

THE MORMON CROSSING OF THE UNITED STATES, 1840-1870

BY PHILIP A. M. TAYLOR*

MOST students of American history know, in outline, the story of the origins of Mormonism, of the Mormon colonization of Utah, and of the journey of thousands of European converts across the Atlantic and the United States. The details of the organization of that journey are less familiar. What follows is an attempt to analyze, largely from unpublished sources and from the Mormon periodical, *Latter Day Saints' Millennial Star*, the organization of the Mormon crossing of the United States from the Atlantic coast to Utah, up to the time when the development of steamship and railway transformed experiment and adventure into routine. In dealing with routes and seasons of migration, with the planning of transport, with the formulation of rules for companies, and with the character of leadership and discipline, the question will always be asked, how far Mormon experience and practice can be called typical of their period, and how far unique.

The Mormon choice of route needs no elaborate explanation. The Pioneer Company of 1847, which established so many precedents, started from Winter Quarters, that is, Omaha, and this in turn was terminus of the previous year's journey westward from the abandoned city of Nauvoo. The same precedent helps to explain why most later companies followed the northern bank of the Platte, as far as a point opposite Fort Laramie, halfway along the thousand mile route, or even all the way to the mountains.¹ The existence of Nauvoo as the destination of the first Mormon converts

*Dr. Taylor, British student of American history with special emphasis on the Mormon emigration from Great Britain, has twice before contributed to the pages of this magazine. See "Why Did British Mormons Emigrate?" *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXII (July, 1954), 249-70, and "Mormons and Gentiles on the Atlantic," *ibid.*, XXIV (July, 1956), 195-214.

¹The most detailed account of the Mormon trail is William Clayton, *The Latter Day Saints' Emigrants' Guide* (St. Louis, 1848), reprinted as the second part of Leander V. Loomis, *Journal of the Birmingham Emigrating Company, 1850* (Salt Lake City, 1928). For the advantage of the South Pass route, which made it much the most popular with all migrants, see Edmund W. Gilbert, *The Exploration of Western America, 1800-50* (Cambridge, 1933), 53-55, 70-71, 75, 145-48.

from Europe determined the early route from Liverpool: by sea to New Orleans, by steamboat to St. Louis, and then upstream by smaller steamer.² The Mississippi route was both easy and cheap, and it remained so when Winter Quarters became the starting-point of a trail across plains and mountains to Utah. But although it was used by almost all the Mormon migration up to 1854, it was recognized even five years earlier that it involved dangers to health. The development of railways in the Middle West conferred more freedom of choice, for in 1854 a line reached the Mississippi at Rock Island from Chicago, itself linked to the Atlantic coast two years earlier. Beginning in 1855, the New Orleans route was therefore abandoned, and experiments were made with various water and rail routes from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. In 1856 Iowa City became the main Mormon outfitting center, with Florence (Winter Quarters) as a subsidiary, because it was now the most westerly railhead. From 1859, New York became the sole port of disembarkation, and the Mormon route lay via Chicago to St. Joseph, the new railhead, and thence by steamboat to Florence, or, from 1864, Wyoming, Nebraska.³ It was to these points that from 1861 there came down from Utah the church teams with provisions for the immigrants whom they took back to Salt Lake City the same season. The only later changes were the abandonment of the outfitting centers, and then of the church teams themselves, as the Union Pacific tracks advanced westward, reaching Utah itself in 1869.

Like other migrants, the Mormons found the season of crossing the West rather rigidly determined. Since they were traveling in large companies with families, needing great numbers of wagons and animals, they were forced to wait for a sufficient growth of grass on the plains. Hence they could seldom start before early May, and it was

²James Linforth, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (Liverpool, 1855), 28-81. Three ships used New York in 1840 and 1841, and one, perhaps two, Quebec in 1841.

³The final route is described in *Latter Day Saints' Millennial Star*, XXV (August 29, 1863), 558. Keokuk was the outfitting center in 1853 because of undue optimism about the speed of railway advance in that direction to Iowa and the Missouri. In 1854 and 1855 the center was Atchison, Kansas, which shared with all main outfitting towns the advantage of a location on that portion of the Missouri that was the readily navigable water nearest South Pass. See *Ibid.*, XV (July 16, 1853), 457-58; XVI (July 29, 1854), 477, 480; XVII (June 16, 1855), 377-78; and (July 21, 1855), 460-61.

imperative to cross the Rockies before winter came.⁴ To make this possible they had to sail from Britain in the spring, unless, as sometimes in the New Orleans period, they went in winter and stayed some months at St. Louis or in camp at the frontier. The railway, and later still the ocean steamship, made the journey faster. From 1863 sailings can be found as late as June, and from 1869 the all-steam route virtually abolished limitations of season.

