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“Full of Courage”
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and BYU’s Kane Collection as Lodestone

William P. MacKinnon

This young man KANE . . . now gratuitously and voluntarily asks to be heard by the present Administration before his bosom friend, and mild, meek, and humble Christian companion BRIGHAM YOUNG is removed from the office of Governor of Utah. . . . As soon as he lectures the President on his duties on Mormonism, I may refer to him again, but trust the necessity will not exist.
—“Verastus” to Editor, New York Daily Times, May 24, 1857

Col. Kane from his long association with that people, has much influence with the Mormons, and especially with their chief. He thinks he can do much to accomplish an amicable peace between them and the United States. . . . He is full of courage, and if his judgment is correct, he may be able to avert a war of extermination against a poor deluded race.
—James C. Van Dyke to President James Buchanan, December 9, 1857

I am here not only because of my interest in the Thomas L. Kane papers but also out of respect and affection for David J. Whittaker. As the Curator of Nineteenth-Century Western and Mormon Americana, Whittaker has not only acquired and organized one of the great concentrations of materials bearing on this subject, he has published a three-volume register of these Kane materials that is itself a remarkable scholarly work. This study is a collector’s item, and after a half-century of research and writing in this field, I think I know a master of his discipline when I see one. Accordingly, I congratulate both BYU and its Harold B. Lee Library for supporting not only Whittaker but also his efforts to acquire outstanding source materials.

For a comprehensive understanding of the complicated—even daunting—subject of Thomas L. Kane’s Utah War involvement, one needs to
plunge into the work of Kane’s first biographer, Albert L. Zobell Jr.; the Utah War analyses of my former collaborator, the late Richard D. Poll; my own book titled At Sword’s Point; and, above all else, Matthew J. Grow’s splendid new biography, “Liberty to the Downtrodden.”5

This article, however, is not meant to be a complete explication of Kane’s Utah War involvement but rather has a more limited focus. In addition to honoring David Whittaker and remembering Thomas L. Kane, I will explore the significance of Kane’s role in helping to resolve peacefully the Utah War of 1857–58 by exploring five questions:

- What was the Utah War?
- When and how did Thomas L. Kane become involved in it?
- What were his motives?
- Was Kane a Latter-day Saint?
- What was the significance of his efforts?

In dealing with these five questions, I will discuss the Kane collection at Brigham Young University and show how it is an indispensable tool for pursuing this subject. I view this collection not only as the Eldorado of Kane primary sources, but also as a sort of basic compass essential to navigating Kane’s very complex psyche as he, in turn, maneuvered through a murky and still poorly understood federal-territorial conflict.

The Utah War: What Was It?

In one sense, the Utah War was President James Buchanan’s (fig. 1) 1857 effort to replace Brigham Young as governor of Utah Territory and to install his successor with an army escort of twenty-five hundred troops.6 It was a change that Young resisted with guerrilla tactics until a controversial but peaceful settlement was reached a year later, largely through the unofficial mediating efforts of Thomas L. Kane, who shuttled between Salt Lake City and Fort Bridger for that purpose.

The war did not just well up soon after President Buchanan’s inauguration because of a single critical incident. Instead, the confrontation was nearly ten years in the making, with Mormon-federal relations—already poor in Missouri and Illinois before the 1847 arrival of Mormons in the Salt Lake Valley—steadily deteriorating immediately thereafter. By Buchanan’s inauguration on March 4, 1857, virtually every interface between the territorial and federal governments had become a battleground.

There were conflicts over the selection and performance of mail contractors; relations with Utah’s Indian tribes; matters of land ownership and the accuracy of federal surveys; financial stewardship of congressional appropriations for the territory; the administration of Utah’s federal courts and criminal justice system; and, perhaps most important, the background, competence, and behavior of appointees to federal office.
in Utah. In addition to these administrative pinch points, there were highly public, event-driven upsets over the 1852 polygamy announcement; the uneven treatment of emigrants passing through Utah to the Pacific Coast; responsibility for a series of uninvestigated, unprosecuted murders; repeated congressional rejection of statehood for Deseret; and a related controversy over whether Young was seeking Mormon independence outside the Union.

At the heart of these clashes was the disconnect implicit in conflicting philosophies of governance: Young’s vision of Utah as a millennially oriented theocracy operating under his autocratic leadership; and the U.S. government’s view of Utah as a federal territory functioning under republican principles as a congressional ward through a federally sworn governor. What Governor Young perceived as a form of intolerable colonialism, the federal establishment viewed as the normal path to statehood established by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.7

In a sense, the conflict was the armed confrontation over power and authority during 1857–58 between the civil-religious leadership of Utah Territory, led by Governor Young, and the federal leadership of President James Buchanan—a contest that pitted perhaps the nation’s largest, most experienced territorial militia (Nauvoo Legion) against an expeditionary force that ultimately grew to involve almost one-third of the U.S. Army. It was the nation’s most extensive and expensive military undertaking during the period between the Mexican and Civil wars. In my view, it was not a religious crusade against Mormonism to eradicate polygamy, an effort that came only after the Civil War.8 Neither was it a campaign to suppress a Mormon “rebellion,” a term that Buchanan used warily as do I, although at the point in fall 1857 when Governor Young declared martial law, forbade free travel within and across Utah (fig. 2), and issued orders to kill U.S. Army officers and their mountaineer guides, it becomes more difficult to avoid the “R” word.

When I entered this field of study in 1958, I used the term “Utah Expedition” for not only the United States Army brigade commanded by

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7 I use the term “Utah Expedition” for not only the United States Army brigade commanded by Governor Young in 1858, but also the Mormon army under Young, Brigham Young’s militia, and the U.S. Army in the region. This term emphasizes the magnitude and scope of the conflict, which involved nearly one-third of the U.S. Army and was the nation’s most extensive military undertaking during the period between the Mexican and Civil wars.

8 The term “rebellion” was used warily by Buchanan and others, as it could have serious legal and political implications. It is important to note that the conflict was not primarily religious but rather a struggle for political and territorial control.
Proclamation by the Governor, September 15, 1857.

We are invaded by a hostile force who are evidently assailing us to accomplish our overthrow and destruction.

For the last twenty-five years we have trusted officials of the Government, from Constables and Justices to Judges, Governors, and Presidents, only to be scorned, held in derision, insulted and betrayed. Our houses have been plundered and then burned, our fields laid waste, our principal men burned while under the pledged faith of the government for their safety, and our families driven from their homes to find shelter in the barren wilderness and that pitiful among hostile savages which were denied them in the bested bosoms of Christianity and civilization.

The Constitution of our common country guarantees unto us all that we do now or have ever claimed.

If the Constitutional rights which pertain unto us as American citizens were extended to Utah, according to the spirit and meaning thereof, and fairly and impartially administered, it is all that we could ask, all that we have ever asked.

Our opponents have availed themselves of prejudice existing against us because of our religious faith, to send out a formidable host to accomplish our destruction. We have had no privilege, no opportunity of defending ourselves from the false, foul, and unjust aspersions against us before the nation. The Government has not condescended to cause an investigating committee or other person to be sent to inquire into and ascertain the truth, as is customary in such cases.

We know these aspersions to be false, but that avails us nothing. We are condemned unheard and forced to an issue with an armed, mercenary host, which has been sent against us at the instigation of anonymous letter writers ashamed to further the base, dangerous falsehoods which they have given to the public; of corrupt officials who have brought false accusation against us to screen themselves in their own infamy; and of birthing priests and howling editors who prostitute the truth for filthy lucre’s sake.

The issue which has thus been forced upon us compels us to resort to the great first law of self-preservation and stand in our own defense, a right guaranteed unto us by the genius of the institutions of our country, and upon which the Government is based.

Our duty to ourselves, to our families, requires us not to tamely submit to be driven and slain, without an attempt to preserve ourselves. Our duty to our country, our holy religion, our God, to freedom and liberty, requires that we should not quietly stand still and see these fetters forging around, which are calculated to enslave and bring us in subjection to an unlawful military disposition which we can only endure [in a country of Constitutional law] from magration, tyranny, and oppression.

