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Cultural Conflict: Mormons and Indians in Nebraska

Lawrence G. Coates

No record reveals any significant contact between the Mormons and the Indians of Nebraska before the Saints left Nauvoo; Mormon experiences with the Indians in Nebraska began during the epic march of the Latter-day Saints to the Great Basin. During the Nauvoo period, however, the Saints enjoyed a particularly friendly relationship with some Indian tribes in Iowa—the Sac, Fox, and Potawatomi. On several occasions, these Indian bands came to Nauvoo, and the Mormons frequently sent men to strengthen their ties with these friendly natives before the Mormon hegira. At the same time, Lyman Wight made contact with some Plains Indians in Texas, and James Emmett spent the winter of 1845 among the Sioux in what became South Dakota. But, apparently, no Mormons made contact with the Omaha, Ponca, Otoe, or Pawnee before 1846 when the Saints spent their historic winter among the natives of Nebraska.

Nevertheless, the Mormons knew the location of the Indians in Nebraska. They studied “a map of Oregon, and also a report on an exploration of the country lying between the Missouri river and the Rocky Mountains” which Stephen A. Douglas had given to Orson Hyde. One version of this map listed the location of the Indians in Nebraska. The Mormons also used S. Augustus Mitchell’s “A New Map of Texas Oregon and California,” and it specifically identified the Indian tribes living in Nebraska. They may have seen a map of the area in the map portfolio of the expeditions of John C. Fremont.¹ Certainly as a result of their study, the Saints knew which Indians they expected to meet in Nebraska during their exodus to the Rockies.

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¹Joseph 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 Book Co., 1948), 6:375. See “Map of an Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the year 1842 and to Oregon & North California in the years 1843–44 by Brevet Capt. J. C. Fremont of the Corps of Topographical Engineers under the orders of Col. J. J. Albert, Chief of the Topographical Bureau” that is included in *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont Map Portfolio*, ed. Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence. See also Lewis Clark Christian, “Mormon Foreknowledge of the West,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 21 (Fall 1981): 403–15.

The Mormons also gathered additional information about the Indians from various sources and printed it in their newspapers. In March 1845, the editors of the *Times and Seasons* read 203 pages of government reports on the Indians and summarized the contents in four pages. They listed the population of each tribe living west of the Mississippi. For the Indians in Nebraska, they reported 1,301 Omaha, 931 Otoe and Missouri, 777 Ponca, and 12,500 Pawnee.² In December 1845, they reprinted a story from the *Independence Express* telling about the extreme difficulties Elijah White and his party had experienced with the Pawnee. These Indians were depicted as “highway robbers,” who had stripped White’s party of all their property and given them in return a few old clothes, some weak horses, a few arms and some ammunition.³ Many other stories were told in Nauvoo about the experiences of travelers while passing through Nebraska.

Church newspapers occasionally told the Saints how other Americans mistreated the Indians. In January 1846, the editor of the *Times and Seasons* reported that the Oneida Indians once had lived in New York state but had subsequently been moved to Wisconsin. Now the people at Green Bay claimed they wanted the Indians to move to the Missouri not “because we envy them their rich lands and comfortable farms” but to save them from the vices of stealing, drinking, and acting immoral which they learned by living too close to white people. “What shall we say [upon] so extraordinary a result of christianity, liberty, and intelligence?” the editor asked. He then replied, “It is a melancholy fact, among all classes, sects, and denominations, (save the Mormons only) that there is not enough virtue among the better to create a reverence for purity among the worse portions of the community. . . . Who [but the Latter-day Saints] will forego the shining moments of amassing a fortune, for the mere name of ‘doing to others as he would wish them to do unto him’?” Then reminding the Mormons of their divine duty towards the Indians, he rhetorically asked, “‘What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’ ”⁴

Mormons had difficulty living in harmony with this noble ideal; nevertheless, they tried. When the pioneers reached the Missouri River on 14 June 1846, they adopted an important rule governing their relations with the Indians. To avoid conflicts with Indians and government officials, the Church members, under threat of being

²*Times and Seasons*, 7 March 1845.

³*Ibid.*, 1 December 1845.

⁴*Ibid.*, 1 January 1846.

disfellowshipped, were told not to trade with the natives because "the Church had no right to trade with the Indians."⁵

Seeking a proper relationship with both Indians and Indian agents, the Mormon leaders on 20 June visited the Indian agency at Trading Point and met with the government agent and several Indian chiefs. The meeting was friendly, and the government agent promised to do all in his power to help the Mormons in their move west.⁶

On 29 June, the Mormons began ferrying a few Saints across the Missouri River into Omaha Indian territory. The following day Captain James Allen arrived at Council Bluffs to recruit five hundred Mormons for service in the recently declared Mexican War.⁷ This request came as no great surprise to Mormon leaders, for they had previously authorized Jesse C. Little to seek government funds to assist the Saints in crossing the Plains.⁸ However, the Mormons had hoped to receive money to build forts or way stations across the Plains to the Rocky Mountains. With the declaration of war, President James K. Polk turned this request for funds into an authorization to pay the five hundred Mormon recruits the regular military salary.⁹

The recruiting of so many from their ranks altered Mormon plans to send a company of able-bodied men over the Rocky Mountains in 1846 to plant seed and prepare for the arrival of the main body of the Church.¹⁰ After lengthy discussions, the Mormon leaders decided to have the Saints spend the winter in Potawatomi and Omaha country.¹¹ Therefore, the Mormon leaders felt it was necessary to get permission from the government to remain on this native territory. Land on the east side of the Missouri became government property during the summer when the Indian land was traded for a region in Kansas, with the Indians retaining the right to use their homeland for several years. However, the land west of the river belonged exclusively to the Indians,

⁵Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 14 June 1846, located in Library-Archives, Historical Division, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives.

⁶Ibid., 20 and 26 June 1846.

⁷See John F. Yurtinus, "'Here Is One Man Who Will Not Go, Dam'un': Recruiting the Mormon Battalion in Iowa Territory," *BYU Studies* 21 (Fall 1981): 475-87.

⁸Jesse C. Little was commissioned to serve as president of the Eastern States Mission on 26 January 1846, and he was instructed to seek aid from the government to help the Saints move west. He used the good offices of Thomas L. Kane to get acquainted with many high government officials including President James K. Polk. Jesse Little proposed that the government use one thousand Mormon settlers to win California, but his idea was modified. Instead, the government recruited five hundred Mormon men for service in the military. Colonel Kane carried this message to General Stephen W. Kearny, who commissioned Captain James Allen to recruit the Mormons. No doubt when Captain Allen arrived at Mount Pisgah on 26 June, he explained the nature and purposes of the recruitment. (See Leonard J. Arrington, "'In Honorable Remembrance': Thomas L. Kane's Services to the Mormons," *BYU Studies* 21 [Fall 1981]: 389-91.)

⁹*History of the Church*, 3:71-77.

¹⁰Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 28 June 1846.

