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Transplanted to Zion: The Impact of British Latter-day Saint Immigration upon Nauvoo

Richard L. Jensen

After the Latter-day Saints’ traumatic expulsion from Missouri, the opportunity to settle in western Illinois and southeastern Iowa revived hopes for a truly international gathering of converts to prepare for the Savior’s millennial reign. Delighting in the prospect of such a development, the Saints had sung since 1835:

There’s a feast of fat things for the righteous preparing,  
That the good of this world all the saints may be sharing;  
For the harvest is ripe, and the reapers have learn’d  
To gather the wheat, that the tares may be burn’d.  

According to the hymn, the Lord’s servants were to go forth to every nation, proclaiming the urgent need to prepare for the Second Coming of the Savior and actively promoting emigration:

Go gather the willing, and push them together,  
Yea, push them to Zion (the saints’ rest forever).

After leaving Nauvoo still in its first stages of development, members of the Quorum of the Twelve found during their fabulously successful mission to the British Isles that their converts needed little if any prodding to gather to Nauvoo. In six short years, more than forty-six hundred Latter-day Saints left the British Isles for Nauvoo and its vicinity. What effect did such substantial immigration have upon Nauvoo? What roles did the immigrants from the British Isles play in significant developments there?

The analogy of the harvest suggested by the early hymn could certainly be appropriate. However, my findings suggest a process more like a transplanting in hopes of additional growth, rather than

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a culminating harvest or an uprooting. The time for that was yet in the future.

The British Latter-day Saint immigration built rapidly to a peak, with nearly 300 reaching the United States in 1840, about 900 in 1841, and more than 1,500 in 1842. With the arrival of 1,022, immigration continued strong through 1843, declining after the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, with 644 arriving in 1844 and probably just over 300 in 1845. Thus more than 90 percent of those British Latter-day Saint immigrants who went directly to Nauvoo arrived before the Martyrdom and were associated in some way with the city under the Prophet Joseph Smith’s leadership.

The addition of substantial numbers of overseas converts could be viewed as progress in the building of God’s kingdom. In a letter dated May 1841, Joseph Smith reported: “I am happy to inform you, that things are going on well in this place, we have been greatly prospered, and many are flocking in from Europe & about 300 have arrived in less than a week, more are on the way.” On the other hand, Bishop George Miller, charged with assisting the poor, remembered that same spring as a challenging time involving hectic effort to relieve the newly arrived poor and provide employment.

Environmental impact studies today try to assess in detail the effects of a rapid influx of people into communities. While the resources for such a study of Nauvoo are presently not at hand, there are indications of some of the challenges created by such a large immigration. Although the land was productive, the processing and distribution of food were problematic until adjustments were made to accommodate the increased demand. Mary Ann Weston Maughan recalled that “the worst part was to get provisions in this new country.” She remembered her husband waiting all night to have a little grain ground at a small Nauvoo gristmill.

Land and housing were also key issues. While Orson Hyde was on a mission in Palestine, Peter and Mary Ann Maughan borrowed his Nauvoo home during the winter of 1841–42 for their newly arrived family of seven. But frontier conditions still prevailed in the new settlement. The Maughans’ feather beds froze to the floor until spring and, because they had no table and no cupboards, much of their china perished during the winter. After Elder Hyde returned in the spring, they camped out at the site of their new home until it was completed sufficiently to house them.

Establishing a home with scanty funds sometimes evoked a frontier style of resourcefulness in the immigrants. In 1843 John Marriott and Christopher Layton, friends from Bedfordshire, appealed to Joseph Smith himself after they found initial arrangements by their compatriots for obtaining property unsatisfactory.
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The Prophet is said to have given each of them 2 1/2 acres of land at what became the Big Mound settlement, about seven miles east of Nauvoo; there the two of them built a one-room sod house for themselves and their wives. Layton later recalled of the house: “When it was pared down it looked pretty well. The first winter we had quilts for doors; we had a dirt floor, and when the beds were made down they just about filled the room.” The largely brick reconstruction of Nauvoo in our day cannot adequately convey a sense of the new settlers’ initial struggles to obtain shelter.

