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My Dear Friend: The Friendship and Correspondence of Brigham Young and Thomas L. Kane

David J. Whittaker

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L
iving as we do in an age of electronic communications, with text mes-

saging, emails, and cell phones, it may be difficult for us to imagine a

world of personal relationships that required careful attention to the reali-
ties of time and space in the creation and sharing of public as well as private

information. During much of the nineteenth century, it could take weeks

or months for a letter to travel to its intended recipient—and there was the

chance it might not get there at all or that it might be read by persons other

than the addressee. Even those living in peaceful times and in stable com-
munities could experience these problems; and if we consider the effects of

religious and political tensions, mass movements of populations, and the

roughness of the western frontier compounded by such factors as the level

of the relationship between those communicating, the state of the postal

service in the area, and the cost of mailing a letter, we can begin to sense the

problems of communication. Unlike emailing today, the speed of which can
easily trivialize the message being sent, correspondence in earlier times was

more focused and thus generally more thoughtful.

Not all letters are of the same value, of course. But how much poorer

would we be if we lacked the treasure trove of the John Adams–Thomas

Jefferson correspondence? By reading their letters, thoughtful essays by

those who were present “at the creation” of the United States, we are invited

into a conversation between two great minds who contributed to its found-
ing. Their correspondence constitutes a journal of their lives and reveals

their concerns, their friendship (even under stress), and their great love

for their lives’ work. In a letter to Robert Walsh in 1823, Jefferson wrote,

“The letters of a person, especially of one whose business has been chiefly

transacted by letters, form the only full and genuine journal of his life.”
One could just as easily think of William W. Phelps and his wife Sally, neither of whom seems to have kept a journal, but whose letters, published in 1993 in BYU Studies, give us an important window into the formative years of Mormonism. William seems to have sensed this, counseling his wife to keep his letters safe, as he planned “to make a book of them.” Presumably, this book would constitute a published record of his life. Likewise, several years ago, Dean Jessee gathered the letters sent between Brigham Young and his sons and published them—these letters are some of the few documents that reveal the more private side of President Young in his role as a father, a role he considered the most important of all his many responsibilities. These letters allow us to see Young counseling his sons on their missionary work, their reading choices, and their schooling experiences, and the documents also reveal the sons’ expressions of love and appreciation to their father. To read such letters is to be invited into a personal conversation that continues to teach us many years after they were written.

When Joseph Smith was murdered in June 1844, it was Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who directed the Latter-day Saint exodus from Nauvoo and then their westward journey to the Salt Lake Valley. Until his death in August 1877, President Young served as the prophet and president of the Church, guiding its growth and development through colonization, immigration, and settlement in the American West, as well as the expansion of missionary work throughout the world. Much of Young’s leadership was directed through his extensive correspondence, surviving today in a large number of letter books maintained by his scribes and clerks. While most of the correspondence was with Church leaders and members, there are also letters to non-Mormons. Particularly valuable are the letters he exchanged with Thomas Leiper Kane, a man who became a close friend and confidant of President Young.

It was during the critical time when the Mormon exiles were temporarily settled in the Missouri River Valley that Thomas L. Kane first met Brigham Young. In January and February 1846, Kane had read accounts in the Philadelphia newspapers of the forced exile of the Mormons from their homes in western Illinois. Shortly after the United States declared war against Mexico in May, Kane sought out Mormon leaders in Philadelphia, first meeting Jesse C. Little, who gave Kane the latest information on the Mormons and their plight. Kane obtained letters of introduction to Mormon leaders from Little, met with President James K. Polk to obtain his counsel and assurances, and then headed west, where he eventually assisted with the call of the Mormon Battalion, helped the Mormons obtain governmental permission to reside temporarily on Indian lands, and began his lifelong friendship with Young and other Mormon leaders.
During his life, Kane was active in the antislavery movement, worked with the Underground Railroad, and fought for the Union Army in the American Civil War (fig. 1), leading a group of western Pennsylvania sharpshooters called the “Bucktails” and fighting at Gettysburg (fig. 2). After the war, he became involved in land development in northwestern Pennsylvania and was a developer of Kane, Pennsylvania (fig. 3). He also involved himself in prison and education reforms, helped establish a medical school, served as the first president of the Pennsylvania Board of State Charities, and had a role in organizing the New York, Lake Erie, and Western Coal Railroad Company among other social and economic institutions. But it was the Mormon connection that was the major thread that ran through his life—and his friendship with Brigham Young was a significant part of that tapestry.

When they first met in 1846, Young was forty-five and Kane was twenty-two. Kane was single and determined to remain a bachelor; Young had already entered into plural marriage—at the time of Joseph Smith’s death in June 1844, Young had married four plural wives (in addition to his original wife, Mary Ann), and the number had increased to at least twelve (and in addition he had already been “sealed” to about eighteen
Thomas's bust. Thomas is buried beneath the flag. Even though Kane had passed away, the group included his bust located under the flag in this photograph. Elizabeth W. Kane is standing to the left of the flag. Elizabeth W. Kane is standing to the left of the flag. She is standing next to the bust of Thomas.}

Fig. 2. Members of the Bucktail Regiment at a reunion, c. 1884. These men and their wives gathered outside the Kane Chapel in Kane, Pennsylvania.
other women) by February 1846, when the Mormons began their exodus from Nauvoo. Both Kane and Young stood about 5'6" tall; Kane was more frail and thin (weighing at most 110 pounds), but both would struggle with various health problems throughout their lives.

**The Young–Kane Correspondence**

The Brigham Young–Thomas L. Kane letters are an important source for understanding both men, as well as various aspects of early Latter-day Saint and American history. They also provide a window into one of those rare, enduring friendships that help reveal the times in which the writers lived. There are about 125 known letters exchanged between them, beginning the year they met in 1846 and extending to 1877, the year Young died. The number of letters averaged three or four per year, with a few spikes, usually during times of crisis: for example, twenty-two letters were exchanged in 1858; eleven in 1861; and nine in 1871. The letters vary in length, from short, one-page notes to letters of nine or more pages of detailed information. Kane’s letters could be addressed to the First Presidency or to Brigham Young alone, and Young’s could be from the First Presidency or just from himself. Not all of the letters are extant;

**Fig. 3.** The Kanes’ large home in Kane, Pennsylvania, constructed 1863–65, burned, in March 1896. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
existing letters refer to other letters (some in cipher) that have been lost. Sometimes information was conveyed orally between Kane and Young by various individual Mormons who were going on trips east or west. No complete records were kept of the times Young and Kane met privately to talk in 1846, 1858, and 1872–73; for these meetings we have to use collateral sources. Both men used scribes (Young more than Kane), and Young was more careful in keeping copies of the correspondence he sent, even preserving the drafts of some of his letters. Kane also sent letters to other Mormon leaders and received correspondence from them, revealing the depth and breadth of his friendship with the Mormons.

Both Young and Kane lived through some of the most critical times in both American and Mormon history. They experienced the political and economic convulsions of Jacksonian democracy, a war with Mexico, the movement of the American population into the West (impelled even farther by the discovery of gold in what would become the state of California), and the growing division of the country into factions over slavery and western expansion that led to a cataclysmic civil war in 1861. Neither individual sat on the sidelines of history but, rather, chose to lead and influence the course of events. Kane found his calling in social reform and in defending the underdog, although he could and did mix his Christian charity with personal aggrandizement; Young found in Mormonism all he wanted and by the 1840s was emerging as a major leader in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Meeting the Mormons in 1846

In July 1846, before Thomas Kane had met Brigham Young, Kane and Henry G. Boyle took a walkabout near some temporary Mormon settlements in Iowa. Through an experience that occurred during this walk and that was recounted in 1882 by Boyle, we are given a glimpse into the deeper feelings Kane would develop for the Latter-day Saints, feelings that he seems to have carried throughout his life and that permeated his correspondence with President Young.