¹¹Ibid. See entries on the following dates: 20 and 26 July, 1 and 9 August 1846.

and the government was legally bound to prevent white people from living on the Omaha, Otoe, Ponca, or Pawnee domain.¹²

Nevertheless, Mormon leaders asked Captain Allen for authorization to stay in Indian country since they would be unable to reach the Rockies before winter. Without hesitation, the captain gave the Saints permission to pass through Indian territory en route to California and to make all necessary settlements or fortifications. However, this permission had to be ratified by President Polk.¹³ At the same time, although it was illegal for any party other than the United States to make agreements with the Indians, the Mormons negotiated a "treaty" with the Potawatomi Indians living near Council Bluffs. The Indians consented to let the Mormons make a settlement and plant crops while the body of the Saints migrated to the Far West.¹⁴ Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders took additional steps to ensure friendly relations; they visited various Indian camps and talked with the Indians not present when this agreement was signed.¹⁵

Meanwhile, Church leaders turned their energies toward recruiting men for the Mexican War. As the Mormon Battalion was making its way to Kansas, Bishop George Miller began ferrying people across the Missouri and led a company of Saints toward Grand Island.¹⁶ While moving west, James Emmett and many members of his company joined them. At this time, Mormon leaders planned to send Miller's company over the Rockies during the fall of 1846 and to move the main body of the Saints up the east side of the Missouri for the winter.¹⁷ But subsequently, these plans were later altered.

As Miller's company moved west, they met several Presbyterian missionaries who were employed by the government to teach farming to the Indians at the Pawnee villages near Grand Island. The Saints learned that recently a band of Sioux had attacked the mission, destroyed some buildings, and killed two of the missionaries. As a result of this tragic episode, the missionaries, who had also experienced internal strife at the mission and were on poor terms with the Pawnee, decided to abandon the farm. When Bishop Miller arrived, the Mormons offered to help the missionaries return to Council Bluffs

¹²Robert A. Trennert, Jr., "The Mormons and the Office of Indian Affairs: The Conflict over Winter Quarters, 1846-1848," *Nebraska History* 53 (Fall 1972): 381-400.

¹³Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1 July 1846.

¹⁴Ibid. See documents inserted on 25 July 1846.

¹⁵Ibid., 10 and 11 July 1846.

¹⁶Hosea Stout, *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1866*, ed. Juanita Brooks, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964), 1:169.

¹⁷Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 14, 17, and 22 July 1846. On this topic, see Brigham Young to George Miller, letter inserted in Manuscript History under date of 1 August 1846.

in exchange for the crops grown on the farm. All the missionaries returned to the United States except James Case, who remained with the Mormons, joined the Church, and subsequently migrated with the first group of Mormons to the Great Basin where he later served as a farmer to the Indians.¹⁸

About this time at Council Bluffs, Brigham Young planned to move the main body of the pioneers to a location between the headwaters of the Elkhorn and the Missouri rivers so the Saints could winter their stock on the peavines growing along the river bottoms and still be able to send to St. Louis for grain, millstones, a carding machine, and other provisions. With this idea in mind, Brigham Young instructed Bishop Miller to leave some of his people at the Pawnee Mission and take the remainder to Grand Island for the winter instead of taking a company to the Rockies. According to this proposal, the main body of the Saints would overtake Miller's company in the spring and they would all cross the Plains together.¹⁹ Soon, Mormon leaders changed their minds again; they decided to settle on both sides of the Missouri—at Council Bluffs and Winter Quarters.

Meanwhile, Bishop Miller met several Ponca Indians, who came to the Pawnee Mission to settle their differences with the Pawnee. Learning that the Pawnee were hunting buffalo and that the Saints were planning to remain at this location for the winter, the Ponca warned Bishop Miller not to stay at the mission because the Mormon livestock would eat the peavines which the Pawnee used for their horses during the early winter. Considering this situation unsafe, the Ponca invited Bishop Miller to winter with them. He accepted this offer and moved 175 wagons to the mouth of the Running Water River, about 150 miles north of the Pawnee Mission.²⁰

However, a few Mormon pioneers remained at the Pawnee Mission. Soon after Miller's departure, the Pawnee returned from their hunt and appeared mildly disturbed because Miller's company had taken the corn in exchange for helping the missionaries. But rather than taking vengeance on the few remaining Mormons, the Pawnee, who had enjoyed great success on their summer hunt, were friendly.²¹

¹⁸William C. Staines lived with Bishop Miller at this time and kept a journal. In the 1880s, Staines published his experiences on this trip into Indian country in the *Juvenile Instructor*. His experiences were entitled "A Reminiscence" and ran in serial from 15 June through 1 November 1880. The same story was later reprinted in 1882 in *A String of Pearls*, the second book of the Faith Promoting series. In 1968 it was reprinted by Bookcraft of Salt Lake City as *Four Faith Promoting Classics: A String of Pearls, Fragments of Experience, Gems for the Young Folks, Early Scenes in Church History*.

¹⁹Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1 August 1846.

²⁰Staines, "A Reminiscence," *Juvenile Instructor*, 1 July 1880.

²¹Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 9 September 1846.

The Pawnee, like most other Indians the Mormons met while traveling to the Great Basin, enjoyed a varied life-style hunting buffalo, harvesting, digging wild plants, and growing corn, squash, and beans. Early in the spring, the Pawnee would begin performing religious ceremonies while planting their crops near their permanent earthen lodges. When the vegetables were hoed for the second time, the Pawnee would pack most of their belongings in skin bags, load them on travois pulled by horses, mules, and dogs, and travel their traditional paths searching for buffalo, deer, antelope, elk, and edible roots. Elaborate religious rituals would also accompany these activities. Late in the summer, they would return to their villages, harvest their crops according to certain prescribed rites, feast for several days, and cache their surplus meat and vegetables at strategic locations in the villages. Early in the fall, the Pawnee would return to the hunt, searching for good pelts to be used for robes or for trading to the whites. Returning to their villages in the spring, the Pawnee would rely upon their cache of food to tide them over until they would begin their hunt in the early summer.²²

When the Pawnee had returned to their earthen lodges, the few Mormons living at the Pawnee Mission realized that the Indians' friendship might not last, so they sent word to Brigham Young explaining their situation. He advised them to abandon their mission and return to Winter Quarters.²³

Meanwhile, Miller's company reached the Ponca villages on the Running Water River and made good friends with a tribe of nearly two thousand people whose life-style of following the buffalo was similar to that of the Pawnee. Communicating through one Ponca chief who spoke Sioux and through James Emmett who had learned some of that language, the Mormons learned the Ponca would soon abandon their camp and go on their winter hunting expedition. In these talks, during which Bishop Miller smoked the peace pipe with them, the Ponca invited the entire Miller company to go with them on their winter hunt, but the Saints declined the offer, sending instead three Mormons to accompany them. Soon, two of the Mormons, John Kay (a gunsmith) and Frederick Bainbridge, unable to endure the ordeals demanded during the hunt, returned to the Mormon encampment. But William C. Staines, although greatly distressed by boils, scurvy, and unfamiliar foods such as dog and skunk, managed to last through the winter. Staines mastered some of the language

²²George E. Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 137-45.

