



4-1-2000

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Recommended Citation

Holzapfel, Richard Neitzel (2000) "New Photographs of Wilford Woodruff's Trip to Alaska, 1895," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 39 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol39/iss2/12>

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Fig. 1. President Wilford Woodruff and party on board the *Willapa* in July 1895. *From left:* Captain George Roberts (steamer captain), Joseph F. Smith, George Q. Cannon, Wilford Woodruff (seated in front), and Gustave (?) Narth (first mate of the steamer). Courtesy of Alaska and Polar Regions Archives, Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks (Accession # 97-196-04).

New Photographs of Wilford Woodruff's Trip to Alaska, 1895

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel

Continuing the photoarchival function of BYU Studies which commenced in the previous issue, this study presents rare photographs that have recently been uncovered.

President Wilford Woodruff and a group of other Latter-day Saint Church leaders, accompanied by family and friends, left Salt Lake City on June 25, 1895, for the Northwest.¹ During their trip, they decided to continue on to Alaska. This segment of President Woodruff's tour was captured in a series of photographs recently discovered in Alaska.

Provenance of the Photographs

The collection of images is found in a nineteenth-century photograph album located in the Alaska and Polar Regions Archives, Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. The library apparently acquired the images in 1998 as part of a larger collection. The album, identified as "Mormon Album," contains forty-nine photographs taken during President Woodruff's trip to Alaska. The 5" x 6.5" album has a brown cover with the title "Photographs" printed in gold. Each photograph measures approximately 3" x 4" and is glued horizontally (even if the image will appear sideways) on card stock with a gold-colored border around the image itself. Below each photograph is a caption printed by hand and providing subject identification.

Subjects of the images include three groups of people (see figs. 1, 2, 3); views of Vancouver Island; totem poles at Fort Wrangle, Alaska; icebergs; glaciers, including Muir, Windham, and Foster Glaciers; several views of other natural wonders seen during the journey; Native Americans at Juneau, Alaska; crew members of the *Willapa* (the steamship that carried the party to Alaska); dwellings, including John Muir's cabin; churches, including a Greek Orthodox church at Sitka, Alaska.

The owner of the album and the photographer are unknown. However, President Woodruff's name is incorrectly spelled ("Woodford" instead of "Woodruff") underneath one of the photographs on the card stock (see fig. 1), suggesting that the album was prepared by someone on board ship who was not a member of the Church.



Fig. 2. President George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith (along with other members of the party) on board the *Willapa* in July 1895. Courtesy of Alaska and Polar Regions Archives, Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks (Accession # 97-196-05).

A cropped version of one of the photographs (see fig. 2) is in the possession of the George Q. Cannon family, suggesting that copies of at least some of the prints were made available to President Woodruff's party.²

Historical Context of the Photographs

According to Wilford Woodruff's biographer, history professor Thomas G. Alexander, the President's body was "showing the increasingly severe ravages of old age. Recovering from bouts with his abdominal disease, his vigor waned in 1895 and 1896 and he was almost constantly under care in 1897 and 1898."³ During the 1895 period of waning vigor, the President's counselors prevailed upon him to seek some relief from his health problems by taking a trip to a lower elevation in the Pacific Northwest. Someone other than President Woodruff wrote the following entry in the President's personal journal on June 22, 1895: "Concluded today, on the advice of my Counselors, to go to the coast, to a lower altitude, in the hope of benefitting my health."⁴ On the following day, he invited Presidents George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith to accompany him on the trip.⁵

The *Deseret Evening News* reported President Woodruff's departure on June 25, 1895:

This afternoon's northern train will carry as passengers bound for the Sound country a party consisting of President Woodruff, wife and daughters, and Presidents George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith, with members of their families. The journey is undertaken for health and pleasure and it is hoped that it will afford especial relief to President Woodruff, who has been suffering for some time past with asthamatic troubles.⁶

