
HE'S BEEN WORKING ON THE RAILROAD: A CASE STUDY OF DANISH CONVERT- IMMIGRANT ECONOMIES IN THE UTAH TERRITORY

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In mid-August 1879, a Danish settler from Pleasant Grove, Utah, named Hans Jørgensen, headed up Spanish Fork Canyon to work on the Utah & Pleasant Valley Railway. He didn't know for sure whether he'd be able to get work or for how long, but it was a risk he felt was worth taking. It was a long, unpleasant journey—he had arrived in Springville early in the morning, but the train up the canyon had left at 7:00 a.m., so he had to wait a full day for the next one. The trip took almost fourteen hours, during which he sat in an open car and “froze mightily,” as he reported to his wife, Mine, in a letter dated 24 August. When he arrived at the Condie & Burto Camp at 9:00 p.m., he was hired on the spot and given a place to sleep in a tent alongside a fellow Dane named Jørgen Nielsen. For the first several weeks Hans worked every day, except for one

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*Portrait of Hans Jørgensen, ca. 1882, reproduced by permission
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Sunday. He didn't much like his employer, whom he called a "slave driver." When he changed employers on 14 September, he wrote to his wife that he was owed payment for twenty-one days of work, but was worried that he wouldn't get paid, except possibly in scrip redeemable at the Walker & Brothers store in Salt Lake City. His new employer paid \$1.10 a day in cash and provided excellent food, Hans reported. Hans worked on the railroad for another few weeks, then came home in mid-October 1879 when the railroad, a narrow-gauge line running from Springville to Winter Quarters coal mine, was completed. For his two months of work, Hans earned the princely sum of \$50.

What makes Hans's two months of working on the Utah & Pleasant Valley Railway in the fall of 1879 significant to the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the way his experiences, documented in his letters to his wife and in a daybook, offer a glimpse into the challenging economies of Danish convert-immigrants in territorial Utah at the intersection of secular and spiritual concerns. Although this wasn't his first stint working on a railroad, Hans was a farmer by trade who sought work on the railroad as a means of supplementing his harvest with some cash money, which was otherwise scarce on the frontier. Hans's decision to immigrate to Utah a decade earlier had been motivated primarily by his conversion to the Church, but the possibility of owning his own land someday and improving his economic position offered a powerful secondary incentive, while the pressing need to make a living for himself and his growing family informed his everyday experience of living in Utah.

Hans's primary objective in coming to Utah was to be united with fellow believers in his new religion and contribute to building the kingdom of God on earth, as he had covenanted to do when he was baptized, but in order to do so effectively he also needed to make a living that, with any luck, would be at least as good if not better than the socioeconomic conditions he had known back in Denmark. The prospect of establishing farms in the Utah Territory, which Church

president Brigham Young strongly encouraged, was attractive to Danish convert-immigrants, but the considerable obstacles that immigrants had to overcome in order to acquire land, livestock, and equipment, to say nothing of the sharp contrast between the arid Utah desert and Denmark's lush fecundity, were often daunting. Such factors as a lack of capital, language difficulties, challenging weather conditions, and the difficulty of finding well-paid employment upon arrival made the decision to immigrate to Utah a sort of economic roulette for Danish immigrants like Hans, who banked on their hope of prevailing over the odds through hard work, determination, and divine assistance in order both to attain a more prosperous economic situation and to enjoy membership in their chosen utopian religious community.

THE SPIRITUAL AND ECONOMIC DREAM OF ZION

The standard narrative about the nineteenth-century gathering of Latter-day Saint converts from around the globe to Utah characterizes it as a theologically motivated undertaking, which converts embarked upon at great physical, emotional, and financial cost in order to build Zion, live and worship alongside their fellow Latter-day Saints, and await the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. While this narrative may be true, it is incomplete on its own, for gathering to Utah was also fundamentally an economic endeavor, both for the Church, which invested heavily in the Utah Territory's economic development but needed laborers to build the physical infrastructure, and for the immigrants who could meet that need and shared the prophetic vision of Zion blossoming as a rose. For converts from European countries like Denmark, where high population density and rigid social stratification made it difficult for people to improve their economic and social standing, the prospect of gaining upward socioeconomic mobility was an added incentive. Latter-day Saint convert-immigrants from Europe were drawn to Utah primarily by faith and obedience to the prophet's

call to gather to Zion, but it is important to remember that economic aspects remained a central part of their experience as immigrants in Utah, one that sometimes came into conflict with their spiritual goals.

Given the largely agrarian character of the Danish economy in this period, the desire to own land—an opportunity that was severely limited in Denmark by rigid class hierarchies and limited supply—was a strongly motivating factor for Danish immigrants, as for Scandinavian immigrants generally, to come to the United States, whether to Iowa or Utah. In contrast to immigrants from western and southern Europe, relatively few nineteenth-century Scandinavian immigrants to the United States sought employment in factories, construction trades, or mining camps. In the *Report of the Industrial Commission*, which contains statistics for the numbers of immigrant men working on farms in 1890, Professor J. R. Commons reported that 40 percent of male Danish immigrants were employed in agriculture versus only 5.8 percent of Italians.¹ Most Danish immigrants to Utah came from agricultural backgrounds, having worked as freeholders, tenant farmers, journeymen, or day laborers on the small Danish farms that had long consisted of scattered strips of farmland parceled out across a village in such a way that every farmer had roughly equal amounts of good and bad land. In the late eighteenth century, land reforms promoted by the Prince Regent consolidated these scattered strips into contiguous parcels of land, which the most successful tenant farmers had been able to buy with state-supported loans. These land reforms drove the rise of a new landowning middle class in Denmark, which became a major force behind the shift to a constitutional monarchy in 1849, but it also forced many tenant farmers, who could not afford to buy their farms, down into the class of landless laborers, massively expanding the pool of cheap labor available to self-owning farmers to exploit. Thus the promise of free or subsidized land in the United States had a particularly powerful appeal for those Danish farmers disadvantaged by the new system.

