

# The Iowa Experience: A Blessing in Disguise

Reed C. Durham, Jr.

February 4, 1846, was a day of Mormon destiny. On that day the exodus began as the first of the Mormon pioneers stepped off a flatboat upon Iowa shores and began to unload his wagon, teams, equipment and goods.<sup>1</sup> After all the planning and work, the time had finally arrived: the move became a reality. It was also a significant historical event, because that first step marked the commencement of the greatest mass movement of people under a single authority in all of United States history.<sup>2</sup> In many respects, such an event was extremely rare, almost unparalleled in the annals of world history;<sup>3</sup> and certainly, the Mormon exodus drastically reshaped the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to this day.

But those first pioneers were not obsessed with making history. They were more concerned about the immediate problem of the frigid cold which was affecting man and beast. Their worries centered on food and forage, wood and fire, sprained wrists and bruised hooves; anxieties were multiplied about tents and wagons, snow and mud, sickness and death. A broken axle or a missing ox became a crisis; a single squirrel shot from the branch of a leafless winter tree to throw into an evening dinner pot was providence. To be sure, when the Mormon pioneers began the exodus, though there was a sense of destiny and idealism about what they were doing, they were compelled to be concerned with daily experiences of sheer survival.

The distance across Iowa Territory from east to west is approximately 310 miles.<sup>4</sup> And yet it took President Young and the main pioneer "camp of Israel" exactly 131 days to complete that trek. This

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Reed C. Durham, Jr., teaches at the Salt Lake Institute of Religion adjacent to the University of Utah.

<sup>1</sup>This was Charles Shumway. See *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 27 March 1846, p. 2, Library-Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter referred to as Church Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Rev. R. E. Harvey, "The Mormon Trek across Iowa Territory," *Annals of Iowa*, 3d ser., 28 (July 1946): 36; Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa*, 4 vols. (New York: Century History Company, 1903), 1:233.

<sup>3</sup>George A. Smith considered this to be the case. See his 10 March 1861 discourse, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886; reprint ed., 1967), 9:66, 73.

<sup>4</sup>*Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State*, Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Iowa, American Guide Series (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), p. 3.

proved to be horrendously slow by known standards of pioneering speed. By comparison, the second leg of the Mormon journey from the Missouri River to the Salt Lake Valley (a distance of approximately 1050 miles) was completed in exactly 111 days—a feat which was replicated in distance and length of time by the majority of the many subsequent Mormon wagon trains.<sup>5</sup> Why, then, did this first leg of the journey take so long? Even those pioneers who followed after President Young's main group traversed Iowa Territory in a fraction of Brigham's time. Isaac C. Haight, for example, crossed Iowa with a little group of thirteen families in 39 days.<sup>6</sup> Norton Jacob left Nauvoo on 17 June and arrived with his people at Kaneshville, Iowa, on 25 July (38 days).<sup>7</sup> Anson Call, taking a slightly different route, made the trip in 43 days.<sup>8</sup> Why did it take Brigham Young so long—three times longer—to complete the journey?

The answer, simply put, is that this first major Mormon pioneering endeavor in Iowa was the most difficult pioneering experience in Mormon history. History records few tragedies equal in scope or intensity to the hardships, deaths, and delays suffered in Iowa. The Mormon pioneers of 1846 suffered far more difficulties than did those in 1847,<sup>9</sup> and, for that matter, more than any subsequent pioneering venture. In fact, not even the experiences of the Mormon Battalion or the handcart companies compare in "real pioneering" or overall hardships to those first experienced in Iowa in 1846. That year was indeed "the most difficult year in Mormon history,"<sup>10</sup> and yet, all other Mormon pioneering endeavors owe their fame or successes "to the struggles, the price paid in Iowa."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the "Iowa portion of the trek is filled with accounts of hardship and service and devotion to the cause that would exceed any other incident in the whole of

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<sup>5</sup>The time en route from Nauvoo to the Missouri River is calculated from 15 February to 14 June 1846 (see Brigham Young, *Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1846-1847* [Salt Lake City: Elden J. Watson, 1971], pp. 32, 183-84). The time spent in the second leg of the journey is calculated from the departure from Winter Quarters on 7 April 1847 to the arrival in the Salt Lake Valley on 24 July 1847. The diaries located in Church Archives of Wilford Woodruff, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, Thomas Bullock, Norton Jacob, and others record the departure from Winter Quarters under the date of 7 April 1847. (See also Young, *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, pp. 547, 564.)

