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St. Louis Luminary: The Latter-day Saint Experience at the Mississippi River, 1854–1855

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The St. Louis Luminary, an LDS newspaper printed in St. Louis, was short lived but is a key to chronicling the status of the Church on the American frontier in 1854 and 1855. Although it was only one volume, the newspaper contained fifty-two issues, each spanning four pages in length with each page divided into five columns. This translates into approximately twenty-six hundred single-spaced pages on 8½" x 11" paper. From the first issue on Wednesday, November 22, 1854, to the last issue on Saturday, December 15, 1855, its masthead proclaimed the paper a “light [shining] in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not,” a reference to the gospel being published in the Luminary in the “gentile” city of St. Louis. A new book, The Best of the St. Louis Luminary, gives an in-depth history of the newspaper and its contents, and includes a DVD of scans of the entire volume of the newspaper in a searchable format. This article is excerpted from that book.

Because of the years in which this newspaper was printed, it played a significant role in the national discussion of polygamy, which had not been publicly announced until 1852. The paper printed an unrelenting defense of polygamy against a backdrop of exaggerated reports and sensational claims that stemmed from the halls of Congress and from eastern newspapers. Editor Erastus Snow did not hesitate to confront politicians, newspaper columnists, or even the president of the United States on the issue.

St. Louis: A Gathering Place for the Saints

By 1854, thousands of Mormons heeded President Brigham Young’s advice to come to Zion. Pushed westward by “black clouds of war” that had
“burst with fearful violence over the Old World” and promises of greener pastures in Zion, great numbers of Mormon emigrants boarded ships in Liverpool and sailed to the United States, landing in New Orleans. From there they traveled up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, a trailhead of the West. Once in St. Louis, some emigrants lacked funds to continue their journey toward Zion. These paused to earn needed funds; others simply remained in the city and did not travel farther. Many looked to Young for counsel on a temporary gathering place but found precious little until he made the decision to open “gathering places in the States.”

It was announced at the April 8, 1854, general conference “that St. Louis was to be organized into a Stake of Zion.” Erastus Snow reported that upon hearing this “some smiled and some laughed outright, and some as guileless as Phillip, said, can any good come out of Saint Louis?” Many Latter-day Saints at the time believed St. Louis to be “a sink-hole of corruption and iniquity.” They saw troubles ahead for Latter-day Saints who remained in that city. In contrast, Church leaders saw great value in St. Louis as a gathering place for the Saints. After appointing John Taylor to New York City and Orson Spencer to Cincinnati, the First Presidency appointed Erastus Snow to St. Louis to “receive and take care of all Saints who shall arrive under his Presidency; counseling them as to their locations and pursuits as he shall be led by the Holy Ghost, and take the oversight and superintend the further gathering of all such as are able, and who may be deemed worthy to swell the numbers in Deseret.” Snow was given authority “to receive donations and collect tithing for and on behalf of said church, and he is hereby appointed agent for said church, to make such a disposition of said funds, and to transact all such business as may be required of him.”

At the time of Snow’s appointment, neither he nor President Young had any firm idea of the multitude of foreign-born Latter-day Saints working in the greater St. Louis area, let alone those members who had gathered to the
city from nearly every state in the Union. Nevertheless, Young urged Snow to accept the assignment. He did so without deliberation and in October 1854 arrived in St. Louis with a letter of introduction from the First Presidency.6

Snow found St. Louis to be a haven, a respite for Latter-day Saints. He wrote:

St. Louis is a fine, large, and flourishing city, and has furnished employment to many hundreds and thousands of our brethren, who have here in a short time made a good outfit for the gathering places of the Saints. This city has been an asylum for our people from fifteen to twenty years. There are few public buildings of any consideration in this city that our brethren have not taken an active and prominent part in erecting and ornamenting. There are few factories, foundries, or mercantile establishments, but they have taken, or are taking an active part in establishing or sustaining, either as employers, as artisans, or as customers. . . . There is probably no city in the world where the Latter-day Saints are more respected, and where they may sooner obtain an outfit for Utah than in this city.7

Snow acknowledged that “St. Louis [was] in many respects a desirable place of residence” for Mormons who ultimately wished to gather in the Rocky Mountains.8

Erastus Snow

Snow was remarkably suited to the task of leading the Saints in St. Louis. He had joined the Church in Vermont in 1832 at age thirteen, and by age sixteen he was a missionary. He brought converts to Kirtland, Ohio, but soon left to preach in the East, writing a pamphlet and newspaper articles along the way. He was in the vanguard company of pioneers, and he and Orson Pratt were the first Latter-day Saints to enter the Salt Lake Valley. He was called to return to the East to gather money and clothing for those traveling across the plains, and in this assignment he journeyed to St. Louis. There he found nearly a thousand Mormons, several of whom donated funds and clothing.

Erastus Snow. A member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Snow was called to preside over Church members in St. Louis in 1854. As part of his duties there, he edited and published the St. Louis Luminary. Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
In February 1849, he was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He advocated the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, a fund organized to help poor Saints reach Zion. He collected money for the fund until October 1849, when he was called to preside over the Scandinavian Mission. While he was there the Lord’s work in Scandinavia rolled forward due to native missionaries and the printing of a number of Church pamphlets, a hymnal, and a Book of Mormon translated into Danish—the first time it was printed in a foreign language. In addition, in October 1851 the newspaper *Skandinavien Stejernen* (Scandinavian Star) was launched.

