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“A Man That You Could Not Help Likeing”: Joseph Smith and Nauvoo Portrayed in a Letter by Susannah and George W. Taggart

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The Prophet Joseph Smith's call for members of The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints to gather to Nauvoo, Illinois, had a wide effect once the settlement acquired the trappings of civilization. What had been the obscure riverside village of Commerce soon evidenced expansion and progress: new inhabitants and bustling construction. Among those who gathered to Nauvoo were Washington and Susannah Taggart, who converted to Mormonism in 1841 or 1842 in Peterborough, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Taught the gospel by Elder Eli P. Maginn, the Taggarts soon planned their departure for the Mormon capital. Their eldest son, George Washington Taggart (age 25), and a younger son, Oliver (18), also embraced Elder Maginn's teachings of the Restoration. But three sons—Albert (23), Samuel (21), and Henry (16)—revolted at what they saw as the family's credulity. The converted Taggarts moved to Nauvoo in mid-1843, while the other three sons remained behind.

The document reproduced here is Susannah and George's letter to those three young men, describing the experiences the converted Taggarts had in Nauvoo. Included in the letter are comments on the unfortunate deaths of father Washington and son Oliver in September 1843, just months after settling in Nauvoo; an appraisal of the city; and, perhaps most significantly, a contemporary description of Joseph Smith. A discussion of the Taggart family and the brief but remarkable missionary career of Eli P. Maginn, the elder who raised a base of Mormon strength in southern New Hampshire, introduces the Susannah and George Taggart letter.

Elder Maginn in New Hampshire

Latter-day Saint missionaries initiated their search for “the elect” in New Hampshire in 1832, when Elders Orson Pratt and Lyman E. Johnson, both twenty-one years old, began their ministry in the Granite State. New Hampshire already had a connection to the Saints that made it important in the collective memory of Church members. The Prophet Joseph Smith’s
mother, Lucy Mack Smith, hailed from Gilsum in southwestern New Hampshire. Her extended family and her husband’s paternal grandfather, Asael Smith, also once lived in the area. The restoration message that spread in this region was embraced by such converts as Amasa Lyman and Hazen Aldrich, who would become important Church leaders. A branch of the Church was raised in New Hampshire by mid-1833. Two more were organized by 1835. However, the migration of Mormon converts to central gathering places during the 1830s drained the New Hampshire branches of vital strength.⁴ Then, in 1841, a spark of regeneration in the person of Eli P. Maginn, an Englishman and missionary sent from Nauvoo, touched the south-central village of Peterborough, revitalizing New Hampshire’s Mormon presence.

Elder Maginn made a significant impression upon many of the nearly nine hundred villagers when he walked into Peterborough in 1841, heralding the truth of Mormonism.⁵ Standing “six feet in height, and of rather a commanding appearance,” the young missionary with “an honest, happy smile” was described by one of his hearers as “truly astonishing,” quoting “the scriptures from memory, giving chapter and verse, with the greatest ease and correctness.”⁶ This young missionary with a “magnetic personality attracted people from far and near to his meetings.” In time, the Latter-day Saint meetings in Peterborough provoked interest among the local residents and often were “so crowded that the speakers were accustomed to stand at the windows and address the larger overflow crowds waiting outside as much as they did the people who filled the hall to capacity.”⁷ Maginn served in Peterborough on and off for at least two years while simultaneously spreading the message in other parts of New England.⁸

Elder Maginn’s commitment was remarkable. Writing to Joseph Smith on March 22, 1842, Maginn described his proselyting endeavors. In the three years since leaving Nauvoo, he had “travelled through eighteen States and British [Canadian] Provinces.” Soliciting donations for the Nauvoo Temple and gathering subscriptions to the Times and Seasons, he “preached from one to three times almost every day,” though he was unable to satisfy all of the “one to twenty of the calls for preaching.” And his message was compelling. His letter stated that several dozen people had joined the Church in New Salem, Massachusetts, and Gilsum, New Hampshire, and another thirty-six had embraced the gospel in Peterborough since the previous fall.⁹ Most of these converts resulted from Maginn’s tireless efforts. Within six months of Maginn’s letter to the Prophet, the number of members in Peterborough tripled to one hundred souls, “all in good standing.” More than a dozen came into the Church over the next few months.¹⁰
The Taggarts, Divided over Mormonism