²³Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 14-15 September 1846.

and a few customs but failed to grasp the fundamental religious ideas of the Ponca. In the spring, Staines learned that the Ponca planned to meet Peter Sarpy, who operated a trading post for the American Fur Company, and exchange their furs for items of trade. Feeling the Saints might wish to participate in the trade, Staines returned to the Running Water encampment and told them about the rendezvous between the trader and the Ponca. To his surprise, he learned that the Saints were preparing to return to Winter Quarters.²⁴

During the winter, Bishop Miller and a few dissatisfied pioneers had returned to Winter Quarters to confer with Mormon leaders.²⁵ In a short while, Bishop Miller had gone back to the Running Water colony. In January 1847, the Twelve, seeking to unite all Mormons in the migration westward, had sent word to Miller's colony among the Ponca, telling them about the revelation Brigham Young had received concerning the migration of the Saints to the Great Basin. Furthermore, they had requested that Bishop Miller return to Winter Quarters.²⁶ When Staines arrived at Running Water, the entire camp was preparing to move to Winter Quarters.

Soon after the Running Water colony arrived at Winter Quarters, Bishop Miller proposed that the Saints change direction and migrate to Texas between the Neuces and Rio Grande rivers. Considering Miller out of harmony with the Twelve, Brigham Young rejected this notion, labeling it "wild and visionary,—that when we move hence it would be to the Great Basin, where the Saints would soon form a nucleus of strength and power sufficient to cope with mobs."²⁷ Frustrated by this rebuff that added to the rift already growing between himself and Brigham Young, Bishop Miller left Winter Quarters with a small company and moved to Texas, where he joined forces with his former friend from the Wisconsin pinery, Lyman Wight.²⁸ Eventually, George Miller left Texas and the Church and joined James J. Strang and his followers on Beaver Island.

When Miller's company had begun making its way to Grand Island in August of 1846, several prominent Mormon leaders ferried across the Missouri to Omaha Indian territory. After some deliberation, they decided to build a community with streets, a school, and log houses and to clear the land, plow the ground, and plant crops. Seeking

²⁴Staines, "A Reminiscence," 245.

²⁵Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 7 January 1847.

²⁶Ibid., 29 January and 23 March 1847.

²⁷Ibid., 2 April 1847.

²⁸Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Co., 1941), 509.



Big Elk

Portrait by George Catlin

to establish friendly relations with the Omaha, Mormon leaders made two very important decisions. First, they agreed to ask the Omaha Indians as soon as they returned from their summer hunting expedition for permission to stay on their land. Second, they decided to advise all their people not to bother Indian burial grounds. On this point, Brigham Young, not knowing the Omaha buried their dead in a sitting position in the ground facing east, warned the Saints not

to disturb an Indian grave, because the Indians frequently deposited their dead in the branches of trees, wrapt in buffalo robes and blankets leaving with them arrows, pipes and other trinkets, which they considered sacred and we should not remove them and our children should be taught to let them alone.²⁹

In a short time, the Mormons heard that the Omaha had returned from their summer hunt, so Brigham Young commissioned three men to arrange for a meeting between him and the Omaha chiefs. Brigham warned this committee not to make any firm agreements with them but simply to tell the Indians that the Saints wanted the privilege of cutting timber, building homes, planting some crops, and perhaps leaving some families on Indian land in the spring. He promised the Mormons would help the Indians by “repairing their guns, and learning them how, and teaching their children, and if they want pay for occupancy of their lands we will pay them; [but] they should not touch our property, and we will not their’s.”³⁰

When the Mormon representatives met with the Indians, Mormon leaders smoked the peace pipe with about eighty Omaha, discussed the Saints’ intentions of journeying to California and asked permission for staying on Indian territory. Brigham Young reaffirmed the promises the Mormons had already communicated to the Omaha, and in addition he said the Mormons were acting according to the instructions of the government. Consequently, the Saints wanted the Omaha to sign an agreement permitting the Mormons to stay on their soil during emigration. Big Elk said that he was willing for the Mormons to stay in his territory, but he was not sure how the government felt about it. In addition, he stated there was some uncertainty about the ownership of this region; the Otoe also claimed it. Big Elk said he had received good reports about the Mormons, and he hoped the Omaha would have a good relation with the Saints.³¹

²⁹Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 7 August 1846.

³⁰Ibid., 15 August 1846.

³¹Ibid., 28 August 1846.

Taking a cue from Big Elk's talk, the Mormons visited the Otoe who lived on the north bank of the Platte and asked them for permission to stay in the region for the next two years. But the Otoe said they wanted no difficulties with the Omaha. Evading a direct answer to the Mormons' request, the Otoe said they would give the Saints an answer when their chief returned.³² Apparently satisfied that no serious troubles would result with the Otoe, the Mormons held another council with the Omaha and discussed the provisions for staying on their property and for employing their young men to herd Mormon livestock. But the Omaha declined the latter offer because they did not have enough young men to herd stock. They also questioned how much timber the Saints would burn. The Mormons reassured them that the Saints would only use a little wood in their stoves and for improvements such as houses, fences, and other structures. The Mormons also promised they would leave these wood buildings for the Indians. Big Elk, Standing Elk, and Little Chief all accepted this offer and placed their "x" on an agreement granting the "Mormon people the privilege of tarrying upon the lands for two years or more, or as long as may suit their convenience . . . provided that our great father, the President of the United States shall not counsel us to the contrary."³³

Meanwhile, Thomas L. Kane, a confidante and friend of the Mormons, had arrived at Council Bluffs with news from his father, Judge J. K. Kane, that President Polk had agreed to let the Mormons stay on Potawatomi soil.³⁴ In addition, Judge Kane forwarded a copy of the instructions which the War Department sent to Major Thomas H. Harvey, superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, saying that as long as the Mormon settlement in Potawatomi territory was "really to be temporary" then the Saints were at liberty "to supply their wants and procure the necessary means for proceeding on their journey." However, the Mormon stay on Potawatomi grasslands, the secretary warned, must not delay "the survey and sales of lands" needed for Iowa to become a state. Nor should the Saints' stay threaten Indian rights and interests.³⁵