The British immigration showed the need for purchasing land beyond that in Nauvoo and Iowa’s Half-Breed Tract, if the Latter-day Saints were to have adequate land for farming. As a result, the settlement of Warren, just south of Warsaw and about seven miles south of Nauvoo, was designated as a gathering place for British immigrants. However, the new settlers found themselves in an untenable position there as surprisingly strong anti-Mormon sentiment bubbled over in Warsaw. The high price and low quality of provisions made available to the Latter-day Saints and restrictions on the availability of firewood made the location undesirable, but if the Latter-day Saints relocated, they risked alienating influential citizens who were selling them the land. Nevertheless, under Joseph Smith’s direction they moved away. That the move was not a totally successful solution is indicated by the fact that Mark Aldrich, one of the principal citizens in selling the land, was later one of the defendants charged with the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. His financial embarrassment resulting from the Latter-day Saints’ cancellation of their purchase of Warren may have been one of the factors leading to his later anti-Mormon activities.

The immigrants’ success in finding work was closely related to their occupational skills. Farmers could begin production immediately—if land was available. Those with experience in the building trade were particularly in demand; many British stonemasons and carpenters helped build the Nauvoo Temple.

On the other hand, when they moved from the world’s most highly industrialized nation to “emerging” Nauvoo, many workers found little need for their specialized skills, particularly those in the textile industries. Joseph Smith appealed to the Saints remaining in Britain and to the Church at large to assist in developing industries in Nauvoo that would utilize these human resources, but the effort to establish factories was stymied by a shortage of experience and capital. While Nauvoo’s new arrivals had plenty of experience as factory workers and even as foremen, none had experience in establishing a factory. In addition, there was little capital available.
among the Latter-day Saints, who were focusing their energies on building the temple and the Nauvoo House. British immigrants who had funds available before emigration had often exhausted them in helping as many of their less fortunate friends to emigrate as possible. For example, Thomas Bullock, though not wealthy by most standards, was credited in an unpublished obituary with assisting forty-three emigrants to Nauvoo.\textsuperscript{12} Edward Ockey, a prominent convert from among the United Brethren, assisted “many families” to emigrate in 1841.\textsuperscript{13} Had non-Mormon capitalists recognized the potential in Nauvoo’s British-trained work force, they might have established several profitable industries; however, in view of the volatile history of the Latter-day Saints’ relations with their neighbors such an investment would have been somewhat risky.

The lack of demand for factory workers meant that they and their families had to adjust to new circumstances. Three years after his immigration, James Jepson had changed from a bleacher in a cotton factory to a horse doctor. John Robinson had broadened his specialty from pistol filer to gunsmith. However, some still listed the specialized skills they had acquired in Britain long after those skills had ceased to be useful to them in Nauvoo. Nauvoo Masonic Lodge records list Frederick Cook as a cotton spinner in 1845 after he had been in Nauvoo for three years.\textsuperscript{14} Dressmakers like Mary Ann Maughan sometimes continued to pursue their trade but found a limited clientele since most women in that part of the United States did their own sewing.\textsuperscript{15}