Returning to Utah in 1852, he was asked to organize the Deseret Iron Company in Cedar City. Soon his leadership was needed more in St. Louis, so in April 1854 he was called to preside over the Church in the “Western states,” or what we now call the Midwest. In that capacity, he was to direct European migration from St. Louis to the Salt Lake Valley and to organize a stake in St. Louis.

**Historical Importance of the St. Louis Luminary**

When Snow arrived in St. Louis, he was disappointed to find discouragement and backsliding among the Saints. Hoping to revive a spirit of commitment and reformation, he instituted the doctrine of rebaptism. His letters to Brigham Young speak of the effects of that reformation upon the St. Louis Saints: “Last Sabbath I visited the Gavois Branch, 6 miles out of town, where there are 175 members in rather a Lukewarm state, and dedicated a new place of worship and endeavored to stir them up and they agreed to renew their covenants and commence a reformation.” Yet time and means prevented Snow from visiting all the branches in the area.

Believing more and better communication among the Saints in St. Louis was needed, and in fulfillment of the assignment given him by Brigham Young, Snow began to search for a facility to house a newspaper and to serve as the Church’s headquarters in the city. After looking throughout the downtown area, he leased a brick church on the corner of Washington Avenue and Fourth Street. The building had a large assembly room with a gallery on the main floor and basement rooms “suited to councils, schools, storage, rendezvous for emigrants &c.” It also had a newspaper office. He purchased equipment and then assumed his position as editor of the *St. Louis Luminary*.

Although Snow was outwardly enthusiastic about his new position, in a private letter to his wife Elizabeth, he wrote, “The church overhead and the other two rooms of the Basement are full of men, women & children, Boxes, Barrels, Sacks, Beds, & filthiness. and they keep up a dreadful meele
that nearly confuses my brain, and the Printing Office & my editorial office is only separated from them by a board partition.”

Conditions aside, Snow wrote in the first issue of the *Luminary*, “We feel assured that the ‘Saints’ and lovers of truth and justice will hail with pleasure the appearance of the LUMINARY,” a paper “devoted to the exposition of the favorable side of Mormonism,” something the “honest inquirer” had longed to read. To him, it was the *Luminary* that would keep the St. Louis Saints focused on their membership and future trek to Zion.

The *Luminary* made its appearance on Wednesday, November 22, 1854. The *Missouri Cumberland Presbyterian* noted the first issue by printing, “This paper [the *Luminary*] will undertake to show that Mormonism is not so bad after all; that men may have a dozen wives and all be right.” The editor sarcastically added, “We may expect the clouds and fogs of error and superstition which have so long hung over our unfortunate country, to be all dispelled by the effulgent light of this ‘Luminary.’” The editor of the *Missouri Cascade* printed, “[The *Luminary*] will doubtless be read with interest by those who wish to be informed as to the peculiar doctrines and practices of this Church,” before admitting, “To us Gentiles, some of the ideas advanced seem rather odd, but perhaps it is because we are behind the times.”

To Snow, the initial response of non-Mormon editors was of little importance. He focused on uniting the westward Saints and addressing their concerns. On the issue of whether to pay tithes before reaching the Salt Lake Valley, Snow said, “If they are not willing to do it, they are not worthy to go there and receive an inheritance among the saints.” When considering “to whom shall they pay it,” Snow advised, “Elder Taylor in New York, Elder O. Spencer in Cincinnati, and myself in St. Louis.” As to whether the Saints should go directly to the Salt Lake Valley or remain in the greater St. Louis area, Snow suggested, “Gather into the region of St. Louis and Cincinnati.” As to helping poor Saints reach the Salt Lake Valley, Snow declared, “As a general thing, those whom the Lord has favored with this world’s goods, would do better to donate liberally of their substance to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, which is . . . designed to assist those who try to help themselves.” He explained, “This method of assisting the poor teaches them to be grateful for the aid afforded them, and to manifest their gratitude by their works.”

Snow used the *Luminary* foremost as a religious newspaper, publishing epistles from the First Presidency, doctrinal treatises in defense of Latter-day Saint practices (especially plural marriage), and news and letters from the Salt Lake Valley before printing local news, poetry, and wise sayings. The paper also contains valuable information that reflects the problems the
Church was facing in the national press during these years, specifically on the topics of plural marriage and Utah Territory’s battle for statehood.

From the beginning, Snow sought ways to circulate the *Luminary* among Latter-day Saints. Early on, he called forty-two men to be missionary-agents, meaning missionaries for the Church and agents for the *Luminary*. Church leaders such as John Taylor in New York, Franklin D. Richards in England, Orson Spencer in Cincinnati, Charles C. Rich in San Bernardino, and James McGaw (the emigration agent in New Orleans) were a few of his missionary-agents. Local leaders like Milo Andrus, president of the St. Louis Stake, and Andrew Lafayette Siler, president of the Atchison Kansas Branch, were traveling agents throughout the west.