Boyle recalled the two of them following a narrow path through a thicket of undergrowth, [when] we came suddenly within a few feet of a man who had just commenced to pray. As we wore on our feet Indian moccasins, we made no perceptible noise, and the man evidently thought himself alone and praying in secret. At the time, I was in the path just in the rear of the Colonel, who, on hearing the beginning of the man’s supplication, halted, and, in doing so, turned half around, with his face in the bright light of the full moon, and in such a position that every feature was plain to my view.
Boyle went on:

I never listened to such a prayer, so contrite, so earnest and fervent, and so full of inspiration. We had involuntarily taken off our hats as though we were in a sacred presence. I never can forget my feelings on that occasion. Neither can I describe them, and yet the Colonel was more deeply affected than I was. As he stood there I could see the tears falling fast from his face, while his bosom swelled with the fullness of his emotions. And for some time after the man had arisen from his knees and walked away towards his encampment, the Colonel sobbed like a child and could not trust himself to utter a word. When, finally, he did get control of his feelings, his first words were, “I am satisfied; your people are solemnly and terribly in earnest.”

Within a week, Kane was introduced to Young. Three years later, Kane would remind his Mormon friends how powerful an impact his first few weeks with the Mormons had on him:

I believe that there is a crisis in the life of every man, when he is called upon to decide seriously and permanently if he will die unto sin [or] live unto righteousness, and that, till he has gone through this, he cannot fit himself for the inheritance of his higher humanity, and become truly pure and truly strong, “to do the work of God persevering unto the end” without endorsing the cant of preachers either. I believe that Providence brings about these crises for all of us, by events in our lives which are the evangelists to us of preparation and admonition. Such an event, I believe too, was my visit to you. I had had many disregarded hints and warnings before, but it was the spectacle of your noble self denial and suffering for conscience sake, first made a truly serious and abiding impression upon my mind, commanding me to note that there was something higher and better than the pursuit of the interests of earthly life.

Young was also impressed with their first interactions. In a letter of recommendation of Kane for Almon Babbitt and others on the East Coast in September 1846, Young recalled Kane’s visit to the Mormon camps:

You will receive this from the hand of Colonel Thomas L. Kane, whom we would introduce to you, as a soldier, a gentleman, a philanthropist, personal friend of President Polk, and the son of Judge Kane of Philadelphia. Colonel Kane came among us at the time Mr. Little was here, whose acquaintance he formed in Washington, and by whom he became enlisting in the sufferings of the Saints, and came on to form their acquaintance & learn their prospects. Not long after his arrival he was seized with a fever, and has mostly been confined to the present time. We are happy to say to you that our acquaintance with Col Kane has been very pleasant, and interesting, and we trust an endless friendship exists between us.
On the same day this letter was written, Church Patriarch John Smith pronounced a patriarchal blessing (fig. 4) upon Kane. It was given at Cutler’s Park, Council Bluffs, and read, in part:

Inasmuch as thou hast had it in thine heart to promote the interest of the children of men[,] the Lord thy God is well pleased with thy exertions. He hath given his angels charge over thee to guard thee in times of danger to deliver thee out of all thy troubles and defend thee from all thine enemies, not an hair of thine head shall ever fall by the hand of an enemy, for thou art appointed to do a great work on the earth and thou shalt be blessed in all thine undertakings and thy name shall be had in honorable remembrance among the Saints to all generations; thou shalt have a companion to comfort thy heart, to sustain thee under all thy trials. Thou shalt raise up sons and daughters that shall be esteemed as the excellent of the earth.14

It is hard to know what Kane thought about the blessing at the time it was pronounced, but the fact that he preserved a copy in his papers and referred to it in a number of letters suggests its importance to him. In fall 1850, Kane wrote to Young, “If I can lighten my tasks, a little ease and attention to health, I am sure, will very probably restore me permanently, and may even invite for me all the Blessings my good old friend the Patriarch invoked upon my head.”15 In another letter dated February 19, 1851, Kane recalled, “My valued ancient friend Mr. Smith gave me a blessing at the Omaha Camp that was full of kind and hopeful meaning,” and then he asked if the blessing was “still to hold?”16 Young conferred with Patriarch Smith and assured Kane that “it shall hold.”17 Kane had a special place in his heart for the old Patriarch, and Young reported in January 1854, “Your old friend the Patriarch, is also slowly sinking away.”18 He would die in
May. In July 1855, Kane wrote to President Young, expressing his feelings of sadness at the death of John Smith, but announcing that he had just become the father of a new baby daughter, as the Patriarch had promised him in the blessing.\textsuperscript{19}

Years later, while in St. George with Brigham Young in 1873, William G. Perkins, the local patriarch, pronounced another blessing on Thomas Kane. At the same time, Thomas’s wife, Elizabeth Wood Kane, received her own blessing. She remained skeptical about Mormonism and recorded in her journal her thoughts about the blessings: “The blessing was somewhat prophetical, and so far as it was did not coincide with one given K. long ago by the old patriarch John Smith, which has been curiously fulfilled so far, strange to say.”\textsuperscript{20}

In addition to assisting the Mormons in getting permission to settle on Indian lands for winter 1846–47 and obtaining certificates of the Mormon’s good behavior when dealing with the Native Americans, Kane helped convince Mormon leaders they could trust President Polk’s offer of financial help for those men (and thus the larger Church) who enlisted in the U.S. Army for service in the Mexican War. Kane worked with Captain James Allen in the recruitment efforts, even staying in Allen’s tent for a short time. Here was the beginning of what would become a familiar pattern: Kane would play the role of the middleman—softening perceptions, defusing tense situations, and helping the Mormons defend themselves before a growing national audience. These would also be the major themes in his correspondence with Young.

Kane would return regularly in his memory and in his written letters to the events of 1846 and the care the Latter-day Saints gave him during his illness. By 1850, he had so identified the Mormon cause as his own that he wrote to Mormon leaders assuring them that he was their friend and that he would stand as their metaphorical second in any “affair of honor”:

It happened that the personal assaults upon myself made your cause become so indentified with my own that your vindication became my own defence and as “partners in iniquity” (to quote one particular black-guard of those times) we had to stand or fall together. This probation it is, that has made me feel our brotherhood, and taught me, in the nearly four years, that have elapsed since I left the Camp where your kind nursing saved my life, to know from the heart, that I love you, and that you love me in turn.\textsuperscript{21}

Kane further reported that he had altered his will, requesting that upon his death (figs. 5 and 6), the Mormons would “receive my heart to be deposited in the Temple of your Salt Lake City, that, after death, it may
DEATH OF GENERAL THOS. L. KANE

[Obituary printed in the Deseret News, January 2, 1884, page 6, likely written by George Q. Cannon.]

THE very large majority of Utah’s people will be pained to learn of the death of their esteemed and valiant friend, General Thomas L. Kane, which took place this morning at his home in Philadelphia. The sad news came by telegram to Hon. Geo. Q. Cannon. Yesterday he received a dispatch stating the General was “ill with pneumonia; very little hope, to morrow will decide.” To-day the following was received:

PHILADELPHIA, Pa.,
8:29 a. m. Dec. 26, 1882.
Hon. George Q. Cannon:

Your friend died quietly at half past three, this morning.

ELISHA K. KANE [son of Thomas and Elizabeth].

To this the annexed reply was telegraphed at once:

I am stunned by this sad event so unexpected. President Taylor joins me in expressing the profoundest sympathy for your mother and the family in your bereavement. Thousands of hearts in this Territory will be filled with grief at the news of the departure of so devoted and steadfast a friend. At what time will the funeral take place?