Drawing many Peterborough residents into the gospel net, Maginn was countered by local religious rivals who had been jousting for converts for decades. The town’s religious community refused to acknowledge the Church’s place. One Peterborough resident, George Bryant Gardner, a Mormon convert and blacksmith, was warned that his affiliation with the Saints would cause the loss of customers and his business. But he would not be constrained. “I burst those bands and was baptized by Elder Eli P. Maginn, on Monday, November 20, 1841, in the Cantacook [Contoocook] River,” Gardner rejoiced.

Maginn’s message divided the villagers and polarized families. One unconverted Taggart son, Samuel, wrote to another, Albert, who was living in nearby Wilton. Samuel expressed his disgust with Elder Maginn’s influence among the Peterborough townspeople. He closed his letter in verse:

let mormonism be forgotten
and never brought to mind
let mormonism be forgotten
in the days of old magin.

Several weeks later, an impetuous Henry complained to Albert that their family was “full of Mormonism.” George had been baptized in December 1841, and now the Taggart parents appeared on the verge of joining him. Asking that Albert “excuse the writing for it is bad and i am Mad,” Henry demurred, “I have got a little some thing to tell you that will make you Swear[,] i guess[,] for it did me[,] the old Man [Washington Taggart] is a going into the Drink [waters of baptism] next friday.” It galled him that his parents and brothers had, in his eyes, been duped, but he assured his brother that “by God i don’t work out to get Money to give to Joe Smith no how.” The resistance of their children did not deter Washington and Susannah from baptism. They continued to associate with other Church members in Peterborough and eventually gathered with the body of the Saints in Nauvoo.

The Taggarts in Nauvoo and in the West

Washington, Susannah, and Oliver moved to Nauvoo a short time prior to George and his wife Harriet Bruce Taggart, who arrived there in June 1843, three months before the Taggarts wrote their letter. Fortunately, communication between the divided family members continued after the move. Despite the initial hostility manifested by Samuel and Henry, Albert seems to have remained cordial if not warm. Although he never converted, Albert continued to receive letters from George as late as 1860.
The Taggarts were of Nauvoo’s rank and file. George served as a seventy, worked on the Nauvoo Temple, and joined the Nauvoo Legion band. Life for the family was not easy during their short stay. Washington and Oliver died from “bilious fever” in September 1843. Susannah married Henry Jolley twenty months later, but she died in Nauvoo on October 31, 1845, just six months afterward. George’s wife, Harriet, also died that year, expiring in February “after a lingering illness of 6 Months.” She left behind a thirteen-month-old daughter. George’s commitment to and understanding of his faith, despite reversal and hardship, is evidenced by his resolve soon after his wife’s death: “I think My lot has been one of sorrow and tribulation since I came to Nauvoo but I do not feel like complaining for sorrow and perplexity is the com[m]on lot of mankind here in this life.” With an infant to care for, George married Fanny Parks within five months of Harriet’s passing.

Among the first wave of exiles from Nauvoo in February 1846, George left his wife and daughter in Nauvoo and crossed Iowa with the body of the Saints. He later joined the Mormon Battalion. Serving as a musician in Company B, he and his battalion comrades mustered out in July 1847 in Los Angeles. Returning to Winter Quarters via Salt Lake City, George was reunited with his family that December. They settled in Harris Grove in northern Pottawattamie County, Iowa, along with other Peterborough Saints converted through Maginn’s influence. George and Fanny had three children together prior to their 1852 journey to Utah with other Saints who had evacuated the Missouri River Valley. After arriving in Utah, George entered plural marriage with Clarissa Marina Rogers, with whom he had twelve children. Settling in Salt Lake City, he became a carpenter and millwright. Later he moved his family to Morgan County, Utah, where George (fig. 1) died on June 3, 1893, at the age of seventy-eight.
When Eli Maginn’s preaching soaked through George Taggart’s skin, the dye ran deep. Contrary to his younger brother’s hope in 1842, Mormonism was not forgotten. George’s last known communication to his brother Albert, written in 1860, reads:

I will[!] suppose in [sic] the first place that about two and a half years ago you probably expected if you ever heard any thing concerning Me it would be that My Name was blotted from the Earth, with all the rest of the community to which I belong, but this is not the case neither will[!] it ever happen, for Mormonism so called or the Kingdom of God is in the ascendant and will[!] continue to be so.\textsuperscript{21}

The September 1843 Letter

The document reproduced on the following four pages is one of nine letters found in the Albert Taggart Correspondence collection in the Church Archives. The letters were preserved by Bob Close, Albert Taggart’s great-great-grandson, who contacted Glen L. Taggart, then president of Utah State University and a descendant of George Washington Taggart. The Church obtained the letters through Glen Taggart in 1983. The document is one sheet of lined paper, folded in half to make four pages for writing. Penned in black ink, the letter measures $12\frac{1}{6}'' \times 17\frac{1}{8}''$ (33 cm x 44.1 cm). Spelling and capitalization in the letter reproduced below are the same as that found in the holographic letter. Common to other writing in ante-bellum America, the Taggart letter is mostly bereft of punctuation, particularly Susannah’s portion. To make the document more readable, I have added punctuation and some paragraph breaks. Angle brackets < > signify textual insertions. Square brackets [ ] include my own editorial clarifications. Erasures are indicated as strikethroughs.
Susannah Taggart and George W. Taggart's Letter of September 6th and 10th, 1843

Nauvoo September 6th 1843

dear Children, I now take my pen in hand to write you a line to inform you of my health which is pretty good. But the subject upon which I must write makes the task a painful one for I must tell you, my Children, you are fatherless. your Father was taken with the bowel Complaint before we got here and he never was well of it while he lived, although he kept about till about a week Before he died. I don't think he felt able to do any work and if he Could have got along without, it would have been better for his health, but he could not.

Oliver was taken with the fever and ague about the twenty fifth of July and we thought was getting better but the bowel complaint set in which caused his death. Oliver died the first day of September five oclock in the afternoon and your father about the same time the next day. you may judge what my feelings must be situated as I am in a Land of strangers, though the neighbors are very kind and the people as far as I have any acquaintance are good.

George and Harriet come before Oliver died to help me take care of him your father and him and they are here yet. how long they will stay I don't know.

your father had bought a house Lot and dug a cellar and got it mostly stoned and made calculations for building this fall but sickness and death has frustrated their his designs and whether George will come on and put up a house and live with me, I don't know. but I would say to you all, I want to see you very much and I hope you will in consequence of this dispensation of providence be led to consider of the uncertainty of life, the certainty of death, and the uncertainty as to the time when and be prepared for the same. and now my children I must conclude by wishing you health and prosperity and by saying my hearts desire and prayer to god is that you may be saved.

Susan Taggart

Albert Taggart Samuel W Taggart Henry C Taggart

[P.S.] give my respects to all inquiring friends and the old neighbours and tell them I like the place very well and I dont know but but [sic] my health is as good as when I left peterborough. write and let us know how you do.

Beloved Brothers, as Mother has not filled out this sheet and considering that you would have to pay as much for one page as you would fore
four, I therefore sit down to employ My pen for a few moments think and that it will be for your satisfaction, and it is with peculiar feelings that I sit down to the task, it is hardly neces sary for Me to Make any remar<s> upon what Mother has written for what she has written is even so. Our Father and Our Brother Oliver is dead. Our Mother is as well as common. My Wife and Myself are as well as usual, it has been rather sickly here through the Month of August, not more so however than would be expected concidering the number of inhabitants and the great emigration which has been going on this season. Our Father bought an acre lot within the precincts of the city and paid twenty dollars. He also had got a cellar dug and stoned and the most of the lumber for a house the walls of which He was going to build of brick. the brick he had not bought. He has left, after paying out all expences, something like ten dollars as near as I can guess. He also made his will by which He gave each of us one dollar and the rest to Mother with the request that I should be His executor. how we shall get along I do not know but I am afraid that We shall not be able to go on and build the house, but I shall do what is in My power to get up a house for Mother this fall. but I expect it will be rather a hard case for it is almost impossible for a man here to get a dollar in money for work, for money is scarce and there is but little confidence to be placed in many of the people and those that have money will not put it in circulation. this perhaps you will wonder at seeing, this is called the land of Saints, but let Me tell you that the people are not all Saints that profess to be.