Physical conditions were the same for Mormons as for other travelers of the period. Aboard the river steamboats, they did not occupy the luxurious salons and staterooms so much described by European writers. Instead, they provided their own food, cooked it at the single stove, and slept on deck, imperfectly separated from the machinery and vulnerable to a variety of accidents. Later, they traveled in special immigrant cars, or in whole trains, slow and uncomfortable but cheap, which some railways were providing from 1845, and most of the 1850's.⁵

But while in so many ways the Mormons were subject to the conditions which governed all western travel, the organization of all stages of their journey within the United States, as on the Atlantic, was peculiar to themselves. If the converts were to reach Utah in good health and spirits, the church had to supplement a system of protection which was defective in the extreme. At first the only protection immigrants received within the United States came from voluntary societies founded within the various ethnic groups.⁶ Then, in 1847, New York State established Commissioners, and in the next year licensed the runners, ticket agents, and keepers of lodging-houses. In 1855 the Commissioners set up Castle Garden as a compulsory landing-place. They developed there facilities for changing money, buying inland passage tickets, forwarding baggage, obtaining meals and medical attention, receiving news from friends

⁴Randolph B. Marcy, *The Prairie Traveller* (New York, 1859), 21-22; Henry Villard, *Past and Present of Pike's Peak Gold Region* (St. Louis, 1860), reprinted in *Narratives of the Trans-Mississippi Frontier* (Princeton, 1932), 152-53; *Millennial Star*, XXVI (January 23, 1864), 61.

⁵Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), chapters 9 and 10. The only disaster suffered by Mormons on the rivers was the explosion of the *Saluda* at Lexington, Mo., in 1852, with 17 deaths. *Millennial Star*, XIV (June 26, 1852), 283. For an unfavorable account of immigrant trains, see *ibid.*, XXVII (July 22, 1865), 461-62.

⁶Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City 1825-63* (New York, 1949), 32, 34-36; Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1865* (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), 156-65; Alan A. Conway, "New Orleans as a Port of Immigration, 1820-60," London, M. A. dissertation, 1949, 100-5.

and sending messages to them, even registering at an employment agency, and all this with no interference from runners or other interested parties.⁷ But while Castle Garden was such an impressive institution, other facts must be kept in mind. No similar system was developed at any other port, and conditions elsewhere were unfavorably commented upon even in the early twentieth century. Further, since the states were concerned only to encourage immigration in the mass—and that only intermittently—there was no public system of protection inland. Nor was there much private philanthropy. The immigrants had at their disposal a transport system and much helpful information, if they could get it and read it. But they were subject to many frauds: the sale of tickets or the transfer of baggage at exorbitant prices, overcharging by employment agencies, and the luring of young women into cities en route on the pretext of offering jobs—to name only a few.⁸

The full system which the Mormons devised dates from 1848, though seven years earlier immigrants had been told that any who landed at New York City could obtain information from Bishop Bernhisel.⁹ Whereas the journey to Nauvoo had been simple, that to Utah was full of complexities. Expert assistance was indispensable if the European converts were to complete hundreds of miles in the settled districts of the United States, and a thousand across uninhabited plains and mountains, and still arrive fit to make their contribution to the new Mormon community. The central feature of the system was the appointment of agents at New Orleans, St. Louis, New York, and at the frontier outfitting centers.¹⁰ Some were sent from Utah. Some went from Britain, though often they were

⁷Friedrich Kapp, *Immigration and the Commissioners of Emigration of the State of New York* (New York, 1870), 211-12; *New York Herald*, July 7, 1867; *Land and Emigration* (Northern Pacific Railroad newspaper, published in London), October, 1872; Ernst, *op. cit.*, 29-30; Edith Abbott, *Immigration, Select Documents and Case Records* (Chicago, 1924), 140-41, for the 1848 law.

⁸John F. Maguire, *The Irish in America* (London, 1868), 192-93, 197-98; A. Lewenhaupt, "Report on Norwegian and Swedish Immigration," *Studies and Records*, XII (Norwegian-American Historical Society), 50-51; see also the Report of the Immigration Commission 1907-10, *Steerage Conditions*, Senate Executive Document No. 753, 61 Cong., 3 sess., 39-40; Grace Abbott, *The Immigrant and the Community* (New York, 1921), 1-23.

⁹*Millennial Star*, II (August, 1841), 62.

¹⁰Between 1848 and 1870, appointments of agents total 57, though some men held more than one appointment during the period, a list of names is too long for inclusion here. During the 1860's, teams of two or three men were usually at New York and at the frontier; earlier, single agents were more common.

experienced missionaries; these traveled in advance, by steamship from the early 1850's, or with the first company of a season.¹¹ They were in constant touch with Utah and Liverpool, information being sent them from the British presidency by mail steamer. In 1869, W. C. Staines even made a short trip to Britain to consult the presidency about details of the season's migration.¹²

The agents made provision for those Mormons who intended to stay in the East, with a view to earning money for the final stage of their journey. In 1849 Thomas McKenzie organized branches of the church at New Orleans and St. Louis. Five years later, William Empey was trying to secure homes at St. Louis, but finding that the owners would rent only for a year with payment in advance, he chartered a boat and took the immigrants upstream to camp. In 1855, a letter was sent back to F. D. Richards at Liverpool:

Our reception at St. Louis far exceeded all I could have expected, and indeed all that ever took place at St. Louis before, and we all realised the blessings of being within the organization of a Stake of Zion. About two days before our arrival, a severe frost set in and the river was nearly blocked with ice. Brothers Erastus Snow, Milo Andrus, the Bishop and his Counsellors, were early on the levee, the majority of the company were taken into the basement story of our large place of worship, the sick were the first objects of attention, and they, as well as the whole company, were located in hired houses as soon as possible.¹³

Mainly, however, they were concerned with a continuous journey from coast to frontier. They chartered whole steamboats, or whole trains, or negotiated for low rates for the large bodies of passengers

¹¹*Millennial Star*, XIV (February 15, 1852), 58; XVI (January 21, 1854), 41-42; XXV (March 28, 1863), 203; XXVII (February 25, 1865), 124; XXVIII (February 24, 1866), 122-23.