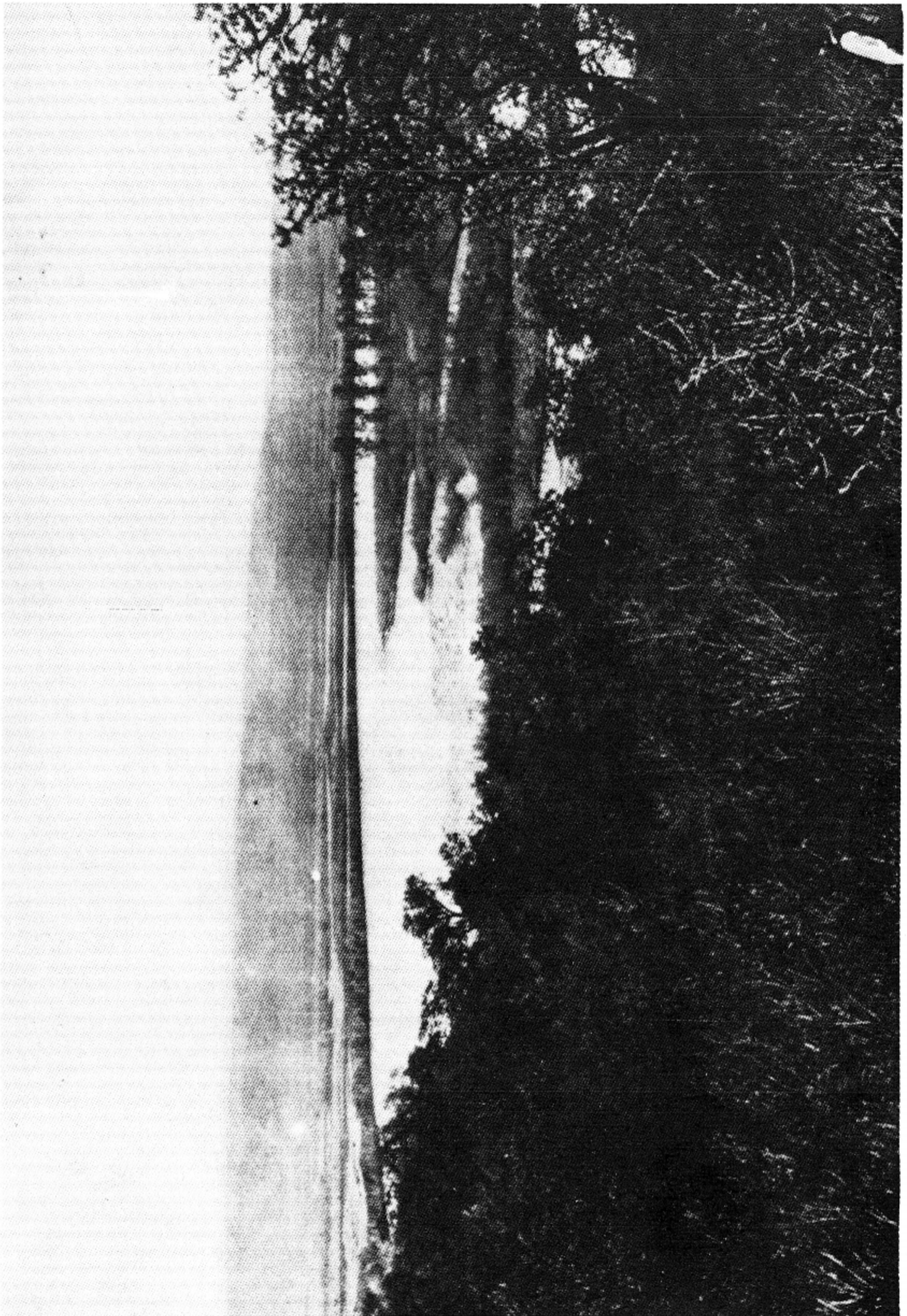
Realizing they needed authorization to be in Omaha country as well as the authorization to be on Potawatomi soil, Mormon leaders immediately wrote to President Polk, asking for permission to camp

³²Ibid., 3 September 1846.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid. J. K. Kane to Thomas Kane, 18 August 1846. Copies of letters sent to Colonel Kane by his father are inserted in the Manuscript History under the date of 4 September 1846.

³⁵Ibid. On 18 August, Judge Kane sent to his son Thomas Kane a copy of the instructions that the commissioner of Indian Affairs, William Medill, later on 2 September sent to Thomas H. Harvey.



Blackbird Hills, Nebraska

The Blackbird Hills were not called that by the Omaha; they were called On'pontonga xaithon or "where Big Elk is buried." Photograph from the Bureau of American Ethnology, Twenty-seventh Report, reprinted from Fletcher and La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe*.

west of the Missouri River while moving to the Rockies. Including a copy of the agreement signed by three Omaha chiefs with the letter to the president, the Mormons emphasized their humanitarian intentions by saying they would lend horses to the Indians “to draw their corn at harvest,” assist them “in building houses, making fields, doing some blacksmithing, etc.,” and give them “a few beeves when hungry” in return for skins and furs to “substitute for worn out clothing and tents in our camp.” In order to legally associate with the Indians in this way, the Mormons further requested “a license giving . . . permission to trade with the Indians while . . . tarrying on or passing through their lands, made out in the name of Newel K. Whitney.”³⁶

Feeling confident they would eventually gain permission to establish a settlement on the west side of the Missouri, the Mormons asked the Omaha Indians to approve a location for the Saints to build a town.³⁷ Subsequently, the Indians told the Mormons to build their city two miles north of the old barracks. So, late in September the site for Winter Quarters—eighteen miles north of Bellevue upon tableland, covering about six hundred yards toward the Bluffs and extending down the river about one mile and a half—was surveyed into blocks. By late December, approximately three thousand five hundred Mormons had moved onto the surveyed land and were living in a number of linen tents, eighty-three mud huts, and forty-eight log cabins.

Mormon settlement on the prairie, however, infuriated Indian Superintendent Thomas H. Harvey, who felt uneasy about the Mormons crossing the river into Indian country. In fact, when he heard reports in mid-April of 1846 that six thousand Mormons were crossing the ferry at Ivory Point, Iowa, on their way west, he said that “so large a body of persons in Indian Country under any circumstances is objectionable; the objection in this case will be greatly increased from the character of the Mormons.”³⁸ Responding to what he considered a Mormon threat, he requested Major C. Wharton at Fort Leavenworth to send a company of dragoons to alleviate any problems that might arise and to force the Mormons to cross his subagency at a point “50 or 60 miles from the river.” Under this arrangement, he wrote,

³⁶Ibid., Brigham Young to James J. Polk, 7 September 1846.

³⁷Ibid., 8 September 1846.

³⁸Thomas H. Harvey to Major C. Wharton, 18 April 1846, Letters Received, Office of Indian Affairs, 1824–81, St. Louis Superintendency (hereafter cited as Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis). See also Thomas H. Harvey to William Medill, 4 May 1846. In this letter, Harvey warns the commissioner of Indian Affairs that “from their character [Mormons], I consider it necessary that their movements be observed. I therefore addressed a letter to Major Wharton commanding at Fort Leavenworth a greeting to send up a company of dragoons should he be informed of their approach.”

“One company would be sufficient to control these mormons—should they decline such an arrangement they might be brought to terms by preventing them crossing.”³⁹

When Superintendent Harvey heard that the Mormons had crossed the Missouri and started a village, he wrote to them and said, “No white persons are permitted to settle on the lands of the Indians WITHOUT AUTHORITY OF THE GOVERNMENT.”⁴⁰ In reply, the Mormons said that they had planned to move farther west than Winter Quarters but that the government had enlisted five hundred of their best men to serve their country, making it impossible for them to move farther west in 1846. In the spring, the Saints planned to settle west of the Rockies. Meanwhile, they stated, Captain Allen had granted them permission to stay on Indian soil while they moved west.⁴¹

Not satisfied with the Mormons' reply, Superintendent Harvey went directly to Winter Quarters and personally investigated the situation. Upon arriving, he talked with Brigham Young, who repeated that Captain Allen had given the Saints permission to make settlements in virgin territory while they moved west. Realizing that Captain Allen may have overstepped his authority on this matter, Brigham said that he had written to President Polk asking for permission to remain on Omaha country but that the president had probably not had sufficient time to reply. When Superintendent Harvey learned it might take the Saints four years to vacate Winter Quarters, he flatly told Brigham Young that Congress in 1830 had made it strictly illegal for white persons to settle on Indian territory, “west of the States of Arkansaw and Missouri & Missouri river.”⁴² Exasperated by the situation, Superintendent Harvey wrote to his superior officer, William Medill, commissioner of Indian Affairs, saying:

I am at a loss in forming an opinion in relation to the future of this . . . deluded people, they say their intention is to cross the mountains, if so, I cannot see any satisfactory reason for them making on the Missouri, such substantial improvements. It may be that their object is to establish a chain of improvements to the Mountains, commencing on the Missouri, as resting points for their people in their emigration to the Pacific; or it may be that they hope to establish themselves on the Missouri, in the Omaha and Purncah Country.⁴³

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Thomas H. Harvey to Alpheus Cutler, 5 November 1846, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis.

