

# ENSIGN



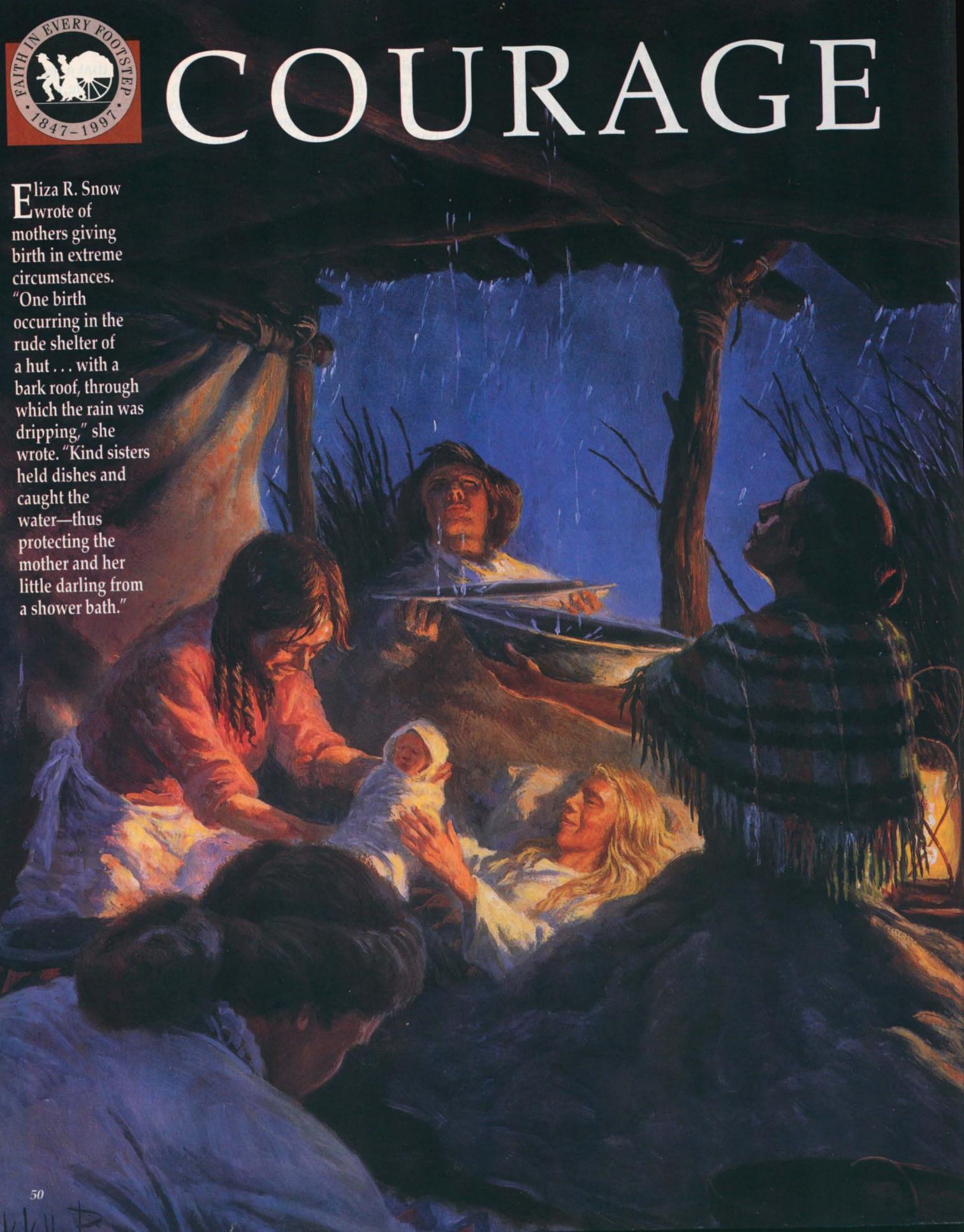
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# COURAGE