Among the most successful contributors to Nauvoo were British immigrants with clerical training. Everywhere one turned, it seemed, a British clerk was keeping track of things. Robert Lang Campbell assisted Patriarch John Smith and Elder Willard Richards with clerical work in Nauvoo.\textsuperscript{16} David Candland was a clerk for Brigham Young in Nauvoo as well as a schoolteacher.\textsuperscript{17} Thomas Bullock was a scribe for Willard Richards and Joseph Smith and served as Nauvoo City recorder.\textsuperscript{18} William Clayton served as Joseph Smith’s secretary and played a major role in the preparation of the Prophet’s history. He was also temple recorder, clerk and recorder for the Nauvoo City Council, secretary pro tem of the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge, and city treasurer for Nauvoo.\textsuperscript{19} Clayton’s Nauvoo journal is an important source for Latter-day Saint history, as are the Thomas Bullock diaries recently acquired by Brigham Young University. George D. Watt, who would later be responsible for the preservation of a generation of Latter-day Saint sermons through his skill in shorthand, taught that skill in Nauvoo, and, beginning in the spring of 1845, recorded minutes of important proceedings, including the trial of the assassins of Joseph and Hyrum Smith.\textsuperscript{20}
The arts benefited by the infusion of talent from the British Isles. William Pitt’s brass band enlivened Nauvoo. Portrait painter William W. Major and artist Sutcliffe Maudsley were welcome additions to the city. John M. Kay was in great demand for the entertainment of visitors as a vocal soloist and instrumentalist. Alexander Neibaur, a native of Alsace–Lorraine who was converted in the British Isles, taught German and Hebrew to Joseph Smith.

Relatively few British Latter-day Saint immigrants held administrative or leadership positions in the Church or in the community. John Benbow was one of fifteen trustees for the Mercantile and Mechanical Association of Nauvoo. William Clayton served briefly on the Zarahemla Stake high council and later as stake clerk before moving to Nauvoo.

In addition, the British immigrants seem to have had relatively little impact in the political sphere, aside from the advantages and disadvantages of helping to make Nauvoo as large as it was. Many of them did not become American citizens until several years after immigrating. Except for Thomas Bullock and William Clayton, their names are scarce among local officeholders. The Council of Fifty, responsible for planning and carrying out Joseph Smith’s 1844 campaign for the presidency of the United States and eventually for preparing for the Latter-day Saint exodus from Nauvoo, included only one British Latter-day Saint immigrant during the Nauvoo period. This was William Clayton, who served as clerk.

In their survey of Church history, The Story of the Latter-day Saints, James Allen and Glen Leonard estimate that nearly one-fourth of Nauvoo’s population consisted of British Latter-day Saint immigrants. The detailed research of Susan Easton Black concurs with this estimate. Clearly, the British Latter-day Saint immigrants constituted a relatively large segment of Nauvoo’s population.

To get a sense of the grass-roots involvement of the British Latter-day Saint immigrants in community-related affairs, I have compared passenger lists of the immigrants with membership lists of the Nauvoo Relief Society and the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge. This comparison made possible a preliminary identification of British Latter-day Saint immigrants affiliated with each organization. The passenger lists that can be located account for only two-thirds of the immigrants. Listings exist for 100 percent of the immigrants in 1840, 54 percent in 1841, 43 percent in 1842, 76 percent in 1843, 22 percent in 1844, and 100 percent in 1845. Although the lack of documentation for one-third of the immigrants allows only a rough estimate, this comparison is still useful in learning something about British Latter-day Saint immigrant activities in Nauvoo.
Nauvoo Relief Society records list nearly 1,300 members by name and indicate that the society had between 1,300 and 1,400 members before it ceased to function in the spring of 1844. Of these, no more than about 70 can be identified from the passenger lists as British Latter-day Saint immigrants. Adding half that number again to compensate for the missing passenger lists, we estimate that about 105 British Latter-day Saint immigrants were members of the Nauvoo Relief Society. This figure is only about 8 percent of the Relief Society enrollment, or one member in twelve. The estimate may be slightly low because some women who arrived in Nauvoo before they married may have joined the Relief Society under their married names, which in most cases I have not identified. But even if as many as 50 women joined Relief Society on that basis, still only 12 percent—one in eight—of the Nauvoo Relief Society members would have been British immigrants, suggesting a much lower rate of Relief Society participation for British Latter-day Saint immigrants than for their neighbors.