Most of the missionary-agents were called and assigned to the Midwest by leaders of the St. Louis Stake. Such assignments suggest that these men were expected to strengthen the St. Louis Stake as proselyting missionaries and to sign up subscribers for the paper. Missionary-agent William Marsdon used the paper to further his proselyting efforts: “Since I have been in receipt of the Luminary, I have endeavoured to let its light shine upon the benighted people of this neighborhood, hoping thereby some might inform themselves of the true principles of our church.” Missionary-agent William Cazier focused on subscriptions: “I did not receive your prospectus until the 7th of this month. I immediately went from house to house canvassing for subscribers, and I have obtained over sixty.”

Although Snow had hoped to devote his paper to “Science, Religion, General Intelligence and News of the Day,” he often used the *Luminary* to vent his monetary frustrations—unpaid notes contracted by previous directors of Mormon emigration and expenses associated with printing the newspaper. He believed these financial problems would be solved by getting more subscribers. By January 1855, the newspaper had about nine hundred subscribers, but most failed to pay the full subscription rate of two dollars per annum. Hoping to attract full-paying subscribers, Snow wrote enthusiastically of the publication:

> From all quarters our correspondents hail the Luminary with joy. We wish them to use their utmost exertions to increase its circulation, and forward us all the means possible; (bills of any sound bank;) urging every friend of the cause to subscribe for as many papers as possible, that we may be enabled to meet the heavy expenses incurred by the Luminary in its infancy.

Perhaps due to his encouraging words or to the paper itself, the number of subscribers did increase, but so did Snow’s financial burden. Indebtedness and longings for family led him to write to Brigham Young on February 3, 1855, asking whether he should remain in St. Louis or travel back to
Utah to attend to personal and “business affairs a few months and return again [to St. Louis] in the fall.”

By the time Snow discovered that Young wished him to remain in St. Louis, it was too late. Snow had already bid farewell to the St. Louis Saints. In an article titled “Friends and Patrons,” he said, “We’re about to leave you! ’Tis eight months since we first made our bow and entered upon our editorial career.” Of this departure Snow explained, “Our multiplied duties during emigration season has prevented our devoting that care and attention to the Luminary which its position and importance demands.” Snow appointed Orson Spencer of Cincinnati as the new editor in chief. James H. Hart, president of the St. Louis High Council and a man who had contributed much to the Luminary, was appointed interim editor until Spencer arrived in St. Louis. With his responsibilities passed to others, on May 23, 1855, Snow left St. Louis aboard the Polar Star bound for Atchison, Kansas, a staging area for emigrating Mormons. From Kansas, he journeyed homeward to Zion.

On July 7, 1855, Spencer arrived in St. Louis. He remained in the city only two weeks before leaving to visit missionaries laboring in the Cherokee Nation. While on this visit, Spencer contracted a “fever accompanied with chills.” He returned to St. Louis “fatigued, debilitated and afflicted” and unable to resume his labors in the editorial department. Yet he was sustained as “President of the Church in this part of the United States.” Unfortunately, he did not live to act in that capacity. Spencer died on October 15, 1855, following a forty-day illness.

Upon learning of Erastus Snow’s departure, Elder George A. Smith of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote to James Hart, “I do not feel altogether disposed to stop my monthly correspondence, but take pen again to note some of the principal events which are transpiring in this corner of Zion.” John Taylor wrote to Hart expressing leadership concerns: “[It is] necessary for me to address you a few words, as the charge of this, as well as...
the eastern country, necessarily devolves upon me." Taylor left New York City to confer with brethren in St. Louis about the best course to adopt for the *Luminary* and the St. Louis Stake of Zion. Taylor found that James Hart had "acted promptly, wisely and judiciously" as had "the High Council, the Bishops and other authorities of the Church." Yet he was "in hopes of the Presidency sending out some one from the Valley, to assist in managing affairs" in St. Louis. During the interim, he asked the St. Louis leadership to be shepherds to the Saints and keep printing the *Luminary*. After promising that he would return in a month or two, Taylor journeyed back to New York City.

The *Luminary* continued to meet publishing deadlines for an ever-increasing readership. "The demand for the Luminary has exceeded our most sanguine expectations," wrote Hart on October 13, 1855. "We have increased the issue twice, and from the present demand, we presume it will be necessary to publish an additional number at the commencement of the second volume." Subscribers were promised that a "second volume should be commenced on the first day of the new year . . . untrammeled by arrearages."

Unfortunately, this promise was not fulfilled. At the very time subscriptions for the second volume were being solicited, John Taylor was making plans to stop printing the *Luminary*. His reason for stopping the press was "the absence of President Erastus Snow to the valley, and the decease of our beloved and lamented brother—Professor Orson Spencer." For subscribers who had prepaid for the second volume, Taylor advised, "As there may be some who have recently subscribed [to the *Luminary*], we shall make arrangements to supply them with the Mormon," the Latter-day Saint newspaper in New York City. For those who had prepaid for advertisements, Taylor assured, "We shall also insert the Luminary's unexpired advertisement" in the *Mormon*. The *Luminary* staff "forwarded to 'The Mormon' all those names, subscriptions and advertisements which have been sent us for
the second volume.” The fifty-second and final issue terminated the modest career of the Luminary.