Sunday Sept 10th. I now sit down to finish this letter not having an opportunity since the 6th. I still find Myself in good health and My Wife and Mother the same. I like the place very much but there is Many inconveniences which we will have to undergo in consequence of not having money, but those that have money can live here just as easy as they please. there is a great deal of building going on here this Summer and the place is growing fast. the most of the people are industrious and honest but poor. but there is many as might be suposed that are not honest, and many that belong to the Church which are not to be depended upon. this I expected before I came here, therefore I am not disappointed.

Now something concerning Old Jo, so called [fig. 2]. He is a young looking Man of His age, which is near 38 years and one of the finest looking men there is in the country and He does not pretend to be a man without failings and follies. He is a Man that you could not help liking as a man, setting a side the religious prejudice which the world has raised against him. He is one of the warmest patriots and friends to his country and laws that you ever heard speak on the subject. neither is He puffed up with His greatness as many suppose but on the contrary is familiar with any decent man and is ready to talk upon any subject that any one
Fig. 2. Excerpt of letter from Susannah Taggart and George Washington Taggart to Albert Taggart, Samuel Taggart, and Henry Taggart, September 6–10, 1843, Church Archives. In this section, George describes the Prophet Joseph Smith, referring to him by the name “Old Jo,” the epithet that George’s brothers probably used. Used by permission from Barry Taggart.
That you could not help liking: Joseph Smith and Nauvoo

wishes, and I assure you it would make you wonder to hear Him talk and see the information which comes out of His mouth and it is not in big words either but that which any one can understand. No more of the Prophet at this time.

Since the 6th I have been looking over the situation of things as Father has left them and I find that there is not more than from 3 to 6 dollars in money that Father has left besides Clothes and what has been done out of the house. One thing more and I must close.

We are now expecting trouble from Misoury and that before long, in consequence of Gov Ford refusing to send out a Military force for the purpose of taking Joseph Smith again which our Gov has refused to do. For particulars concerning Fords answer to the Gov of Misoury in relation to this matter you will find Fords letter in the Nauvoo Neighbor of Wednesday Aug 30th 1843, which I think Livingstone & Pevey take.

Now concerning public reports and stories that are abroad in the world concerning Joseph Smith and the Mormons, so called; as a people that is, the “public reports and stories” are as false as the Devil or those that make such stories. I say this as a fact knowing it to be so. Therefore if you ever believed Me to be one of truth is am still the same.

I wish to hear from each one of you and would like to see you but the latter I shall not expect this fall but I am in hopes that I shall see all of you here day. I wish you to write, all of you, and when you do fill up a whole sheet and, if you cant, each of you fill a sheet, take a good big one and all write in it, and it will not cost but 25 cts whereas if you send 3 by mail it will cost 75 cts. and I could raise 5 dollars in the east quicker from My work easier than I can raise 75 cts here. Luther Read & his Wife are sick with the chills and fever. Milton How has been attacked with the fever but I have not heard from him for 3 or 4 days and do not know how he now is. The rest of the peterboro folks I think are all well. This from your Friend & Brother G W Taggart


[P.S.] Brother Henry, Father told Me since we came here that cousin James Taggart owed him so one bushel of rye which he came away and forgot. also the [grain] hoks [hooks] were left at Nichols old house. this account you may look to if you choose and the hooks you may get if you can & if you come out here throw them into a chest for they will be very handy here as such things cost 8 times as much here as it would cost to bring or send them here. Give My respects to all enquiring. please tell Father Bruc's folks that Harriet and Myself are in good health. good bye Henry. My respects to —. G[eorge] W[ashington] T[aggart]