GEORGE Q. CANNON.

There is no man outside of Utah who holds a warmer place in the hearts of the “Mormon” people than the hero who has just departed. The exact date of his birth we are not able to give at present. He was about sixty years of age, and was born in Philadelphia. His father was the celebrated Judge John Kent Kane, and his ancestors on both sides were illustrious [sic]. The family name of Kent came from Chancellor Kent, notable in the annals of jurisprudence, and the Van Rensselaers, to whom he was related on the mother’s side, are well known to fame and cut a prominent figure in American history. His brother Dr. Elisha Kent Kane, after whom his son is named, stands prominent among the great men of the age now departed; as an explorer, a surgeon and a scientist he occupies a proud position in the estimation of the well informed in all the civilized world.

Our esteemed friend partook in an eminent degree of the qualities which shone so brightly in his illustrious relatives. His early days were spent in Philadelphia under the influence of the learned judge, his father, and to complete his education he was sent to England and France, where he spent several years, and the latter part of that time served as Secretary of the Legation at Paris. He then returned home and acted as clerk of the court in which his father presided, took an active part in politics, but declined the official career which was often opened to him. He was
a prominent worker in the charitable associations of his state, and was noted for his kindness of heart and moral and physical courage.

His sympathies were powerfully enlisted in the “Mormon” cause when the news of the expulsion from Nauvoo became a subject of public interest. How he interested himself with President Polk and the Administration in company with Colonel Jesse C. Little, when the “Mormons” were seeking aid to cross the Great American Desert to the Pacific slope; how he followed [sic] them to the frontier when the Mormon Battalion was mustered into service—taking the very strength out of the “Mormon” camp that was needed on the journey across the great plains—how he championed the cause of the afflicted people in the lecture halls and assemblies of the chief cities; how he interposed on behalf of this maligned people when, through false representations, an army was sent here to destroy them, how he crossed the isthmus and came up from the south at the solicitation of Prest. Buchanan, traveling incognito and passing through great perils and privations and many dangers; how he explained the facts to the General Government and procured the Commission which came here and found that the reports on which the army were sent here were groundless; how in many ways he befriended an unpopular people and manfully stood up against immense odds for their rights, are incidents in his career which are familiar to all who are acquainted with “Mormon” history.

When the war of the rebellion broke out he enlisted on the side of the Union, and commanded the Pennsylvania “Bucktails,” performing deeds of valor which proved him as brave in the battlefield as in fighting for the right by tongue and pen. He was dangerously wounded, and for some time after his partial recovery went about on crutches, but in a subsequent visit to Utah recovered his health and threw away his wooden supports. For his prowess in the war he was breveted Major General, a

![Fig. 5. Thomas L. Kane, post-mortem photograph, December 1883. It was common in the late nineteenth century to take photographs of the deceased. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.](image)
promotion which he richly deserved. He was practically without fear, and in the disputes that arose over the so-called “Mormon war” he challenged General Albert Sydney Johnson [sic] to mortal combat.

Gen. Kane was small in stature but possessed a great and magnanimous soul. He was a brilliant writer and an impressive speaker. His views of all public matters and religious and philosophical principles were broad and strongly marked, and the qualities of the statesman, the warrior, the independent thinker, the poetic writer and the generous philanthropist were thoroughly established in his character.

In his labors of love for the unfortunate he has been ably supported by his talented and benevolent wife, who still figures prominently in the great charitable institutions of the country, and whom he has left with three sons and a daughter to honor his name and revere his memory. We condole with the bereaved, and express the sentiments of the people of Utah in imploring the divine influence for the comfort of those who mourn, and in saying, blest be the name of Thomas L. Kane through all generations, and may the flowers of peace bloom over his grave, and the rest of the righteous be his for ever!

Fig. 6. Thomas L. Kane’s tombstone, outside Kane Chapel, Kane, Pennsylvania. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
repose, where in metaphor at least it often was when living.”22 Kane wrote in February 1851:

For you—I need not name you—who met me on the Prairie, you all of you who helped me, nursed me, and I know loved me as much as I bore you love in return—I avow I must always entertain a different kind of attachment than for others; but all the rest of you I wish to regard also as friends entitled to my best wishes and efforts always and always to be presumed by me united and worthy until the contrary be intrusively shown. I wish to work with you and for you, with all of you, and for all of you.23

On his way home to Philadelphia from the Mormon camps in 1846, he visited Nauvoo, Illinois, which by then was almost a ghost town. Kane wrote to Brigham Young from Nauvoo on September 22, 1846; “I am getting to believe more and more every day as my strength returns that I am spared by God for the labour of doing you justice; but, if I am deceived, comfort yourself and your people, with the knowledge that my sickness in your midst has touched the chords of noble feeling in a brave heart.”24

After Kane returned home to continue his defense of the Mormons, he realized it was “next to impossible to do much for you before the public opinion was corrected” and concluded, “Outcasts you may be; but if I should turn the tide at last, believe me, nothing will give me more honest gratification than my right thereout [sic] to know myself your friend.”25

Kane’s haunting description of Nauvoo was an important part of his 1850 address to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Published as The Mormons: A Discourse Delivered before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, March 26, 1850 (fig. 7), the address was distributed to members of Congress, various newspaper editors, and to other influential people in the country. When it raised questions about Mormon beliefs, Kane soon reissued it with some supplementary material that attempted to address these questions. Mormons also reprinted the discourse in their newspapers, first in the Frontier Guardian and then in other venues. The work was the first short history of the Latter-day Saints read by either Mormons or non-Mormons, and it helped shape Mormon self-understanding. For literary effect, the work reversed the actual chronology of Kane’s visit to Nauvoo, beginning first with his visit to the vacant city and then moving west to meet the Mormons, when, in fact, he visited Nauvoo on his way home from assisting them.26

Through The Mormons and in his many other public relations efforts, Kane was helping to create the image of the Mormons as a suffering and downtrodden people, an image that remains a powerful factor in Mormon historiography even into the twenty-first century. Kane also was the first to publicly tell the story of the miracle of the seagulls in early Utah history,
a story he received secondhand, probably from Joseph Young via a letter from William Appleby (fig. 8).

Because of Kane’s genuine affection for the Mormons, his home in Philadelphia was a welcome stop for Mormons traveling in the area, including the regular visits of the Utah territorial delegates, with whom Kane would counsel on various matters relating to the Mormons. Many of Kane’s Mormon visitors would hand-deliver letters to Kane from Young and also take notes for Young back with them to Utah.27

All of his activities in behalf of the Mormons, and especially his close friendship with Brigham Young, led a number of writers to wonder if Thomas Kane was indeed a secret member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Had Thomas, they suggested, been baptized into the Church in 1846? In a 1906 letter to a Reverend Buckley, Elizabeth Kane responded to Buckley’s discussion of her husband’s relationship to the Mormons in a forthcoming book. She told of her husband’s visit to the Mormon camps in 1846 in western Iowa and his serious illness there:

He broke down while they were still on the Platte in “Misery Bottom,” with the malarial fever, and “black canker,” from whose consequences
FIG. 8. William I. Appleby to Thomas L. Kane, October 9, 1848. Here, Appleby, then the leading Church official on the East Coast, reported information obtained from Joseph Young (who was reporting it from a third party) regarding seagulls attacking crickets that had been threatening the Mormons’ crops in the Salt Lake Valley. This information, probably combined with other sources, encouraged Kane to discuss this famous episode with great literary flare in his 1850 publication titled The Mormons. For many readers, it was their first knowledge of what came to be understood as a miracle in Mormon pioneering history. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
he never wholly recovered. He owed his life to the tender care and nursing that he received from the Mormons. He was particularly grateful to Brigham Young; and throughout the rest of his life he showed his gratitude to the Mormons and his pity for that people at the cost of obloquy [disgrace or shame] cast upon him by his dearest friends, and at the risk of his life. But gratitude and pity were his sole incentives to all he did. It is perfectly true, as stated by Linn, that Colonel Kane was baptised [sic], but it was when he was believed to be dying. He was delirious and entirely unconscious of what they were about. They hollowed out a log, filled it with water from the Platte and put him in. The shock aroused him, and cooled the fever. Probably it did him good physically, but I never heard any Mormon claim that it did him spiritual good to his own knowledge. I have no doubt that they deemed it efficacious to salvation, however, and did it from the purest motives.  