<sup>6</sup>Diary of Isaac Chauncey Haight 1813-1862, 3 June 1846-12 July 1846, Church Archives.

<sup>7</sup>Diary of Norton Jacob 1804-1852, 17 June 1846-25 July 1846, Church Archives.

<sup>8</sup>Diary of Anson Call 1839-1872, 2 May 1846-14 June 1846, typescript, p. 35, Merrill Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

<sup>9</sup>Andrew Love Neff, "The Mormon Migration to Utah, 1830-1847" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1918), pp. 106-107; David E. and Della S. Miller, *Nauvoo: The City of Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1974), p. 211. Both of these sources express chagrine that the "glamorous" 1847 pioneer trek into the Salt Lake Valley has robbed all the glory rightly belonging to the 1846 Iowa trek. (See also Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979], pp. 97-98.)

<sup>10</sup>Andrew Karl Larson, *Erastus Snow* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971), p. 103; Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>11</sup>Eugene England, *Brother Brigham* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), p. 120.



American History.”<sup>12</sup> Another writer described the accounts of hardships as being “the most awful scenes ever enacted on Iowa soil.”<sup>13</sup>

From the numerous extant pioneer journals of the Iowa experience we could easily document the intense and varied sufferings endured by the pioneer Saints; and it is from these journal excerpts that we come to appreciate more fully the true measure of faith, courage, and devotion of these Saints when we reflect upon their overwhelming hardships and adversities. But when the exodus from Nauvoo commenced and the Saints crossed the “great river” and planted themselves in Iowa, their new home for a year or more, it was precisely because of such hardships they failed at first to recognize that Iowa was in reality, and for many valid reasons, a blessing to them—even a blessing in disguise.

Under the circumstances, the Mormon pioneers did not realize that when forced to leave what had been called the “city beautiful” they had crossed the Mississippi into a territory whose name meant “beautiful land.” Early explorers and settlers of Iowa unanimously agreed Iowa was so fertile and beautiful a land that one early writer wrote with enthusiasm that it “surpasses any portion of the United States.”<sup>14</sup> It was also variously described as the “Western Paradise,” the “blooming belle of the American Family,” “the Garden of America,” “gardens of the wilderness,” and the “most magnificent dwelling place prepared by God for the abode of man.”<sup>15</sup> Isaac Galland’s *Iowa Emigrant* (1840) described Iowa as a country of “surpassing fertility and beauty, . . . one of the most sublime, terrestrial objects which the Creator ever presented to the view of man.”<sup>16</sup>

Whether or not the Saints were acquainted with many of these particular publications during their travels in Iowa, the stark reality of the difficult exodus in wintertime would certainly have, at least for the time being, belied all of these glowing descriptions. When first upon Iowa soil, the Saints were freezing, rather disorganized, and hungry. Going on an exodus was no picnic, no vacation. They had no time to enjoy the beauty of this “land between the two rivers.” Yet, it was providential that it was to Iowa the Saints came for refuge.

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<sup>12</sup>Miller and Miller, *Nauvoo*, p. 211.

<sup>13</sup>Edgar Harlan, “The Mormon Trail,” *Washington Journal*, 8 November 1913, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup>Lieutenant Albert M. Lea, *Notes on the Wisconsin Territory; Particularly with Reference to the Iowa District, or Black Hawk Purchase* (Philadelphia: H. S. Tanner, 1836), p. 12.

<sup>15</sup>John B. Newhall, *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846*, 2d ed. (Burlington, Iowa: W. D. Skillman, 1846; reprint ed., Iowa City, Iowa: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1957), p. 9; John Plumbe, Jr., *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chambers, Harris & Knapp, 1839), pp. 2, 6; James L. Scott, *A Journal of a Missionary Tour* (Providence, R.I.: Published by author, 1843; reprint ed., Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1966), p. 151.