¹²*Ibid.*, X (October 1, 1848), 301; XXVI (August 13, 1864), 524; XXXI (July 17, 1869), 467, (August 7, 1869), 515.

¹³*Ibid.*, XVII (April 7, 1855), 222. See also *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* entry of October 28, 1849, in *Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City; William Empey Journal, 1852-54, 123-29*. Typescript copy in the library of the Utah State Historical Society. Agents boarded ships, gave advice, arranged inland passage, and sometimes traveled upstream with immigrants. *Millennial Star*, X (July 1, 1848), 204-5; XI (June 15, 1849), 186; XV (June 25, 1853), 409-10. They reported on ship's captains: criticisms are in *ibid.*, XI (February 15, 1849), 54; XII (July 15, 1850), 217. A warning to the British president against a man who was committing frauds in offering river steamboat passages is in *ibid.*, XI (March 1, 1849), 72.

involved.¹⁴ Most revealing of all the evidence is the long letter written from a Mississippi steamboat by John S. Fullmer to Franklin D. Richards in July, 1857. Fullmer reports on the whereabouts of other agents, acknowledging their cooperation. He suggests the separation of Perpetual Emigrating Fund personnel for ease of administration. He complains of having to pay for surplus baggage, and urges that this be controlled at Liverpool. He reports on the immigrants' health and on the food they have received. His description makes it clear that he traveled far and fast. Back and forth between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia he moved, meeting companies, chartering vessels, sending telegrams, making rapid decisions as to details of the journey.¹⁵

Mormon immigrants were far more dependent on outfitting centers than were Middle Western farmers on their way to Oregon or California, who might have animals, wagons, implements, weapons, and food of their own growing. Even rural Mormons were unaccustomed to many of the essential tasks, and the majority of the British came from industrial districts.¹⁶ In 1863 the leader of one company reported that he had had to teach some Scandinavians to yoke and drive oxen, and that without knowing their language.¹⁷ Organization—and this meant well-considered rules and experienced agents to enforce them—was essential to the success of such a large undertaking.

The agents at the frontier had to collect wagons, oxen, and foodstuffs, either with church funds or with money entrusted to them by those who were financing themselves.¹⁸ Their work was somewhat reduced only when the church teams came down from Utah with basic supplies. Whenever possible contracts were made

¹⁴*Ibid.*, XV (April 30, 1853), 282, mentions a contract for river steamboat passage; XXV (June 27, 1863), 413, shows Horace S. Eldredge securing special concessions despite agreements among railroad companies on minimum fares. *Autobiography of Pioneer John Brown, 1820-96* (Salt Lake City, 1941), 294, refers to free passes for Mormons who had contracted to work on the construction of the Union Pacific.

¹⁵*Millennial Star*, XVII (July 21, 1855), 458-60.

¹⁶See the analysis of occupations and places of origin in my articles, "Why Did British Mormons Emigrate?" *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXII (July, 1954), 259-66.

¹⁷*Journal History*, September 12, 1863.

¹⁸Examples of the sending of money with agents from Britain are in *Millennial Star*, XIV (November 27, 1852), 632-33; XV (February 12, 1853), 105; XVI (January 21, 1854), 41-42; XVIII (January 12, 1856), 26. After 1856, independent emigration became much smaller.

for deliveries, and in 1856 there is even a report of a ten-year contract for timber, fuel, and ferry-tolls.¹⁹ A letter of 1857 from James A. Little to Orson Pratt in Britain deserves close attention. His report includes news of the early arrival of the George Washington company, which caused him to collect hurriedly all the tent covers and other goods being made at St. Louis and to put them hastily on the steamboat going the same night to Muscatine, landing-place for Iowa City. It includes also remarks on the poor crops that will raise the price of the immigrants' provisions and details of contracts for cattle which are being fed in Clay County, Missouri, until the first of May. He goes on to explain the reason for writing at such length:

While I am labouring for the present, I wish to make the experience of these labours of some benefit to emigration next season. In this way besides the satisfaction of knowing how matters are now moving from time to time, I may throw out some ideas that will assist you in making calculations for another year.²⁰

Such reporting was common practice and played its part in building up the church's experience of organizing migration. As a further example, the reports from Wyoming, Nebraska, may be summarized. They include descriptions of the organizing of a company of men to unload river steamboats, the arrival of immigrants, the recruiting of single men as teamsters in freight companies, and worries over the strength of wagons in relation to loads, as well as details of the supplies collected and the buildings constructed to store them. The work at Wyoming was on a very large scale. By May, 1864, there were two warehouses three stories high, and stocks included 2,500 sacks of flour, 70,000 pounds of bacon, 80 sacks of beans and 50 of dried apples, together with cooking stoves and other equipment. Despite the expected arrival of church teams, additional wagons were ordered from Chicago:

¹⁹*Ibid.*, XVIII (May 24, 1856), 333; thus, the Missouri ferry was to cost 50 cents for a wagon and team, 5 cents for additional animals, 10 cents for hand-carts, while immigrants crossed free. Reports of purchases of livestock, contracts for hand-carts, etc., are in *ibid.*, XV (May 14, 1853), 317; XVI (July 29, 1854), 477; XVIII (May 3, 1856), 281. See also William Empey Journal, 1852-54, 121-22.