Since Elizabeth was not there, she must have heard some of the details from Thomas. The details are good enough to suggest a basic accuracy of the account. But what she seems to be describing is not the normal Mormon priesthood ordinance, or ritual, of baptism by immersion for entrance into Church membership. It is not the practice of Latter-day Saints to baptize “delirious” or “unconscious” people. But it is possible that she is describing the early Mormon practice of baptism for the restoration of health.  

If Kane had been secretly baptized, Young, of all people, would have known. An examination of their correspondence reveals the improbability of the rumor. In 1858, following Kane’s peacemaking efforts in Utah, President Young wrote to him, “My Dear and Tried Friend.”  

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 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 religious 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 interchanges 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 commonly received by the religious world.
Young went on to invite Kane to have a frank discussion of Mormon religious beliefs, hardly an invitation to someone who had been secretly baptized twelve years earlier.30 Young was even more direct in 1864, “You are doubtless aware that, as heretofore, we should be much pleased to have you embrace the Gospel we profess and are striving to obey, and doubt not but what you will do so in the Spirit world, if you do not in this time.”31

**Major Themes of the Letters**

A major topic of the Young and Kane correspondence was politics—especially affairs in Utah, the Mormon quest for statehood, and the growing national sentiment against the Mormons. Thus, their letters contain reports and concerns as well as strategies for dealing with these matters. Because Kane personally knew several U.S. presidents (especially Polk, Fillmore, Buchanan, and Grant), various cabinet members, and other important public figures, like Horace Greeley, Kane’s relationships were vital to keeping the Mormons informed of the national mood. Ulysses S. Grant even stayed with the Kanes in 1869 while he was president. (Elizabeth left a manuscript account of that visit, which the BYU Library now owns.)

Before Utah became a state, its colony-like status meant that most of its key leaders would be appointed in Washington rather than elected locally, and that most of these officials would be strangers, if not enemies, to the Latter-day Saints. Thus, a key theme of the correspondence was discussion of federally appointed officials: who they were and how they behaved once they arrived in Utah.32 Kane also advised the Mormons as they strove to attain statehood status, although this did not come until 1896, after both Young and Kane were gone from the scene.33 The Mormons, in turn, kept Kane apprised of the great possibilities of investment and the potential for the development of lands in the West, a topic that had been on Kane’s mind from the very beginning of his association with the Mormons.34

By July 1850, Kane thought he was finished in the battle for the Mormon reputation, that “there is nothing more left to do than scatter here or there a routed squad or two, and bury the dead upon the field.” He continued:

I believe that Providence brings about these crises for all of us, by events in our lives which are the evangelists to us of preparation and admonition. Such an event, I believe to, was my visit to you. I had had many disregarded hints and warnings before, but it was the spectacle of your noble self denial and suffering for conscience sake, first made a truly Serious and abiding impression upon my mind, commanding me to note that there was something higher and better than the pursuit of the interests of earthly life for the spirit made after the image of Deity.35
Renouncing all interest in politics at the time, Kane told Young that he had prepared a manuscript history of his official connection with the Mormons. In it, Kane said, he “told all,” implying that there had been a conspiracy of certain government officials to do harm to the Latter-day Saints. While no copy of this history has yet been found, Kane promised he would keep it in his possession, but should an accident happen to him, the history would become the property of Young.  

It was a measure of the Mormon’s trust in Kane that Governor Young invited him to serve as Utah’s territorial delegate to Congress in 1855, an offer Kane turned down because he felt he could be of better service to the Latter-day Saints by remaining an outsider.

Some Key Episodes

To read and study the extensive correspondence between Young and other Church leaders with Kane is to feel the great love and respect each side had for the other. Space limitations allow us to address only a few topics of their correspondence here.

Kane and the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage. In 1851, the eastern press attacked Young’s character and that of President Millard Fillmore for knowingly appointing such a supposedly bad character to the office of territorial governor. Kane previously had defended Young and Fillmore both in newspapers and in private correspondence. In 1852, various charges by the first set of federally appointed officials to Utah were made public and published in the New York Herald on January 10, 1852. Kane and Jedediah M. Grant met together at Kane’s home in Philadelphia to prepare a response. This response eventually took the form of three letters, but initially only the first was printed in the New York Herald, with a fuller response subsequently published in pamphlet form (fig. 9). The federal officials charged the Mormons with a number of violations of the law, but the only charge that attracted public attention and that would increasingly become the major criticism was that the Mormons were practicing plural marriage.

The official public acknowledgement of the Mormon practice of plural marriage came in August 1852, probably in response to the growing public awareness of their marital arrangements. In a letter to Young, Grant describes how he first informed Kane of the practice. Kane strongly opposed this marriage system, but he wrote to Young in October 1852:

I wish to thank you for making my old friend Grant the bearer to me of his tidings. I ought not to conceal from you that they gave me great pain. Independent of every other consideration, my Pride in you depends so
much on your holding your position in the van of Human Progress, that I have to grieve over your favor to a custom which belongs essentially, I think, to communities in other respects behind your own.

. . . I think it my duty to give you thus distinctly my opinion that you err: I can now discharge you and myself from further notice of the subject.41

Young responded on May 20, 1853:

Permit me to thank you most cordially for the open, frank, and candid expression of your views and feelings, on one important truth connected with my history, and the history of friends and worlds with which I associate. Your brief, explicit, and plain expression of fear and feeling, endears you to me, more than all the Rhetoric of ages could have done. . . .

Permit me to repeat, your plainness strengthens our bonds of endearment, for my soul delights in plainness.42
After receiving Young’s letter, Kane responded on July 18, 1853:

I must honestly tell you how glad I have been to get [your last letter]. I was discomforted by your not answering my letter of October last. . . .

It cost me a great deal. Not for nothing, old friend, do men stand by one another through good and evil report for years. Their attachment strikes so deep in time that to get it down you must tear up the earth with its roots. I could not believe I had not rightly known you; it was harder still to believe you changed, And now your letter explains [to] me everything as I would have it, and its internal evidence more than its words of text satisfies me my heartfull that you are as you say: “a lover of truth, and an undeviating friend.” I never have changed, and therefore know you will understand my pledging you in your own offer. Long may we truly know each other, for so long we shall be friends! 43

Thus, in spite of the deep, personal challenge that the reality of plural marriage presented to Kane, truth between him and Young strengthened their friendship. 44

Young and the Mountain Meadows Massacre. In 1859, U.S. Attorney General Jeremiah Black, a friend of Kane, requested through Kane a written statement from Young regarding his knowledge, as the territorial governor, of the infamous Mountain Meadows massacre, a September 1857 tragedy that occurred in southern Utah when Mormons with the assistance of a few Paiutes attacked and murdered about one hundred twenty unarmed men, women, and children. 45 Young responded to this request on December 15, 1859, with a long letter that contained one of his few expressions regarding this terrible episode:

Neither yourself, nor any one acquainted with me, will require my assurance that, had I been apprized of the intended onslaught at the Meadows, I should have used such efforts for its prevention as the time, distance, and my influence and facilities, would have permitted. The horrifying event transpired without my knowledge, except from after report, and the recurring thought of it ever causes a shudder in my feelings.