The Luminary’s Content

From the selection of newspaper agents, who were set apart as Latter-day Saint missionaries, to the lead article, a doctrinal treatise, the Luminary was a Mormon newspaper. Yet the paper also printed local news—day-to-day events, weather forecasts, election results, and business opportunities. And, like other papers of the day, it was a composite of exchanges, or clippings, and telegraph dispatches. Most of the national and international news and pithy sayings found in the Luminary were reprints from other papers.

Articles about Plural Marriage. In most issues, lengthy doctrinal treatises covered all five columns of page one. A general epistle of the First Presidency or counsel from Brigham Young were typical. Of this, one subscriber, William M. White, wrote, “Through the good instruction contained [in the Luminary], many may obtain a knowledge of the truth.” When such treatises were not forthcoming, Snow reprinted writings of Orson Pratt originally published in the Millennial Star. The treatise that received the most notice contained Pratt’s views on the Latter-day Saint doctrine of plurality of wives. “It is not as many have supposed,” penned Pratt, “a doctrine embraced by [Mormon men] to gratify the carnal lusts and feelings of man; that is not the object of the doctrine.” He explained the doctrine with references to Father Abraham: “How did Abraham manage to get a foundation laid for this mighty kingdom? Was he to accomplish it all through one wife? No. Sarah gave a certain woman to him. . . . It would have been rather a slow process if Abraham had been confined to one wife, like some of those narrow, contracted nations of modern Christianity.” Pratt concluded that plurality of wives existed so that participants could “inherit the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and receive a continuation of [their] posterity, that they may become as numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore.”

Few outside of Mormonism shared his views, but not all were hostile. The Luminary printed the following report from the New York City Nichol’s Journal.

The House of Representatives spent two whole days not long since, in debating that most amusing of modern bugaboos, the Polygamy of Utah. . . .

We cannot help thinking that a Mormon, who in good faith takes two or three wives, and maintains them, may be a better man than a good many other sort of Christians we know of, in Congress and out.
Everybody thinks Abraham, and Jacob, and the Patriarchs were good men. Why not the Mormons, who believe as they did? Would Congress punish Abraham? . . .

People are predicting that we shall have trouble about Utah. So we shall, and shall deserve to have it, if we meddle with what don’t concern us. What possible business is it to any citizen of New York, how many wives some man has in the City of the Salt Lake?

When the *Morning Herald* suggested that a young man loved by two girls “join the Mormons, and marry both of these spunky girls,” the editor of the *Luminary* retorted, “In all cases the preliminary requisition . . . is baptism for the remission of sins; and about twelve months probation, to see if the candidate is worthy of one wife; and if he should have a Laban to deal with, he might be required to serve fourteen years for the second.” The national sentiment toward polygamy led Snow to print such notices as “Christian Europe sustaining plurality of wives in Turkey. Uncle Sam please take notice.” He also printed John Milton’s views on polygamy: “Either, therefore, polygamy is true marriage, or all the children born in that state are spurious; which would include the whole race of Jacob, the twelve holy tribes chosen by God.” More than one subscriber thanked editors of the *Luminary* for their strong defense of plural marriage. One subscriber penned, “I cannot help thanking you for coming down from the hill of Zion to defend the truth, and let the world know there are two sides of the question to read.”

**News from the Salt Lake Valley.**
The 1850s was a difficult decade for Utah Territory. Federal officials appointed numerous territorial officers, many of whom became known as runaway officials because they went to Utah, stayed only a short time, and then left—sometimes with the federal money that had been earmarked for the territory. Some of this drama was reported in the *Luminary*. “I perceive by the tone of the press, that politicians, moralists and religionists are in trouble about Utah and Polygamy. ‘War!’ ‘war!’ ‘blood’ and ‘destruction,’ to the poor heathen.

John M. Bernhisel. A physician by trade, Bernhisel served as Utah Territory’s first delegate to Congress and often supplied the *St. Louis Luminary* with political news and documents. Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
Mormons!” wrote Parley Pratt. Orson Pratt reached the same conclusion, but added, “We look calmly at the approaching storms, knowing that each in succession will precede a more glorious day to all who remain faithful in the cause of truth.”

Editors of the Luminary were “indebted to Hon. John M. Bernhisel, Delegate from Utah, for papers and public documents” and to Brigham Young for opinions about important matters before the U.S. government. The most interesting, of course, were Young’s opinions. For example, on the subject of the U.S. president’s salary, Young exclaimed he “should not have $25,000 a year pledged to him, for if he knew enough to rule the nation, he would know enough to take care of himself.” As to how the government should treat Mormonism, Young advised, federal officials “ought to treat the religion of the Latter-day Saints as they do Methodism, Presbyterianism, Quakerism, Shakerism, and many other isms and say; ‘Here, I wish you to hold your tongues about the Mormons, for they have just as good a right to their religion as you have to yours.”

As for the persecution the Mormons suffered because of their religious practices, Young said, “Let us alone and we will send Elders to the uttermost parts of the earth, and gather out Israel wherever they are; and if you persecute us we will do it the quicker, because we are naturally dull when let alone.” As to the prospects of a new governor presiding in Utah, Young said, “Let them send whom they will, and it does not diminish my influence one particle.”