²⁰*Millennial Star*, XIX (June 13, 1857), 377-79; Little himself went to Iowa City with the immigrants. Journal History, July 13, 1849, shows a frontier agent reporting on the misconduct of a steamboat captain.

Our expenses are enormous. Tents and waggon covers alone make an item of over \$5,000, and having to feed the emigrants so long while we wait for the waggons, makes a very heavy provision account. I have today bought a train of 15 waggons and 60 yoke of oxen, chains and all complete for \$15,000.²¹

These supplies had to be distributed among the wagons, and loads carefully regulated if the immigrants were to avoid the wholesale jettisoning of goods which characterized the California migration of 1849 and 1850. It was commonly thought that a four-yoke team of oxen should pull no more than 2,500 pounds, and Mormon rules stated 1,500 pounds for two-yoke teams.²² Those Mormons who were paying their own way naturally had some freedom of choice. But in 1854 a precise scale was laid down for the Perpetual Emigrating Fund companies: each wagon was to carry 1,000 pounds of flour, 50 each of sugar, bacon, and rice, 30 of beans, 25 of salt, 20 of dried fruit, 5 of tea, plus a gallon of vinegar and 10 bars of soap. It would perhaps be fair to reckon six to ten persons to each wagon, and two or three months for the journey, though these are no more than broad averages.²³ When the church teams were established, immigrants were each allowed 50 pounds of baggage free of charge.²⁴ For the handcart companies, designed largely for economy, the scale of provision was very different. In Bunker's company of 1856, each adult had seventeen pounds of bedding and clothes and each child ten; the carts carried also the cooking utensils; heavier equipment and stores were carried in wagons; there was a tent for each twenty persons; daily rations were one pound of flour per person, plus tea or coffee, rice and sugar, milk from the eighteen cows taken with the company, and fresh meat from game shot along the trail.²⁵

²¹Andrew Jenson, "Latter Day Saints' Emigration from Wyoming, Nebraska, 1864-66," *Nebraska History*, XVII, 113-27 (the quotation is on p. 118).

²²*Millennial Star*, XXIV (August 2, 1862), 491-92; XXV (March 7, 1863), 158.

²³Linforth, *op. cit.*, 19. *Millennial Star*, XVII (January 20, 1855), 41, assumes 10 people to each wagon. This seems approximately correct for P.E.F. companies and many of the church teams. Independent companies seem to have had a lower ratio, and in the early 1850's examples can be found of 4 persons per wagon. Full details are available for only 49 companies, but those in the 1850's usually took three months or somewhat more from the Missouri to Utah, and those in the 1860's, two or two-and-a-half months.

²⁴*Ibid.*, XXIV (April 26, 1862), 267.

²⁵*Ibid.*, XVIII (November 29, 1856), 767.

The organization of the companies was derived from that of the Pioneer Company, or even in some measure from the exodus of 1846 from Nauvoo. Brigham Young's Revelation of 14 January 1847, "The Word and Will of the Lord concerning the Camp of Israel in their Journey to the West," required division into hundreds, fifties, and tens, each with captain, and the Pioneer Company had two, five and fourteen of these groups.²⁶ The 1848 migration was supervised by Young and other apostles, who had returned to Winter Quarters from Salt Lake City. The names of officers and rank-and-file were all committed to paper, together with the number of animals and wagons, and at one time four clerks were kept busy.²⁷ In later years, companies usually had a president and two counselors, captains of fifties and tens, a captain of the guard, a clerk, and often a chaplain.²⁸ The senior officers were selected by the agents at the frontier, and the weight of evidence supports the generalization that even the junior officers were so appointed, unless an apostle or other dignitary acted as company president, when he would naturally be allowed to choose his own subordinates.²⁹ The officers were sometimes "sustained" in traditional Mormon fashion:

The company was called together . . . for the purpose of electing officers. The Captain of the Hundred . . . was present and addressed the brethren upon the subject of a

²⁶B. H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (6 vols., Salt Lake City, 1930), III, 164. The Revelation can also be found in all but the earliest editions of *Book of Doctrine and Covenants*. The journey from Nauvoo is described in William Clayton, *Journal* (Salt Lake City, 1920), 9-10, 13; the remainder of this work concerns the Pioneer Company. It is recorded that in Brigham Young's own company of 1848, "The order of the Pioneer Camp was read as a sort of sample for us." Oliver Huntington *Journal*, II, 22. Typescript in Utah State Historical Society library.

²⁷*Journal History*, May 31, June 1 and 8, 1848. Similarly, *ibid.*, October 10, 1853; October 16, 1862.

²⁸*Ibid.*, October 5, 1854, shows captains of tens required to report to their superiors on the needs of each family in their charge, so that food could be given to the most necessitous. In 1864, an "officer of the day" was appointed to travel in the rear and prevent straggling. *Ibid.*, October 26, 1864.