Therefore I, Brigham Young, Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Territory of Utah, in the name of the People of the United States in the Territory of Utah,

1st—Forbid all armed forces, of every description, from coming into this Territory under any pretense whatever.

2nd—That all the forces in said Territory hold themselves in readiness to march, at a moment’s notice, to repel any and all such invasion.

3rd—Martial law is hereby declared to exist in this Territory, from and after the publication of this Proclamation, and no person shall be allowed to pass or repass into, or through, or from this Territory, without a permit from the proper officer.

Given under my hand and seal at Great Salt Lake City, Territory of Utah, this fifteenth day of September, A. D. Eighteen hundred and fifty seven and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty second.

BRIGHAM YOUNG.

Fig. 2. Proclamation by the Governor, September 15, 1857. As the U.S. Army approached Utah’s northeastern frontier, Governor Brigham Young proclaimed martial law, forbidding entrance to Utah without permission from him or other territorial officers. This extraordinary decree, aimed at the army’s Utah Expedition, shocked the country and soon resulted in Young’s indictment for treason by a federal grand jury at Fort Bridger (dropped without trial in 1859). L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol48/iss4/6
Albert Sidney Johnston (fig. 3) but also for the broader conflict itself. Decades later professor Richard D. Poll led me to understand that the label Utah Expedition overlooks the fact that there was a large group of people engaged on the other side who had nothing to do with the army, specifically Utah Territory’s Mormon population. Since then I have used the term “Utah War,” and have reserved “Utah Expedition” solely for the uniformed federal and camp followers involved.

The flip side of this parochialism is the term “Johnston’s Army,” an ethnocentric label used in Utah and few other places. To me it is an understandable but unfortunate term that trivializes the war by personalizing it in much the same way that “Seward’s Folly” was once used to ridicule the federal government’s purchase of Alaska. The term is especially inappropriate in my view since Johnston was not the expedition’s initial commander and, once appointed, there were efforts on two occasions to supersede him. I was surprised to learn through researcher Ardis Parshall that the war’s participants did not even use the term Johnston’s Army. The label took root in Mormon Utah only decades later for political and cultural reasons, and the term “Buchanan’s Blunder” also came into vogue. Elder Boyd K. Packer used the latter label at the semiannual general conference in October 2008, so old ways are sometimes enduring.

While on the subject of terminology, I would note that within the institutional army there is an aversion to using the term “war” for this conflict. The military prefers to call it a campaign or an expedition. The army’s logic is that there was neither a congressional declaration of war nor pitched battles between massed troops and wholesale bloodletting on the scale of Civil War battles. Quite true, but I continue to think that “war” is an appropriate, common-sense term—as with the way we discuss the “Indian Wars.” Consider the following points: (1) for years Camp Floyd, Utah, near Salt Lake City, was the nation’s largest army garrison; (2) the confrontation was so costly that it virtually bankrupted the U.S. Treasury.

Fig. 3. Albert Sidney Johnston, commander of the U.S. Army’s Utah Expedition. Johnston was a key figure during Kane’s involvement in this armed Mormon-federal confrontation. In the midst of the campaign, Johnston was promoted from colonel to brevet brigadier general. He died at the battle of Shiloh in April 1862 as the Confederacy’s senior general in the field. Library of Congress.
and devastated Utah’s economy; (3) the conflict’s financing forced the resignation of the secretary of war, John B. Floyd (fig. 4); (4) the citizens’ move south—an effort to flee the approaching army—put thirty thousand Mormon refugees on the road from northern Utah to Provo and perhaps beyond; (5) Brigham Young and scores of others were indicted by a federal grand jury for treason; and (6) the Mountain Meadows massacre alone, the conflict’s greatest atrocity, was one of the worst incidents of organized mass murder against unarmed civilians in the nation’s history. For me “Utah War” is an appropriate term.

Kane’s Involvement:
When and How?

My guess is that most people who are aware of Thomas L. Kane’s famous Utah War involvement think of this as an activity that began midway through the conflict with his January 4, 1858, departure from Philadelphia for Salt Lake City via Panama and California. How, as well as when, all this came about is not well understood. The fact is that Kane entered the picture in March 1857 even before the conflict started. He did so in response to a letter written by Young on January 7, 1857, asking for his help in lobbying the incoming president whose name Young had just learned after a two-month postelection communications lag. Young wanted to ensure that he kept his gubernatorial appointment, the term of which had expired in 1854.  

After reading Richard E. Bennett’s article, readers might not find this request by Young a strange one in view of Kane’s earlier substantial service to the Church, especially through his 1846 trip to Iowa and 1850 lecture on Mormonism in Philadelphia. But, surprisingly, there are telltale signs that Messrs. Young and Kane had not communicated with one another for quite some time—perhaps as long as a year or more. Young had been busy with, if not distracted by, a host of church, political, and medical problems. Kane, in turn, had been preoccupied with illness as well as daunting personal and family responsibilities—even tragedies.
What drove Young to reestablish contact with Kane by letter in early January 1857 were two factors: the realization that his hold on Utah’s governorship was extremely precarious, given President Pierce’s refusal to reappoint him; and the imminent inauguration of Pierce’s successor—Buchanan—would undoubtedly churn the federal patronage, including the positions of territorial appointees. With the March 4 inauguration fast approaching and severe time lags in winter mail service between Salt Lake City and the Atlantic Coast, Young realized that he had a very narrow window of opportunity during which to influence the incoming president’s appointment decisions. To Kane he wrote:

Again do I venture to break the silence of intervening months, and draw upon your time and perhaps patience long enough to read a line or two from your old friend. Well, we in the mountains are still alive. . . . In regard to other matters, through the Providence of God and doubtless the influence and favor of kind friends I am still Governor of Utah. In this I shall ever appreciate the kindness of Col. Kane and shall hold myself in readiness to reciprocate whenever opportunity shall occur.16

Young closed this long letter with another, even more convoluted summation about his gubernatorial role, “We thus recommend ourselves to you honestly believing that we are as willing to serve our country (this part of it) as we are to have anybody else to serve it for us, and better acquainted with the merits and conditions of the people, better capable of doing it correctly.”17 On January 31, concerned that weather might delay this letter’s eastbound passage, an anxious Young wrote a follow-up message to Kane. Young commented, “We are satisfied with the appointment of Buchanan as future president, we believe he will be a friend to the good, Pres. Fillmore was our friend, but Buchanan will not be a whit behind.”18

When he received Young’s first letter in late March, Kane swung into action, doing so at a time when the new president and his cabinet were exhausted and beleaguered—working feverishly night and day to fill thousands of federal appointments ranging from those for country postmasters to territorial governors. Kane’s first overture came through a March 21 letter to Buchanan pleading that he retain Young as Utah’s governor. Kane proposed that Buchanan do so not by reappointing him—an act that would have triggered a controversial confirmation process in the U.S. Senate—but rather by the technical gambit of taking no action to remove or replace him.19 On April 1, one of Young’s agents in New York reported to him,

I had a long talk with Col. Kane yesterday; he informed me that he received a letter from you a short time since. He has written to the President and also to Judge Black Attorney General of the U.S. in relation to Utah, and the [negative] reports, urging your reappointment, how it will terminate [turn out] he says he cannot at present determine, but he
will do his best, and use his utmost endeavors and influence for you and the Welfare of Utah. His feelings are good. 20

Two weeks later Elder John Taylor, also in New York, added the following news:

Col. Kane has been using all his influence with the administration; he is a true friend. In an interview that I had with him lately, he informed me that he had received a letter from you & was desirous to carry out your request as far as possible, he did not think it prudent, however to recommend all [your nominees]; but seemed more desirous to first secure the governorship. 21

Kane himself reported to Young that, there exists where there shd. not be a spirit of determined hostility to your interests. The best thing that can be done at present, as I am advised, is to obtain delay—at any price. I have accordingly procured an influential friend to represent to Mr. Buchanan how complicated as well as embarrassing the whole Utah question was to be considered. . . . This is about the drift of my own letter. . . . Mr. Buchanan is a timorous man, as well as just now an overworked one. 22

Notwithstanding Kane’s upbeat interactions with Mormon leaders on the Atlantic Coast, his lobbying efforts on Young’s behalf took place during a period of great personal turbulence. Kane was beset by a continued grief over the recent death of his older brother Elisha, an internationally famous explorer; the financial and emotion collapse of his father-in-law; his own prolonged illness; and plans for an expedition to the Arctic inspired by Elisha that his family considered and rejected on March 27. 23 Although Thomas was neither the Democratic Party stalwart nor the Buchanan intimate that his father was, the younger Kane had good reason to assume the president would give his letter and offer to visit the White House careful thought as the cabinet focused on Utah affairs.