In a preliminary membership survey which matches the names on passenger lists with those on the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge’s records, I identified 57 British immigrants to Nauvoo among the 1,354 men associated with the lodge. This number probably accounts for only two-thirds of the actual number of British immigrants to Nauvoo who were lodge members; thus about 86 of the British Latter-day Saint immigrants joined the Masonic lodge—just over 6 percent of the lodge’s membership, or about one in sixteen.

Immigrants living away from the city were at some disadvantage with respect to activities available in Nauvoo. The apparently low rate of participation of British Latter-day Saint immigrants in two organizations that played such significant roles in the social and religious life of the community raises several interesting questions which can only be outlined here in hopes that further study may help shed additional light on Nauvoo’s social and religious history. How many of the immigrants actually lived in Nauvoo or in close enough proximity to attend meetings regularly? For example, living in the Big Mound Settlement, John Marriott was not a member of the Masonic Lodge, nor was his wife Susan a member of the Nauvoo Relief Society. Many British-American Saints relocated from Iowa and Warren to Nauvoo, but how many lived in the city and how many in the surrounding countryside, at least throughout Hancock County? Aside from the fact that they were not the earliest settlers, are the reasons so many British immigrants settled outside Nauvoo itself understood sufficiently?

How many British Latter-day Saint immigrants never settled in Nauvoo and vicinity? Defections from the ranks sometimes
occurred before the immigrants ever set foot on Nauvoo soil. For example, in 1841 about thirty passengers of the Sheffield remained at St. Louis, having become disaffected through reports they heard about Nauvoo.34 How many others abandoned their goal en route? How many British immigrants and other residents left Nauvoo before the exodus? Could Nauvoo have had a more fluid population than may have been thought?

Were the British immigrants less inclined than their American neighbors to join such organizations as Relief Society and Masonry? The urgent requirements of making a living and establishing a home in a new country may have dominated their time to the exclusion of organizational activities, particularly if, as a general rule, their financial situation was precarious.

Were the immigrants less frequently invited to join these organizations? Were significant social barriers, or perhaps just social distances, connected with Nauvoo's differences in national origin? How important were kinship networks and older friendship networks in establishing access to these organizations, which apparently remained fraternal and sororal in nature despite the size they attained? Many may have mistakenly attributed a more open, even democratic, approach to the recruitment process of these organizations than was actually the case.

Participation in temple-related ceremonies was another significant facet of life for many in Nauvoo. Three British Latter-day Saint immigrants were among 88 Saints who received their endowments before the Nauvoo Temple was opened for the ordinances. These were Jenetta Richards and William and Ruth Clayton.35 In Nauvoo Temple records, places of birth are listed for many of the more than 5,600 individuals who received their endowments in the temple.36 A comparison of these with passenger lists reveals that 216 of the British-born endowed were British Latter-day Saint immigrants. From among the relatively large number of persons for whom no birthplace is given, 81 can be tentatively identified as British immigrants to Nauvoo. If about 150 are added, in proportion to the passenger lists that are lacking, the estimated total of 450 indicates a remarkably low immigrant participation in relation to the total number of endowments. Apparently only about 8 percent of those endowed in the Nauvoo Temple were British Latter-day Saint immigrants—fewer than one in twelve.

The relatively low participation of British-American Latter-day Saints in temple ordinances raises questions about religious observance and belief. In June 1843 Joseph Smith taught that the purpose of the gathering was to build a temple and to go there to
learn the “ways of salvation” and participate in vital ordinances. Why, then, did relatively few of the immigrants participate in something so central to the very reason for which their immigration was encouraged? For some, distance from Nauvoo may have hindered participation in temple ordinances since endowments in the temple were performed only for a period of nine weeks, from 10 December 1845 through 8 February 1846. However, although distance may have been a factor, it is not a sufficient explanation. Were the immigrants less likely to pay tithing—a prerequisite for temple ordinances—than others? Were the immigrants as a rule poorer than their American neighbors?