²⁹In 1850, Orson Hyde organized W. Foote's company, while Wilford Woodruff organized his own. *Ibid.*, September 17 and October 14, 1850. Eliza R. S. Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City, 1884), 94, shows Snow selecting his own captains of fifties. There are still a few exceptions: thus, *Journal History*, October 10, 1853, shows captains of fifties choosing their own captains of tens.

proper organization. The officers were all accepted according to their previous appointment.²⁰

All this was in marked contrast to contemporary practice. It is true that some of the 1849 gold rush companies were elaborately organized, as joint-stock companies or with complex constitutions. Others, with simpler structure, might be formed by groups of neighbors before leaving their homes. But most often, companies were formed at the outfitting center or on the trail to the west of it, on the basis of confused electioneering among people who had drifted together by chance. Many leaders so chosen proved incompetent, and regardless of their efficiency they were liable to be deposed if opinion turned against them. Either way, the stability and success of the expeditions suffered.²¹

The forming of the Mormon companies was often the occasion of detailed advice by agents or other church leaders. Thus in 1865 Thomas Taylor reported:

I advised the Saints to be obedient to the requirements of their officers, and also to let Miner G. Atwood [the captain] equalise the strength of the teams. The general instruction to be moderate in driving and in the use of the whip was given . . . Elder John S. Holman remarked that the English Saints had been organized by themselves only to separate them, that in case of sickness better care and attention could be bestowed by those who understood each other's language; he also remarked that the teams were to take their turns in rolling out [i.e. starting in the morning] in order that all should have equal chances of camp-grounds. . . .²²

But in addition to such verbal exhortations, detailed codes of regulations were from time to time drawn up. There is considerable uniformity among the surviving examples, and it will be enough to describe those of 1849 in full, and then note additional features of the others. In twelve clauses, the rules of 1849 ordered that

²⁰*Ibid.*, September 24, 1848. Appointment from above, and "sustaining" clearly included captains of tens in James S. Brown, *Life of a Pioneer, being the Autobiography of James S. Brown* (Salt Lake City, 1900), 397.

²¹For detailed analysis of contemporary companies on which comparisons with Mormon methods can be based, see my article, "Emmigrants' Problems in Crossing the West," *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, V (1955), 83-102. I acknowledge the courtesy of the editor of that *Journal* in allowing me to use here the substance of a few paragraphs and some quotations from original sources.

²²Jensen, *op. cit.*, 123. This company also had a commissary.

each ten should take turns to lead the company; that lost property was to be entrusted to captains of fifties; that dogs should be tied up at night; that an officer's consent was needed before anyone left camp; that prayers were to be said regularly and attended by all; that guards were to be posted each night; that the day's march was to begin at 7:30 A.M., that obedience to officers should be complete; that each man was responsible for securing his own animals at night; that each member was to be in his wagon by 9 P.M.³³ The rules of 1848 required each fifty to have a blacksmith and wagon-maker with tools; each wagon was to have a gun and fifty rounds; outfits were to be inspected before starting; weekly halts were to be made for washing and baking, while Sundays were to be set aside for rest and worship.³⁴ The 1852 rules laid down penalties for neglect of guard duty: public reproof for the first offense, and for the second, extra duty in herding cattle. For profanity, public reproof was the punishment, and for cruelty to animals, fines.³⁵ Those of 1853 prohibited card-playing in camp.³⁶ Those of 1854 made it clear that all able-bodied males over sixteen were to stand guard; each ten was to have a strong rope suitable for use in fording streams; precautions were to be taken against careless use of firearms.³⁷

Enough evidence exists for conditions in practice to show that Mormon companies experienced many of the difficulties and hardships of their contemporaries in the West. They traveled the same ten, fifteen, twenty miles a day, all but small children and sick people walking. The pace was that of the oxen, one-and-a-half or two miles an hour. Since the journey was made in summer, temperatures were high during the day with no shade, constant dust, and frequent thunderstorms. Food—the bacon, bread, beans, coffee,

³³Journal History, July 14, 1849.

³⁴Millennial Star, XXXI (January 9, 1869), 20-21, referring back to 1848 under the heading "An Answer to Several Questions in Relation to the History and Doctrine of the Latter Day Saints and the Settlement and Progress of Utah Territory." William Chandless, *A Visit to Salt Lake* (London, 1857), 16, observed the Sunday halts. But circumstances could sometimes override the most pious resolutions: Journal History, September 24, 1848, gives an example.

³⁵James A. Little, *From Kirtland to Salt Lake City* (Salt Lake City, 1890), 240-41.

³⁶Journal History, September 9, 1853.

³⁷Robert Campbell's Journal. Quoted in LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis M. Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West* (Glendale, Calif., 1938), 213-14.

dried fruit of all western travel—was monotonous. To fatigue and thirst was added loss of sleep, for the men stood guard at frequent intervals after their long day's work with the teams.³⁸ Stampedes of the animals at some sudden fright, accidents with firearms, illness, delays and deaths due to childbirth, none of these hazards of the trail could the Mormons escape.³⁹ The basic routine also was similar. Like their contemporaries, the Mormons started early each day, did half or more of their mileage before a noon halt, continued until late afternoon, made camp and allowed the animals to graze again, and formed a circular or elliptical corral of wagons linked together, within which animals could be bunched for control or protection. In 1849 the clerk of one of the companies wrote:

It is quite interesting in the evening when the camp stops to witness the activity of all that are able; some watering cattle, some driving others to herd, others making fires and carrying wood for evening and morning, while others are preparing their meals; after supper, the driving up of the herd, chaining and tying up cattle. The captain of the guard blows his horn and summons the guard to duty. The camp, after prayers, retires to rest, with their camp fires burning and their lamps lighted up in their waggons, with the lowing of oxen, the bleating of sheep and neighing of the horses in the corral, the howling of wolves on the distant hills and prairies, with the half hourly cry of the guards from No. 1 up, as they cry the hour of the night with "all is right," all combined lends enchantment to the scene and a feeling of praise, veneration and thanksgiving to the God of the Saints.⁴⁰

³⁸Clayton comments on this in his *Journal*, 88. The pioneers were picked men, not immigrants just arrived from Europe.