⁴¹Alpheus Cutler to Thomas H. Harvey, 6 November 1846, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis.

⁴²Thomas H. Harvey to William Medill, 3 December 1846, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis.

⁴³Ibid.

Meanwhile on 15 November, the Mormon leaders, feeling the Indian agents were putting undue pressure on them to evacuate Winter Quarters, registered their complaints against the agents with their trusted gentile friend, Thomas Kane, asking why Superintendent Harvey continued to harass them for being on “‘the lands of the Indians *without authority of the government.*’” Didn’t the superintendent realize that the plight of the Mormons was complicated by the government’s drafting five hundred men, they queried. Further venting their feelings, they complained that the Indian agents were discriminating against them by refusing government annuities to those “‘one or two half breeds or French who have married and been adopted into the Potawatomi nation and believed in Mormonism.’” In addition, the agents refused to pay James Case for his services as government farmer for the Pawnee, discharging him from government service “‘only because he was a *Mormon.*’”⁴⁴

On 5 December, before these complaints reached Colonel Kane, the Mormons received some encouragement from him. Stating he hoped they had not allowed themselves to “‘be discouraged by my long continued silence,’” he assured the Saints that justice would prevail. “‘There will be less difficulty with regard to the Omaha lease than my Father had with regard to that of the Pottawatomies; which stands to me as a precedent.’”⁴⁵ On the last day of December, the Mormon leaders received word from Orson Spencer that Colonel Kane had recently said the government had granted permission for the Saints to “‘remain on the Omaha lands.’” However, Kane had said the government had not authorized the Mormons to have a subagency for the Indians. Finally, on 18 February 1847, thinking the government had authorized their petition, the Saints sent Levi Stewart to see Superintendent Harvey at St. Louis to get “‘the Government permit for us to remain on the Omaha lands.’”⁴⁶

The Mormons were mistaken, however. Government officials refused permission for the Saints to stay in Indian territory. Feeling it a duty to protect Indian rights and fearing permission for the Saints to stay at Winter Quarters would result in the Mormons’ establishing many similar settlements at strategic locations on the Plains, William Medill, commissioner of Indian Affairs, denied the Mormons’ application for

⁴⁴Willard Richards to Thomas Kane, 16 November 1846, Manuscript History of Brigham Young. Also see complaints registered on 6 November 1846.

⁴⁵Thomas L. Kane to Willard Richards, 26 October 1846. The letter is inserted in the Manuscript History of Brigham Young under the date of 5 December 1846.

⁴⁶Orson Spencer to Brigham Young, 26 November 1846. The letter is inserted in the Manuscript History of Brigham Young under the date of 31 December 1846.

a permit to remain at Winter Quarters. He felt not even the president of the United States could legally authorize the Mormons to stay in Indian country because the 1830 Indian trade and intercourse law prohibited any white person from making settlements on land belonging to any Indian tribe. Moreover, this law required the president to employ military force to remove such persons who violated the law. Seeking to show no discrimination in applying the law to all emigrants passing through the territory, Commissioner Medill asked, "Are they [Mormons] more deserving the protection of the Government, and entitled to privileges which are not granted to the mass of bold & hardy pioneers who have already crossed the plains west of the Missouri? . . . Because they are banded together in one common community gives no rights," he said; "on the contrary, their associations so distinct and separate, require the exercise of caution and prudence."⁴⁷

Undaunted by Medill's stand, the Mormons, through their friend Thomas L. Kane, continued asking the government to give them permission to live in Omaha territory while they migrated to the Great Basin. Seeking to influence important government officials, Colonel Kane wrote several letters, saying the Mormons were a destitute and persecuted people who planned to migrate to "the Bear River Valley or some portion of the Utah Country" and as a result they needed shelter for thousands of people while crossing the Plains. Humanity demanded at least that much concern.⁴⁸ Moreover, while the Saints had been in Indian territory, they had had a good influence on the Indians, he said, by protecting the Omaha from their fierce Sioux enemies, by providing material assistance for them, and by avoiding the introduction of liquor among them.⁴⁹ After a few months of pleading, Colonel Kane realized there was no hope of gaining permission for the Mormons to stay west of the Missouri River, so he pled with officials to at least let the Saints know through reliable channels if the president had decided to use force to evict "the aged men, the women, and children . . . while the natural protectors are still serving at a distance under the flag to which government itself

⁴⁷William Medill to William L. Marcy, Secretary of War, 24 April 1847, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis.

⁴⁸See Thomas L. Kane to William L. Marcy, 20 April 1847, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis. In this letter, Colonel Kane, after rehearsing the difficulties of the Mormons, made two requests: first, he asked for a permit for the Saints to remain on Indian land west of the Missouri; second, he asked Secretary Marcy to commission some Mormons as agents or subagents. This would enable the Saints to legally conduct relations with the Indians while moving west. (See also Thomas L. Kane to William Medill, 21 March 1847, and especially Kane to Medill, 24 April 1847.)

⁴⁹Kane to Medill, 21 March 1847.

invited them.”⁵⁰ Finally, after months of failure, the Mormons decided in December 1847 that they would abandon their settlement at Winter Quarters.⁵¹ However, even though it was illegal, the Mormons remained at Winter Quarters until the summer of 1848.

During the time the Saints lived among the Omaha, their relations with these Indians were not very cordial, and this conflict tested the ability of the Saints to live up to their ideals. From their viewpoint, the most serious infraction of civil life came from the Indians’ stealing their cattle, sheep, pigs, and horses. Soon after crossing the Missouri, the Saints turned their livestock into the river bottoms with little supervision, and the Omaha began taking two or three cattle per day. Disturbed by these losses, the Mormons held a council among themselves and decided the Saints should not feed the Indians, “nor let them into their tents; for they would steal with one hand while you give them a loaf of bread in the other.” But if the Saints caught the Indians “skinning their oxen,” they should not shoot them.⁵² Considering the Indians to be somewhat like the Gadianton Robbers spoken of in the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young advised the Saints:

to geather and form a square so that we could keep them out our midst and then if they came and went either to killing cattle or stealing our clothing blankets or anything else for us to whip them . . . and not sell our dogs . . . for the Indians were buying them to get them out of camp so that they could more easily pilfer from us.⁵³

Subsequently, the Mormons confronted the Omaha chief, Big Elk, on the subject of stealing. Hearing that his people had taken at least fifty oxen and many sheep, Big Elk said he thought the Saints “were soldiers enough to defend” themselves and their property and furthermore he “considered the destruction of his game, timber and land of more value than the cattle taken.” As he continued, Big Elk reported:

His young men could not help stealing when our cattle were all about, and they would steal if they were admitted into . . . camp; his young men did not like white people, and they did not like him; he told them we would do them good, and they call him a liar. . . . His young men

⁵⁰Thomas L. Kane to Dear Sir [probably Marcy], 21 June 1847, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis. In this letter, Colonel Kane said he had already made the same request of Medill.

⁵¹Thomas L. Kane to William L. Marcy, 22 January 1848, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis. Kane reports that the Mormons have decided to abandon Winter Quarters.