Ms Samuel W. Henry C. Taggart Peterborough N H

[postmarked Nauvoo, September 1843]
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1. An overview of the Taggart family and their early experiences in the Church is found in Forrest Rick McConkie and Evelyn Nichols McConkie, eds., George Washington Taggart, Member of the Mormon Battalion: His Life and Times and His Wives Harriet Atkins Bruce, Fanny Parks, Clarissa Marina Rogers, and Their Ancestors, 1711–1901 (Fort Duchesne, Utah: Jennie’s Family Histories, 1997).

2. Maginn is pronounced Mah-gin’ or Mah-gine’ and variously spelled Magin or McGinn.

3. Susannah and George Washington Taggart to Dear Children [Albert Taggart, Samuel Taggart, and Henry Taggart], September 6 and 10, 1843, in Albert Taggart Correspondence, 1842–1848 and 1860, Church Archives, Family and Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Church Archives).


5. Maginn, said to have been born in England, may have immigrated to North America from England and with other family members joined the Church in or near Scarborough, Ontario, known then as Upper Canada, in 1836–37. Apparently a young man of enormous talent and ability, Maginn, at about the age of nineteen, was ordained a priest at a December 1837 conference held in Scarborough. He immediately embarked on what became his missionary ministry. His brief but productive career came to a close on April 27, 1844, in Lowell, Massachusetts, where he died at age twenty-six from consumption (tuberculosis). George Abbott Morison and Etta M. Smith, History of Peterborough, New Hampshire, 2 vols. (Rindge, N.H.: Richard R. Smith, 1954), 1218; Richard E. Bennett, “A Study of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Upper Canada, 1830–1850” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 56–59; Charles Henry [Hales], Hales Family Biographical Sketches, Church Archives; Charles Hales autobiography, in Windows: A Mormon Family, comp. Kenneth Glyn Hales (Tucson: Skyline Printing, 1985), 33–34; Vital Records of Lowell, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849, 4 vols. (Salem, Mass.: Essex Institute, 1930), 4202; Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register: 10 December 1845 to 8 February 1846 (Salt Lake City: Temple Index Bureau, 1974), 89.


6. “Mormonism,” Times and Seasons 4 (May 15, 1843): 206. This article, originally published in the Boston Bee and signed “A Seeker after Truth” (likely a Church member in the Boston, Massachusetts, area), identified Maginn as being “24 years of age, though his appearance is that of a man farther advanced in years.”


8. After Maginn’s early success and the establishment of a substantial Church presence in the village, Peterborough became a regular stop for missionaries traveling to and from New England. In Peterborough, Brigham Young and Orson Pratt, returning to Nauvoo after short missions in New England, heard conclusively that Joseph and Hyrum Smith had been murdered. It was in Peterborough on July 16, 1844, that Brigham Young stated, “The first thing which I thought of was, whether Joseph had taken the keys of the kingdom with him from the earth; brother Orson Pratt sat on my left; we were both leaning back on our chairs. Bringing my hand down on my knee, I said the keys of the kingdom are right here with the Church.” Watson, Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 170. A local tradition arose among Peterborough residents that in their town “Brigham Young first received news that he was the head of the Mormon Church.” Morison and Smith, History of Peterborough, 1:190.


12. As quoted in McConkie and McConkie, Taggart, 2.

13. Samuel W. Taggart to Albert Taggart, May 31, 1842, Albert Taggart Correspondence.

14. George’s baptism date is confirmed in George Washington Taggart, Notebook, 1837–1857, Church Archives.

15. Henry Taggart to Albert Taggart, July 20, 1842, Albert Taggart Correspondence.

16. Taggart, Notebook; George Washington Taggart to Albert Taggart, March 5, 1843; Samuel Taggart to Albert Taggart, April 11, 1845; George Washington Taggart to Albert Taggart, September 9, 1860, all in Albert Taggart Correspondence.