It is a subject exclusively within the province of judicial proceedings, and I have known and still prefer to know nothing touching the affair, until I in common with the people, learn the facts as they may be developed before those whose right it is to investigate and adjudicate thereupon. Colonel, you may think this a singular statement, but the facts of the massacre of men, women, and children are so shocking and crucifying to my feelings, that I have not suffered myself to hear anymore about them than the circumstances of conversation compelled. 46

The letter also outlined what Governor Young’s course had been during this critical period, suggesting why he did not pursue any specific course of action. Again, Kane was a trusted confidant to whom Young could convey his deepest feelings.
The Kanes' Visit to Utah in 1872–73. Throughout their correspondence, Young had regularly invited Kane and his family to visit Utah. The Kanes finally came in 1872 and journeyed south with Brigham Young to St. George, where the group spent the winter. Both Elizabeth’s journal and her later published accounts are remarkable documents of Mormon social history. Her Twelve Mormon Homes, published in 1874, was a compilation of letters she had sent to her family during her visit to Utah, with a focus on the Mormon communities they visited while traveling south from Salt Lake City. Elizabeth came to see the Brigham Young that her husband had known for years. Her own prejudices against plural marriage and Mormon religion ran deep, but this visit among the Mormons softened her perceptions. She was a great observer, giving us this account of their evening at the home of Bishop William Dame in Parowan in December 1872:

When we reached the end of the day’s journey, after taking off our outer garments and washing off the dust, it was the custom of our party to assemble before the fire in the sitting-room, and the leading “brothers and sisters” of the settlement would come in to pay their respects. The front door generally opened directly from the piazza into the parlor, and was always on the latch, and the circle round the fire varied constantly as the neighbors dropped in or went away. At these informal audiences, reports, complaints, and petitions were made; and I think I gathered more of the actual working of Mormonism by listening to them than from any other source. They talked away to Brigham Young about every conceivable matter, from the fluxing of an ore to the advantages of a Navajo bit, and expected him to remember every child in every cotter’s family. And he really seemed to do so, and to be at home, and be right­fully deemed infallible on every subject. I think he must make fewer mistakes than most popes, from his being in such constant intercourse with his people. I noticed that he never seems uninterested, but gave an unforced attention to the person addressing him, which suggested a mind free from care. I used to fancy that he wasted a great deal of power in this way; but I soon saw that he was accumulating it. Power, I mean, at least as the driving-wheel of his people’s industry.

During their stay in St. George, Thomas took ill. One day, when Elizabeth had returned to their residence after a walk, she found Young in her husband’s room, praying over him. She was deeply moved by this private act and told her children that she wished she could tone down her earlier harsher remarks about Young in her journals and letters home.

Kane and Young discussed a variety of things during their time together in southern Utah. Based on their activities and correspondence thereafter, they discussed economics, education, colonization, and the need for Young to prepare a will. These are all topics beyond our detailed
concern here, but a brief examination will reveal a better understanding of their deep friendship.

Kane had an intense interest in education, and no doubt the two discussed this topic at length. After returning home, Kane wrote to Young, recalling their discussions on education:

The most cheering, probably the most important feature of the tidings brought by Mr. Cannon is your resolve to found an Educational Institution worthy to bear your name. It is impossible to deprecate too seriously the growing practice of sending your bright youths abroad to lay the basis of the opinions of their lives on the crumbling foundations of modern Unfaith and Specialism. Why should you not inaugurate a System of education informed by your own experience of the world, embodying your own dearly earned wisdom, and calculated peradventure to endure for ages with the stamp of your originality upon it?51

Another important topic of conversation was the possible expansion of Mormon colonization and settlement southward, first into Arizona and then into Mexico. Kane strongly advocated both plans before they were seriously considered by the Mormons. Again, the correspondence of Young and Kane reveals this interest for both. Kane actually traveled into Mexico after his meetings with Young, hoping to establish a plantation in Coahulia,52 and Young (fig. 10) sent Mormon settlers into Arizona initially in 1873, but more extensively along the Little Colorado River in 1876 under Lot Smith and others.53 The Mormons first ventured into Mexico in 1875 in search of places to settle, but serious colonization did not begin until 1885.54

Kane had earlier counseled Young about the need to prepare a will, including the need to carefully separate his personal properties from those belonging to the Church, and the men discussed these matters in more detail in St. George. As further testimony of Young’s trust in Kane, Young’s son John prepared a detailed family listing containing all of Young’s plural wives and children to be used as part of Young’s “Last Will and Testament.”55 Young wanted Kane to prepare the will, but Kane referred him to Eli K. Price, a Philadelphia lawyer and friend of the Kane family. That such personal and private matters were discussed between the men is another measure of the trust and high regard each had for the other.56 Young wrote to Kane after their time together in Utah: “We often think of yourself, Mrs. Kane and Evan and Willie and the many pleasant hours we spent together. Your visit made impressions that will never be forgotten.”57
When Thomas Kane was informed of Brigham Young’s death in August 1877, he immediately made plans to journey to Utah, in part to assist with the settlement of the Brigham Young Estate. Once there, Kane assured the remaining Mormon leaders of his continued friendship and support, and he was invited by John Taylor to journey to Logan for the groundbreaking of the temple there.  

Young remained a consistent friend of Kane throughout his lifetime. Running throughout their correspondence are strong expressions of respect and brotherly love. Kane had planned to visit Utah as early as 1855 “and brighten up again the links of the brave chain of trusting friendship with which time has so long held us.” He managed to visit during the Utah War and later in 1872–73. In 1851, Kane wrote:

It is my hope, and I am ready to say, God willing, my intention, to correspond with you freely, about your interests in this quarter of the world. . . . But now my second nights candles are burning low, on one of them sputtering over one of my ink smeared pages, suggests to me to avoid tiring you as much as myself with this long worldly letter. Write
to me in answer to this; for, even with the best intentions, I have found there is no keeping up a correspondence without some degree of mutuality. Your writings shall continue to be regarded confidential, of course . . . command me freely as of old when I can render you or yours any service. Nothing will better keep fresh my feeling in your favor.60

Throughout their correspondence are expressions of friendship and trust, as well as an eagerness to hear from a distant friend. In May 1852, Young expressed his thoughts: “Relying upon your generosity to excuse the tediousness of past correspondence I bid you adieu invoking the choicest of heavens blessings in your behalf that from henceforth your health may be preserved and truth as hitherto abide with you”61 In 1871, Young again wrote, “For my part, you have my undeviating friendship which has never abated one particle, not lessened in the measure one grain since we first became acquainted; and I can assure you that I have no more doubt of your faithfulness and integrity of heart that I have of my own.”62 A year later, in March 1872, Young penned, “Your past labors of love for us, your meditations in our interest, and your counsels to me are sweet and precious, and let me say, that when I perused your late letters, I felt in my heart, the spirit of the Gods is with the General.”63 In June 1854, Young wrote:

I endeavor to answer in truth and friendship, even as I ever cherish you in my memory: in this spirit I formed your acquaintance, which I found you a ready sympathizer with the distressed, since when you have given ample assurances by acts more than words, of the deep impression then received. You then for the first time learned us as we were, and found a people, few in number, it is true, yet a people full of faith, of good works, struggling for an existence upon this earth, of whom you previously had comparatively little knowledge.64

When offering Kane the position of Utah territorial delegate in 1854, Young referred to the feelings of openness and honesty they had shared in their communications:

I take it for granted that you are sufficiently acquainted with me and my course, to know that when I speak, or write, I do so in all frankness and candor, for the best interests of the people of Utah, and their friends, and the lovers of truth in all the world, and I think I am not mistaken in your feelings when I presume that you will candidly receive, weigh, and act upon my business views in this letter as proceeding from one truly your friend.65

And in 1871, following a break in their letter writing, Young again reflected on their relationship: “For my part, you have my undeviating friendship which has never abated one particle, nor lessened in the measure one grain since we first became acquainted; and I can assure you I
have no more doubt of your faithfulness and integrity of heart than I have of my own.”