⁵²Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 21–24 October 1846. For another account of the same troubles, see Stout, *Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:204–7.

⁵³Stout, *Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:205.

felt bad when we crossed the river. When we cut their timber, we left them like the trunk of a tree,—without leaves or limbs.⁵⁴

Under these trying circumstances, Brigham Young maintained his famous Indian policy which held that it was “cheaper to feed the Indians than fight them.” For on this occasion, he promised Big Elk some tobacco, powder, and lead if the Mormons could range their cattle on the bottoms, without molestations. Replying to this offer, Big Elk said “he knew the white people were quick tempered, his people were slow; he should counsel them till he went into his grave; he came to settle the difficulty . . . [but] he would not ask for powder and lead, if he had means to buy it.”⁵⁵ In a few days, Brigham Young sent Big Elk a barrel of powder and one hundred pounds of lead, wished him a prosperous buffalo hunt, volunteered to get his guns repaired, and asked him to counsel his men “not to kill any more of my cattle.”⁵⁶ Big Elk accepted the gifts, visited the Mormon leader, gave him two horses, and said he could not control his bad young men, “although they had been chastised for their conduct.”⁵⁷

Obviously, Mormon settlement among the Omaha created many sharp cultural contrasts for Big Elk, whose ideas were radically different from those of the Mormons. Unlike the Mormon concept of God as a personal being, the Omaha believed in a mysterious life power, called *Wakon'da*, that purportedly permeated all visible and invisible portions of the universe. For the Omaha, as well as for many people in the Orient, this life power was not synonymous with nature, an objective god, nor the Great Spirit which the Mormons mentioned when they talked with the Omaha. Instead, the Omaha believed that nature simply reflected the activities of the invisible *Wakon'da* that punished those who were not truthful, not faithful, not responsible, nor kept their vows by striking them with disaster. Furthermore, the whole universe was thought to be divided into two forces, male and female. In this regard, the sky, sun, father, day, certain heavenly bodies, and other things were all considered masculine while the earth, mother, night, moon, and other celestial bodies were all seen as feminine. Accordingly, the Omaha thought it was necessary for some form of union to occur between the masculine and feminine in order for harmony to be maintained throughout the entire cosmos. If

⁵⁴Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 24 October 1846.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., 6 November 1846.

⁵⁷Ibid., 15 November 1846.

man interrupted this order, the natural food supply would not continue, for Wakon'da would mete out some punishment.⁵⁸

So that every person would understand his niche in this universal scheme, many elaborate rituals and ceremonies were performed to instruct the people. Shortly after a birth, a certain priest would come to the tent of the newborn child, raise his hands to the sky, and intone a prayer that acknowledged a common life power, introduce the child into the whole universe including the wind, rain, mist, and the earth's varied landforms, and to all animal life, and implore the mysterious life power to make the child's path safe during his passage over the four hills of life.⁵⁹ When an Omaha child reached the age when he could walk on his own, the priests placed moccasins with a hole in the sole upon his feet so if a messenger came from the spirit world and asked the child to go with him the child could say, "I cannot go; my moccasins are worn out." During this ceremony, called turning the child, the priest also gave the child a name, designated his place in the tribe, and assured him a long journey through life.⁶⁰ Furthermore, when a boy reached a certain age he was consecrated to Thunder, the god of war, through an elaborate ritual that involved cutting the hair in a prescribed style, performing sacred ceremonies, and singing certain songs.⁶¹

But the most sacred ceremony of all was the one introducing the Omaha youth to Wakon'da. According to the Omaha, it was necessary that the mind of the child, which symbolically represented the feminine portion of the cosmos called the dark of night, be united with the masculine portion known as the clear light of day. When a young person reached puberty, he was no longer in the dark like a child, but he was a conscious individual who had known sorrow, could remember things in the past, and could observe discriminately. Consequently, this age was the proper time for him to enter a personal relationship with Wakon'da.

As a result, early in the spring, each youth who had reached puberty and had not yet married silently slipped away from the village, secluded himself from all other people for four days and

⁵⁸Alice C. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 2:597-601. The two volumes published as a Bison Book edition were originally published as the Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1905-1906 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911). Alice Fletcher spent twenty-five years collaborating with Francis La Flesche, the son of a principal chief of the Omaha Indians. During this period, Fletcher interviewed many Omaha, examining their artifacts and recording their beliefs and customs.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 1:115-16.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 1:117-22.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 1:122-28.

nights, fasted, prayed, and sang a prescribed song. During the time he followed this ritual, he thought about having a happy life, good health, successful hunts, victorious wars, and being protected from the weapons of his enemies. If during this ordeal he fell into a trance or sleep and saw a vision or had a dream, then the object that he visualized became his special medium for receiving supernatural aid from Wakon'da. After four days of fasting and prayer, the youth returned to his father's lodge, said nothing about his experiences, and recuperated for four days. He then went to a trustworthy old man, smoked a pipe, and told him about his vision. Following his report, the youth again left camp, found the object he had seen in vision, killed it, and preserved a portion of it as a symbol of his vision. From this time forward he was forbidden to eat the object since it was now sacred.⁶²

Not only were the ideas of the Omaha Indians different from those of the Mormons but also the Omaha life-style was a marked contrast to the Saints' agricultural life pattern. The Omaha, like the Pawnee and Ponca, established villages in good locations, built permanent earthen lodges, planted crops, and hunted buffalo, deer, and elk during the summer and winter months.⁶³ When the Mormons arrived on the scene, the Omaha probably felt the Saints might take advantage of their absence during the hunts and plunder their villages, so they left some people to protect their property. This action meant fewer hunters and considerable competition between those Omaha who were left behind and the Mormons for the game, grass, and other natural resources. To compensate, individual Omaha Indians simply took the stray Mormon livestock.

During the winter and spring of 1847, the competition between the Mormons and the Indians became very keen. As a result, the Omaha Indians, since they usually prohibited unauthorized war parties from looting or fighting their enemies, empowered small war parties to secure booty from the Mormons. According to custom, those who wanted to form a party to take spoils from an enemy invited the Keeper of the Sacred Pack of War to four feasts. During the fourth feast, the Keeper of the Sacred Pack instructed the leader of the party in the rituals that he must perform, indicated the relative size of the party, explained how to organize and conduct the raid, and gave him certain charms concealed in small bags which were to be carried by a member of the war party. At this point, the leader solicited

⁶²Ibid., 1:128-33.

⁶³Ibid., especially 1:1-68, 161-312.

volunteers, organized them, and directed the party according to instructions.⁶⁴ During the raids the Omaha conducted against the Mormons, some members of the war party hid in grass and the timber, slipped among the cattle herds, stampeded the livestock; then others appeared on horses and rounded up all the stray cattle. These raids were so successful that the Mormons became alarmed at the incredible “amount of cattle killed by them the past winter & spring.”⁶⁵

Property loss had become so great by the time the first company of Mormon pioneers began their historic march across the Plains that the Saints who remained in Winter Quarters decided they had to stop the Indians “if it had to be by harsher means.”⁶⁶ Three steps were taken to protect their cattle.