President Woodruff recorded in his journal the names of family who traveled with him: "I am accompanied by my wife, Emma, and daughters, Blanche, Alice, and Clara and Ovando Beebe, and Phoebe Scholes, my grand-daughter."⁷ The *Deseret Evening News* announcement continued, "The trip will probably occupy two weeks and before being concluded the party may visit San Francisco. They occupy a private car kindly furnished by Mr. Bancroft of the U[nion] P[acific]."⁸

On their way to the Northwest, the party met Nebraska senator John Mellen Thurston, who told the group of his recent visit to Alaska. The discussion of Alaska's natural beauties excited President Woodruff, who apparently for some time had wanted to visit there. As a result, the party decided to change their itinerary and made arrangements to visit Alaska.⁹

Through the efforts of C. E. Peabody, the general manger of the Alaska Steamship Company, the party arranged to travel on a small steamer, *Willapa*, from Victoria, British Columbia, to Alaska.¹⁰ While in Alaska, President Woodruff and his party visited some of the glaciers and watched

the formation of icebergs of which Glacier bay is full. Thousands upon thousands of tons of ice break off from the front of the glacier and fall with

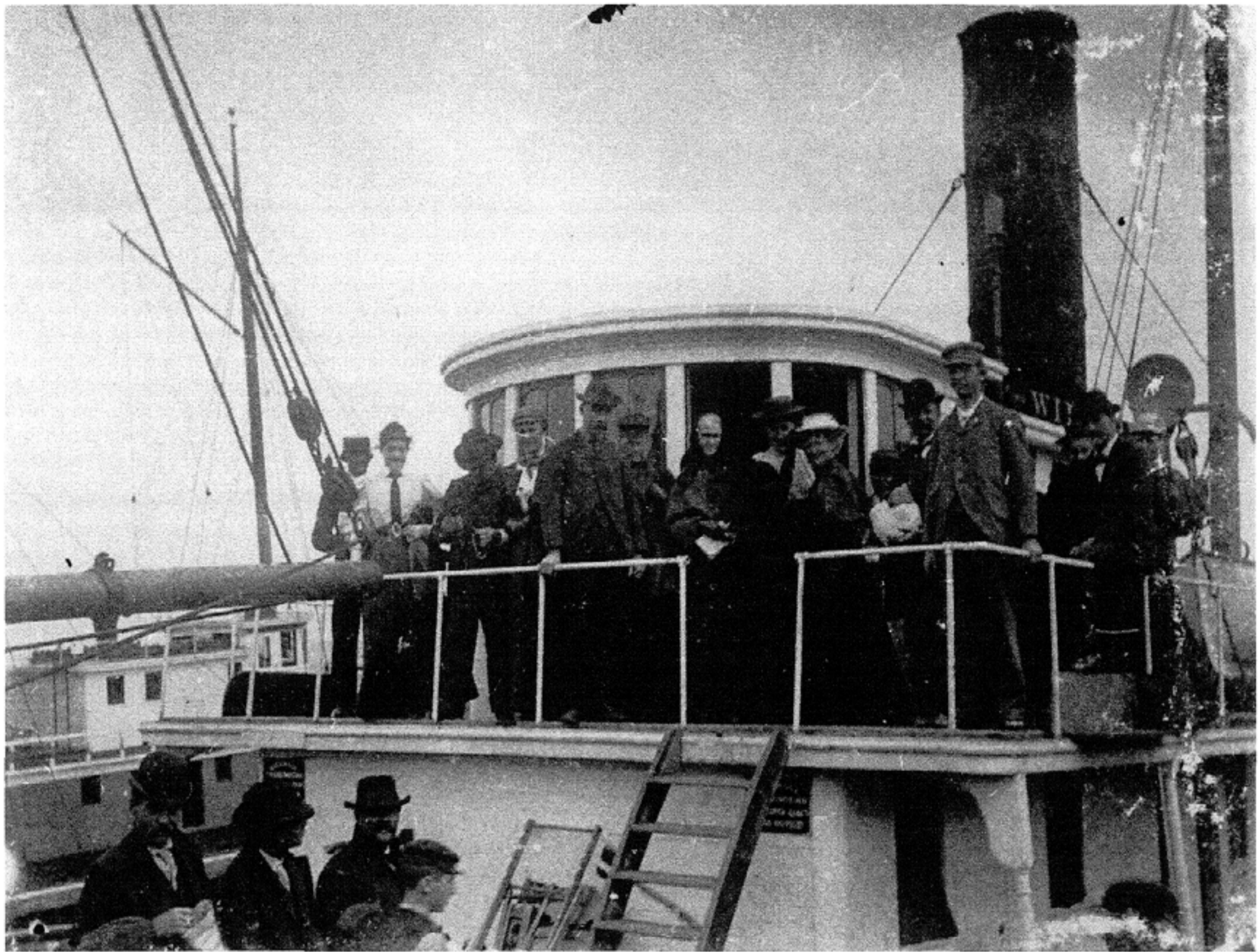


Fig. 3. Passengers on board the *Willapa* in July 1895. Courtesy of Alaska and Polar Regions Archives, Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks (Accession # 97-196-45).

tremendous crash such as the discharge of many cannon might produce. While the vessel lay in front of this glacier the young and active members of the party ventured to explore the sides and the surface of the glacier and they brought back thrilling accounts of the wonderful crevasses and caverns at the bottom of which were rushing torrents and waterfalls.¹¹

In his journal, President Woodruff made several comments about the sights. Regarding the Mina Glacier, he wrote, “The whole ocean was covered with ice bergs, from very large ones down to small ones. The sea was covered in this way as far as the eye could see. We stayed three hours at the glacier. . . . I felt that I had seen in the wonderful glacier one of the finest sights of my life.”¹² The scenes of nature, reported the *Deseret Evening News*, “aroused feelings of admiration and praise for the creator who had raised such monuments to his greatness and power.”¹³

Several of the photographs were probably taken at this point, including two group shots (see figs. 1, 2) that captured the First Presidency on the deck of their steamer in Glacier Bay.