It is not always possible to understand what draws people into a circle of friendship: shared values tested in the furnace of real life, a sense of integrity felt and known between individuals, honesty and consistency in their relationship, a serious level of tolerance between them, and specific actions that gave public life to the friendship are surely at the core. It was said that Young was a shrewd judge of character; the fact that Kane was one of his closest non-Mormon friends speaks strongly of this gift. Kane appeared at a critical time in Mormon history, and he remained a consistent supporter of Young and the Latter-day Saints throughout the remainder of his life. At the center of this relationship was his connection with Young. It was a friendship that only deepened with time and circumstance. Their correspondence serves as a window into a comradeship that had significant impact on both Mormon and American history.

Wilford Woodruff, who served as a clerk for Kane’s 1846 patriarchal blessing, had written to Kane in 1858, providing what remains a truism in Mormon culture: “Your name will of necessity stand associated with the history of this people for years to come, whatever may be their destiny.” Brigham Young himself, during a personal conversation in 1858, told Kane, “Brother Thomas the Lord sent you here and he will not let you die. No you Cannot die till your work is done. I want to have your name live with the Saints to all Eternity.” Kane’s good friend Jedediah Grant had written to him in 1852: “We can never in this world, cancel the Debt we owe you. . . . The poor Mormons will never forget Col. Kane.” In a quiet moment of introspection, probably feeling the weight of public opinion judging him harshly for even associating with the Mormons, Kane wrote in a journal: “Others may respect me less for being alone in the defence of a dispised and injured people—but I respect myself more.” These were the reflections of a true friend. On Kane’s deathbed in 1883, some of his last thoughts were recorded by his wife, Elizabeth: “My mind is too heavy, but do send the sweetest message you can make up to my Mormon friends—to all, my dear, Mormon friends.” Had Brigham Young been alive, Thomas Kane would have no doubt directed these thoughts specifically to him.

David J. Whittaker (who can be reached by email via byustudies@byu.edu) is curator of nineteenth-century Western and Mormon manuscripts in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Harold B. Lee Library and is an Associate Professor of history at Brigham Young University. He was the curator of the Thomas L. Kane exhibition in the Lee Library and served as the guest editor of this publication containing the lectures that were presented as part of the exhibit.


3. Dean C. Jessee, ed., Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book in collaboration with the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1974).


6. For a listing, see Arrington, Brigham Young: American Moses, 121. See also Jeffrey O. Johnson, “Determining and Defining ‘Wife’: The Brigham Young Households,” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 20 (Autumn 1987): 57–70. Kane would not learn of the Mormon practice of plural marriage until 1851, but in 1847, he asked Young for the details of a well-reported Boston divorce case relating to Augusta Cobb (she had become one of Young’s plural wives in 1843). See Kane to Young, December 9, 1847, Brigham Young Papers, Church History Library, Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Young Papers, Church History Library). The best account of Young’s family during this period is Dean C. Jessee, “Brigham Young’s Family: The Wilderness Years,” BYU Studies 19, no. 4 (1979): 474–500.


8. One thinks of the friendships of Oliver Wendell Holmes and Harold Laski, and Samuel Johnson and James Boswell; both were relationships between older and younger men, and like Boswell, Kane wanted to interview Young and write his biography. It is interesting to speculate, given his Boswell-like relationship and interest in Young, just what kind of biography Kane would have produced had he fulfilled his wish. See further, Jeffrey O’Connell and Thomas E. O’Connell, Friendships across Ages: Johnson and Boswell; Holmes and Laski (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008). Writing Young’s biography was a subject that was addressed in several of the letters; for example, in Kane to Young, October 12, 1871 (Young Papers, Church History Library), Kane spoke of his plans of coming out to Utah to compile materials “for the Life of Brigham Young,” and in Kane to Young, October 16, 1872 (Young Papers, Church History Library), Kane announced he was coming to Utah for “daily literary work,” recording Young’s thoughts for the anticipated biography. Young sent Kane typescript drafts of chapters from Edward Tullidge’s forthcoming Life of Brigham Young; this probably ended Kane’s plans for such a work by himself. It is not known when Young sent this material to Kane; the biography was published in New York in 1876. The typescript of six chapters in seventy-five pages is in the Thomas L. Kane and Elizabeth W. Kane Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections).
9. The main location of these letters is the Brigham Young Papers, Church History Library, supplemented by those in the Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. Especially useful are the typescripts of the Young-Kane correspondence prepared by Edyth J. Romney and Debbie Lilenquist in the Church History Library. Photocopies of these typescripts were made available to me by the staff of the Church History Library. There are other Kane letters located in various repositories throughout the United States, although some still remain in private hands. Much of the original Thomas L. Kane archive was gathered and organized by his wife Elizabeth, who had served as his scribe; various family descendants inherited portions of the extensive collection through the years, and they have disposed of the materials as they saw fit. The bulk of John K. Kane’s papers are in possession of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. Some of the Thomas Kane manuscripts and the papers of his brother Elisha Kent Kane remain in private hands.

10. For more on Brigham Young’s rise to leadership, see Ronald K. Esplin, “The Emergence of Brigham Young and the Twelve to Mormon Leadership” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1981; BYU Studies, 2006).


12. Kane to First Presidency, July 11, 1850, Young Papers, Church History Library.


14. Thomas L. Kane, Patriarchal Blessing, September 7, 1846, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. The earliest handwritten copy is dated September 7, but others were dated September 8. In April 1853, when he was thirty-one, he married his sixteen-year-old second cousin Elizabeth Wood. The couple eventually had one daughter and three sons; see also Kane to Young, July 18, 1853, Young Papers, Church History Library. See Darcee D. Barnes, “A Biographical Study of Elizabeth D. Kane” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2002).

15. Kane to Young, Fall 1850, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.

16. Kane to Young, February 19, 1851, Young Papers, Church History Library. In the same letter, Kane referred to 4 Nephi in the Book of Mormon, actually citing page 555 (4 Nephi 1:15 in modern editions), which refers to there being “no contention in the land,” and he also referred to the “honey bee in the valley of Nimrod” from the Book of Ether (chapter 2:3 in modern editions). These lines clearly suggest Young had presented Kane with a copy of the Book of Mormon and Kane had read it carefully.

17. Young to Kane, September 15, 1851, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.

18. Young to Kane, January 31, 1854, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.

19. Kane to Young, July 10, 1855, Young Papers, Church History Library.

20. Elizabeth Kane, St. George Journal, February 11, 1873, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.

21. Kane to First Presidency, July 11, 1850, Young Papers, Church History Library. This personal sense of honor runs through much of Kane’s life; for more
detail, see Matthew J. Grow, “‘I Have Given Myself to the Devil’: Thomas L. Kane and the Culture of Honor,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2005): 346–64.

22. Kane to First Presidency, July 11, 1850, Young Papers, Church History Library; and “Last Will and Testament of Thomas L. Kane,” n.d. [1850], Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. This ought to be seen as a symbolic expression of love, reflecting the contemporary view that where one’s heart is, there are his deepest feelings. In this same will, he donated his body to science. However, when Kane died in December 1883, he was buried in Kane, Pennsylvania.