Epistles from the First Presidency, letters from various ecclesiastical leaders and traveling missionaries, and clippings from the Deseret News took precedence over local Latter-day Saint news in St. Louis. Letters from the Salt Lake Valley contained news of celebrations, the Twenty-fourth of July being the most elaborate, and reports of the advantages of living in the westward Zion. Deseret News clippings provided “home news that may be of interest” to readers, such as “descriptions of Utah—its climate, soil, productions, geography and aboriginal tribes.”

Minutes of Church Conferences in St. Louis. Minutes of the annual and semiannual St. Louis conferences (held November 1854, April 1855, and October 1855) were printed in the Luminary. At the first conference, held on November 4, 1854, few Latter-day Saints attended. “There are many men and women professing to be Saints, in this city and vicinity,” remarked Snow, “who cannot realise, and do not appreciate the importance of this occasion, or their seats would not have been vacant this morning.” Attendance aside, Snow proceeded with the conference. He reported on “the vote of the General Conference, appointing [him] to come to this place to take charge of the churches in this vicinity, to organize a gathering place and Stake of Zion.” Snow then organized the St. Louis Stake of Zion with “a
Presidency and a High Council, a Bishop and his Counsellors, with such other quorums as the circumstances and conditions of this people may require." He addressed the question, “Why is it that Stakes of Zion are located in this place?” His answer—

It is just as proper to organize a stake of Zion in Cincinnati, St. Louis, San Jose, California, or any other place which the Lord may designate, as in Salt Lake City. . .

Relative to the Saints gathering from other parts of the world to this place, to Cincinnati, to California, to Salt Lake, or other parts of Utah; every Latter-day Saint throughout the world is at liberty to gather to either of these places, according to their choice.

Snow then spoke of tithing, acknowledging “a large portion of the Saints congregated in St. Louis and the region round about are poor.” He advised, “The law of tithing is a part of the celestial law, and obligatory upon all who expect to enjoy Zion’s blessings.”

Three weeks before the April 6, 1855, semiannual conference was held, advance notice of the date and place of the conference was printed in the Luminary. Also printed was the request for “all our brethren who are interested therein to favor us with their presence on that occasion.”

Better attendance at the second conference was reported. “Erastus Snow was sustained as President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Western States,” and Milo Andrus was sustained as president of the St. Louis Stake of Zion, along with other local leaders. After the sustaining vote, Snow spoke on the topic of sustainings, concluding that “the Lord will think better of you if you refuse to vote, than he will if you vote to sustain them and then fail to do so in your actions.” Conference proceedings included statistical reports on the number of high priests (17), seventies (27), elders (208), priests (126), children blessed (41), English deaths (16), and Danish deaths (17) in the St. Louis Stake since the last conference. The most interesting report was the number of...
rebaptisms (1,010) and the total number of members, including officers of the stake (1,661), an increase of 341 since the November 1854 conference.\textsuperscript{61} Snow expressed displeasure with the increase: “God has not given [St. Louis] to his saints for an inheritance, but as a place to rest their feet.” He wanted all in attendance to make plans to immigrate to Zion before the next conference.\textsuperscript{62}

The October 6 to 8, 1855, conference was held after Snow had departed for his home in the Rockies. James H. Hart, president of the St. Louis High Council, presided at the conference, explaining, “We have not the company of Elder Orson Spencer. He is now sick, but he is in the hands of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{63} Hart transacted business at the conference and remarked “on the improved condition of the Stake, and the augmentation of the branches to nearly double to what they were in November, 1854.” He announced “the ‘Luminary’ was increasing in its circulation, and gave notice of the publication of the second volume.”\textsuperscript{64} After “a few closing remarks,” Hart invited the congregation to sing “Go Ye Messengers of Glory.”\textsuperscript{65}

**Local Church News and Advice.** Knowing when and where meetings and conferences were to be held was important to the Church organization in the greater St. Louis area.\textsuperscript{66} Knowing what languages would be spoken at these gatherings was just as important. The *Luminary* reported, “On Sunday last religious worship was conducted at our Church on Washington avenue in four different Languages, English, French, German and Danish,” and “three services were held at the same time in separate departments.”\textsuperscript{67} But to Snow, payment of tithes and fast offerings to benefit the poor was of greater importance. He advised local leaders “to have an open ear all the time to the voice of the poor.”\textsuperscript{68}

Presidents Milo Andrus and James Hart saw the need for counsel on family relationships. Husbands were to “love [their] wives [and] treat them kindly and tenderly, as Christ does his church”; wives should “honor and
obey [their] husbands as your future presidents on earth”; and parents should remember that “children are an heritage and gift of God. . . . Be careful that you set a proper example before them.”

Missionary News. The Luminary printed names of Latter-day Saint missionaries released from European missions who were returning to the United States. It also printed letters from missionaries still serving in distant regions of the world. To editors of the Luminary, missionary work was of great importance—none more so than the work within the St. Louis Stake. Stake missionaries or missionary-agents were admonished to search out “those who have been in the Church some twelve, fifteen, or eighteen years, but have never gathered with the Saints. We wish to hear of such, that they are disposing of their houses, lands, &c., and are preparing to gather home to Zion. It is time that all such were in the valleys of Utah.” Missionary letters that told of success among early Church members who had fallen away but who were now coming back were received with joy. One such letter from James Case, laboring in Keokuk, Iowa, told of “gathering unto the fold some of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. . . . The whole number that I have re-baptised since last April Conference is 108.”