<sup>16</sup>Isaac Galland, *Galland’s Iowa Emigrant* (Chillicothe, Ohio: Wm. C. Jones, 1840), p. xi.



Iowa in 1846 was already becoming a significant producer of corn. Its precious deep and black prairie soil was rich in minerals and organic matter. Recently turned by the new settlers and squatters, that soil had already produced annually close to eight million bushels of corn, the grain that soon would reign as “king” in Iowa.<sup>17</sup> Whether the large white or the yellow flint corn, more of it was produced in the south and southwest portions of Iowa in 1846–1847—the very area traversed by the Mormons—than anywhere else in the whole state. It was reported that corn was so easy to raise in Iowa soil that it “would astonish a New Englander.”<sup>18</sup> A white corn crop yielded “from fifty to one hundred bushels per acre,” and the yellow flint corn had a yield of from “forty to seventy-five bushels per acre.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, corn, the staple crop of Iowa, was by all measures the single commodity upon which both man and animals could best thrive, and the LDS pioneers had an abundance of both men and animals in need of such sustenance. It was abundantly available in Iowa and in northeast Missouri at the same time because of an exceptionally bounteous harvest in 1845–1846—the year of the greatest need for the Saints.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, there was a surplus of corn—an oversupply—creating a greater eagerness on the part of both Iowan and Missourian settlers for trade and exchange.<sup>21</sup> With supply and demand appropriately matched at the same time, what could have been better?

Furthermore, corn was not the only crop produced in this breadbasket of the nation. Other agricultural products consisted of wheat, rye, oats, buckwheat, potatoes, turnips, beans, melons, squash, and all kinds of other garden vegetables. Clover, timothy, and other grasses grew luxuriantly upon the beautiful prairie lands of Iowa. J. B. Newhall described these prairies as “great natural meadows of exhaustless fertility, affording the richest herbage for cattle, hogs and sheep.”<sup>22</sup> The Reverend James Scott described the prairies with such expressions as “unbounded stretch[es]” of “surpassing beauty.”<sup>23</sup> Lieutenant Albert M. Lea used such descriptive words as “contiguous,” “grand,” and “rolling.”<sup>24</sup> After winter had waned,

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<sup>17</sup>LeRoy R. Hafen, W. Eugene Hollon, and Carl Coke Rister, *Western America: The Exploration, Settlement, and Development of the Region beyond the Mississippi*, 3d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 265.

<sup>18</sup>Newhall, *Glimpse of Iowa*, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup>Lea, *Notes on the Wisconsin Territory*, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>John R. Young, *Memoirs of John R. Young: Utah Pioneer 1847* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1920), pp. 22–23.

<sup>21</sup>Hafen, Hollon, and Rister, *Western America*, p. 265.

<sup>22</sup>Newhall, *Glimpse of Iowa*, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup>Scott, *Journal of a Missionary Tour*, p. 128.

<sup>24</sup>Lea, *Notes on the Wisconsin Territory*, p. 13.

by April and May, the natural tall grasses of these fertile prairies could have sustained many times the number of stock possessed by the Mormon pioneers. The grasses seemed like an infinite ocean. By the last of May, Mormon livestock had become sleek and fat. Such an amount of forage is easier to imagine when we note that "tall" grasses of the Iowa prairies generally range from five to eight feet in height.<sup>25</sup> Because of these grasses, covered wagons while crossing the prairies often could barely be seen in the distance, and it was easy for children and cattle to get lost. It was also difficult to find game quickly, to spot the Indian prowler, or sometimes even to find the road.