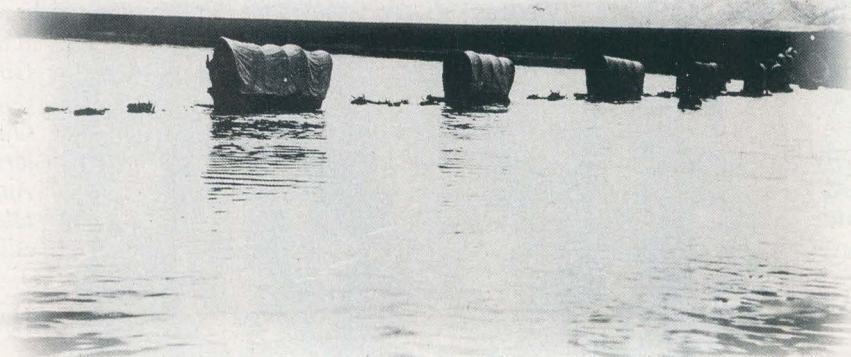
Eliza R. Snow wrote of mothers giving birth in extreme circumstances. "One birth occurring in the rude shelter of a hut . . . with a bark roof, through which the rain was dripping," she wrote. "Kind sisters held dishes and caught the water—thus protecting the mother and her little darling from a shower bath."



# the Unfailing Beacon

BY SUSAN EASTON BLACK

*Courage is a virtue that calls us to move ever forward in crossing whatever mountains or deserts loom in our lives.*



*While some river crossings were refreshing during a hot summer day, others were filled with risks resulting in loss of property, animals, and even human life.*

**G**od Almighty is my shield,"

stated the Prophet Joseph Smith.

"What can man do if God is my friend?"<sup>1</sup> His bold pronouncement of divine friendship as

he confronted mounting persecution and affliction evidenced his unwavering trust in God. With his own life as a prototype, the Prophet encouraged his faithful followers with these moving words: "Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward and not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory!" (D&C 128:22).

To obtain the anticipated victory, the brethren did go on with fearless valor. "I just do the thing that I know to be right," said President Brigham Young, "and the Lord blesses me."<sup>2</sup> On 4 February 1846 he gave the Saints nestled in Nauvoo an opportunity to draw upon their courage when he advised them to prepare to leave: "We can do almost anything, for our Father in heaven will strengthen us, if we strengthen ourselves. He will work according to our faith. . . . If we say, in the name of the Lord we will go! and set ourselves about it, he will help us."<sup>3</sup>

The very day of that prophetic announcement, Charles Shumway, in nearly zero-degree weather, loaded his ox-drawn wagon onto a flatboat and was the first to cross the Mississippi River on the now-famous Mormon trek to the Rocky Mountains. Other Saints courageously rumbled along streets in beautiful Nauvoo with only meager supplies loaded in covered

wagons and crossed the river to join Brother Shumway that first day. Flatboats, old barges, and a number of skiffs formed a makeshift fleet carrying Latter-day Saint exiles

from Illinois. "We must not look back," wrote Joseph Young, the brother of President Brigham Young, "but placing our faith in God, we must leave our destiny in His hands."<sup>4</sup> As one by one the Saints joined in the exodus, they likely reflected upon all they were leaving behind in Nauvoo as well as the uncertainties that lay ahead. Yet they drew upon their faith and courage and moved forward.

These Latter-day Saints, whose vision and industry had built Nauvoo, turned their "hearts and all their labors . . . towards the setting sun" of the West.<sup>5</sup> An entire community moved itself and its shopkeepers, artisans, mechanics, and skilled laborers.

Courageous? Yes! These Saints were not cowards, trembling with fear from the rigors of the arduous trek or the unknown dangers lurking in the western wilderness. They drew upon inner strength to persevere. Courage marked their every footstep as they pressed on to the Rockies. We can learn from their example.

## "MY BABE SEEMED SO BEAUTIFUL"

The challenges certainly were formidable for Latter-day Saint women who knew they would soon give birth. Facing the dangers of childbirth in extreme

conditions without proper supplies and sometimes without proper help must have been frightening to these women. Yet with unflinching courage, they joined the exodus, gave birth, and continued the trek.