23. Kane to “My Dear Friends,” February 19, 1851, Young Papers, Church History Library.

24. Kane to Young, September 22, 1846, Young Papers, Church History Library. Kane was still suffering from a “disease shattered frame” when he wrote Young and included copies of John K. Kane’s correspondence, presumably to keep Young informed of national concerns.

25. Kane to Young, December 2, 1846, Young Papers, Church History Library. In his December 6, 1847, letter to Kane (Young Papers, Church History Library), According to Webster’s 1828 dictionary, thereout was an adjective, meaning “out of that or this.” Kane was an educated man who rarely misspelled words. Young hoped that the Mormons could be the recipients of the same kind of assistance Americans were then offering to victims of the Irish famine, mentioning specifically that the Mormons were “a fit subject for an appeal to the American people,” as Kane himself had suggested. The Kane Collection at BYU has a copy of an 1846 broadside that was just such an appeal for help, signed by a number of people in Philadelphia, including Kane.

26. For a detailed account of Kane’s preparation and delivery of this address when he was very ill, see his letter to Young, Fall 1850, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. Young received a copy of the work in 1851 and conveyed his positive comments about it to Kane in a letter dated September 15, 1851.

27. See, for example, Kane to Young, April 28, 1854, Young Papers, Church History Library.

28. Elizabeth D. Kane, draft of letter to Rev. Dr. [James Monroe?] Buckley, March 6, 1906, Daytona, Fla., Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections, 6–7.

29. For more information as well as the sources, see David J. Whittaker, “New Sources on Old Friends: The Thomas L. Kane and Elizabeth W. Kane Collections,” *Journal of Mormon History* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 92–93.

30. Young to Kane, May 8, 1858, Young Papers, Church History Library. On Kane’s religious views, which tended, much to Elizabeth’s consternation, toward an anti-Evangelical Christianity, see Whittaker, “New Light on Old Friends,” 90–94, and various comments throughout Matthew Grow’s recent biography, “Liberty to the Downtrodden.”

31. Young to Kane, April 29, 1864, Young Papers, Church History Library. Kane did not join the Church during his lifetime. His good Mormon friend George Q. Cannon had the vicarious ordinance work done for Kane after he died.

32. See two letters: Kane to Young, April 7, 1851, Young Papers, Church History Library (Kane’s introduction of Perry E. Brocchus and Lemuel Brandeberry, newly appointed justices of the Utah Territorial Court whom Kane did not know personally); and Kane to First Presidency, July 29, 1851, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections (Kane’s defense of attacks on President Fillmore).
33. For the full story, see Ronald W. Walker, “Thomas L. Kane and Utah’s Quest for Self-Government, 1846–51,” Utah Historical Quarterly 69, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 100–119.

34. Kane’s papers at BYU reveal his support for the purchase of Alaska and the development of plantations in northern Mexico (he publicly supported both subjects), as well as his own interest in the governorships of California and later Washington. Early on he encouraged the Mormons to move into Arizona and Mexico during Brigham Young’s lifetime; after their meeting in St. George in 1873, Young did begin sending Mormon settlers into Arizona, but the movement of Latter-day Saints into northern Mexico came under the direction of John Taylor in the mid-1880s.

35. Kane to First Presidency, July 11, 1850, Young Papers, Church History Library. When Young responded on September 15, 1851, more realistically to this letter (which had only reached him much later), he wrote: “We rejoice, with you, that Providence spared [you], until you could rightfully ‘esteem the battle for the Mormon reputation ended,’ i.e. for the then time being, but to suppose for a moment that the General War, on ‘Mormon reputation,’ or Saint’s Salvation, ended, or at its meridian: would be as absurd and false, as to suppose that all that shines is pure Gold. When the earth is purified by fire, it will be known whose works have been like Gold, Silver, and Precious Stone; and whose will be like wood, hay, and stubble; and until that day, the war between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdoms of the world (ofSatan) will wax hotter and hotter, with occasional slight intervals of rest, in appearance only, as you have seen, but as yet there is no time for burying the dead. We drop this hint to a friend that he may not be found with his armor off, while spies attack him when asleep or he be ambushed in the rear.”

36. Kane to First Presidency, July 11, 1850, Young Papers, Church History Library. There are a number of such references relating to Kane’s work with the Mormons that have never surfaced, suggesting that there are additional Kane manuscripts yet to be discovered. Another aspect of Kane’s own sense of paranoia was his telling Mormon leaders of high-level government conspiracies against them—opinions that undoubtedly fostered a deeper sense of mistrust of the federal government by the Latter-day Saints.

37. Young to Kane, October 30, 1854, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections; Kane declined in a letter to Young January 5, 1855, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.


39. Lemuel G. Brandebury, Perry E. Brocchus, and Broughton D. Harris were the officials. Their report was republished as a twelve-page pamphlet in Liverpool [Polygamy Revived in the West: Report of the Judges of Utah Territory to the President of the United States, on the Conduct of the Mormonites (Liverpool: T. Brakell, 1852)], and it created a further stir in England, where the Church was having great missionary success at the time. See also Roberts, Comprehensive History of the Church, 3516–44.

40. See Jedediah M. Grant to Brigham Young, December 30, 1851, in Young Papers, Church History Library. For the context of the 1852 public announcement,
see David J. Whittaker, “The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt and the Public Announcement of Plural Marriage,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (July 1987): 293–314. The pamphlet came out under the name of Jedediah M. Grant, but the contemporary documents, especially Grant’s letters to Young, reveal Kane’s involvement. The publication was *Three Letters to the New York Herald, from J. M. Grant, of Utah* [New York, 1852]. The first letter appeared in the *New York Herald*, March 9, 1852. See further, Gene A. Sessions, *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 100, 109–10, 264–65, with the entire pamphlet reprinted on 319–68.

41. See Kane to Young, October 17, 1852, Young Papers, Church History Library. More privately, Kane’s notebooks reveal that he was deeply hurt by this knowledge, suggesting he felt as if he had just learned of a wife’s infidelity. See the comments in Thomas L. Kane, November 1851–September 1852 Notebook, December 27 and 28, 1851, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. While in his October 17, 1852, letter Kane told Young that “you err” in this matter, Kane also reflected that the recent death of his brother seemed to draw his thoughts closer to his Mormon friends: “It seems to me that as the ties grow fewer which attach me to the world here my thought turns more frequently toward happy Deseret and my many cherished friends there.”

42. Young to Kane, May 20, 1853, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. In this same letter, Young defended the Mormon marriage practice as protected by the U.S. Constitution under its guarantee of religious freedom. Young called the Constitution our great “Magna Charta” and declared that he would defend it “while God gives me breath, if I have to flee to Africa’s Deserts for doing it.”

43. Kane to Young, July 18, 1853, Young Papers, Church History Library. In this same letter, Kane informed Young of his recent marriage to Elizabeth Denny Wood, writing he was “married as if on purpose to fulfill my old Patriarch friend’s seemingly long ago lost prediction.” Young responded with great enthusiasm on January 31, 1854 (Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections). Kane reported the birth of his first daughter in a letter of July 10, 1855 (Young Papers, Church History Library). Young responded to the news on September 30, 1855 (Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections), conveying his “warmest wishes that Heaven’s choice blessings may attend your daughter during her sojourn in this time, . . . for you are more or less aware of the high estimation in which I hold children as a blessing.”

44. In the same letter of July 18, 1853, Kane discussed the growing national attention to the construction of a railroad across the country. Kane asked Young if he would consider it “your policy to have the Road conducted through your Valley”? This would become another thread in their correspondence: the transcontinental railroad and western development. In Young to Kane, January 31, 1854, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections, Young commented that both the railroad and the telegraph would be a “most natural highway” for trade and commerce.