In addition to the production and availability of corn, in 1846 there was another important farm product of both Iowa and northern Missouri which thrived: hogs. Corn and hogs went together: Because hogs were fed corn (including the husks, stocks, and roots), the abundance of corn led to a great increase in hog production. In Iowa alone, the number of hogs produced was approximately 300,000 head.<sup>26</sup> Missouri ranked fourteenth in the nation's production of hogs in 1840, and by 1860, it had moved to fourth place. With good feed, hogs were relatively easy to care for; at that time they were also the most easily marketed product and "the most easily preserved meat."<sup>27</sup> Hog production was such a solid economic endeavor that banks would offer readily available loans to farmers, "at legal interest, for the purchase of barrels, salt, and other needed articles to put pork into a marketable condition."<sup>28</sup> By the time of the Mormon exodus, "packing houses" had been established "in nearly every river town."<sup>29</sup> "Many herds of swine . . . were driven great distances to market, and travelers observed that the Iowa roads were alive with hogs. Each animal represented 'fifteen or twenty bushels of corn on four legs' and contributed to a 'universal squeal heard all along the Mississippi.'"<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the abundance of hogs in Iowa and Missouri, the Missourians had produced a large quantity of livestock. Their interest in this pursuit reflected both a practical economic endeavor and a pride in their fine animals, which were a sign of status.

Most migrations westward somehow touched bases in Missouri before crossing the 36th parallel further west. Missouri quickly

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<sup>25</sup>Leland L. Sage, *A History of Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974), p. 10.

<sup>26</sup>Hafen, Hollon, and Rister, *Western America*, p. 265.

<sup>27</sup>Perry McCandless, *A History of Missouri, Volume II: 1820 to 1860*, ed. William E. Parrish, 3 vols. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1972), p. 49.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>Hafen, Hollon, and Rister, *Western America*, p. 265.



produced a superior stock of quality horses. They improved the Durham or Shorthorn breed of cattle, which were valued for "their size, early maturity, smoothness of flesh, high percentage of choice cuts . . . and their tremendous prepotency."<sup>31</sup> They also produced an improved line of sheep. But of all the stock industry, the famous "Missouri Mule" became the "major state export."<sup>32</sup> It was certainly helpful to the unprepared Mormons who left Nauvoo still to be able to rearrange, modify, trade, add, or deplete their stock and cattle as each pioneer's situation demanded.

Though all of this did not appear suddenly out of the heavens, the ample availability of these commodities was nonetheless a god-send. The cumulated daily recorded amounts of corn, wheat, oats, flour, potatoes, hay and straw, as well as hogs and pork (including a major by-product of lard), cattle, sheep, horses, and mules which the Mormon emigrants were able to purchase with money, exchange, or labor literally totalled into hundreds of tons.<sup>33</sup>

Yet there is more about the lands of Iowa which should be recognized as clearly advantageous to the Mormon hegira. There were no mountains or even high hills to go over, because Iowa is made up only of "green carpeted prairies," sloping and graceful. While the landscape is not especially flat, it resembles nothing more harsh than a waving surface, swelling into gentle ups and downs. Obviously, undulating or rolling lands are far easier to traverse than abrupt or angular elevations. Thus, it was a blessing for the pioneers to be able to start their journey on easy terrain. The elevation of the entire Mormon trek across Iowa from east to west, or from the beginning exodus at the Mississippi River to the Missouri River at Kaneshville, did not at any time vary more than 1000 ft. from start to finish. At the end of the roughly three-hundred-mile journey across the state, the Saints were only a mere 450 ft. higher in elevation above sea level than they were when they started. At no point in Iowa is there an elevation above 2,000 ft. nor below 400 ft., a fact which very clearly emphasizes the relative flatness of the land.<sup>34</sup>

Iowa is a prairie land, with each section of prairie bordered by woods and forests. From the air, Iowa resembles a patchwork quilt which, during all the seasons except winter, is as brightly colored as any that can be purchased:

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<sup>31</sup>McCandless, *A History of Missouri*, p. 49.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>33</sup>This information was obtained from a tally constructed from Mormon pioneer diaries found in Church Archives.

<sup>34</sup>*Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State*, p. 3.