18. George Washington Taggart to Albert Taggart, March 5, 1845.

19. George Washington Taggart, Register of Family Births and Deaths [ca. 1877], Church Archives; Taggart, Notebook; McConkie and McConkie, Taggart, 8, 10, 15, 18, 21–23.

Harriet Goodrich Collett, “George Washington Taggart,” in Kate B. Carter, comp., 
*Treasures of Pioneer History*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1955), 
4:470–72.


22. This portion of the document is written by Susannah Law Taggart (1786–1845), 
wife of Washington Taggart (1786–1843) and mother of six sons, the oldest five of whom 
lived to maturity. Susannah was born to Reuben Law (1751–1840) and Alice Piper Law 
(1759–1821) in Sharon, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. She married Washington 
Taggart on January 16, 1816. Together they had six sons, the youngest, Reuben, 
dying within a year of birth. Susannah evidently became a Latter-day Saint in July 1842 
at the same time as her husband. She immigrated to Nauvoo with her husband and 
her son Oliver, probably in the spring of 1843. Writing from Nauvoo, she addressed her 
sons Albert (1818–1904), Samuel W. (1820–87), and Henry Curtis Taggart (1826–62), all 
of whom lived in or near Peterborough, New Hampshire, at the time this letter was 
written. After Washington’s death, she married Henry Jolley on May 4, 1845. She died 
on October 31, 1845, in Nauvoo. McConkie and McConkie, *Taggart*, 105–13; Dunbar, 
*Diary*, 91, 142.

23. Washington Taggart, son of James (1742–1815) and Elizabeth McNay (or 
McNee) Taggart (ca. 1750–1814), was born in Peterborough, Hillsborough County, New 
Hampshire, the youngest of eight children. His father and grandfathers, all veterans of 
the Revolutionary War, were among the first settlers of Peterborough. Washington 
became a Latter-day Saint in late July 1842. He immigrated to Nauvoo the following 
year, and he died within months of his arrival. McConkie and McConkie, *Taggart*, 
105–14, 128.

24. Oliver Hazard Perry Taggart (1824–43), the fourth son of Washington and 
Susannah Taggart, was born in Sharon, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Bap-
tized a Latter-day Saint probably in 1842, he immigrated to Nauvoo with his parents in 
the late spring of 1843 and died on September 1, 1843, having never married. McConkie 

25. On September 6, 1843, the *Nauvoo Neighbor* published notice of the deaths of 
Oliver and Washington Taggart. Both died, it was reported, of “bilious fever.” Absent 
the exacting postmortem medical analysis employed today, the terms *bilious fever* and 
*ague* then described malaria with its symptoms of debilitating chills, fever, sweating, 
and disorientation that often led to death. While Susannah Taggart plainly states that 
she son died on September 1, 1843, and that her husband died the following day, some 
Taggart family records indicate that Washington died on August 2 and Oliver on 
August 11. Other family sources state that Washington died on September 20. The dates 
Susannah gives are recorded in George Washington Taggart’s Register of Family Births 
and Deaths and circumstantially confirmed in Cook, *Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages*, 75.

on May 7, 1843. She was born in Peterborough to Peter (1790–1850) and Eliza French 
Bruce (1798–1874), the third of their eleven children. Likely the only member of her parents’ 
family to become a Latter-day Saint, Harriet was baptized in Peterborough on 
February 20, 1842, by Eli P. Maginn. She and her husband moved to Nauvoo the follow-
ning year. They had one child, Eliza Ann, born January 28, 1844. Harriet died in Nauvoo 
on February 19, 1845. McConkie and McConkie, *Taggart*, 4, 165–76; 182–83; Taggart, 
Register of Family Births and Deaths.

27. Washington Taggart purchased block 29, lot 2, in Nauvoo, seven blocks north 

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol40/iss2/13
28. Albert Taggart (1818–1904), second son of Susannah and Washington Taggart, was born in Sharon, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. He married Mary E. Gowing in 1849. They had two children. He did not become a Latter-day Saint. McConkie and McConkie, Taggart, 112–13; Albert Smith, History of the Town of Peterborough, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1876), 307.

