are occasionally found in the country. . . . These stones were rudely dressed but answered a good purpose in preparing food for a number of people; they were about 2½ feet in diameter and 2 feet thick.⁵⁴

⁴⁷Journal History, 31 May 1846.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Jenson, *Historical Record*, 6:887.

⁵⁰*Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:165.

⁵¹Jesse Wentworth Crosby, "Diary and Reminiscences, 1847 to 1860," p. 31, Church Archives.

⁵²Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Co., 1941), p. 546.

⁵³Lorenzo Snow, "Diary and Account Book," Bk. 11, Church Archives.

⁵⁴*Biographical and Historical Record of Ringgold and Union Counties, Iowa*, p. 660.

LIVING CONDITIONS AT MT. PISGAH

The Saints at Mt. Pisgah saw both happy and sad times. Women in particular appear to have suffered. Sarah Pea Rich, wife of Charles, recalled that it was not uncommon while traveling the prairies of Iowa “to find snakes coiled up under our beds when we took them up in our tent in the morning.” The high prairie grass made “perfect hiding places for the timber and prairie rattlers which sometimes made their appearances at very inauspicious times.”⁵⁵

Sickness was another ever-present companion. During the latter part of July and all of August 1846, a general and almost universal scene of illness prevailed in the camp. In numerous instances, so many were ill that no one could be found to take care of the sick and dying. Zina D. Young reported that death was so frequent a visitor “that enough help could not be had to make coffins, and many of the dead were wrapped in their grave clothes and buried with split logs at the bottom of the grave and brush at the sides, that being all that could be done for them by mourning friends.”⁵⁶ Charles C. Rich recorded that deaths occurred so frequently that it was often necessary to bury the dead in a common grave.⁵⁷

The number of deaths at Pisgah may never be known. According to Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jenson, about 150 people died during the first six months, the first being Noah Rogers on 31 May 1846.⁵⁸ Later, the settlement was abandoned, and an approximation of deaths was set at somewhere near 300.⁵⁹ In 1885, nearly thirty years later, the cemetery was purchased by President John Taylor with funds collected by donation through the efforts of Oliver B. Huntington, son of Mt. Pisgah’s first president. A small monument presently marks the site of these early burial grounds.⁶⁰

But there were some pleasant times as well. Joseph Cluff reported that he lived with his family of fourteen in Pisgah from 1846 to 1849. He built a double cabin near a clear spring and planted seeds brought from Nauvoo in the plot assigned to him. During the growing season, he and his three sons found work as carpenters and blacksmiths in Iowaville, one of the larger Iowa settlements. Prior to leaving, however, they opened up a “beautiful forest” of sugar maples from which they later extracted maple syrup. Joseph

⁵⁵Charles C. Rich Journal, 2:7.

⁵⁶James A. Little, *From Kirtland to Salt Lake City* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1890), p. 54.

⁵⁷Charles C. Rich Journal, 2:13–15.

⁵⁸Jenson, *Encyclopedic History*, pp. 546–47.

⁵⁹*Biographical and Historical Record of Ringgold and Union Counties, Iowa*, p. 660.

⁶⁰Journal History, 1 December 1888. See also *Deseret News Weekly* 36 (26 January 1887): 31.

reminisced happily of harvesting butter, hazel, and hickory nuts, and of sitting at home on long winter evenings enjoying the fruits of their summer labors. He also told of how parents instructed their children in the ABC's and boasted of how he and his sons were "abundantly paid" for their long hours in the sun by excellent crops.⁶¹

Although food was scarce the first year, conditions improved, Joseph reported:

At first, common table items such as cheese, preserves, and homemade cakes were scarce, and such food as was available was course and somewhat tiring as a steady diet. By harvest time, however, turnips, potatoes, corn, and buckwheat were on the tables of Mt. Pisgah homes. In 1849 travelers on their way to the California goldfields paid top prices to replenish their food supplies. This enabled at least one family to buy a team and wagon and thus pursue their journey to the West.⁶²

Socials during those first years, while extremely rare and of meager fare, were held as occasion would permit. Eliza R. Snow tells of a party held at Lorenzo Snow's home in which the dirt floor was strewn with straw while the cabin walls were draped with sheets to give a homier appearance. Quoting from Lorenzo's Journal, Eliza describes the happy occasion as being lighted by large turnips from which the centers were scooped out, and in which lighted candles were placed. These, suspended from the ceilings or appended to the walls, "imparted a very peaceable, quiet, Quakerlike influence, and the light reflected through these turnip rinds imparted a very picturesque appearance." The celebration featured a simple meal of corn and pea kernels served up with "short speeches full of life and sentiment, spiced with enthusiasm, appropriate songs, recitations, toasts, conuncrums, exhortations, etc." The evening appears to have been a profitable and enjoyable one, for "all withdrew, feeling as happy as though they were not homeless."⁶³

CALL OF THE MORMON BATTALION

The settlement at Mt. Pisgah was slightly more than a month old when Captain James Allen arrived in camp with a military escort to raise a battalion of Mormon men to serve twelve months in the war against Mexico.⁶⁴ The battalion, commanded by Colonel Stephen

⁶¹Joseph Cluff, *Cluff Family Journal, Reminiscences of Family Members*, vol. 1, no. 8 (n.p.: Cluff Family Organization, n.d.), pp. 122-23.