The first coat of grass is mingled with small flowers; the violet, the bloom of the strawberry, and others of the most minute and delicate texture. As the grass increases in size, these disappear, and others, taller and more gaudy, display their brilliant colors upon the green surface, and still later, a larger and coarser succession rises with the rising tide of verdure . . . the whole of the surface of these beautiful plains, is clad throughout the season of verdure, with every imaginable variety of color, "from grave to gay". It is impossible to conceive a more infinite diversity, or a richer profusion to hues, or to detect any predominating tint, except the green, which forms the beautiful ground, and relieves the exquisite brilliancy of all the others. The only changes of color observed at the different seasons, arise from the circumstances, that in the spring the flowers are small, and the colors delicate; as the heat becomes more ardent, a hardier race, appears, the flowers attain a greater size, and the hue deepens; and still later a succession of coarser plants rises above the tall grass, throwing out larger and gaudier flowers. As the season advances from spring to midsummer, the individual flower becomes less beautiful when closely inspected, but the landscape is far more variegated, rich and glowing.<sup>35</sup>

Iowa formed a land-bridge between the thickly forested lands of the eastern states and the nonforested grasslands of the high prairie plains west of the Missouri River. When the Saints entered into smooth rolling Iowa lands, three-fourths of the surface was devoid of forest and trees. Freed from the difficulty of having to clear roads through heavy groves and thickets, the Saints could generally wend their way from one stretch of open prairie to the next. Most of the earlier advocates of Iowa emphasized the fact that the ground was already a kind of highway and that no new ones needed to be made: "The country being so very open and free from mountains, artificial roads are little required. A few trees taken out of the way, where the routes much travelled traverse the narrow woods, and a few bridges thrown over the deeper creeks, is all the work necessary to give good roads in any direction."<sup>36</sup> The statement is somewhat exaggerated, but it still suggests what advantage the terrain was for the Mormons.

Each section of prairie was fringed with the most excellent of wooded groves and forests. The bottomlands produced the ash, sycamore, cottonwood, black walnut, bur oak, and elm trees. These alluvial lowlands were also filled with shrubbery of every kind—the pawpaw, grape, plum, dogwood, spice bush, sumac, etc. The woods of the uplands consisted of every variety of oak, sugar maple, hickory, hazel, cherry, white walnut, mulberry, etc.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Plumbe, *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin*, pp. 24–25.

<sup>36</sup>Lea, *Notes on the Wisconsin Territory*, p. 42; see also Plumbe, *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin*, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup>Newhall, *Glimpse of Iowa*, p. 15.



In Iowa, the Saints were never out of range of wood, which was so essential to pioneering. In fact, the most heavily forested area in all of Iowa, consisting mainly of oak and hickory, was (and is) located in the southeastern part of the state. These woods extended westward to the Thompson River Divide running through Adair, Union, and Decatur counties.<sup>38</sup> For the rest of the pioneer trek westward across Iowa, the Saints encountered few forests. Was it simply a coincidence the Latter-day Saints traveled during the winter and cold months in the very area of Iowa which contained the most available and accessible wood? Wood was necessary for the fires to heat wagons, tents, people, and animals. Over these same fires women cooked food, and blacksmiths forged iron. Wood was used to repair boxes, wagons, tents, and all manner of tools. It was used in making rafts, boats, and barges with which to cross the large rivers. And it was needed to build the bridges over other bodies of water. When they stopped long enough, the Saints used wood to build huts, cabins, fences, and boweries along the way. And even when the pioneers were not stopping to make a temporary settlement, these groves of trees became welcome shelters from storms, violent cold, or terrible heat.

Another vital commodity for pioneering was water. Once again, Iowa was most admirably equipped to provide the Saints with this necessity on a year-round basis. The Mormon pioneers never once lacked water in Iowa. Invariably, each section of prairie was interspersed with creeks, rivulets, or rivers. None of them were fed by the runoff from high mountains, as in the Mountain West, but by underground springs scattered over the whole state. Such springs flowed all year and supplied many lakes, which in turn fed the numerous rivers. Even though the pioneers' crossings of these many rivers brought hardship, struggle, and occasionally even death, the very rivers they complained about provided the water essential to the life of the camp.<sup>39</sup>

The land of Iowa possessed several additional treasures of nature which were extremely beneficial to the Saints. The abundant wildlife of Iowa provided measurable assistance throughout their trek, but especially after they had departed from most of the inhabited settlements. When the Mormons could no longer rely upon the settlers for resources, they became more reliant on God, on their own provisions, and on their own independent efforts to utilize the natural fish and game resources of Iowa. Miraculously, the fish in Iowa were

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<sup>38</sup>*The National Atlas of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Interior Geological Survey, 1970), pp. 154-55.