When his overtures to Washington were met with silence, Kane interpreted this as an embarrassing, offensive rebuff compounded by what he perceived as indiscreet handling of his correspondence by the administration. The latter resulted in humiliating public ridicule by the venomous, debauched Judge W. W. Drummond through pseudonymous letters about Kane written to various newspapers. After attempting to build a backfire against Drummond by collecting and forwarding to the administration material damaging to the judge’s reputation collected by Elders John Taylor and George A. Smith, Kane notified Brigham Young of the failure to influence Buchanan. 24 Kane then withdrew from Mormon affairs, and retreated with his family from Philadelphia to Pennsylvania’s mountains. What Kane and Young did not know was that on March 19 and 20
Buchanan and his cabinet had already received three new batches of materials from Utah that—true or not—destroyed any remaining vestiges of Young’s political viability. These were inputs that one Buchanan cabinet secretary informed Utah Territorial Delegate John M. Bernhisel were interpreted as a Mormon “declaration of war.” What followed in short order was the administration’s decision to appoint a new governor and to provide him with some sort of substantial military escort.25

In May, a few weeks before General Winfield Scott (fig. 5) issued orders to the army launching the Utah Expedition, Kane received Young’s second letter—the one written at the end of January. On May 21, in what almost sounds like a valedictory letter, he replied to Young in fatalistic fashion:

I am still without good news to communicate. We can place no reliance upon the President: he succumbs in more respects than one to outside pressure. You can see from the papers how clamorous it is for interference with Utah affairs. Now Mr. Buchanan has not heart enough to save his friends from being thrown over to stop the mouths of a pack of Yankee editors. . . I thank you for writing to me. I am growing old enough to prize the friends whom Time has left me. . . . Yet this writing, my friend Young;—does it keep down the miles of waste which seem to be growing up between us every year? I wish I had your hand to grasp. I write myself, and it seems but form.26

Several years later, after Kane had criticized Bernhisel for also withdrawing from Washington during spring 1857—thereby creating a lamentable vacuum in Mormon lobbying capabilities at a crucial time27—Bernhisel countered with a polite criticism of his own communicated to one of Buchanan’s closest political confidantes. That advisor, in turn, reported Bernhisel’s comments to Kane:

**Fig. 5.** Brevet Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, the army’s general in chief at mid-century. In 1857 he unsuccessfully opposed a move on Utah until 1858 and was unaware of Kane’s involvement until reports from Fort Bridger reached him in early summer 1858. From the 1862 class album, United States Military Academy Library, West Point.
[He] expressed great regret that you had not thought of going out [to Utah] at an earlier date; and he had no doubt that had you gone there during the latter part of the summer [of 1857] and given them assurances of the prosecution of offenders and of the pardon from the President of such persons as they might desire, his belief was that you could have exerted a powerful influence in persuading his people to return to their allegiance to the U.S.28

This, then, was how Kane first came to become involved with what soon unfolded as the Utah War. This is not the place to describe the equally complex story of how Kane spent summer 1857, how and why Young reached out to him again in August and September 1857, and how Kane ultimately returned to the fray of Mormon affairs with two trips to the White House on November 10 and December 26, 1857, the genesis of his 1858 mediating mission to Utah.29 It is relevant, though, to plumb the depths of his motivations in undertaking such a task.

Kane’s Motives: The “Why” Question

Why, at the end of December 1857, would Kane return from the White House to Philadelphia, quit his job as clerk of his father’s U.S. district court, and—to the accompaniment of Judge Kane’s disapproval and predictions of failure—convince his wife of his need to hurry off at age thirty-five in the dead of winter to Utah in pursuit of a dangerous humanitarian mission of uncertain character and indeterminate length among a people whose religion he did not share? All this was to be done while leaving Elizabeth and their two children as virtually destitute boarders in his parents’ home. In his essay, Richard Bennett describes the motivations behind Thomas’s somewhat similar 1846 visit to the migrating Mormons in western Iowa and the reasons for his attachment to the Mormons in terms of such drivers as empathy for and bonding with a sickly, beleaguered people. I do not challenge the accuracy of any of these early factors in the relationship Kane had with the Mormons but would add that in 1846 Kane was also strongly interested in the fanciful possibility that if he reached the Pacific Coast with Young’s pioneer party, he might somehow become governor of California. Before reaching Iowa, Kane had written to a brother:

At one time or other a government representative may be wanting [in California]. Who so fit for one as I?—above all if on the journey I shall have ingratiated myself with the disaffected Mormon army before it descends upon the plains—and according to the promptings of occasion, be or be not the first Governor of the new territory of California.30

If one accepts the assumption that most of these same motivations were still present in Kane’s mind during late 1857, it is important to ask
whether there were any other factors influencing his decision to intervene in Utah. In my view there were several new drivers to be considered in assessing Kane’s Utah War role.

Chief among these factors was the devastating impact of Elisha Kent Kane’s death in February 1857 during a fruitless attempt to recover his long-deteriorating health in Havana. Thomas was in Cuba with Elisha during his brother’s final illness—the very time when Brigham Young was reaching out to him. He accompanied the body home to Philadelphia and immediately plunged into not only deep grief but also the complex role of Elisha’s legal and literary executor as well as the keeper of his reputational flame. Because of Elisha’s notoriety as a naval surgeon, Arctic explorer, would-be rescuer of Sir John Franklin’s fatal British expedition to that region, and best-selling author, his funeral cortège through New Orleans, Louisville, Cincinnati, Pittsburg, and other cities produced an event unmatched in American mourning during the period between the funerals of Presidents Washington and Lincoln.31 This example and the knowledge that during the Mexican War Elisha had undertaken a confidential, dangerous government mission to carry dispatches to General Winfield Scott in the field as he had done earlier in a diplomatic mission to China, provided a powerful motivator for Thomas to emulate, if not match, his brother’s accomplishments. Hence Thomas’s quixotic, unsuccessful attempt to mount an Arctic expedition of his own during late March 1857, shortly after Elisha’s death and only a few weeks after his March 12 burial and Thomas’s March 21 letter on behalf of Young to Buchanan. By the end of the year, the prospect of substantial bloodshed in Utah provided still another opportunity for a dramatic adventure—one made all the more compelling, if not appealing, by the daunting nature and the blunt skepticism of his prominent, overshadowing father.32

Having at least introduced the subject of Thomas L. Kane’s famous older brother and widely respected father, I am not going to wade deeper into the murky diagnostic waters of psychohistory. What I can do, though, is discuss Kane’s mediating mission to Utah in terms of the observations of those in close proximity to him as well as his own explanation.