29. Samuel W. Taggart (1820–87), third son of Susannah and Washington Taggart, was born in Sharon, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. He married Catherine Turner in 1845. They had one child. He did not become a Latter-day Saint. McConkie and McConkie, Taggart, 112.

30. Henry Curtis Taggart (1826–62), fifth son of Susannah and Washington Taggart, was born in Sharon, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Never joining the Church, he married Fidelia Twitchell in 1845 but was later killed during the Civil War at the second battle of Bull Run. His body was not recovered. McConkie and McConkie, Taggart, 112–13.

31. This portion of the document was written by George Washington Taggart (1816–93), who was born in Sharon, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire, the son of Washington and Susannah Law Taggart.

32. Susannah Law Taggart died in Nauvoo on October 31, 1845, at the age of 59. Taggart, Register of Family Births and Deaths.


Lyndon Cook’s compilation of deaths in early Nauvoo suggests that the year 1843 was, as the Taggart letter indicates, a sickly time for many of Nauvoo’s residents. There were about 350 deaths in Nauvoo for 1843, the highest number of deaths of any year the Saints occupied the city. The sickliest period was the three months between August and October, when 57 percent of the year’s deaths occurred. Cook, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 1–87. It should be noted that Cook’s figures vary considerably from those in M. Guy Bishop, Vincent Lacey, and Richard Wixon, “Death at Mormon Nauvoo, 1843–1845,” Western Illinois Regional Studies 9, no. 2 (fall 1986): 73.

34. Homes constructed of brick were a later phase in Nauvoo. The earlier, and majority of, homes in the city were frame or log homes. See Givens, In Old Nauvoo, 20–30.

35. It is not known whether Susannah Taggart’s home was ever completed.

36. Due to the lack of currency circulating in Nauvoo, residents primarily used a barter economy. For an overview of Nauvoo’s economic struggle, see Robert Bruce Flanders, Money Kings in the Mississippi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 144–78.
37. Earlier in the year on April 13, 1843, in a sermon before newly arrived British converts and “a great Multitude of others assembled at the Temple,” Joseph Smith is reported by Willard Richards to have stated:

Where a crowd is flocking from all parts of the world of different minds; religions; &c, there [will be some] who do not live up to the commandments— [there will be] & designing characters who would turn you aside & lead you astray.—speculators who would get away your property. therefore it is necessary we should have an order here, [&] when emigrants arrive to instruct them concerning these things. Joseph Smith, Diaries, April 13, 1843, Joseph Smith Collection, 1827–1844, Church Archives.

This entry has been published with slightly different punctuation in Joseph Smith Jr., An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith, ed. Scott H. Faulring (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 361 (April 13, 1843); and Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 191 (April 13, 1843).

38. “The one industry which employed more labor and capital probably than all others in Nauvoo combined was the building industry.” Flanders, Nauvoo, 156.

39. Taggart’s reference to “Old Jo, so called,” is probably a response to the language used by his unbelieving and antagonistic brothers. Contemporaneous Latter-day Saints generally referred to the Prophet by his complete name, “Joseph.”

40. Joseph Smith had for some time expressed contempt over the manner in which the Saints had been treated in Missouri during the 1830s. The repeated attempts of Missouri officials to extradite him for escape from Liberty Jail and for alleged complicity in the attempted murder of ex-governor Lilburn W. Boggs, as well as state and national governmental indifference to Mormon pleas for justice and redress for Missouri losses, provoked the Prophet to speak out in the summer of 1843 on subjects such as liberty, constitutional law, and citizens’ rights. It is apparent that Taggart had heard at least one of these discourses after his arrival in Nauvoo. See also Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 216–29 (June 30, 1843): 236–37 (August 6, 1843); 242–43 (August 13, 1843).