³⁹See my article, cited in Note 31, for further discussion and documentation; and Georgia W. Read, "Diseases, Drugs and Doctors on the Oregon-California Trail in the Gold Rush Year," *Missouri Historical Review*, XXXVIII (1944), 260-76. Evidence for Mormon mortality is slight. Only 19 companies afford detailed figures, i.e. fewer than one-sixth of the known companies. Leaving aside the last two handcart groups of 1856 (72 deaths of 450 in one, and 140 or more of 700 in the other), the average mortality is slightly under 3 per cent. But within this broad average, two companies with high rates suffered from cholera, three others had epidemics among the children, while others had rates below 1 per cent. Deaths on the river and rail journeys, especially the former, must be added, but the evidence is equally inadequate. The high proportion of children and old people in Mormon companies must always be kept in mind.

⁴⁰*Journal History*, October 27, 1849. See also *Millennial Star*, XXIV (December 6, 1862), 781-82; XXV (January 24, 1863), 60-61. And Chandless, *op. cit.*, 54.

This quotation might have been drawn from any diary of the period. But from one of the major characteristics of travel in the West the Mormons were largely exempt. In many companies an attempt was made to provide for the orderly settlement of disputes, and indeed to transport to the West the whole structure of law and order known to the settled regions of the United States. Despite this, the story of western migration is full of quarrels, sometimes attended by violence, and of the breaking up of companies, often caused by the quarrels or by discontent with elected leaders. Underlying all this was the strain imposed on human physique and temper by the conditions of the march. "The trip is a sort of magic mirror," wrote one early traveler, "and exposes every man's qualities of heart connected with it, vicious or amiable."⁴¹ The conditions were the same for Mormons. They were often, indeed, physically far less fitted for the trail than were native Americans. Mormon companies, too, were far larger than the contemporary average, and might be expected to have been harder to manage.⁴² But against these factors must be set three which will be discussed in turn: the morale of the rank-and-file, the professional character of the leaders, and the special nature of the leaders' authority.

The first point needs little elaboration. The immigrants were not hand-picked by any physical tests, still less for their proficiency in frontier skills. But they were converts to a religion, and they were migrating in fulfillment of an essential part of their faith. Mormonism inspired enthusiasm, but it also stressed discipline and order. The converts were on their way to a highly organized society virtually identical with their church. They had, in short, every reason to behave in a disciplined manner and to endure the hardships of the journey with unusual fortitude.⁴³ Indeed, as the story of the

⁴¹Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California* (Third edition, New York, 1849), 68.

⁴²Of 123 companies recorded in the period 1848-66, 80 had between 200 and 500 members, and 17 had more than 500, as compared with the 50 to 150 most common among other migrants. Mormon companies sometimes divided to find forage. *Journal History*, July 15, 1848; October 27, 1849; October 14, 1850; September 27, 1852. But sometimes they traveled together for protection. *Ibid.*, September 9, 1853; October 5, 1860; October 26, 1864.

⁴³Although it is unlikely that much evidence will ever come to light, some desertions certainly took place. *Millennial Star*, IV (February, 1844), 147; XVIII (October 4, 1856), 637.

1856 handcarts demonstrates, their courage might carry them far beyond the bounds of prudence.⁴⁴

In the early years of the migration, many companies on the plains were lead by men who had presided over companies on board ship, though it would be hard to prove that the personnel of the two types of company were identical. However, only three examples of this can be found after 1859. The church team system meant not only that leaders came down from Utah each year and returned with the immigrants, but that the same men came year after year. J. R. Murdock is said to have made no fewer than eleven round trips, H. D. Haight seven, S. Roundy five, Milo Andrus and H. Duncan three each.⁴⁵ In this way, too, technical doctrine could become established, and the rank-and-file could all the more easily accept rules enforced by those whose competence was so apparent.

The discipline of Mormon companies did not depend solely on the technical accomplishments or the force of personality of men elected or accepted by the companies' members. Leaders were appointed by higher authority. They were often themselves of high rank in the priesthood. They were leaders "on mission" just as much as if they had been engaged in the work of conversion overseas. As was so often true in the Mormon Church, their authority was both secular and ecclesiastical; or rather, in what was regarded as sacred work, there could be no real distinction between the two. Offenses against the discipline they enforced were therefore punishable by penalties both material and spiritual. In 1853, one company had two disputes. One consisted of threats against the captain because of the state of the bacon supply and its distribution. The leaders decided that all had been done fairly, and that hot weather had caused the wastage that was the root of the trouble. The man who had complained was censured, and it was resolved that certain brothers "wait upon him and endeavour to remove the bad spirit from him which existed." The other concerned the refusal of several men to stand guard. The captain of the guard was told

⁴⁴*Journal of Discourses* (26 vols., Liverpool, 1854-86), IV, 115; John Chislett's Narrative, in T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York, 1873), 316-17.