"I was informed that on the first night of the encampment . . . nine children were ushered into the world," wrote Eliza R. Snow of the exodus. "And from that time, as we journeyed, mothers gave birth to offspring under almost every variety of circumstances except those to which they had been accustomed. . . . I heard of one birth occurring in the rude shelter of a hut—the sides formed of blankets fastened to poles stuck in the ground, [with] a bark roof, through which the rain was dripping: Kind sisters held dishes and caught the water—thus protecting the mother and her little darling from a shower bath."<sup>6</sup>

Zina D. H. Young, who became the third president of the Relief Society, remembers giving birth in a wagon on the banks of the Chariton River in Iowa. "[We traveled in] the face of the fierce winds of departing winter, and amid rains that fairly inundated the land," she wrote. "By day we literally waded through mud and water. . . . I called for a halt in our march. There was but one person with me—Mother Lyman . . . ; and there on the bank of the Chariton I was delivered of a fine son."

Almost immediately, they resumed travel. "Occasionally the wagon had to be stopped, that I might take breath," wrote Zina. "Thus I journeyed on. But I did not mind the hardship of my situation, for my life had been preserved, and my babe seemed so beautiful."<sup>7</sup>

### "FRESH COURAGE TAKE"

Repeated trust in God nourished courageous heroism in the Mormon pioneers. Upon discovery that little Arthur Parker was not with the migrating children of the wagon train, men readily volunteered to search for him. After a two-day search, they returned without the boy. As the pioneers proceeded on their westerly course, Ann Parker, the mother of Arthur, pinned a bright shawl around her husband's shoulders as he prepared to search for the child once again. If he found their son dead, he would bury him in the shawl, but if Arthur was found alive, the shawl could be used as a flag to signal Ann from a distance.

Father Parker retraced miles of the trail—calling,

searching, and praying for his child. When he reached an outlying trading post, he learned that a woodsman had found Arthur "sick with illness and with terror." The overjoyed father expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the woodsman and to the Lord, and together he and his son traced the wagon ruts to the encampment. When Ann saw the bright red shawl whirling as a flag in the sunset, she knew that her lost son was found and that once again "all was well."<sup>8</sup>

For the Parkers and for thousands of the Mormon pioneers, obtaining the victory of which the Prophet Joseph Smith had spoken meant to press forward with courage and trust in God. Reflecting that resolve as they trekked toward the valley of the Great Salt Lake, the multitude sang:

*Why should we mourn or think our lot is hard?*

*'Tis not so; all is right.*

*Why should we think to earn a great reward*

*If we now shun the fight?*

*Gird up your loins; fresh  
courage take.*

*Our God will never us  
forsake;*

*And soon we'll have this  
tale to tell—*

*All is well! All is well!*<sup>9</sup>



*The Claridge family, shown here in about 1891, helped colonize the Muddy Mission in Nevada's Muddy River Valley. Back row: left to right: George, Rebecca, Hyrum, David, Joseph, Wilford. Front row, left to right: Nell, Mercy, Samuel, Katherine, Rebecca, Edward (behind), Julia, Joy.*

### HANDCART RESCUE

In 1856 the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies became stranded in the early winter snows of Wyoming. Responding to their plight, President Brigham Young immediately mounted a rescue effort. At the time, Ephraim Hanks, who

would be instrumental in rescuing the stranded pioneers, was in Provo on a fishing expedition, unaware that several rescue parties were already on their way toward the snowbound handcart companies. His story of courage began with his obedience to the promptings of the Spirit. "I . . . felt impressed to go to Salt Lake, but for what reason I knew not," he wrote. That night he heard a voice on three different occasions that told him the handcart people were in trouble and asked him if he would go and help them. He answered each time, "Yes, I will go."

After breakfast, Ephraim headed to Salt Lake, where he quickly learned that the next group of rescuers would not be ready to go for a few more days. "I spoke out at once, saying, 'I am ready now.'" So the next day, all alone, he headed eastward over the mountains.

On the way he met a team returning to Salt Lake that had turned back because of the deep snow.



**E**phraim Hanks responded to a strong spiritual prompting to help rescue survivors of the Willie and Martin handcart companies who were stranded in the snows of Wyoming in 1856. Leaving home immediately, he proceeded eastward alone, at times through waist-deep snow.