Mormon Immigration to the Salt Lake Valley. The Luminary reported that “in every seaport of any consequence in this country and in Europe, emigration agents are located to give information to the inquiring, and to aid those who desire to go to Utah, and arrange for their safe and speedy transportation.” Emigrants receiving assistance from the Perpetual Emigrating Fund were advised to “go directly through to Utah.” All others were to concentrate at St. Louis and report themselves at the Luminary office.

As emigrants arrived at the office, they were schooled on commodities needed for the next leg of their journey: “Every person will need to have . . . one hundred pounds breadstuffs, and a few pounds bacon or dried beef, and as much sugar, tea, coffee, and dried fruit as they calculate to eat during a three month’s journey over the plains.” Once outfitted with the necessary provisions, emigrants were notified of dates and places of expected departures for Atchison, Kansas, the next destination on their westward trail.

Marriages and Deaths. It was customary to announce upcoming marriages of Church members in the Luminary. The name of the bride and groom, the date, and the place of the wedding made up a typical entry. A poetic phrase promising future happiness for the couple appeared next to the marriage entry when a gift had been presented to the Luminary staff by the couple.
Death notices were written in a brief, matter-of-fact manner. For those whose death caused personal sorrow to the *Luminary* staff, a short statement followed the obituary, such as “Elder Wm. W. Major, formerly well known to many of the Saints in St. Louis, a man of exemplary piety and untiring zeal for the cause of God, has finished his earthly mission and passed within the veil.” Several obituaries also mentioned the cause of death.

**Poetry.** Most poetic verses in the *Luminary* were written by Latter-day Saints like Joel Hills Johnson of Salt Lake City. One telling poem was “Plurality of Wives” by Alexander Robbins Jr.

“It Plurality of Wives”

Ye theologians, pray tell me why,
(If such sage counsel in your craniums lie,)
Those ancient men of God took many wives,
In sacred union, for eternal lives?
* * * *

The time the Prophet saw is on the wing,
“When seven women to one man shall cling,
(Not for the lack of clothing, or of bread,
But for a husband—for a man—a head)”

**Wise Sayings.** Short pithy sayings were popular in nineteenth-century newspapers. The following are examples of wise sayings printed in the *Luminary*:

“When we record our angry feelings, let it be on the snow, that the first beam of sunshine may obliterare them forever.”

“The softest pillow is a good clean conscience.”

“Every good scholar is not a good schoolmaster.”

**Humor.** Jokes were another common element in newspapers of the era. The following examples appeared in the *Luminary*:

“A man came into a printing office to beg a paper. ‘Because,’ said he, ‘we like to read the newspaper very much, but our neighbors are all too stingy to take one.’”

“There is a shop kept by an old maid in New York, in the windows of which appear these words: ‘No reasonable offer refused.’”

**Newspaper Exchanges and Telegraph Dispatches.** As with other papers of the day, the *Luminary* was a composite of exchanges and telegraph dispatches. National news and wise sayings printed in the *Luminary* lacked originality but proved the newspaper staff had access to the *New York Post, San Francisco Herald, Detroit Advertiser, Washington Star, Cincinnati Gazette,*
As to foreign papers, the *Luminary* was dependent upon exchanges carried aboard transatlantic steamers and telegraphers that sent summaries via dispatches to the *St. Louis Republican* office. Once dispatches or summaries were printed in the *Republican*, editors felt at liberty to reprint these in the *Luminary*. “Most people think the selection of suitable matter for a newspaper the easiest part of the business,” Snow recalled. He concluded:

> How great an error. It is by all means the most difficult. To look over and over hundreds of exchange papers every week from which to select enough for one, especially when the question is not what shall, but what shall not be selected, is no easy task. If every person who read a newspaper could have edited it, we should hear less complaints. Not infrequently is it the case that an editor looks over all his exchange papers for something interesting, and can absolutely find nothing. Every paper is drier than a contribution box. 87

**Advertisements.** Reasonable rates were extended to merchants who advertised in the newspaper. Discounted rates were given to merchants like J. W. Marrion, a blacksmith in Kansas City, Missouri, for favorable reporting of Mormonism. 88 Editors encouraged readers needing a buggy, a cookstove, ready-made clothing, cheese, or a ferry ride to look no further than St. Louis. Whether readers needed a watchmaker, jeweler, tailor, dentist, doctor, sign painter, gunsmith, tin maker, music teacher, or attorney, editors assured them services were available in the city.

**Conclusion**

In 1856, Brigham Young instructed Erastus Snow to return to St. Louis and resume publishing the *Luminary*. 89 Snow began his return to St. Louis with the intention of complying with Young’s wishes. By the time he arrived in St. Louis, however, he had made other plans. To Snow, emigration took precedence over resurrecting the *Luminary*. On September 25, 1856, he wrote to Brigham Young, “I find on the adjustment of the Luminary a/c that I sunk about $1,300 in its publication last year. And as the business swallowed it including advertising & subscription list, during my absence, despite its struggles and *remonstrances* I should hardly have faith to call it again to life.” 90 On October 31, 1856, Young replied, “We hardly expect that you will be able to start the Luminary. This is all right. If however you are able to do so, you are at liberty to do as you please about it.” 91