The British Latter-day Saint immigrants’ relatively low level of participation in temple work, Relief Society, and Masonry does not necessarily demonstrate disaffection from the Latter-day Saint Church’s doctrine and leadership in Nauvoo. One indicator of their later loyalty and commitment to the Church, under the leadership of the Quorum of the Twelve, would be the extent to which they followed Brigham Young and the Twelve in the trek west from Nauvoo. Black’s data for early Latter-day Saint membership could eventually provide data on that subject, but no study to this point addresses the question.

British immigrant Latter-day Saints maintained a relatively low profile in Nauvoo. Individuals who had been leaders in the British Isles were not so prominent in Nauvoo. Thomas Kington, leader of the United Brethren, who was converted by Wilford Woodruff and others, was conference president and an outstanding missionary in the British Isles, but little is heard of him in the Nauvoo period. Like many of his fellow British immigrants, he lived outside Nauvoo itself, six miles from the city. Later, in Utah he became bishop of the settlement at South Weber. Second in authority to Kington in the United Brethren had been Thomas Henry Clark, who led a company of Latter-day Saint immigrants to Nauvoo in 1841. Little is known of Clark in Nauvoo; he eventually presided over a ward in Grantsville, Utah.

Others had not yet come into their own in Nauvoo. The orphaned George Q. Cannon learned much in the household of his uncle, Elder John Taylor, and in Taylor’s Times and Seasons print shop. Later, as a publisher and as counselor in the First Presidency, he made use of what he had learned in Nauvoo. Many immigrants were like Cannon in several respects, serving apprenticeships in Nauvoo, as it were, in preparation for larger roles thereafter.

After the decision was made for the Latter-day Saints to leave Nauvoo, British immigrants were among those who helped prepare for the exodus. Richard Ballantyne managed the Coach and
Carriage Manufacturing Company, which built many of the wagons used in the trek west. British Saints like Charles Lambert helped defend the city in the September 1846 Battle of Nauvoo, using makeshift cannons they improvised from steamboat shafts. Many were like Thomas Bullock; sick, weak, and hungry, they were forced to join the last evacuees. They later experienced the miracle of the quail that provided food on the Iowa side of the Mississippi.

The transplanting of British Latter-day Saints to American soil in Nauvoo involved thousands of individuals in a process somewhat analogous to the plant world. For a time, the operation had a dampening effect on visible growth and performance. Most of the immigrants had been Latter-day Saints for only a relatively short period. During this interlude it was necessary for these immigrants to establish their roots more firmly, while many others who had associated as fellow church members in America for years had already developed extensive support systems. In time, many of the British Latter-day Saint immigrants whose growth in Nauvoo had been less evident would become fully productive participants in the Mountain West and in missions further afield. Integration would be facilitated by the shared experiences of crossing the plains and establishing communities together. A new frontier setting would provide better opportunity for an open society. But that is another chapter beyond Nauvoo.