In that connection, it is important to understand that on December 9, 1857, James C. Van Dyke, the president’s shadowy political confidante, wrote to Buchanan to brief him on Kane’s mood and thinking. This took place soon after news of the Nauvoo Legion’s successful raid on the Utah Expedition’s supply trains reached Washington and the day after the president sent his first annual message to Congress, but before Kane’s fateful Christmas visit to the White House. Although at approximately the same time territorial delegate Bernhisel had described visiting Kane in a “sick
room” in which he was beset by personal “anxieties and troubles,” Van Dyke reported a different view to Buchanan:

Col. Kane from his long association with that people, has much influence with the Mormons, and especially with their chief. He thinks he can do much to accomplish an amicable peace between them and the United States. He is willing to make an expedition to Salt Lake this winter, even at his own expense, if hostilities have not advanced to such a point as would render useless any efforts on his part. He has conversed with me much, on this subject, and my conclusion from all he has said has been, that it would not be an unprofitable thing if you would have a consultation with him, and hear his views. . . . He is full of courage, and if his judgment is correct, he may be able to avert a war of extermination against a poor deluded race.33

Buchanan, of course, did meet with Kane on December 26, and Kane later recorded that he had explained his motivations to the President by saying, “I will not be a disappointed man unless I fail to prove myself.”34 As Kane was confiding this driver to Buchanan, Kane’s wife recorded in her diary the news that,

God has mercifully brought out of them [our adversities] one great blessing already, in uniting Tom and me in the bonds of a common [Christian] faith. Tom thinks he may be of service to Him by bringing about a peace between Utah & the U.S. and went to Washington last night to see the President about it. May God give him wisdom to do right, and may His peace be with him. And oh, may He guide Papa.35

After he returned from Utah in June 1858, Kane told territorial delegate Bernhisel that “he would have the world know that he m[a]de his journey at his own expense, in the interest of the whole United States, and of humanity as well as the friends he loves in Utah.”36

The longest, most interesting assessment of Thomas L. Kane’s motives came from his younger brother, John, who was studying in Paris at the time of Thomas’s decision to go to Utah. On January 21, 1858, with awareness that his older brother had indeed left for the West, John wrote to his siblings and parents:

I am glad the family did not make him unhappy by useless remonstrances . . . [and unlike father] I am moreover not so sure of an unsuccessful termination to the affair. I have great confidence in Tom’s long head and unbounded energy and however impossible a thing may seem I regard the fact of Tom’s having undertaken it as more than half a success. Then too when I reflect that Tom is never so well as when exposed to what would kill most men of his build, and that hard life in open air (no matter how hard) always agrees with him better than the most tranquil of sedentary existence. . . . At home Tom’s big soul was preying on his body. The loss of dear Elish. and the crushing blow which this finan-
cial crisis gave to his hopes of organizing a new [Arctic] expedition were killing him by inches. He is too great a man to occupy himself with trifles... Now he has got an object large enough and noble enough to draw his thoughts away from the poor self on which they were fading and I cant help hoping that his physical man will improve in consequence. However be the result of what it may the object is grand and noble and does him and the family honor and I for one say God bless and speed him with all my heart.37

Such was the combination of drivers that propelled a sickly, overshadowed, ambitious, restless, and religiously struggling Thomas L. Kane from the comforts and boredom of Philadelphia to the wilderness perils of the American West. Here was an unconventional mission on behalf of a beleaguered Mormon people whom both President Buchanan and territorial delegate Bernhisel feared might kill Kane in southern Utah, scene of the Mountain Meadows massacre less than three months earlier.38

Was Kane a Latter-day Saint?

In spring 1858, when it became known on the Atlantic Coast that Thomas Kane was in Utah and somehow engaged in the war, there was a great deal of speculation as to whether this unclear involvement stemmed from membership in the Latter-day Saint church. Was Thomas a closet Saint? Many newspaper commentators as well as troops at Fort Bridger thought so, but the fact is that he was not. The clearest, most concise assessment of that question appears in an article by David J. Whittaker. He explains that, although Thomas had been baptized in 1846 for health while visiting the Mormons in Iowa, this was not a religious commitment or affiliation—just an act of mercy extended to what appeared to have been a visitor dying of malaria. As Whittaker also notes, Elizabeth Kane’s diary at BYU makes clear that the relevant question for the Utah War period was not whether Thomas was a Mormon but rather whether he was even a Christian.39

In his essay, Richard Bennett comments that at the time of Thomas Kane’s 1846 mission to Iowa “he embraced no one particular Christian faith.” Twelve years later, just before Kane was to leave Utah to return home, Brigham Young made a highly tactful attempt to invite Kane to investigate Mormonism (fig. 6) by writing, “For your own eye”:

Though our acquaintance from its commencement, which now dates from many years past, has ever been marked by that frank interchange of views and feelings which should ever characterize the communications of those who have the welfare of mankind at heart, irrespective of sect or party, as I am well assured by a long and intimate
Fig. 6. Letter from Brigham Young to Thomas L. Kane, May 8, 1858. During Kane’s involvement as a mediator between the Mormons and the federal government following the Utah War, there was much speculation about whether Kane had been secretly baptized as a Mormon. In this letter, Young invited Kane to learn more about the beliefs and doctrines of the people Kane had so ardently defended, something Young would not have done if Kane had already been baptized. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
acquaintance, is a feeling signally shared by yourself in common with
your best friends; yet, so far as I can call to mind, I do not remember to
have ever, either in correspondence, or in familiar conversation, except,
perhaps, by a casual and unpursued remark, alluded to matters of reli-
gious belief, as entertained by myself and others who are commonly
called “Mormons”; nor do I remember that you have ever overstepped
the most guarded reserve on this subject in all your communications
with me. So invariably and persistently has this peculiarity marked our
friendly and free interchange of views upon policy and general topics,
that I have at times imagined, and still am prone to imagine, that you
are more or less inclined to scepticism even upon many points com-
monly received by the religious world.

The faith embraced by the Latter Day Saints is so naturally philo-
sophical, and so consistent with and enforce of every valuable and
true principle that should govern in every department of life, that I am
strongly of opinion that a plain, candid exposition of the faith of the
everlasting gospel, which I have so much at heart, cannot, probably, fail
to at least interest a person of your reflective turn of mind. Such being
my conviction, your permission to me to converse familiarly with you
upon a subject of so much import, previous to your departure for your
home, or to write to you upon your return to the society of your family
and friends, will confer a highly esteemed favor upon, [me].

Matthew J. Grow, Kane’s latest biographer, argues that “Kane rejected
Young’s overtures; for him Mormonism would always remain in the realm
of reform not personal belief.”

While Kane was in Utah, even President Buchanan waded into the
fray of controversy over Thomas’s religious affiliation, doing so, in his typi-
cal indirect fashion, through his party’s political organ, the Washington,
D.C., Union. On May 20 or 21, 1858, Kane’s brother Pat visited the president
to complain of the Union’s lack of support for Thomas’s humanitarian
mission to Utah. Elizabeth Kane recorded that at that session Buchanan
“with his own hand wrote a notice to the Union, saying that Tom was no
Mormon, but a worthy brother of Elisha’s, a noble enterprise—etc. etc.” An
unsigned editorial in these words appeared in the Union’s May 21 issue.

Kane arrived home on June 19, 1858, and, before departing for
Washington two days later to see Buchanan, he devastated Elizabeth by
announcing that he had lost the newfound religious commitment that had
so enraptured her at the time of his departure six months earlier. In her
journal she recorded:

Tom and I had a good deal of talk together. I said in my diary that “I was
so happy and unhappy”. What made me unhappy was this. Tom told
me the first moment we were alone, like my dear honest darling, that
the hope that had dawned on him of being a Christian was gone.—Now
what distresses me is not the same trouble as I used to have, because I am
sure it is only a cloud veiling the sun. I know that my prayers won’t fall to the ground, I know that he will be a Christian, and if I exulted in the answer to my prayer too soon, I can wait patiently. Late or soon it shall be answered. Not all the men on earth, nor all the fiends in hell could persuade me against Christ’s words “Ask and ye shall receive”. I know that I ask a prayer that is a right one, and the answer I will have. True it is that for six years I have prayed daily for this one thing, but sometimes it has been more habit, not always the “strong crying and tears” with which I prayed last night. I need no special revelation, no messenger from heaven to tell me what I feel in the depth of my soul that my Savior hears, and is my advocate. I know my prayer will be granted. My grief is that the only comfort in his trouble is not his now. All my letters dwelt on that comfort. What can he do? And how hard it will be to shut up in my own breast again all the sympathies that went out to my brother Christian. He was so much nearer me! I don’t know how to talk to him, for my thoughts have so moulded themselves around that hope that I – Oh dear poor Tom! I think I must not show you my diary. It would pain you now. I am glad I did not know he had lost his staff till now. I could not have borne his absence.42

In 1859, James C. Van Dyke, Buchanan’s political advisor, related to Kane a conversation he had with Delegate Bernhisel during Kane’s late December 1857 visit to the White House:

His [Bernhisel’s] remarks upon your influence with the Mormons were so pointed an[d] decided that I felt some curiosity to know how it was that you had ingratiated yourself into the affections of this strange people. I remarked to him, “How is it that Col. Kane has such influence with your people?” I said jocously, “He is no Mormon, and does not, I believe, approve of those peculiarities in their religion which appear to be the principal obstacle to a cordial affiliation between you and the rest of the U.S.” He said, “Oh no! he is no Mormon, and of late years has treated us very coldly; we think on account of our religion which we all very much regret; but our friendship for and confidence in him is of a different nature.”43

Kane’s Mediating Mission: Significance and Impact

The last of my five questions investigates the significance and impact of Thomas L. Kane’s Utah mission. Did it make a difference? Was it important? At one point, soon after Kane’s late-February arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, Elder George A. Smith wrote to one of the prime movers in the Mountain Meadows massacre to describe sarcastically Kane’s plea for Mormon leaders to negotiate with rather than fight the army:

It turns out that Col Tho. Kane’s message is an unofficial one, he designs [intends] our good & is a warm friend, but he wants us to spare the lives of the poor soldiers camping about Bridger. Mr. Buchanan would like us
to feed them, and not destroy them until he can get sufficient reinforce-
ments to them to destroy us? This is as near I can learn the design of the
President of the United States.

Smith summarized his assessment with the single word “Bah!”\textsuperscript{44}
But when the smoke cleared, President Buchanan felt that Kane’s
effort had indeed been beneficial, although consistent with his convoluted
style he could barely bring himself to say so publicly. At the end of 1857,
Buchanan had crafted two letters of introduction for Thomas Kane to take
west as an expression of goodwill and a means of introducing him to any
federal officers whom he encountered. Given the criticism of his Utah pol-
icy then developing in Congress, what Buchanan had written for Thomas
in his cautious, lawyerly, and secretive fashion was a model of what in
today’s presidential politics and intelligence work would be called plausible
deniability. The letters were a means of distancing Buchanan from Thomas
if his secret mission should become known, controversial, or a failure
while providing signs that on at least a personal basis he had wished Kane
well—thin gruel and cold comfort. From the distance of Philadelphia,
George Plitt and John W. Forney—jaundiced former friends of the presi-
dent—and Pat Kane immediately recognized the letters as such. Elizabeth
Kane recorded their reactions and commented: “[They] think Mr. B. has
behaved badly. His exceedingly noncommittal letters are, they say, ‘Buck
all over, so that if Mr. K. succeeds, he may approve him, if he fails disavow
him.’\textsuperscript{45} When a controversy indeed arose in summer 1858 over Kane’s role
and authority, Buchanan again turned to the \textit{Washington Union} to make
his case while protecting his anonymity:

Dr. Kane, [was] a mere private citizen without power or authority of any
sort. . . He was a personal acquaintance of the President and possessed
his esteem, and hence, we believe, took with him letters of introduction
to officers of the army from Mr. Buchanan as from an [private] indi-
vidual. But he went neither as agent of the President nor as officer of the
government; neither as secret agent nor as public officer; but simply on
an individual, self-imposed mission, as a private citizen, philanthropist,
well-wisher of the Mormons, or what you will. He took no message from
the President, other than the President had publicly announced [in his
1857 annual message], in regard to the Mormons.\textsuperscript{46}

Old Buck’s only recorded public utterance appreciation came in a
single, muted sentence buried in his December 1858 second annual mes-
sage to Congress: “I cannot, in this connection, refrain from mentioning
the valuable services of Colonel Thomas L. Kane, who, from motives of
pure benevolence, and without any official character or pecuniary com-
pensation, visited Utah during the last inclement winter for the purpose of
contributing to the pacification of the Territory.”\textsuperscript{47}
My view is that Kane’s intervention made an indispensable difference in the outcome of this confrontation and that Buchanan, although fundamentally silent in public, was vastly relieved. Absent Kane’s gratuitous intervention, the result could well have been substantial bloodshed beyond what had already taken place in Utah during fall 1857—a carnage roughly equivalent to what prompted for Utah’s eastern neighbor the enduring label “Bleeding Kansas.”

Although Kane’s March 21 letter to Buchanan and his November and December visits to Washington appeared to have had little or no overt influence on the President’s thinking, Kane did have an impact on Brigham Young’s decision making at a crucial juncture in the war. At first it appears that Kane’s late-February/early-March discussions with Young and his counselors in Salt Lake City were fruitless. Elder Smith’s “Bah!” reaction may not have been unique among the views of senior Mormon leaders. However, as discussed below, I believe that, beneath the surface, Kane’s arguments for a peaceful resolution of the armed standoff prepared the way for the marked change in Young’s then confrontational posture that took place immediately after Kane left for Camp Scott on March 8.

As Kane was departing Salt Lake City, exhausted messengers arrived to inform Young of a surprise attack on the Church’s Salmon River Mission in southern Oregon Territory (Fort Limhi) by two hundred Bannock and Northern Shoshone warriors. Mormon losses had been two killed and five wounded, together with hundreds of cattle and horses. Kane apparently took little note of the incident, preoccupied as he was with his departure on a daunting, lonely trek to Fort Bridger across 113 miles of mountainous terrain in bad weather. But Young understood immediately the implications of the bad news from Fort Limhi. It meant his inability to count on Lamanite allies in any coming fight with the Utah Expedition and the loss of safe access to a northern escape route to Montana’s Bitterroot Valley or perhaps even to the Pacific Coast. With the north closed to him by this catastrophe, the army approaching from his east, California to the west inflamed over the Mountain Meadows massacre, and the army’s Ives Expedition ascending the Colorado River from the south, Young realized he was trapped.

He immediately did two highly unexpected things. First, he sent one of his sons galloping east to intercept Kane on the trail to deliver a note offering to donate or sell large quantities of flour to the army as a goodwill gesture. Then he began to consider plans for a mass Mormon exodus from northern Utah that by March 21 would be refined into what became known as “the Move South.” Without Kane’s foundational arguments in Salt Lake City and his immediately subsequent presence on the trail to Fort Bridger,
it is unlikely that Young would or could have undertaken to send the conciliatory flour signal to Albert Sidney Johnston as he did. I would argue that there is also a likelihood that Kane’s determination in December to broach the notion of a Mormon exodus to Young when he reached him in February had a real but unclear influence on that leader’s March decision to launch the Move South.  

Even more consequential to the outcome of the war was Kane’s pivotal role during April in persuading Alfred Cumming (fig. 7), Young’s gubernatorial successor, to change his hostile attitude toward the Mormons. As a result, Cumming agreed to Kane’s proposal that he travel from Fort Bridger to Salt Lake City to take up his office unescorted by the army and accompanied only by Kane and two servants. It was a highly symbolic, unthreatening gesture that permitted Young to yield the governorship with some semblance of dignity while allowing Cumming, in turn, to declare to the Buchanan administration that federal authority had indeed returned peacefully to Salt Lake City.  

Finally, I would note that by traveling to the White House in June 1858 while deathly ill to brief Buchanan in person on conditions in Utah and to do so even before the president’s own official peace commissioners had returned from the West, Kane provided Buchanan with the wherewithal to do something he had contemplated for some time—to declare victory in Utah, halt the massive military reinforcements already on the march to the territory from Kansas, and begin to wind down an enormously expensive and embarrassing armed confrontation. Buchanan declared “the Mormon problem” had been resolved to his satisfaction, a position that permitted him to turn attention from his then-controversial and expensive military intervention in Utah to other issues such as statehood for Kansas and Indian conflicts in both the Pacific Northwest and Southwest.
No one else could have done all this, especially under such daunting circumstances. Kane’s accomplishments were those of a person uniquely willing to champion the Mormon cause with an unmistakable idealism abetted by a hidden manipulativeness that matched James Buchanan’s own such behavior. Although he did not know the half of what Kane had done, it was a performance that prompted one New York war correspondent to write a dispatch from Utah that, in turn, prompted his distant editor to argue that the nation owed a substantial debt of gratitude to a largely unknown Colonel Kane:

> We are not yet apprised of the precise nature and extent of Col. KANE’s negotiations with the Mormon leaders, but they were certainly followed by an invitation to Governor Cumming to visit Salt Lake City—an invitation which the Governor immediately accepted . . . Without doubt they [Mormon leaders] have been greatly influenced by the counsels of Col. KANE.