⁴⁵Andrew Jenson, *Latter Day Saints' Biographical Encyclopedia* (4 vols., Salt Lake City, 1901-36), provides the evidence on the "professional" leaders. The generalization about ship's presidents is based on an analysis of all Mormon companies, mainly from *Millennial Star*.

to take their names and hand them to the clerk; if they persisted in their refusal a formal entry was to be made in the company's journal, which the church authorities in Utah would read.⁴⁶ In another company the same year, a man "was brought before the camp charged with profane swearing and abusing his team, which charges were sustained, and he failing to make suitable acknowledgement was disfellowshipped." In that same company a little later, a dispute was submitted to the president, his counselors, and the captains of tens:

Brother B., being charged with profane swearing and also with threatening the life of Brother K. by shooting and preparing his gun, . . . therefore, Brother K. being charged with using abusive language towards Brother B., and the statements of the parties having been heard and the testimony of witnesses. . . . It was considered by the said board that Brother B. is guilty of the charges above specified and that he make suitable acknowledgement to the camp and humbly ask forgiveness of the same which he accordingly did. And it was further considered that Brother K. is not guilty as specified above, all of which proceedings were approved by the camp and agreed to by the said parties.⁴⁷

Last may be quoted an example from a journal of 1849:

A melee occurred between two Brothers, one a Welshman, the other an Englishman, concerning some cattle, in which blows and threats were used. They were brought before the president and his counsellors, severely reprimanded and a fine of doing extra duty on guard [was imposed]. They made a confession, asked forgiveness, promised to do better, and were resored to fellowship.⁴⁸

Aid from Utah was not confined to the sending of leaders. As early as 1848, relief was sent to the companies on the march, and in the following year David Fullmer's party went as far east

⁴⁶Journal History, October 10, 1853.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, September 9, 1853. Names of persons are omitted at the request of the Church Historian.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, October 27, 1849. Some examples of disputes raise no question of principle. Thus in 1854, two men sharing a wagon quarreled over the weight of each other's baggage. "A committee was appointed to investigate the matter and decide justly." *Ibid.*, October 5, 1854. In 1856, one member of a company refused to comply with a rule that assigned to the family in greatest need any loose livestock found on the trail; the leaders decided to save themselves trouble by allowing him to keep certain animals, as he desired. *Ibid.*, November 8, 1865.

as the Sweetwater River.⁴⁹ When the handcart plan was put forward, it was at once appreciated that relief would be more than ever necessary. The preparations suggested in 1852 did not need to be put into practice. However, in 1856, the first year of the handcarts, aid was organized on a large scale. On 5 October, Brigham Young appealed for twelve tons of flour, wagons to carry it, teamsters, and forty spare men. The quota was made up in three days, together with quantities of other provisions, blankets, boots, and clothing. Further appeals were made at Salt Lake City three weeks later, and one hundred twenty people volunteered to join an expedition.⁵⁰ Other settlements contributed. At Provo, no fewer than forty-eight people helped to make up the quota of two thousand pounds of flour, in amounts of twenty-five to one hundred pounds each. At Union, five wagons with provisions started at only a day's notice. Provo contributed again in November, ninety-six church members offering a wagon, horses, harness, grain, or other supplies according to their means, to make a total of ten teams with seven tons of flour.⁵¹ The relief parties went as far east as Devil's Gate, and they helped to mitigate, though they could not avert, the disaster to the last two handcart companies.

Such relief became unnecessary as the church teams were organized.⁵² But immigrants always needed aid on arrival in Utah.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, August 28, 1848; John M. Wooley Journal, 29-30. Typescript in Utah State Historical Society library. Salt Lake Stake History, for August 12, 26, 1849, in Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City. J. M. Stewart, "Overland Trip to California in 1850," *Southern California Historical Society Publications*, V (1901), 179, refers to a relief expedition on the Sweetwater. For later years, see John Pulsipher Journal, I, 31. Typescript in Utah State Historical Society library; Journal History, October 5, 28, 1854 (a man was sent ahead from one company to find a relief party expected to be at Green River, to report to them on the company's condition and to urge them to come further to give aid); *Millennial Star*, XV (February 19, 1853), 115; XVII (November 17, 1855), 730.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, XIV (July 31, 1853), 355; *Journal of Discourses*, IV, 113 (Brigham Young, October 5, 1856); Journal History, October 4, 7, 1856 (the first entry consists of the minutes of a meeting at which Young learned the needs of the handcart companies from returning missionaries who had overtaken them; the second gives details of the clothing and other supplies offered). See also Salt Lake Stake History, October 26, 1856; Oliver Huntington Journal, II, 105-7. Typescript copy in Utah State Historical Society library.

⁵¹Provo Historical Record, Minutes of General Meetings, Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, October 6 and 9, 1856; November 29, 1856. Journal History, November 9, 1856. *Deseret News*, October 29, 1856.