First, they sent a committee to discuss the matter with the Indians. In their initial discussion, Big Elk said the Indians were justified in taking the cattle since the Saints were cutting the timber, using the grass, and driving the game away. But he would try to stop his young men from taking the cattle, Big Elk said, if the Mormons would give him two hundred dollars’ worth of corn. Unable to make such a commitment, the committee said they had to talk the matter over with their Mormon chief, Alpheus Cutler, when he returned from St. Louis.⁶⁷

Simultaneously, the Mormons took their second step by revising their method of protecting their cattle. Mormon leaders told their bishops to group the cattle of the ecclesiastical units called wards, appoint a captain, and arm all able-bodied men “with guns &c. to defend the cattle.” In addition, Hosea Stout, chief of police, was ordered to mount ten men on horses, arm them with horsewhips, “and reconoitre the country and see if there were any Omahas lying in hiding places and if so . . . to give them a severe flogging.” The Saints also advised the Indians they were going to prevent them from entering Winter Quarters by placing additional guards “to meet them in case they attempted to force our cattle away.”⁶⁸

Finally, Mormon leaders took a third step; they held a general meeting of the Saints to tell them that all the trouble there had been with the Indians had been caused by the “stupidity of the people in [not] observing the council & instructions of the Twelve & their

⁶⁴Ibid., 2:404–9.

⁶⁵Stout, *Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:250.

⁶⁶Ibid., 1:251.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

heedlessness about their cattle in exposing them to the Omahas.” Following the severe reprimand, the Saints voted unanimously to “obey council,” to finish the stockyard before any more Saints moved west, to herd the cattle more closely and secure them against the Omaha, and to pay “a company of ten tough Rangers . . . [who had already been appointed] to guard the outskirts of the Herds to prevent Omaha depredations.”⁶⁹

These stronger measures paid some dividends, for in two weeks Young Elk and some of his men made their way to Winter Quarters to return six stolen horses, and when they reached the Mormon picket lines, the guards stopped them. Chagrined by this treatment, Young Elk protested, saying he had a right to go where he wished, but the guards told him they could not violate their orders. After some debate, the guards agreed to permit Young Elk and a few of his men to enter Winter Quarters to parley with the Mormons.

Soon after Young Elk reached the city, a regular council was called with Lot Smith, Hosea Stout, and some guards on one side and the Omaha on the other. Opening the conversation, Young Elk said he was ready to hear anything the Mormons had to say. In anger, Lot Smith blurted out that the Indians had not lived up to their agreements and unless they were ready to keep their word, there would be no use talking. Controlling his emotions, Young Elk coolly remarked “he had been sent . . . by his father [Big Elk] to bring in our horses & enter into a better understanding of peace.” But in attempting to carry out this mission he and his men had been “stoped on the praire like wild beasts & not even admitted a hearing & how it wounded his feelings to have to be guarded into town & leave his braves under guard to offer peace to us & deliver up stolen property & give their pledge that no more should be stolen.” At the same time, Young Elk said he had to contend with his own people to give up the stolen horses and now he was being treated like a prisoner. If the “‘Big Red headed’ chief [Brigham] had been here,” Young Elk sharply said, “he would have taken them & spoken friendly to [them] . . . [oh how] he wished the Big Red Head chief would come home & stay here & then we would have peace.” Since Brigham Young was not here, Young Elk would accept presents from the Mormons to cement peace.⁷⁰

Deeply moved by Young Elk’s sincere words, the Mormon delegation said they could not give him an answer until their Mormon

⁶⁹Ibid., 1:254.

⁷⁰Ibid., 1:257.

chief [Alpheus Cutler] returned from Missouri with supplies. Although not well pleased with this reply, Young Elk left, and in a few days Alpheus Cutler met with the Indians and gave them some presents.⁷¹

Despite the hopes for peace generated by the parleys with the Omaha, serious trouble continued between the Mormons and the Indians. Within a few days after Young Elk's peace talks, the Indians killed Francis Weatherby near the Mormon gristmill at the Horn. As a result, the Mormons contacted the Indian agents and demanded the guilty Indians be brought to justice. Thinking the agent had asked the Mormons to provide fifty men to search for Weatherby's assailants, the Saints raised the troops and started for Bellevue to meet the agent; but complications arose regarding the jurisdiction of the agents, and so the case was dropped.⁷² This incident only foreshadowed many other occasions in which the Indians took Mormon livestock and threatened the lives of the Saints while the Mormons remained in Winter Quarters.⁷³ In June 1848, for example, as the Heber C. Kimball Company was beginning its migration westward, several Omaha Indians attacked and wounded Thomas E. Ricks and Howard Egan while they were trying to stop the Indians from raiding their cattle and horses.⁷⁴

Obviously, Mormon settlement on Omaha lands depleted much game and timber which the Indians needed to sustain their traditional life-style. The Omaha felt completely justified in taking Mormon livestock to compensate for the losses they sustained while the Mormons were on their soil. The Mormons felt otherwise; to them the Indians' taking livestock was pure and simple theft. The Saints felt they were giving the Omaha other compensations. For one thing, the Saints felt the protection they gave the Omaha from their traditional enemies was more than ample pay for the Saints' using their land.

No doubt the Mormons did provide a measure of protection to the Omaha from their tribal enemies. On several occasions the Omaha sought the protection of the Saints in the conflict with their enemies. For example, about 3 A.M. on 9 December 1846, a band of Omaha camped near Winter Quarters was attacked by a party of Iowa. After the raid, the Omaha fled to Brigham Young's house. In

⁷¹Ibid., 1:258-59.

⁷²Ibid., 1:262-65. See also letter of Alfred B. Lambson, dated June 1847 and located in LDS Church Archives. The letter details the incident, explaining how they stopped in the path of the oxen and the men tried to get the guns from the Indians. In the process Francis Weatherby was shot.

⁷³Hosea Stout reported of at least fifteen incidents of Indians taking livestock between October 1847 and June 1848.

⁷⁴Stout, *Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:315.

describing this incident, Hosea Stout said that when he got to Brigham's house it was "crouded full of Omahas who had fled for shelter." Filling in the details, Stout said:

One squaw had been shot through the arm which was shattered to atoms & an old indian picking out the little bones with his fingers. . . . Old Big Head a chief was shot in the head arm & had his thumb shot off. He was badly wounded some were missing and supposed to be dead. . . . I in company with a party of police and some others went with some of the indians to their Lodges to see if any thing more was done and to hunt for the missing.

Their lodges were in a gore of blood but could not find any one. However, after a long while one of the old Indians raised a howling yell & was answered not far off where we found the one we supposed to be dead. He was at Charles Patten's he was very badly wounded a ball passing in near the left eye. The ball was started out of its socket. . . . We then went back and after seeing that all was put to rights came home & yet it was not day. While at their Lodges we could hear the Iowas howling on the other side of the river.

