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# Thomas L. Kane

## A Guide to the Sources

*David J. Whitaker*

Thomas Leiper Kane was born in 1822 to John K. Kane and Jane Duval Leiper. John K. Kane was a personal friend of several U.S. presidents, including Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk, who appointed John to the federal bench in Philadelphia. Until his death in 1858, John remained well connected to the power brokers in Washington, D.C. His son Thomas, also trained in the law, first learned of the Latter-day Saints through Philadelphia newspaper accounts that described the forced migration of the Mormons from their homes in Illinois in early 1846. Using connections through his father, Thomas began what would be a lifetime role as a friend, mediator, and peacemaker for the Mormons as they dealt with sometimes hostile government officials and tried to combat a negative public image. Thomas traveled west to the Mormon encampments along the Missouri River valley and assisted in the call of the Mormon Battalion in 1846; he publicized their plight in an influential lecture called *The Mormons*, published in 1850; and he was a major factor in the peaceful resolution of the Utah War in 1857–58. Thomas continued throughout his life to counsel, defend, and actively seek the welfare of the Latter-day Saints. He worked to soften anti-Mormon legislation while mentoring Latter-day Saint leaders like George Q. Cannon in the tasks of working with Congress and the public media to present a more positive and accurate view of the Latter-day Saints. Thomas's extensive correspondence with Brigham Young shows a deep friendship and trust developed between them. In 1872–73 Thomas and his wife, Elizabeth, journeyed to Utah and traveled with Brigham Young to his winter home in southern Utah. Elizabeth's *Twelve Mormon Homes* (1874) remains a classic account of Mormon social history.

Thomas Kane was also involved in a number of other causes during his lifetime, including the antislavery movement and educational and health reform. He was close to his brother Elisha Kent Kane, the famous arctic explorer, whose accounts Thomas helped edit for publication and whose accomplishments Thomas helped publicize. Thomas was a complex individual, never joining a church but living a deeply Christian life of selfless service. He suffered with poor health throughout his life but managed to accomplish much in spite of it. He died in 1883.

### *Thomas L. Kane (1822–1883)*

#### I. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

The L. Tom Perry Special Collections in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University owns the largest collection of Thomas L. and Elizabeth W. Kane manuscripts in the world. Vault Manuscript 792 contains seventy-nine archival boxes of material, available to researchers on forty reels of microfilm. An eleven-hundred-page guide to this collection is available and includes a listing of important Kane material in other repositories as well as a biographical register of Kane family members and of people mentioned in the Kane papers. This extensive collection is described in David J. Whittaker, “New Sources on Old Friends: The Thomas L. Kane and Elizabeth W. Kane Collection,” *Journal of Mormon History* 27 (Spring 2001): 67–94. The collection includes military material (Kane fought in the American Civil War, including in the Battle of Gettysburg); Kane’s extensive correspondence with Mormon leaders; family correspondence; information on the development of Kane, Pennsylvania; and an extensive collection of Elizabeth’s journals, miscellaneous writings, and scrapbooks. For both American and Mormon history, this collection is a treasure trove of material for the serious researcher. Very useful is Jana Darrington, “Ancestors and Descendants of Thomas L. Kane and Elizabeth W. Kane” (a professional genealogical compilation of two hundred pages relating to the extended Kane family), MSS 2212, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU, 1999.

The BYU library has subsequently acquired additional Thomas L. Kane and Kane family manuscripts: Vault MSS 3190 was obtained in 2003 and contains an additional fourteen archival boxes. A guide (eighty-five pages) has also been prepared for these materials. The BYU library has been acquiring Kane manuscripts since about 1978, and additional collections are described in the guides mentioned above. A sampling includes

the 1852 pocket diary of Thomas L. Kane (VMSS 796) and the 1858 pocket diary of Thomas L. Kane (VMSS 807). BYU also owns an extensive collection of Kane family photographs.

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