Ephraim wrote, "Those in charge had come to the conclusion that . . . [the handcart pioneers] had all perished, and they did not propose to risk their lives by going any further." Yet he continued on alone in obedience to his spiritual promptings.

"Just before I reached South Pass [Wyoming], I was overtaken by one of the worst storms that I ever witnessed," Ephraim wrote. He found shelter at the summit with another rescuer who had a wagon of provisions. After the storm passed, he "continued on [his] way in snow almost to [his] waist."

Two days later he knelt and prayed that he would find a buffalo. Upon finishing his prayer, he looked up and saw a buffalo standing nearby. He brought it down with one shot. Soon he came upon another one and shot it also. "I cut the meat into long, thin strips, and lashed it onto my horses. . . . About sundown, I reached the ill-fated handcart camp, and the sight that met my eyes was enough to rouse the emotions of the hardest heart. The starving forms and haggard looks of those poor, dejected creatures can never be blotted from my mind. Flocking around me, one would say, 'Please give me some meat for my hungry children.' Shivering

urchins with tears streaming down their cheeks would cry out, 'Please, mister, give me some,' and so it went. In less than ten minutes the meat was all gone, and in a short time everybody was eating bison with a relish that did one's eyes good to behold."<sup>10</sup>

There is no doubt that Ephraim Hanks's courage to move ahead unaccompanied and with utmost dispatch led to the preservation of many lives.

### "NOTHING BUT DEEP SAND"

Few settlements faced harsher circumstances than those established to raise cotton in the Muddy Mission in southeastern Nevada in the late 1860s. Those who know the story say that it stands as "an ordeal beyond compare."<sup>11</sup> The forbidding landscape of near-barren mountains and mesas provided scant supplies of grass for livestock and wood for fuel or building. Summer temperatures often reached 120 degrees Fahrenheit, and there was little rainfall. "Oh, what a place it was!" wrote one settler. "Nothing but deep sand and a burning sun."<sup>12</sup>

Because it took great courage to meet this assignment,

not everyone accepted the call to go to the Muddy. Of those who did, not all stayed. Elizabeth Claridge wrote of a conference held in Nephi, Utah, during which President Young read the names of those called to settle the Muddy. When she heard the name of her father, Samuel Claridge, "then how I sobbed and cried!" she penned. Her friend queried, "What are you crying for? It doesn't make me cry, I know my father won't go." Elizabeth remarked, "Well, there's the difference. I know my father *will* go—that nothing could prevent him."<sup>13</sup>

Elizabeth knew her father would courageously face any challenge to obediently follow the prophet. Yet, for him the way seemed hedged on every side, preventing his departure from the rural community. Some of his friends counseled Samuel to stay in Nephi, explaining, "Brother Claridge, this shows that you should not go." Samuel Claridge replied, "It shows me that the adversary is trying to prevent me from going, but I shall go, if I walk!"<sup>14</sup>

Samuel and his family did go to the Muddy, arriving there in November 1868. He remained with other families until President Young, recognizing the extreme difficulties of the mission, advised the settlers to abandon the mission in 1870. The fact that the harshness of the environment forced the closure of this mission serves to remind us of the faith and courage required to live there.



*Even normal activities, such as eating, sleeping, caring for children, repairing wagons, and tending animals, often required courage in the face of exposure to the extremes of weather, illness, and traveling through the unknown.*

### "WHY PUT YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE?"

After the Saints had been driven from Missouri, Church leaders asked Brother David White Rogers to return and sell the land earlier acquired by the Saints there. Knowing well the dangers of the assignment, he responded, "I will go and do the business or be found dead trying." His words foreshadowed his actual experience.

Upon his arrival in Jackson County, Missouri, Brother Rogers went to the recorder's office. There he registered his power of attorney and paid the taxes that had accumulated for the past five years on the land. Within a few days he had sold one of the largest pieces of land for \$700 cash plus a horse, saddle, and bridle worth \$100.