Another newspaper dubbed Kane the “Peace Maker” and attributed to him “the close of the Mormon war” with enormous cost savings to the federal government (fig. 8).55

At the end of 1857, Buchanan lacked a plan for resolving the Utah War except for the application of more force. Small wonder that when Kane returned in June 1858 to meet for five days with Buchanan and his cabinet, the president was vastly relieved and grateful. As Kane later related the scene to Elizabeth, upon first seeing him the president immediately ushered out Pennsylvania’s politically powerful Senator William Bigler, exclaimed “Colonel Kane!” and took his hand with “effusion.” When Kane asked, “Well, Sir, Have I been as good as my word?” Buchanan gushed, “Better—More than as good as your word,” following which Kane reported “more effusion and words of thanks.”56

**BYU’s Kane Collection: Observations and Lessons Learned**

In thinking about lessons to be learned from BYU’s Kane collection—or at least those I have derived from using these materials—four principal observations come to mind:

**Importance of the Collection.** I want to re-emphasize the importance of these materials. Although there are ten or more concentrations of Thomas L. Kane’s papers in various repositories across the United States, BYU’s collection is enormously important and clearly the most vital to understanding his role in the Utah War. I have found BYU’s holdings essential to grasping not only crucial aspects of what happened but also the reasons events took place.

I will mention just one example. Richard Bennett’s article touched on Thomas’s 1846 Iowa visit in terms of Kane’s illnesses and certain
distinctive behaviors such as his use of family members as intermediaries with the White House; attempted exercise of presidential authority and power; and extreme secretiveness, including the use of codes and ciphers. To be aware of this Kanesean style during the Mexican War brings meaning to its reappearance twelve years later in the Kane documents generated during the Utah War. In effect, all of this permits historians and biographers to discern a distinct pattern of operation.

_Necessity of Looking beyond Kane’s Papers._ My second point is that to understand Thomas’s role in the Utah War it is important to consult not only _his_ papers at BYU but also those in Provo generated by his spouse and siblings. For example, Elizabeth’s diary is an indispensable source by which to understand the depth of family sacrifices implicit in Kane’s travel to Utah. It is also the sole means by which one can grasp Thomas’s fragile religiosity and the family’s deep ambivalence about President Buchanan’s dealings with him. Thomas L. Kane’s papers alone are not enough; they are necessary, but not sufficient, to provide a rounded understanding of the man. (Would that President Buchanan or one of his cabinet members had kept a diary as Elizabeth Kane did!)

_BYU’s Holdings—Only Part of the Puzzle._ In somewhat the same vein, my third point is that, as important as BYU’s Kane collection is, researchers seeking a rounded picture of the man and his Utah involvement will need to venture beyond the Harold B. Lee Library. No single repository has holdings sufficiently broad to permit a full understanding of such an extremely complex man. Among the high-yield collections that can and should be consulted in addition to BYU’s are those at:

- The American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia, Penn.)
- Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Utah)
- Yale’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (New Haven, Conn.)
- The University of Michigan’s William L. Clements Library (Ann Arbor, Mich.)
- Stanford University Libraries (Stanford, Calif.)
- Pennsylvania State Archives (Harrisburg, Penn.)
- The Huntington Library (San Marino, Calif.)
- Private collections (various locations)

I will mention just one example of the extent to which materials to be found outside of Provo shed important light on Kane. Until quite recently, his crucial interactions with President Buchanan during December 1857 were almost wholly unknown. Until BYU acquired Elizabeth’s diary, historians were not sure of how and when they took place and certainly were unaware of what Kane told his family upon returning home from
“To Col. Thomas L. Kane”

Much Honor’d Sir,
I’d fain address my pen
To you, a lover of your fellow men.
I dare presume; but beg you’ll pardon, Sir:
I trust you will, if I, presuming, err.

You plead the rights of man—you fain would see
All men enjoy the sweets of liberty.
Goodness is greatness—knowledge—pow’r; and thou
Perchance art greatest of your nation now.
And while that nation sinks beneath its blight;
You, like a constellation, cheer the night.

If you can quell the raging ocean’s wave,
You may, perhaps, your fallen country save.
If you can cleanse corruption’s growing stream,
Hope on, your nation’s honor, to redeem—
Give back our martyr’d Prophet’s life again
And from th’ escutcheon, wipe that dreadful stain.

Your civil pow’rs—your Officers of State,
On freedom’s shoulders, throw a deadly weight;
With suicidal acts, they’ve trampled down,
Our Charter’d Rights, and God Almighty’s frown
Is resting on them; and the bitter cup
They’ve dealt, they’ll drink; and drink it wholly up.
Though for a while you may avert the blow,
The deed is done, which seals their overthrow—
The pois’nous canker-worm is gnawing where
No skill—no med’cine can the breach repair.

What have they done? O blush, humanity!
What are they doing? All the world can see.

Where is the Banner which your nation boasts?
Say, Is it waving o’er the gentle hosts?
Where are the Statesmen that have never swerv’d?
By whom the Constitution’s Rights preserv’d?

Here in the mountains, ’neath the western sky,
Columbia’s Banner proudly waves on high.
And here are men with souls—men just and true—
Men worthy of our noble sires and you:
They have preserv’d our sacred Constitution
’Midst fearful odds and cruel persecution.
Your noble, gen’rous heart, with pure intent,
Would screen the guilty from just punishment.
But God is at the helm—th’ Almighty rules—
He, in whose hand the nations are but tools:
His kingdom, Daniel said, would be set up:
’Tis here: ’twill swallow other kingdoms up.
The seeds of wickedness, the nations grow
Within themselves, will work their overthrow;
Though for a season, mercy stays its hand,
Justice will have its own, its full demand.

We’ve sued for peace and for our rights, in vain;
Again we’ve sought for justice—and again—
We’ve claim’d protection ‘neath that lofty spire
Columbia boasts:—’twas planted by our sires.

But now we ask no odds, at human hand:
In God Almighty’s strength alone, we stand:
Honor, and Justice, Truth, and Liberty
Are ours:—we’re Freemen, and henceforth we’re free.

composed by Eliza R. Snow March 6, 1858
published in Deseret News, April 10, 1861

Fig. 8. Opening lines of “To Col. Thomas L. Kane,” a poem by Eliza R. Snow, plural wife of Joseph Smith and later Brigham Young and poet laureate of Mormonism. Snow mixes multiple messages here: gratitude laced with skepticism for Kane’s efforts; a litany of Mormon grievances; defiance; a veiled declaration of Mormon “independence”; and hints of the broader national civil conflict to come. A typescript of the complete poem precedes this detail of Snow’s original handwritten version. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. For another published text and analysis, see Jill Mulvay Derr and Karen Lynn Davidson, eds., Eliza R. Snow: The Complete Poetry (Provo and Salt Lake City: Brigham Young University Press and University of Utah Press, 2009), 571–74.
Washington. Supplementing this important behind-the-scenes glimpse provided by Elizabeth are astonishing pieces of the puzzle to be found in each of the repositories listed above. Perhaps the most arcane information about the December Buchanan-Kane meeting, though, comes from an indirect source, a letter written to the president by Judge Kane on December 31 to thank him for seeing his son and to comment on what Thomas told him of their White House conversation. This document is now in a private collection in California. Here Judge Kane commented matter-of-factly that, in the course of his presidential interview, Thomas indicated his intent to discuss with Brigham Young what could be interpreted as a Mormon mass exodus from Utah. With this piece of the puzzle at hand, it is now possible to understand—or at least to speculate about—an enigmatic, cryptic sentence that later appeared in two letters that Young wrote to agents in Washington and Liverpool during Kane’s visit to Salt Lake City. The sentence was, “We continue to keep our eyes on the Russian possessions [Alaska].”