NOTES

2Emma Smith, Sacred Hymns, hymn 35, stanza 10.
3The focus of this study is on Latter-day Saints who converted in the British Isles and then immigrated to Nauvoo. Apparently the Nauvoo experience of other British immigrants, whose conversion to Mormonism came in Canada or the United States, tended to be somewhat different from that of the new convert-immigrants.
4Estimates based on Conway B. Sonne, Saints on the Seas: A Maritime History of Mormon Migration, 1830–1890, University of Utah Publications in the American West, 17 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), 148–49; on Andrew Jensen and others, comp., “Church Emigration” (4 vols., typescript), Archives Division, Church Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives), vol. 1; and on my own examination of passenger lists from the following series: 1. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (hereafter, USINS), Port of New Orleans, passenger lists for arriving vessels; 2. USINS, Port of New Orleans, abstracts of passenger lists for arriving vessels; and 3. USINS, Port of New York, passenger lists for arriving vessels.
5Joseph Smith to Oliver Granger, 4 May 1841, in Dean C. Jessee, ed., The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984), 494.
6George Miller, Correspondence of Bishop George Miller with the Northern Islander from His First Acquaintance with Mormonism up to near the Close of His Life, 1855, cited in Robert Bruce Flanders, Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 145.
10. Thomas Bullock autobiographical sketch, ca. 1845, Record of the Twenty-Seven Quorums of Seventies, Seventies Quorum Records, LDS Church Archives.
19. A copy of the document certifying Peter Maughan’s application for citizenship, filed 3 May 1848, suggests that a two-year waiting period after application was common practice (Maughan Journal, Our Pioneer Heritage 2:371).
20. Quinn, "The Council of Fifty and Its Members," 163–97. Quinn’s article includes a list of all known members of the council during the time period involved.
23. Passenger lists generally provide name, age, sex, occupation, country of origin, and country (sometimes state) of destination. Some passenger lists, particularly the abstracts, are less complete, sometimes listing initials rather than given names, and rarely giving occupations. The absence of passenger lists for larger numbers of immigrants in certain years complicates efforts to provide meaningful estimates. However, the pattern of generalizations indicated by this study seems strong enough to warrant the use of this approach, though with some caution.
24. Minutes of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, original in custody of the Relief Society General Presidency, Salt Lake City, Utah, copy in possession of Maureen Usrenbach Beecher. Members accepted into the Relief Society are listed in the order in which they were admitted. Only names are listed; no personal data is given. The estimate of between 1,200 and 1,400 members is the final item in the minutes as part of an undated entry apparently made in March 1844.
25. Hogan, "Vital Statistics of Nauvoo Lodge." This source provides date of application for membership, name, age, occupation, town of residence, date of acceptance or rejection, and other data concerning any nonroutine matters in the processing of applications. A few entries contain only partial information. I found 24 applicants listed whose applications were never approved; they are not included among the 1,354 members. In this index Mervyn Hogan also lists 50 Latter-day Saints known to have been affiliated with three other lodges. As far as I could determine, none were British Latter-day Saint immigrants.
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Jenson, “Church Emigration,” vol. 1.

Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question” (Master’s Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), 102–3.

Nauvoo Temple Endowment Record, 1845–46, microfilm copy, Family History Library, Salt Lake City.


Flanders, Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi, 206–8; and History of the Church 7:292–93, 301.

Dean L. May estimated that about 38 percent of the Latter-day Saints who joined in the westward trek and went at least as far as western Iowa by 1850 were recent immigrants from the British Isles. Dean L. May, “A Demographic Portrait of the Mormons, 1830–1983,” in After 150 Years: The Latter-day Saints in Sesquicentennial Perspective, ed. Thomas G. Alexander and Jessie L. Embry, Charles Redd Monographs in Western History, no. 15 ([Provo, Utah]: Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, Brigham Young University, 1983), 46–50. May’s focus, however, was on British who immigrated after the exodus began and did not include immigrants to Nauvoo. May’s estimate was unfortunately distorted by his inclusion of immigrants for two years beyond the period under consideration. Without those extra immigrants, using May’s statistics and following his procedures, I estimate that the post-Nauvoo British Latter-day Saint immigrants and their offspring could have constituted about 24 percent of the Latter-day Saint westering population in 1850. 


Jenson, LDS Biographical Encyclopedia 1:547.

Beatrice Cannon Evans and Janath Russell Cannon, Cannon Family Historical Treasury (Salt Lake City: George Cannon Family Association, 1967), 85–117; for Cannon’s Nauvoo apprenticeship, see especially 88.

Conway B. Sonne, Knight of the Kingdom: The Story of Richard Ballantyne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1949), 28, 35.

Jenson, LDS Biographical Encyclopedia 2:779.

Thomas Bullock, “Letter from the Camp to Elder Franklin Richards,” Millennial Star 10 (15 January 1848): 28–30. This undated letter from Winter Quarters was written ca. 1 December 1847.

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