Although there are only fifty-two issues of the *Luminary*, the content of the paper, especially that concerning polygamy and its effect on Latter-day Saints in the Midwest, is most interesting and informative. Latter-day Saints
at the Mississippi were encouraged to muster their strength and become a buffer between national concerns over polygamy and practicing Mormons in a westward Zion—this is what makes the newspaper different from its many predecessors. The Saints needed to be armed with reason, rationale, and logic as well as the Spirit to combat a nation determined to end plural marriage. The Luminary did much to prepare the Midwest Saints to defend their faith and, if necessary, to leave their homes to fight territorial injustice in the West. The paper is as defensive in its approach to plural marriage as it is militaristic in its stance toward government intervention in religious matters. For a people on the front lines of verbal assault, the Luminary was an outlet for sharpening skills of debate and reason. The wide distribution of the paper did much to inform an outraged public of Mormon persecutions and frustrations in defending their religious practices.

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5. Young, Kimball, and Grant, “To All to Whom This Letter Shall Come,” St. Louis Luminary, December 23, 1854, 2, col. 1.
6. Young, Kimball, and Grant, “To All to Whom This Letter Shall Come,” St. Louis Luminary, December 23, 1854, 2, col. 1.

10. Letter from Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, September 21, 1854, as cited in Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 258–59. Original found in Official Correspondence file, Church History Library. The collection consists of over two hundred letters and telegrams written by Erastus Snow to Church leaders and associates and received by him from them. There are fifty-one letters in the collection from Erastus Snow to Brigham Young.


12. Letter from Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, September 21, 1854, as cited in Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 259. Original found in Official Correspondence file. The Church headquarters in St. Louis had previously been located at No. 12 St. Charles Street in St. Louis. See “Notice,” *St. Louis Luminary*, May 26, 1855, 3, col. 4. Emigrants arriving up the river from New Orleans, not having a place to stay, often used the church basement.


15. By the third issue of the *Luminary*, the publication day was Saturday.


17. “St. Louis Luminary,” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 13, 1855, 3, col. 5.

18. “Questions Answered—Tithing and Emigration,” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 13, 1855, 2, col. 1. Later Snow printed, “Stakes of Zion are to be built up at St. Louis and Cincinnati. . . . The Saints have their choice of locating in either of the above Stakes, but if circumstances prevent, they can locate at Philadelphia.” “Movements of the Church,” 4, col. 2. The First Presidency lamented “those who are in debt to the Fund neglecting to pay for their emigration.” “Twelfth General Epistle,” *St. Louis Luminary*, July 21, 1855, 1, col. 5.


22. See “Terms,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 1, col. 1. If the paper was “delivered to City Subscribers,” the cost was sixty cents per quarter.

23. “Summary of Local Correspondence,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 2, 1854, 2, col. 3.


26. “President Erastus Snow,” *St. Louis Luminary*, July 21, 1855, 2, col. 3; Larson, *Erastus Snow*, 265–66. The gathering place was actually Mormon Grove, which was three to four miles from Atchison. For more information, see Fred E. Woods and Melvin L. Bashore, “On the Outskirts of Atchison: The Imprint of


28. Dr. Jethro Clinton attended Orson Spencer. See “President Spencer’s health is slightly . . . ,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 2, col. 3.

29. “Minutes of the Conference,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 3, col. 1; and “Obituary of Orson Spencer,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 20, 1855, 2, col. 4.


32. “President John Taylor,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 24, 1855, 2, col. 3.


37. William M. White, “Correspondence,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 20, 1855, 2, col. 5.


40. “Polygamy in Utah,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 2, 1854, 1, col. 5.

41. “Two young ladies have fallen in love with one young man . . . ,” *St. Louis Luminary*, April 21, 1855, 2, col. 3.

42. Remarks of Governor Young, at the Celebration of the Fourth of July, in Great Salt Lake City, 1854,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 16, 1854, 1, col. 5.