⁶²Ibid., p. 116.

⁶³Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1884), pp. 91-92.

⁶⁴For a fuller account of the Mormon Battalion, see John Yurtinus, "'Here Is One Man Who Will Not Go, Dam'um': Recruiting the Mormon Battalion in Iowa Territory," this issue.

W. Kearny and known as "the Army of the West," was prepared to reimburse the men for their services.

The call came on 26 June 1846. Those leaders present in Mt. Pisgah, including Wilford Woodruff, a member of the Twelve, immediately went into conference with the people. William D. Huntington reported: "Captain Allen delivered an address to the brethren appropriate to his foolish errand. I followed him with an address by way of commendation or as the old proverb says, answering a fool according to his folly."⁶⁵

Obviously, the initial reaction of the Saints to the government's request was not exactly favorable. Even the captain's appearance among the Saints created "great confusion and excitement." "The report had gone from tent to tent that the United States troops are upon us."⁶⁶ This paranoid reaction is quite understandable when one remembers the Saints had been driven from their homes five times prior to this and had been under threat from the military before. Even when the truth was known, the Mormon attitude was one of disfavor toward the request. Sarah Pea Rich said she regarded it as "a cruel demand made upon us" from a government that had rendered the Mormons no aid in their own time of need. Why should the Saints respond any differently?⁶⁷

Wilford Woodruff, however, was more pacific. He agreed to notify Brigham Young at Winter Quarters of the demand and ask for counsel.⁶⁸ On 6 July, Brigham returned to Pisgah and in a public meeting the next day recommended support of the request. A letter suggesting a similar response was immediately sent to Garden Grove.⁶⁹

The practical mind of Brigham Young quickly saw advantages to the call. First, he said, it would give the Saints an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States; second, it would transfer five hundred men fifteen hundred miles west at government expense; third, it would furnish money for the Saints to make the trip west since the volunteers could draw some of the money for their clothing allowance in advance.⁷⁰

There were disadvantages, of course. One was that the movement to the West for many families would be delayed at least a year, if not two.

⁶⁵Jenson, *Historical Record*, 8:10.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Evans, *Charles Coulson Rich*, p. 123.

⁶⁸Jenson, *Encyclopedic History*, pp. 546-47.

⁶⁹Journal History, 7 July 1846.

⁷⁰Charles C. Rich Journal, 2:11.

DISBANDING THE SETTLEMENTS

By the end of 1851, the Iowa way stations had served their purposes. They had provided permanent homes for more than two thousand persons and temporary stopping places for thousands more. Nearly all migrating Saints between 1846 and 1852 passed through Garden Grove and Mt. Pisgah.

Earlier in 1851, the Saints began preparations to abandon the settlements and go west. In the spring they planted crops for the last time. As the harvest drew near, a letter dated 21 September 1851 in Great Salt Lake City and signed by Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards, the current First Presidency, urged that the move begin at once. "Come all ye officers in the Church. . . . There is no more time for saints to hesitate."⁷¹

Acting on these instructions, the Saints began to organize for the move. Following the harvest and winter months, the move began. Only a few families declined to go.⁷² Today, Garden Grove continues as a flourishing community, while the cemetery is all that remains of Mt. Pisgah. This cemetery is maintained by the Church as a memorial to the more than three hundred Saints whose bodies lie interred beneath its Iowa sod.

SUMMARY

There can be no doubt about the valuable service performed by the Iowa way stations for the migrating Mormons. From the time the Saints first crossed the Mississippi and headed west, their journey was fraught with danger and challenges. Failure on the part of some migrants to make proper preparations for the lengthy trip rendered a precarious trip foolhardy indeed. As it was, death dogged their every step, wood was scarce, winds howled, rain drizzled without letup, and snow drifted, leaving roads impassable. Men, women, and children of all ages became victims of the terrible exposure to which they were subjected. The decision to create way stations where these pioneers could camp, recuperate, raise crops, replenish their supplies, and prepare for others yet to come, without doubt saved many lives and greatly facilitated the monumental task of moving west.

⁷¹"Epistle to the Saints in Pottawatamic," letter dated 21 September 1851, *Millennial Star* 14 (15 January 1852): 29.

⁷²According to Andrew Jenson, only two Latter-day Saint families stayed on at Garden Grove as permanent settlers—Oliver C. Haskins and Jefferson Cleveland ("Iowa Settlements," Church Archives).