<sup>39</sup>Lea, *Notes on the Wisconsin Territory*, p. 11.



abundant in all the many waters, and many varieties existed. "Every stream is filled with them," reported Lea; there were "immense quantities" of speckled trout, white perch, black and rock bass, pike, pickerel, catfish, shad, red horse sucker, white sucker, sturgeon, and buffalo fish.<sup>40</sup>

The varied wild game and fowl of Iowa were similarly plentiful, except for larger game animals, such as the buffalo, elk, deer, and bear. Earlier, these animals could be found in abundance, but by 1846-1847, the Indian hunters and the westward movement of civilization had diminished the number of such beasts. This is not to say that they were extinct; the Mormons got their share of all four of these game animals, but not as often as they desired or needed. On the other hand, raccoons, "the pork of the Indians," existed in great abundance. Squirrels and rabbits of all kinds also provided many meals along the way. Little use was made of the possums, polecats (skunks), hedgehogs, groundhogs, or porcupines, which were also found along the trail.

Fowl, both land and water types, was very abundant and therefore made a welcome supplement to pioneer eating regimen. Wild turkeys, prairie hens, quails, and pheasants enriched many a pioneer table. Yet, the birds eaten most often by the Saints were the swans, geese, brants, cranes, "and an almost endless variety of ducks" which existed in the "greatest abundance along the rivers, upon the lakes, and not infrequently upon the prairies."<sup>41</sup>

Another treasure of nature which proved to be an additional blessing for the Saints—and again, at a time when it was most beneficial and welcomed—was the munificent array of wild fruits and berries found throughout Iowa. Isaac Galland reported in detail about this matter:

The earliest fruit, which ripens in the last of May or the first of June, is the strawberry. It grows in barren land, or adjoining the timber in prairies, and often on the second bottoms, which are of a sandy soil. This fruit is of an excellent flavor, and in some seasons can be obtained in almost any quantity.

Blackberries grow plentifully, in those places where the timber has been either cut down by the hand of man, or where it has been prostrated by hurricanes; these are also a very pleasant berry, but not so delicious as the strawberry.

Raspberries are not as plentiful as the foregoing, but they are very common in the country.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14; Scott, *Journal of a Missionary Tour*, p. 154.

<sup>41</sup>Galland, *Iowa Emigrant*, p. 20.

Gooseberries are in many places in the greatest abundance, and of the best quality; they are large and smooth and of an excellent tast [*sic*].

Plums abound in great variety of size, color and flavor, and grow on trees or bushes in a variety of soils, some of them are of an excellent flavor.

Crab apples are found plentifully about the head of the water-courses in the edges of the prairies, they are very large and make excellent preserves, having a fragrant smell and a fine golden color. Several varieties of hickory nuts, the black walnut, the butter nut, the hazel nut and the pecan, are plentiful in many places.

Grapes. Both summer and winter grapes, and of several varieties, both in size and flavor are found in the country. Wild cherries, the black haw, the red haw and the paw-paw, are also found here.

Cranberries grow in the greatest abundance in the northern parts of this Territory, and are obtained from the Indians by the traders in large quantities.<sup>42</sup>

The reception of this blessing of berries, fruits, and nuts “out of the wilderness” no doubt prompted the Saints to recall, and perhaps recite, one of their precious scriptures:

Yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; yea for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul. And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man.<sup>43</sup>

The agricultural richness of Iowa was due not only to the fertility of its prairie soil but also to the climate. Iowa was called “the best corn climate in all the world.” What made it so were the moist winters, wet springs, hot and humid summers, long growing seasons, and favorable winds.<sup>44</sup> The land thrived not only upon the moisture it absorbed during the winter but also upon the moisture which came during the spring and summer seasons and was always far greater than that received in winter. The precipitation in June was probably four times that of the winter months, with about seventy percent of the total annual precipitation occurring during the months of April through September. Indeed, Iowa received a great amount of moisture during the year. The southeast area, where the Mormons first crossed, probably received a yearly average of 36 inches of rain.<sup>45</sup>

The Iowa climate simply reflected its geographical position deep in the interior of the continent. The winters were very cold, coming from the great Arctic cold masses which regularly swept across the

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>43</sup>Doctrine and Covenants 59:18–20.