And the Lost Shall Be Found—More to Come. My fourth and final observation is there are far more Kane documents that will indeed be discovered in the years to come. My confidence that wonderful additional discoveries await us is the reason that my September 2008 Arrington Lecture at Utah State University on the future of Utah War studies was an optimistic talk.

One of the missing documents that I expect to surface is the text of a lecture on Utah that Kane delivered at the New-York Historical Society in March 1859. In many respects, the very fact of Kane’s New York lecture reflects the complexity of his character and personality while demonstrating the need to consult multiple sources to understand them. With this lecture, Kane rendered Governor Cumming an enormous service, and he did so by traveling to Manhattan in the dead of winter while struggling with another of his episodic life-threatening illnesses. Kane did so because he believed that retention of Cumming as governor was essential to the well-being of the Latter-day Saints and to the tranquility of Utah. Yet Kane was hardly an admirer of Cumming, a four-hundred-pound alcoholic of limited talent who had successfully alienated not only Albert Sidney Johnston, his military protector, but former colleague Isaac I. Stevens, governor of Washington Territory.

Kane’s personal disdain for Cumming and cynicism about his susceptibility to manipulation were such that in April 1858, when he first introduced the new governor to Brigham Young, George A. Smith recorded that “Col. Kane visited Gov. Young [and] told him that he had caught the fish, now you can cook it as [you have] he had a mind to.” On May 1,
General D. H. Wells reported to Young on a recent discussion with Kane in which Cumming was described as “the poor old man” and “the Old Man,” a descriptor that Wells used in such a way that it appears to have been Kane’s as well as his own way of speaking about the new governor. Kane and Young frequently exchanged comments about Governor Cumming’s drinking problem, yet Kane in March 1859 was willing to leave what territorial delegate Bernhisel had once called his “sick room” in Philadelphia and travel to Manhattan to lecture the world on Alfred Cumming’s courage.62

It was a gambit that generated such extensive publicity that it made it virtually impossible for President Buchanan—a leader whom Kane had once described to Young as “a timorous man”—to remove Cumming. This was Kanesean wire-working on an even grander scale than Kane’s May 1858 arrangement for dispatches to Albert Sidney Johnston to be delivered only by uncommunicative Mormon couriers, a system that Kane devised because he knew it would enrage the colonel and “tend to add fuel to the fire between Cumming and Johns[t]on.”63 Here one sees the combination of nobility and manipulation that had permitted a younger Kane to plan a mission of compassion to Iowa in 1846 while simultaneously dreaming of becoming governor of California with the armed might of his new, hopefully ingratiated Mormon friends behind him.64

And so I believe strongly that the stuff from which will come an even better understanding of a very complex Thomas L. Kane and his important Utah War contributions awaits our discovery. All that is needed to find such material is energy, imagination, support, and persistence of the type that have created in such wonderful fashion BYU’s Kane collection.

William P. MacKinnon (MacKBP@msn.com) earned a BA degree magna cum laude from Yale University and an MBA from Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration. As an independent historian, MacKinnon’s articles, essays, and book reviews on the American West have appeared in more than thirty journals and encyclopedias. He was honored with the Mormon History Association’s Thomas L. Kane Award in 2008, and he is president-elect of the Mormon History Association for 2009–2010.


2. James C. Van Dyke to James Buchanan, December 9, 1857, James Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Van Dyke was U.S. attorney in Philadelphia and was the president’s closest political advisor there. Kane’s military title sprang from his brief appointment in 1846 as a militia lieutenant colonel on the staff of Pennsylvania’s governor.


6. While twenty-five hundred men is the size of the Utah Expedition most frequently cited by historians (and was its originally intended strength), by the time the expedition had reached Fort Bridger in November 1857 massive desertions had reduced it to slightly under fifteen hundred. By early 1858, a total of more than five thousand troops were under orders for Utah. See MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 221 n. 52; Roger B. Nielsen, Roll Call at Old Camp Floyd, Utah Territory: Soldiers of Johnston’s Army at the Upper Camp July 8 to September 1858 (Springville, Utah: n.p., 2006), iii; Curtis E. Allen to William P. MacKinnon, January 18, 2009, copy in author’s possession.

7. For a review of the nearly ten years of deteriorating Mormon-federal relations leading up to the Utah War, see David L. Bigler, “A Lion in the Path: Genesis of the Utah War, 1857–1858,” Utah Historical Quarterly 76 (Winter 2008): 4–21; William P. MacKinnon, “And the War Came: James Buchanan, the Utah Expedition, and the Decision to Intervene,” Utah Historical Quarterly 76 (Winter 2008): 24–25; MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 41–82. For more on Utah’s quest for statehood, see Thomas Alexander’s essay herein.

8. Although not a successful executive, James Buchanan was a competent lawyer and was careful to justify the Utah Expedition as a measure to maintain federal authority rather than to confront Mormon Utah on religious grounds. In 1859, he reprimanded Utah’s chief justice Delana R. Eckels, his own appointee, for charging a federal grand jury on the subject of polygamy, a practice against which there was no federal prohibition until enactment of the Morrill Act in 1862 during the Lincoln administration.


11. There have been two interrelated factors destructive to any positive assessment of Buchanan’s handling of “the Mormon problem.” First came a largely successful campaign—begun by Mormon leaders during the Civil War—to portray the entire Utah War as a blunder brought on by ineptness as well as proto-Con federates among Buchanan’s cabinet officers covertly plotting dis union as early as 1857. Implicit in the depiction of the Utah War as “Buchanan’s Blunder”—a label still used by Mormon commentators—was the notion that the entire confrontation, including the removal of Brigham Young as governor, was unnecessary as well as horribly expensive. (I have likened this image campaign by Mormon leaders to that by which, after the Civil War, former Confederate generals created the Myth of the Lost Cause to justify a War Between the States in defense of a chivalric, agrarian society rather than to perpetuate chattel slavery. See William P. MacKinnon, “Epilogue to the Utah War: Impact and Legacy,” Journal of Mormon History 29 [Fall 2003]: 217. An example of the negative effect on James Buchanan’s image is the title of Richard D. Poll and Ralph W. Hansen, “Buchanan’s Blunder: The Utah War, 1857–1858,” Military Affairs 25 [Fall 1961]: 121–31.) Accompanying this thrust was a second factor—widespread revulsion over the Civil War’s carnage that broke over Buchanan’s reputation indiscriminately and with such corrosive force that no memorial would be erected to him in Washington until as recently as Herbert Hoover’s administration. The impact of these twin forces over the past 150 years has been the degradation of Buchanan’s historiographical image into one blending a cartoonish bumbler on barely understood Utah matters with a passive, if not pro-Southern, chief executive presiding over the national slide into disunion.


13. Brigham Young to Thomas L. Kane, January 7, 1857, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. Because President Pierce appointed no successor who accepted the position after Young’s term expired, Young remained governor on a de facto basis under a continuance, an ambiguity left to Buchanan to resolve. See MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 223.

14. The somewhat awkward opening phrase of the January 7 letter implies noncommunication. On April 14, 1856, the governor had written to Kane seeking political counsel but with no apparent response to that letter or to Elder George A. Smith’s unsuccessful follow-up visit to Philadelphia while Kane was absent. For that matter, there is no indication that Kane wrote to Young at any
time during 1856, although Elder Taylor visited Kane at his Philadelphia home on March 8, 1856, and undoubtedly discussed the statehood (Deseret) thrust. John Taylor to Brigham Young, April 16, 1856, Church History Library.

15. A summary description of these distractions appears in MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 61–63.

16. Young to Kane, January 7, 1857. The text of much of this letter appears in MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 74–76.

17. Young to Kane, January 7, 1857.

18. Brigham Young to Thomas L. Kane, January 31, 1857, Church History Library. Fillmore, upon Kane’s recommendation, had appointed Young in September 1850.

19. Thomas L. Kane to James Buchanan, March 21, 1857, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections; MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 114–15.