Conclusion

Just six months before Utah gained its long-sought-for statehood, President Woodruff spent several weeks visiting the Northwest and Alaska, seeking relief from health problems that increasingly plagued him as well as taking a much-needed respite from the heavy administrative burdens he shouldered as President of the Church. The *Deseret Evening News* reported the results:

Taking all in all, the grandeur of the scenery and the wonderful natures of the channels and waters through which they passed are indescribable, but all expressed themselves as having had a time of unalloyed enjoyment. President Woodruff's health was very good. He enjoyed his sleep the most of the time and his appetite improved. . . . The rest has been of great benefit to him. He has been free from care as none of the party have received a word from homes since the 6th until this morning.¹⁴

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1. Figures 1 and 2 have been published in a local stake history: *Faith in the Far North: A History of the Fairbanks Alaska Stake* (n.p., 1998), 2, 3.

2. See Davis Bitton, *George Q. Cannon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 362.

3. Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 308.

4. Wilford Woodruff Journal, June 22, 1895, Wilford Woodruff Collection, LDS Church Archives; see also Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–84), 9:356. The entries from June 22, 1895, until July 29, 1895, are in the handwriting of someone other than President Woodruff or his faithful personal secretary, L. John Nuttall. Probably a family member who accompanied him on the trip, the scribe entered the entries as if Woodruff had written them himself, suggesting that he most likely dictated them during the journey.

5. Woodruff Journal, June 23, 1895; see also Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 9:357.

6. "For Rest and Pleasure," *Deseret Evening News*, June 25, 1895, 5.

7. Woodruff Journal, June 25, 1895; see also Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 9:357.

8. "For Rest and Pleasure," 5.

9. "From Alaska," *Deseret Evening News*, July 27, 1895, 5.

10. "From Alaska," 5; Woodruff Journal, June 26, 1895; see also Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 9:357.

11. "From Alaska," 5.

12. Woodruff Journal, July 19, 1895; see also Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 9:361.

13. "From Alaska," 5.

14. "From Alaska," 5.