<sup>44</sup>Sage, *History of Iowa*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.



central prairies states out of the north and northeast. The springs and summers were the other extreme. Maritime tropical warm air masses coming up from the Gulf of Mexico brought frequent thunderstorms and moisture, causing the summer months to be hot and humid.

All of this abundant wet weather in winter, spring, and summer, and the excessive spring warmth and humid summer heat, were admirably suited for the agricultural excellence in Iowa. It did indeed make great corn, but it was not very good for pioneer traveling. Mormon emigrants traveling westward cursed both the wet weather and the accompanying highways of mud which it made, as well as the high humidity. And rightly so, for the hardships endured by the Saints resulted in great measure from these climatic conditions; therefore it was difficult for the Saints to view anything positive in the weather they endured. Few of the Saints recognized that the needed blessing of the abundant supply of food and feed, water and wood, fish and game, and grass and fruits which were bounteously produced in Iowa and available at that time for them and for all of the continuing Mormon migrations could exist only because of the abundance of inclement weather which they were called upon to endure.

There were still several more significant advantages accruing to the Saints by their traveling in Iowa. First of all, when the Saints initially crossed into Iowa country, and for a little more than the first two months thereafter, they were traveling in the area which was inhabited and relatively settled. There were farms, towns and settlements, stores, hotels, schools, churches, courts, and jails. Most importantly, there were nearby, or at least accessible, mills, including the gristmills, which could grind the pioneers' wheat and corn into usable meal and flour. In other words, during the very severest times of their trek—the times of the worst weather conditions, the times of the most serious lack of food and feed, and also during the times of the greatest disorganization among the ranks—there were always some settlers in the prairie neighborhood to whom they might appeal for help, even though the population was relatively sparse.<sup>46</sup> Had it

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<sup>46</sup>The "neighborhood" through which the Saints traveled included parts of eight counties on the Iowa-Missouri border: Appanoose, Davis, Van Buren, and Lee in Iowa; and Putnam, Schuyler, Scotland, and Clark in Missouri. The population of these eight counties in 1846-1847 was approximately forty thousand. (See Walter Williams, ed., *A History of Northeast Missouri*, 3 vols. [Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1913], pp. 336-38, 342, 361-64, 378, 523, 606; Elizabeth Prather Ellsberry, *1850 Federal Census for Sullivan County, Missouri* [Chillicothe: n.p., n.d.], pp. 1-32; Gue, *History of Iowa*, pp. 223-24; *History of Adair, Sullivan, Putnam and Schuyler Counties* [Chicago: Goodspeed Co., 1888], pp. 79-80, 423, 448, 513, 615, 642; Plumbe, *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin*, p. xv; *The History of Van Buren County, Iowa* [Chicago: Western History Co., 1878], pp. 255-56, 456; *The Story of Lee County, Iowa*, ed. Nelson C. Roberts and S. W. Moorhead [Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1914], 1:365; E. M. Violette, *History of Adair County* [Kirkville, Mo.: Denslow History Co., 1911], pp. 7-19; Charles A. White, *Report on the Geological Survey of the State of Iowa* [Des Moines: Mills and Co., 1870], 1:142-64.)

not been for those settlers and their resources, especially at that time, the Saints would probably not have survived.

In conclusion, it should also be re-emphasized that all this good fortune was available to the Saints at the right time of the year and in the right place in their travels when it would be most beneficial. And with few exceptions everything was free to the Saints just for the taking. Could there have been any place else where the whole Mormon movement could have gone out of Illinois and sustained themselves? Was Iowa tailor-made by divine hands to be so prepared by 1846–1847 in order to take care of this people?

While pointing out the advantages Iowa possessed which favored the Mormon experience, there is no attempt to de-emphasize the overwhelming accomplishment of the pioneers. No tribute should be denied them when discussing this marvel of human effort. It would never do to try to “explain away” the very real saga of intense suffering and agony experienced by these Saints of God. Indeed, that is the very point: they *were* the Saints of God, and he was with them, even in their most terrible hours. He brought them into Iowa, and in the long run it was a great blessing to them—a blessing in disguise.