45. The request of Jeremiah Black is mentioned in Kane to Young, July 24, 1859, Young Papers, Church History Library.

46. Young to Kane, December 15, 1859. Young included in this letter a copy of George A. Smith’s letter to Young regarding the massacre, dated August 17, 1858. Both letters are in Thomas L. Kane Correspondence, Perry Special Collections.
For the full story, see Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). As this study reveals, few Paiute Indians were involved in the planning or killing, but Mormons did try to cover their own involvement by telling others that the Indians were the guilty murderers.

47. See, for example, the following letters from Young to Kane: December 6, 1847, Young Papers, Church History Library; May 20, 1853, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections; January 5, 1855, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections; September 30, 1855, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections; June 29, 1857, Young Papers, Church History Library; September 27, 1860, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections; September 21, 1861, Young Papers, Church History Library; October 15, 1869, Young Papers, Church History Library; April 16, 1871, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. See also, Kane to Young, October 16, 1872, Young Papers, Church History Library (Kane writes that he is coming to Utah); and October 31, 1872, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections (Young writes that he is glad Kane is coming to Utah, and he hopes Kane’s wife and children will come, too).


49. Elizabeth Wood Kane, *A Gentile Account of Life in Utah’s Dixie, 1872–73: Elizabeth Kane’s St. George Journal*, ed. Norman R. Bowen (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Library Tanner Trust Fund, 1995), 167–70. The original journal is in the Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. Elizabeth’s account of a dinner in Brigham Young’s home in Salt Lake City remains a wonderful description of domestic life seldom mentioned in Mormon sources. See Elizabeth Kane’s letters to her daughter Harriet Kane, December 7 and 11, 1872, originals in Kane Collection, BYU.

50. George Q. Cannon was summoned to St. George by Brigham Young during this time. Cannon recorded in his journal that Kane dispensed “much valuable advice which his familiarity with public affairs and the public men of the country enabled him to do.” Cannon, Journal, January 8, 1873, as cited in Matthew J. Grow, “‘Liberty to the Downtrodden’: Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2006), 623 n. 60.

51. See Kane to Young, December 4, 1873, Young Papers, Church History Library, in which Kane actually calls this school “Brigham Young University.” President Young would found a number of academies throughout Mormon settlements; Brigham Young Academy in Provo was founded in 1875 and was renamed Brigham Young University in 1903.

52. See Thomas L. Kane, “Coahulia,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 16 (January 19, 1877): 561–567. Kane’s trip to Mexico is detailed in his Notebook, July 31, 1873–December 1876, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. See also Kane to Young, May 28, 1876, Young Papers, Church History Library, in which Kane reports his contacts with Mexican officials and his plans to establish a colony in the “rich unpeopled lands of Northern Mexico.” In Kane to Young, March 2, 1877, Young Papers, Church History Library, Kane discusses his project in more detail and seems to be inviting the Mormons to assist him. See also John Taylor to Kane, May 14, 1878, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.
Collections, in which President Taylor reveals his “complete sympathy” with the earlier plans of Brigham Young. The only question, Taylor wrote, was the matter of timing for the Mormons to establish colonies in Mexico.

53. Young to Kane, July 31, 1873, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections, reported that the initial movement into Arizona was not successful, and that Young planned to personally lead the next group in the Mormon exploration of Arizona. In his November 16, 1873, letter (Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections), Young told Kane, “I have forgotten nothing connected with Arizona; my eye is constantly on the mark.” See further, Charles S. Peterson, Take Up Your Mission: Mormon Colonizing along the Little Colorado River, 1870–1900 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1973). Peterson first called my attention to the Kane-Young plans for exploration and settlement into Arizona and then in the Sonora Valley of Mexico (5–6, 15, 17). The plans called for railroad development as well. For Kane’s positive account of the plans for Mexican settlement, see Kane to Young, March 2, 1877, Young Papers, Church History Library.

54. For the larger story, see F. LaMond Tullis, Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987).

55. This listing, or “Family Record,” received by Kane on May 20, 1873, is in the Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. Kane had written to Young on April 4, 1873 (Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections), that Young’s estate was so complex a legal issue that its settlement would take much time: “There is scarcely a feature of your case that is not bristling with law points,” he wrote. In spite of Young’s efforts to address this matter, the settlement of his estate following his death in 1877 took several years. See Leonard J. Arrington, “The Settlement of the Brigham Young Estate, 1877–1879,” Pacific Historical Review 21, no. 1 (February 1952): 1–20. Young expressed his gratitude to Kane for his advice on these matters in letters to him on May 7, 1873, and November 16, 1873 (both in Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections).

56. Drafts of Brigham Young’s will and related materials are in the Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.

57. Young to Kane, July 31, 1873, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.

58. The telegram to Kane informing him of Brigham Young’s death, from John W. Young, George Q. Cannon, Daniel H. Wells, and Brigham Young Jr., dated August 29, 1877, is in the Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. A note at the bottom says Kane left for Salt Lake City on September 6, 1877. Kane’s account of his 1877 visit to Utah is in the Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.

59. Kane to Young, January 5, 1855, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.

60. Kane to “My Dear Friends” [Brigham Young, Willard Richards, and Heber C. Kimball], February 19, 1851.

61. Young to Kane, May 29, 1852, draft letterbook, volume 1, May 27, 1852–February 27, 1853, Young Papers, Church History Library. In the same letter, Young described his recent tours of the Mormon settlements. Such local information was a regular part of Young’s communications with Kane. Kane’s growing interest in the plight of Native Americans was also informed by Young’s occasional reports of his own interactions with the native peoples of Utah.

62. Young to Kane, April 16, 1871, Brigham Young letterbook, volume 12, September 9, 1870–May 31, 1871, Young Papers, Church History Library.

63. Young to Kane, March 5, 1872, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.
64. Young to Kane, June 29, 1854, draft letterbook, volume 3, November 30, 1853–August 26, 1854, Young Papers, Church History Library. Underlining in original.
65. Young to Kane, October 30, 1854, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections. Underlining in original. Toward the end of the letter, Young thanked Kane for the kindness he had shown to the missionaries who had passed through Philadelphia, especially since such treatment was a “rare occurrence” from those “not of our faith, but as evidencing that high toned fellow feeling so indicative of upright, sympathetic magnanimity.”
66. Young to Kane, April 16, 1871, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.
67. It was Cicero who suggested that “only those are to be judged friendships in which the characters have been strengthened and matured by age.” Cited in Michel de Montaigne, “Of Friendship,” in Montaigne, The Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 139.
68. Wilford Woodruff to Thomas L. Kane, March 4, 1858, Young Papers, Church History Library.
69. Wilford Woodruff, Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1984), 5:171, February 25, 1858. This had been seen in more tangible ways in Mormon history: they named their main settlement in western Iowa “Kanesville” (name later changed to Council Bluffs); in 1864 a southern Utah county was named after him; and a bronze statue of Thomas L. Kane remains on the grounds of the Utah State Capitol in Salt Lake City.
70. Jedediah M. Grant to Thomas L. Kane, May 5, 1852, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.
71. Undated entry, Thomas L. Kane Diary, 1858, Perry Special Collections, [5]. Underlining in original.
72. Elizabeth W. Kane to George Q. Cannon, December 30, 1883, Church History Library as cited in Leonard J. Arrington, “In Honorable Remembrance: Thomas L. Kane’s Services to the Mormons,” BYU Studies 21, no. 4 (1981): 400–1. For details of Thomas Kane’s last weeks of life, see the diary of Harriet A. Kane, December 13–27, 1883, Kane Collection, Perry Special Collections.