20. William I. Appleby to Brigham Young, April 1, 1857, Church History Library.

21. John Taylor to Brigham Young, April 18, 1857, Church History Library.

22. Thomas L. Kane to Brigham Young, ca. late March 1857, Thomas L. Kane Papers, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.


24. For Judge Drummond’s newspaper attack on Kane and Kane’s campaign, in league with Elders Smith and Taylor, to discredit Drummond, see MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 119–20.


26. Thomas L. Kane to Brigham Young, May 21, 1857, Thomas L. Kane Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.; MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 135.


30. Thomas L. Kane to Elisha K. Kane, May 17, 1846, Thomas L. Kane Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, transcription courtesy of Matthew J. Grow. Kane’s 1846 letters to his family from Iowa at the William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, also shed light on this political motive.


32. Judge John K. Kane to Thomas L. Kane, January 4, 1858, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections; MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 510–11.


34. Thomas L. Kane to James Buchanan, January 3, 1858, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
35. Elizabeth W. Kane, Journal, December 26, 1857, Perry Special Collections. “Papa” referred to Thomas, not to her father.

36. John M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, December 11, 1858, Church History Library.

37. John K. Kane Jr. to family, January 21, 1858, John K. Kane Collection, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

38. Van Dyke, Memorandum for Kane. Based on these concerns and Kane’s secretive behavior while passing through southern Utah and even once in Salt Lake City, it appears that his use of the nom de guerre “Dr. Osborne” was intended as much to protect him from apprehensive Latter-day Saints as from angry, anti-Mormon Californians.


40. Brigham Young to Thomas L. Kane, May 8, 1858, Church History Library; Grow, “Liberty to the Downtrodden,” 190.

41. Elizabeth W. Kane, Journal, May 21, 1858; “Col. Thomas L. Kane,” Editorial, Washington Union, May 21, 1858, 2. Pat Kane’s complaint to Buchanan about the Union’s treatment of Thomas and Buchanan’s immediate communication with the newspaper may have been prompted by the Union’s publication of a letter a few days earlier asserting, “Mr. KANE, of Philadelphia, is a Mormon, and not sent out by the President, or any authority of the Government.” Union (pseud.) to Washington Union, May 15, 1858, reprinted in New York Times, May 21, 1858, 1.


43. Van Dyke, Memorandum for Kane.

44. George A. Smith to Col. William H. Dame, February [March] 3, 1858, Church History Library, transcription courtesy of Will Bagley.

45. The assessments by Messrs. Plitt, Forney, and Pat Kane were recorded in Elizabeth W. Kane, Journal, April 16, 1858. For a discussion of Buchanan’s letters, see MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 503–6.

46. “Rebellion Complaints of Bad Faith,” Editorial, Washington Union, July 8, 1858, 2. This disavowal of any official role for Kane was followed by the same newspaper’s denigration of Kane’s influence over Cumming’s decision making and its assertion that reports of Kane’s effectiveness in motivating Cumming to travel to Salt Lake without the army were “untrue in every particular. Col. Kane admitted his mission was a failure.” “Truth” (pseud.) to editor, July 2, 1858, Washington Union, August 1, 1858, 3.


49. The date of Kane’s departure for Fort Bridger can be determined from Brigham Young to Thomas L. Kane, March 9, 1858, Perry Special Collections.

50. David L. Bigler, “Mormon Missionaries, the Utah War, and the 1858 Bannock Raid on Fort Limhi,” Montana: The Magazine of Western History 53

51. Brigham Young to Thomas L. Kane, March 9, 1858, Perry Special Collections.

52. For Kane’s virtually unknown predeparture intent to discuss an exodus with Young, see MacKinnon, At Sword’s Point, Part 1, 501–3.


56. The Buchanan-Kane exchange was reported in Elizabeth W. Kane, Journal, June 20, 1858.

57. An example of the mixed feelings about Buchanan’s motives and the reliability of his support for Kane appears in Elizabeth W. Kane, Journal, April 16, 1858. In contrast, Judge Kane found Buchanan to be extremely helpful to his son and was grateful to the president. Judge John K. Kane to James Buchanan, January 2, 1858, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.


59. Brigham Young to John M. Bernhisel, March 5, 1858, Church History Library; Brigham Young to Asa Calkin, March 5, 1858, Church History Library.


Of all the potential discoveries of Kane-related documents that I most anticipate, five items immediately come to mind:

• The long memo of instructions that Wilford Woodruff drafted on March 4, 1858 to prepare Kane for his visit to the army at Fort Bridger. Is there anyone who would not like to know what Apostle Woodruff wrote on six pages “giving a reason of our hope and faith and the cause of our defending ourselves”? Wilford Woodruff, Memorandum for Thomas L. Kane, described in Wilford Woodruff, Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–84), 5:173 (March 4, 1858).

• The daguerreotype that Elizabeth Kane took at her home in June 1858 to capture the handsome face of Maj. Howard Egan, the Mormon frontiersman, bodyguard, and executioner who mesmerized her while awaiting completion of a Kane memo to carry back to Brigham Young. Elizabeth W. Kane, Journal, July 17, 1858.

• The 1857–58 letters home of Lafayette Shaw (Fay) Worthen, the young Kimball relative from Illinois who accompanied Kane and Egan during their long journey east in May 1858. Fay Worthen’s father, Amos Henry Worthen, was Illinois state geologist. As a distant relative of LDS first counselor Heber C. Kimball, courier between Salt Lake City and Fort Bridger during the late winter
of 1857–1858, informal aide to Gov. Cumming, and long-distance escort for Kane, Worthen’s missing papers are potentially rich sources about the war, especially its later stages.

- The papers of Capt. John Cleveland Robinson, Fifth U.S. Infantry, the Utah Expedition officer who carried an exhausted, frozen Kane to the warmth of his own tent upon his nocturnal arrival at Fort Bridger on March 12, 1858. Kane described Capt. Robinson’s compassion and overnight hospitality to the president in Thomas L. Kane to James Buchanan, ca. March 15, 1858, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. Long after receiving the Medal of Honor and losing a leg as a Civil War major general and serving as New York’s lieutenant governor, Robinson wrote a brief account of the Utah War. John Cleveland Robinson, “The Utah Expedition,” *Magazine of American History* 11 (January–June 1884): 335–41. This study ignored Kane and most of the author’s personal experiences in Utah as a company commander. Any surviving Robinson papers contemporary to the Utah War would potentially shed light on Kane’s dramatic arrival at Fort Bridger, including their overnight discussions in Robinson’s quarters, as well as life within the historiographically “silent” Fifth Infantry, a regiment from which virtually no insider accounts have surfaced.

- The text of the lecture that Kane delivered at the New-York Historical Society in March 1859 to describe the beneficial impact of Governor Cumming’s April 1858 journey from Fort Bridger to Salt Lake City on the smoothness with which he assumed his gubernatorial role. It was a supportive lecture that helped to preserve Cumming’s position at a crucial juncture when Buchanan was considering removing him. We have press accounts but not the text of this important speech, “The Executive of Utah, Lecture by Col. Thomas J. [sic] Kane,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1859, 2. The author’s belief is that the text of this lecture is missing from the otherwise voluminous files of Kane and the New-York Historical Society because he may have given this material to T. B. H. Stenhouse or Apostle George Q. Cannon. Both Mormons were present at the talk so as to obtain national publicity for Kane’s remarks by immediately visiting the editors of New York newspapers and the Manhattan headquarters of the Associated Press.


62. For Kane’s “fish” metaphor, see George A. Smith, “Historian’s Office Journal,” entry ca. April 13, 1858, Church History Library. In this entry Smith also noted: “G.A.S.’s first impression when he saw Cumming was that he was a toper [drinker], but on examining him with his glasses he concluded he was a moderate drinker and a hearty eater.” Daniel H. Wells to Brigham Young, May 1, 1858, Church History Library. Other comments on Cumming’s alcohol consumption appear in Thomas L. Kane to Brigham Young, July 24, 1859, Church History Library; and Brigham Young to Thomas L. Kane, December 15, 1859, Church History Library.

63. Kane to Young, c. late March 1857, Stanford University Libraries; Wells to Young, May 1, 1858.

64. See p. 98 above.