⁵²Space forbids a full discussion of this system, which was a plan for the entire migration rather than limited programs of aid from Utah. An annual quota was fixed, of teams, teamsters and guards, and flour, this to be cached en route or taken to the frontier and there used by the immigrants or bartered

They were tired, and their supplies were low. It is probable that many had little or no money. They had no certain employment and no promised home. Here, too, church organization and private philanthropy combined. In 1859, when news of a company's approach was received, "immediately every horse and vehicle in the city was seemingly in motion, conveying those who were anxious to witness the egress of the company from the Canyon."⁵³ The first P.E.F. company, in 1852, was greeted by the first presidency, with a band, a salute of guns, and a speech by Brigham Young. A similar welcome was accorded to the first handcart company in 1856. Food also was distributed.⁵⁴ In 1859, Edward Hunter, the presiding bishop, was ordered to clear the Tithing Yard to receive the immigrants' cattle, to have food cooked, and to allow the new arrivals to camp in Union Square.⁵⁵ In 1864, the bishops of the Salt Lake City wards organized the serving of "hot soup, beef, mutton, potatoes, pies, etc."⁵⁶ After early years of temporary camping, a wooden building near the General Tithing Office was set aside for the immigrants' use, and in 1866 they were being fed at church expense.⁵⁷

Brigham Young's workshops, and such public works as the Temple, provided some temporary employment.⁵⁸ But many of the immigrants had to be distributed through the territory. Friends and relatives often met them and took them back to outlying settlements, and in this they were aided by the publication in the *Deseret News* of such lists of members of arriving companies as were available.⁵⁹ In 1864, church members attending the General Conference at Salt Lake City took the opportunity of collecting newly arrived friends, to such an extent that "twenty-four hours after the arrival of each train it would have been difficult to find a family on the public

for other goods and services. Quotas were apportioned downward by authority, until in the wards volunteering under the usual social pressures supplied individual contributions. The teams assembled at Salt Lake City, went to the outfitting center, and returned the same season with the migrating Saints.

⁵³Journal History, September 4, 1859.

⁵⁴*Deseret News*, September 18, 1852; *Millennial Star*, XIV (December 25, 1852), 698-700, which includes Brigham Young's speech; XVIII (December 13, 1856), 794-95.

⁵⁵James S. Brown, *op. cit.*, 404.

⁵⁶Journal History, October 26, 1864.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, October 8, 1866; *Millennial Star*, XXVIII (October 13, 1866), 651.

⁵⁸*Journal of Discourses*, VIII, 11-12 (Brigham Young, April 5, 1860); Edward W. Tullidge, *History of Salt Lake City* (Salt Lake City, 1886), 671, 677.

⁵⁹Such lists are in *Deseret News*, September 12, 1855; October 15, 1856; September 24, 1862; August 26, 1864.

square.⁶⁰ But the distribution often required the intervention of church authorities. In 1850, Brigham Young diverted the occupants of the first eight wagons of Aaron Johnson's company to the new settlement of Springville.⁶¹ In 1854, the following instructions to the bishops were published:

You are hereby instructed to proceed forthwith and make diligent enquiry, to ascertain who in your wards can take into their families and houses some of the brethren, or members of their families, who are now on the road to this land, and give employment and food until the harvest of 1855, and furnish those who may need it transportation from this city to their several places of destination.⁶²

In the autumn of the same year, Bishop Tarleton Lewis came from Cedar City with thirty wagons and persuaded one hundred fifty P.E.F. immigrants to return with him to Iron County, together with some Danes from an independent company.⁶³ In 1856, the first presidency ordered the bishops to distribute immigrants through Utah in such a way as to use their skills to the best advantage. The directive included a complaint that hitherto the bishops had taken the able-bodied, leaving the aged and infirm to be a burden on Salt Lake City.⁶⁴ In 1866, a gentile observer was allowed to attend a discussion at which bishops from all over Utah stated their need for labor and, as it were, apportioned the immigrants among their several wards. "In a few minutes I saw that two hundred of these poor immigrants had been placed in the way of earning their daily bread."⁶⁵ In the same year, one company was brought to Utah under the church team plan in wagons provided mainly by Utah County. After unloading in the Tithing Yard, these teams

⁶⁰*Millennial Star*, XXVI (February 20, 1864), 122. *Journal of Discourses*, IV, 88 (Heber C. Kimball, November 9, 1856), refers to the collection of friends by church members in relief expeditions.

⁶¹Milton R. Hunter, *Brigham Young the Colonizer* (Salt Lake City, 1940), 229-30. This is the best book yet published on the planned settlement of Utah, though its detail becomes far less complete after the first decade.

⁶²*Deseret News*, July 6, 1854.

⁶³*Millennial Star*, XVII (January 27, 1855), 61.

⁶⁴*Salt Lake Stake History*, October 15, 1856. Church members were of course still exhorted to care for their own friends and relatives.

⁶⁵William H. Dixon, *New America* (2 vols., London, 1867), I, 252-53.

gathered such of the immigrants as had decided to settle in that country, and left at once on the last stage of their journey.⁶⁸

The Mormon system of crossing the United States was therefore characterized by the same thoroughness that can be seen in their Atlantic crossing. The success of the system owed something to the loyalty of converts, something to technical skill, much to the spiritual element in the leaders' authority. But even this does not account for all the contrast between Mormons and their contemporaries in the westward movement. Mormon immigrants were bound, not for some mining camp or district of pioneer farms, but for a community which from the beginning was integrated under authority. Utah was "Zion," the focus of their religious hopes. From the economic standpoint, it was a centrally planned society. It was the source of authority and leadership. It was the source also of aid. In short, it must never be forgotten that for the Mormon Church conversion, migration, and the colonization of Utah were indivisible.

⁶⁸Journal History, October 8, 1866. One more example may be given. *Millennial Star*, XXXI (September 18, 1869), 613, shows relatives being met at the railroad; but the bishops were distributing other immigrants "as may appear most advisable or as the emigrants may choose."