About the middle of the fornoon, I went up again to see how matters were going on. I found the wounded indians located in a sod house where they had been put up by order of President Young. . . . The rest of the Indians moved their lodges by President Young's house as they were afraid to stay any longer where they were least they should be attacked agan.⁷⁵

The Mormons frequently reminded the Indian agents, government officials, and the Indians of the protection they were giving the Omaha.⁷⁶ The Indian agents also felt the Saints provided a measure of protection for the Omaha Indians, for they suggested the government build a fort at Winter Quarters to give the Omaha the protection they were getting from the Saints when the Mormons evacuated Winter Quarters and moved west.⁷⁷

In addition to giving protection, the Saints felt they made a signal contribution to improving the life-style of the Omaha. Certainly, the Saints believed the land they cleared, the crops they harvested for

⁷⁵Ibid., 1:216-17. See also Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 9 December 1845. For other examples of protections, see the Manuscript History on 9 and 13 December 1846; 7 January 1847; 10 and 15 1847; and Stout, *Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:189. On this occasion, Big Elk said he wanted Brigham Young to protect his people and take pity on them. Big Elk also asked the Mormons to store the Indians' corn to keep other tribes from getting it. However, the Mormons made it clear they did not want to get so involved that they were forced into an intertribal war. See also Stout, *Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:233, in which he tells how he was told to post extra guards to watch Indians other than the Omaha when they came to Winter Quarters.

⁷⁶See previously cited letters Thomas L. Kane wrote to public officials, particularly Kane to Medill, 21 March 1847.

⁷⁷John Miller to William L. Marcy, Secretary of War, in care of Thomas H. Harvey, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, 20 January 1847, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis.

the Indians, the livestock they gave them, the skills they taught them, and above all the houses, other buildings, gristmills, and other improvements which they would leave the Indians when they abandoned Winter Quarters were more than sufficient compensation to the Indians for the privilege of staying on Omaha soil.⁷⁸

But apparently the Indians did not feel these services compensated for the timber, game, and other natural resources used by the Mormons. The log houses, school buildings, and other structures arranged in city blocks which the Mormons had built in Winter Quarters were of little value to the Omaha since they arranged their tribe to conform to their fundamental religious ideas. Since the Omaha believed Wakon'da had arranged the entire universe into male and female forces, they divided their tribe into two grand divisions, one the sky people or the masculine, and the other the earth people or the feminine.⁷⁹ This philosophy influenced Omaha marriages, tribal organization, and even the arrangement of their villages. Each village, hunting camp, and lodge was circular in form and was arranged according to the Omaha concept of the cosmos. Each tribal unit or gens had a designated location within the village. The five tribal units or gentes which composed the sky people formed the northern half of the village, camp or ceremonial lodge and the five gentes which were designated the earth people were situated on the southern half. Even within the family lodge or dwelling, each person had his or her special place based on the belief about the masculine and feminine forces within the universe.⁸⁰

Thus, the Mormon arrangement of Winter Quarters into city blocks did not fit the Omaha's ideas for an ideal village. If the Mormons had understood clearly the religious ideas of the Omaha and how these ideas motivated the Indians to think and behave as they did, their relationships with the Indians would have been more cordial. At the same time, the Omaha did not understand the Mormons' religious ideas and life-style.

The local Indians felt no remorse when the Saints evacuated Winter Quarters during the summer of 1848. For along with the trouble they had received for taking Mormon beef, they no doubt remembered the episode that involved the desecration of graves. Although Brigham Young had strongly advised the Saints to leave Indian

⁷⁸Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 15, 20, 28, and 31 August 1846. See also Jenson, *Encyclopedic History*, 957.

⁷⁹Fletcher and La Flesche, *Omaha Tribe*, 1:134-98.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 1:134-41.

graves alone, sometime in 1847 Arza Adams and Henry W. Miller reportedly took a wagonload of buffalo robes, leggins, and other articles from an Omaha burial ground and planned to sell them. This act created great resentment; the Omaha considered it to be a "sacralagious insult to their dead friends." Trying to settle this affair respectably, Mormon leaders demanded these men "restore the things taken to the place whence they took them & make satisfaction to the Omahas as soon as possible."⁸¹

Mormon memories of their relations with the Indians at Winter Quarters, for the most part, were not pleasant ones. Added to the list of the loss of property and life already mentioned, the Saints also had some trouble with the liquor traffic among the Indians. Repeatedly, Indian agents pointed their finger at the Mormons for this illicit trade.⁸² Sufficient amounts of whiskey were sold to the Indians at Winter Quarters that it caused trouble among the Indians. Frequently, Joseph and George Herring, two Indian converts, became drunken "specticals." On one occasion, Joseph Herring, who had been drunk all day, was cared for by Hosea Stout. Speaking of this incident, Stout records, "At Bed time he was dead drunk & I had to lay him down to bed as a dead man."⁸³ Repulsed by this drunken episode and others, Brigham Young said if anyone sold whiskey to the Indians "they ought to be handed over to the Indian agent to be delt with according to the laws of the United States."⁸⁴

Finally, the Saints were plagued by the question of whether the Otoe or the Omaha owned the land where Winter Quarters stood. In this regard, the Mormons, just days before abandoning their improvements, were approached by the Otoe and Agent Miller, who demanded the Saints pay them instead of the Omaha for using the land at Winter Quarters.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, not all Mormon memories of the Indians during their stay among the natives in the Indian territory were unpleasant ones. Sometimes the Saints were on friendly terms with the Indians and preached their religion to them, and occasionally the Indian

⁸¹Stout, *Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:233. See also Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1-2 February 1847.

⁸²Thomas L. Kane to William L. Marcy, 20 December 1846, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis. Kane, reacting to the charges the agents were making about the Saints, denied that the Mormons would sell whiskey to the Indians (see also Kane to Medill, 21 March 1847, and John Miller to Thomas H. Harvey, 10 September 1847). Agent John Miller reported the Mormons had bought from the Omaha "in the last 12 months some 30 horses for whiskey, not getting more for a poney than from 2 to 4 gallons & that well watered."

⁸³Stout, *Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:229, 308. For some unexplained reason, the Herring brothers became very disappointed with the Twelve. The Twelve later excommunicated them from the Church.

⁸⁴Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 17 January 1847.

⁸⁵Stout, *Diary of Hosea Stout*, 1:311.

agent hired Mormons to serve the government.⁸⁶ For example, a Mr. Wicks hired some Mormon women, whose husbands were in the Mormon Battalion, to move to Indian Mills where they held school for the Indian children, teaching them to sew, spin, read, write, cipher, and spell.⁸⁷ However, these teachers had a hard time keeping the children in school or even teaching the girls to knit and sew. Apparently, Mormon children were more successful in reaching the Indian children than were their parents. Mosiah Lyman Hancock, who was a youngster at the time, reported in his autobiography that some of the children taught the Potawatomi and Delaware children to read. Indeed, Hancock recorded that he had a friend named Optekseck who learned to read the Book of Mormon.⁸⁸

Had the government permitted the Saints to remain on Indian land, no doubt the Mormons would have tried to lessen the sharp cultural conflicts which they had experienced with the Indians. Obviously, the cultural gap that existed between the Indians who followed a deeply religious life blended with a hunting life-style and the Mormons who lived a different religious life pattern based on cultivated agriculture was so sharp that peaceful relations would have been impossible without considerable tolerance, understanding, and adjustment in behavior on both sides.

⁸⁶Hyde, *Pawnee Indians*, 166-68, 224-26. For example, Hyde reports that when the Presbyterian missionaries were brought back to Winter Quarters by Miller's company, they brought with them several Pawnee children. When they arrived, Brigham Young provided warm clothing, food, and other necessities for the children until some were returned to the tribe with the others taken by a group from Oberlin.

⁸⁷Mosiah Hancock Journal, 95, LDS Church Archives.

⁸⁸"The Life Story of Mosiah Lyman Hancock," 22, LDS Church Archives.