The next morning, as Brother Rogers and his helper, Charles Bird, were crossing the public square, a posse of about 40 men surrounded them. "On looking around, I saw the people on every side coming until the crowd

would have numbered some three hundred," Brother Rogers wrote later of the event. "[One of them] informed me that I must deliver up to them the money and property for which I had sold the land, and that I must leave the county before sunset, or I would be found a dead man."

Drawing upon his inner courage, Brother Rogers told them he was there to sell the lands of the disabled, poor, sick, and widowed. "In the name of Israel's God, and by his power, I shall accomplish the work," he continued. "And in no way can I be prevented, only by committing willful, cold-blooded murder. And, if anyone present is prepared for that, now is the best time you can ever have, in the blaze of this beautiful morning sun."

Tension filled the silence following his words. No one spoke. Slowly the mob left. Over time Brother Rogers sold all but one piece of land.<sup>15</sup>

The actions of Latter-day Saints today also often serve as an unfailing beacon of courage and trust in God. In 1992 when a riot erupted in southern California

because of a highly publicized racial incident, the city of Long Beach was aflame. Through television a nation watched with astonishment as shopping malls, grocery stores, apartment houses, and neighborhoods were looted and set ablaze.

After Long Beach California Stake president Robert L. Ward went to his place of business to protect the family's

furniture and electronics store, Church member Tino Vailoti stopped by the store to ask President Ward if he needed help. "Yes" was the immediate reply, but President Ward wondered how he could ask a friend to risk his life for him. Without hesitation, Tino made phone calls, and within minutes eight members came to help. For four nights these brave young Latter-day Saint men repelled the angry youth clamoring outside the store. When a television reporter interviewing the courageous men asked, "Why would you put your life on the line for [President Ward]?" the answer was, "We love him, and we know he loves us." The reporter took aside President Ward and asked him, "Why did these young men risk their lives for you?" President Ward, without knowing the answer given by his brave friends, said, "Because they know I love them, and I know they love me."<sup>16</sup>

We too can develop the virtue of courage in our own lives. Though the challenges along our individual paths are often much different from those that confronted the early pioneers, our need for courageous



**D**uring rioting in southern California in 1992, several Latter-day Saints courageously faced angry mobs for four nights to protect the furniture and electronics store of their stake president.

resolve to uphold truth and live true to our covenants is no less vital. We are heartened to know that the Lord Omnipotent will not leave us comfortless (see John 14:18). Indeed, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). The beacon of courage is born of love and trust in God. Its light will illuminate the dangerous paths of life and help lead us forward to victory. □

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*Gospel topics: courage, faith*

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

*This article may furnish material for a home evening discussion or for personal consideration:*

1. How can we develop the pioneer virtue of courage in our lives?
2. Are there stories of courage from the lives of your parents, grandparents, or other ancestors that inspire you today?
3. What can we learn from stories of courage in the scriptures?

### NOTES

1. *History of the Church*, 5:259.
2. As quoted in Thomas Bullock notes, 8 Mar. 1847, in Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (1985), 130.
3. *History of the Church*, 7:517.
4. Quoted in Lucille Young Nelson, "Joseph Young" (n.d.), 107; in author's possession.
5. Kate B. Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 20 vols. (1958-77), 7:206.
6. Quoted in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 17:330-31.
7. Quoted in Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (1877), 328.
8. See Boyd K. Packer, *ENSIGN*, Nov. 1974, 89-90; LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* (1960), 61.
9. "Come, Come, Ye Saints," *Hymns*, no. 30.
10. Quoted in Solomon F. Kimball, "Belated Emigrants of 1856," *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1914, 290-92; punctuation adjusted.
11. S. George Ellsworth, *Samuel Claridge: Pioneering the Outposts of Zion* (1987), 83.
12. Elizabeth Claridge (daughter of Samuel Claridge), quoted in *Samuel Claridge*, 98.
13. Quoted in Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, 4 vols. (1893), 4:607; emphasis in original.
14. Quoted in *History of Utah*, 4:607.
15. Statement of David White Rogers, 1 Feb. 1839; LDS Church Archives.
16. Telephone interview with Robert L. Ward, 25 Dec. 1992.