41. Other immigrant-converts who came to Nauvoo described Joseph Smith in similar language. In early 1843, Jonah R. Ball wrote of meeting the Prophet: “When we all had a social chat I found Joseph familiar in conversation easy & unassuming. I found no syconphany [sic]. there is that came in or went out not even taking their hats or caps off their heads. . . . he is what the Mormons represent him to be & the stories about him are false.” Jonah Randolph Ball to Dear Brother [Harvey Howard] and Sister, January 15, 1843, Letters 1842–1843, Church Archives. See also William Clayton’s December 1840 description of Joseph Smith in James B. Allen, “To the Saints in England: Impressions of a Mormon Immigrant,” BYU Studies 18, no. 3 (1978): 478–79.

42. This event stems from the arrest by Missouri officials of Joseph Smith in Dixon, Illinois, on June 23, 1843. After Joseph Smith’s maneuver to free himself from arrest, Missouri governor Thomas Reynolds requested Illinois governor Thomas Ford to employ state militiamen to arrest and then extradite the Prophet to Missouri. Ford declined Reynolds’s request. History of the Church, 5:533–36. For a summary of the entire incident, see Donna Hill, Joseph Smith, the First Mormon (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), 324–34.

43. This is undoubtedly a reference to Jonas Livingston and Merrill Peavy. Jonas Livingston, A History of Illinois (Chicago: Albert O. Stevens & Co., 1886), 489. Merrill Peavy was born to a native who, with his wife, Angelina Morse, was baptized into the Church. They did not immigrate to Nauvoo with other
Peterborough members. Later one of the most prominent citizens of the community, Livingston served as president of two local railroads as well as being involved in other significant community matters. Livingston may have been a relative of Susannah Law Taggart. Susan Jolley to Samuel Jolley, October 2, 1845, Albert Taggart Correspondence; Morison and Smith, History of Peterborough, 1:128, 196, 308–11, 360, 375, 2:684. Merrill Peavy and his wife, Abiel, were both Church members in Peterborough. Morison and Smith, History of Peterborough, 1:190, 196.

44. Luther Reed (1797–1871), a New Hampshire native, was baptized in Peterborough by Eli P. Maginn on November 7, 1841. He and his wife Charity Buell (1801–?) gathered to Nauvoo and were endowed in the Nauvoo Temple before their departure west. Luther Reed lived in Utah, married Clarissa Caulkins and Elizabeth Sophia Bailey, and died in Bloomington, Idaho. Black, Membership, 36:311–14; Temple Index Bureau, Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register, 221.

45. Samuel Milton Howe (1824–?), a former Peterborough resident, was the son of Asahel (1798–1844) and Fannie Spafford Howe (1802–?). Asahel, Fannie, and three of their children, including Milton, converted to the Church. Asahel died in Nauvoo from bilious fever in August 1844. Milton Howe married Jane Sanford (1830–63) in 1845 and was endowed in the Nauvoo Temple before moving west. Milton and Jane had four children. Milton, “a well-educated man” who “had known no hard work,” later abandoned his faith and family and returned to the East. Jane remained faithful, remarried, and died in Provo, Utah. Morison and Smith, History of Peterborough, 1:195; Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register, 257; Cook, Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 40; Louisa Howe Brown, Family History, 1924, 1, Church Archives.

46. Peterborough locals believed that “one hundred and eight [Latter-day Saint] residents of Peterborough went on to the West,” many of whom undoubtedly lived for a time in Nauvoo. Morison and Smith, History of Peterborough, 1:191.

47. At this point, the text contains an undecipherable figure.

48. This may have reference to non-Mormon Thomas Nichols, whose sister-in-law was Naamah Carter of Peterborough. Naamah later became a plural wife of Brigham Young. Morison and Smith, History of Peterborough, 1:191, 513. “Grain hooks” refer to reaping hooks, or sickles, used at the time to harvest wheat.

49. “Father Bruce” refers to Harriet Atkins Bruce Taggart’s father, Peter, then living in Peterborough. Harriet Bruce Taggart’s family probably did not join the Church. McConkie and McConkie, Taggart, 164–83.

50. This symbol encircled by a seal mark appears to be the initials “TH,” standing for “Taggart, Henry.”