44. Absalom M. Young, “President Erastus Snow,” *St. Louis Luminary*, September 29, 1855, 2, col. 5.


47. Orson Pratt, “Can They Let Us Alone?” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 20, 1855, 2, col. 3.

49. “St. Louis Luminary,” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 13, 1855, 3, col. 5.
50. “Extracts of a Di[s]course by President Brigham Young, February 18, 1855,” *St. Louis Luminary*, May 19, 1855, 1, col. 2.
52. “To the Missionaries from Utah,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 16, 1854, 2, col. 4.
55. “Conference Minutes,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 4, cols. 3 and 5. It should be noted that six wards were organized in St. Louis and nine branches in Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois. At the time, there were 788 members residing in the six St. Louis wards, the largest number being in the St. Louis Sixth Ward. There were 532 members residing in the nine branches.
56. “Conference Minutes,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 4, cols. 1–2. Reacting to the news, missionary-agent Charles Bassett penned, “This new movement—the establishment of Stakes of Zion in the different States—will be an important epoch in the history of Mormonism.” Charles H. Bassett, “Correspondence of the Luminary,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 30, 1854, 2, col. 2.
57. At the conference, “it was unanimously voted to adopt the law of tithing throughout this Stake.” “Conference Minutes,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 4, col. 3.
58. “Saint Louis Conference,” *St. Louis Luminary*, March 17, 1855, 2, col. 2. About the conference, Snow also said, “We hope to see many of our elders face to face, and to hear from their lips an account of their labors.” “Summary of News from Our Elders,” *St. Louis Luminary*, March 17, 1855, 2, col. 2.
59. “Minutes of the St. Louis Semi-annual Conference, Held in the Church Cor. Fou[r]th St., and Washington Avenue, April, 1855,” *St. Louis Luminary*, April 14, 1855, 2, col. 5.
60. “Remarks of President E. Snow, Saturday Afternoon, April 7th 1855,” *St. Louis Luminary*, May 5, 1855, 2, col. 2.
61. “The following is the report . . .,” *St. Louis Luminary*, April 21, 1855, 3, col. 4; see “Conference Minutes,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 4, cols. 1–4.
63. “Minutes of the Conference,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 2, col. 5.
64. “Minutes of the Conference,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 3, cols. 1–2.
65. “Minutes of a Meeting,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 27, 1855, 2, col. 3.
66. See “Notice,” *St. Louis Luminary*, May 19, 1855, 3, col. 3.
68. Erastus Snow, “To the Saints in St. Louis, Extract of Elder Snow’s Remarks, on Sunday, 12th November,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 2, 1854, 2, col. 2. In a show of support for Snow’s stance, the high council issued the following statement: “Observe the law of tithing, it is henceforth the duty of all Latter-day Saints in this state of Zion, to pay the tenth of all they possess.” J. G. Hart and
J. S. Cantwell, “The High Council to All the Saints in St. Louis, and throughout This Stake of Zion—Greeting,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 16, 1854, 2, col. 2.

69. Milo Andrus, “The High Council to All the Saints throughout This Stake of Zion—Greeting,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 23, 1854, 2, col. 4.

70. For the names, the *Luminary* staff relied on information printed in the *Millennial Star*. See “Return of Missionaries,” *St. Louis Luminary*, January 6, 1855, 2, col. 3.

71. “We are pleased at all times, to hear . . . ,” *St. Louis Luminary*, July 14, 1855, 2, col. 1.

72. James Case, “To the Editor of the Luminary,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 2, col. 3.

73. The *Luminary* added, “All along the line of travel, too, other agents are in waiting with the necessary supplies for the journey, and under the auspices of Mormonism the great land voyage across the plains is now almost as safe as a journey from New York to Albany.” “The Mormon Immigration,” *St. Louis Luminary*, June 9, 1855, 4, col. 1. “It is estimated that there are at this time en route between Liverpool and St. Louis not fewer than two thousand Latter-day Saints, who are mostly from the British Isles, there are some from France and the Channel Islands, some from Italy, Switzerland, Malta, and Gibraltar and other nations, and Islands of the sea.” “The Emigration,” *St. Louis Luminary*, May 5, 1855, 2, col. 2. “Between November 24, 1854, and April 26, ’55, I shipped about 3,650 souls of Saints from the European missions, of whom 1,126 were emigrated wholly, or in part, by the perpetual emigrating fund, about 600 intended to go through to the Valley on their own means, the remainder purposeful to stay at New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, St. Louis.” “Interesting Correspondence from F. D. Richards,” *St. Louis Luminary*, May 26, 1855, 2, col. 3.

74. “Emigration,” *St. Louis Luminary*, December 15, 1855, 3, col. 3. The reason for the directive was stated by Brigham Young: “The operation of the Company thus far, have been very successful, although comparatively little remuneration has as yet been received from those benefitted. . . . Thousands are anxiously awaiting for the time when the Company will be able to bring them.” “Governor’s Message,” *St. Louis Luminary*, March 24, 1855, 1, col. 4.

75. Snow believed that within “two or three years” those who had reported to the *Luminary* office could “gather up to Zion by adopting the plan of saving weekly some portion of their earnings.” “Save Your Dimes,” *St. Louis Luminary*, June 2, 1855, 2, col. 3.

76. “Notice to Our Emigrants,” *St. Louis Luminary*, April 14, 1855, 2, col. 1.

77. For a more complete listing of Latter-day Saint deaths in St. Louis, see “Lists of Deaths in the St. Louis Branch Records of Members, 1849–1862,” film CR 375/8, reel 4267, Church History Library.

78. “Another Good Man Departed,” *St. Louis Luminary*, November 22, 1854, 2, col. 2.

79. The index of nineteenth-century terms on the DVD-ROM accompanying *The Best of the St. Louis Luminary* defines these causes in modern medical terms.

80. See “Joel H. Johnson . . . ,” *St. Louis Luminary*, October 13, 1855, 2, col. 3.

82. “When we record our angry feelings . . .,” St. Louis Luminary, December 30, 1854, 4, col. 4.
83. “The softest pillow is a good . . .,” St. Louis Luminary, February 3, 1855, 3, col. 5.
84. “Every good scholar is not . . .,” St. Louis Luminary, July 21, 1855, 4, col. 2.
85. “A man came into a printing . . .,” St. Louis Luminary, January 6, 1855, 3, col. 5.
86. “There is a shop . . .,” St. Louis Luminary, March 17, 1855, 4, col. 2.
87. “Selections for a Newspaper,” St. Louis Luminary, January 27, 1855, 3, col. 5.
90. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, September 25, 1856, as cited in Larson, Erastus Snow, 284. Original in Official Correspondence file.