Hans Jørgensen's personal history illustrates how the American dream of economic success was inextricable from the gathering of Danish Latter-day Saint converts to Zion. The stratified social hierarchy and extremely limited economic mobility of nineteenth-century Danish society shaped the course of Hans's childhood. He was born in the village of Kappendrup, near the city of Odense, on the island of Funen, on 25 September 1845, to Jørgen Hansen and Maren Nielsen.² Jørgen and Maren were both cottagers, part of the landless peasant class that had been marginalized and largely disenfranchised by the abovementioned land reforms. These reforms gave freeholder or "self-owning" farmers increased economic and social mobility, at the expense of those peasants who were not in a position to buy their farms and therefore slipped into the lowest socioeconomic class, subjected to increasingly heavy labor dues and unfavorable, short-term cottage tenancy contracts. Typical of members of his socioeconomic class, Hans's father Jørgen began hiring out as a day laborer at the age of seventeen, earning enough to live on but not to support a family, while Maren was in domestic service. When Hans was born in 1845, his parents did not have the economic stability to marry or maintain a permanent home. Their precarious financial position forced them to send Hans out to be fostered by neighbors, Anders Hansen and his wife Abelone, in the town of Hjadstrup, where Hans attended school from 1852 to 1858. During the summers, Hans worked for another neighbor, Knud Larsen, as a farmhand, for which he was paid two rigsdaler and some clothing per summer.

Religious matters played a small but significant role in Hans's early life, not least because of the establishment of religious freedom by Denmark's liberal constitution of 1849. The Danish Evangelical Lutheran state church (renamed Den Danske Folkekirke, the Danish People's Church, in the 1849 Constitution) was an integral part of every Dane's life, as Danes outside of Copenhagen were required to attend the congregation in the parish where they lived and the local pastor was

responsible for many secular matters, including taking the census, collecting taxes, and supervising the local schools.³ In the fall of 1858 Hans began attending school in Skovsgaard Espe by Fadborg, where his mother was employed on a large farm. He spent a year at the school and was discharged with a good character reference from the local parish priest. In keeping with local custom and by his own choice, Hans was confirmed in the Danish People's Church in Skovsgaard Espe in October 1859, at age fourteen. In a letter inviting his foster parents to attend his confirmation, Hans described the upcoming ceremony as "the most important day in my entire life."⁴ It was a significant day in both a spiritual and a legal sense, because confirmation into the Danish State Church had been, prior to 1849, synonymous with the attainment of Danish citizenship and its attendant privileges, including the right to marry, change one's residence, and travel about the country,⁵ so it is not surprising that Hans felt the weightiness of the occasion.

Economics and religion began competing for precedence fairly early in Hans's life when he encountered representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who were proselyting in the area. While working as a farmhand for C. Hall in Vendsyssel in northern Jutland in 1860, fifteen-year-old Hans became acquainted with the Latter-day Saint missionaries and accepted their teachings. The first missionaries had arrived in Denmark in 1850, where they found a particularly receptive audience among cottagers and day laborers, most of whom had very little social status to lose by associating themselves with this foreign, non-Lutheran church and for whom the message of chosenness conveyed by the missionaries offered a sense of empowerment. Converting meant breaking away from the national community of Danish Lutherans and standing out as different in a society that prized homogeneity. Hans took nearly three years to make this weighty decision but was finally baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on 21 January 1863 by Elder Peter Nielsen. His decision to leave the Danish People's Church incurred the disapproval of his

master and overseers and, as Hans recollected later, resulted in “severe persecution.” As punishment, farmer Hall arranged for Hans, who was still a minor, to be transferred to the employ of a Mr. Lyberg Petersen, whom Hans described as a “regular tyrant” and who denied him contact with fellow converts and missionaries for a year. In 1864, having attained his majority and returned to northern Jutland, Hans chose to prioritize religion over economic concerns and served for almost three years as a local missionary in Denmark before emigrating to Utah, departing England on 20 June 1868 on the pocket ship *Emerald Isle*.

Though Hans doesn't mention how the missionaries promoted emigration, other contemporary accounts suggest that the missionaries' invitation to European converts to join with the Saints in Utah was inextricable from (and to a certain degree interchangeable with) the flood of propaganda circulating in European towns throughout the nineteenth century about the possibilities of wealth and status available to all comers in America. Successful immigrants, immigration agents, newspaper reports, and dime novels made financial success seem inevitable and effortless, an attitude that the satirical Norwegian folksong, “Oleana,” that mocks a Norwegian settlement in Pennsylvania that failed in 1852, parodies: “They give you land for nothing in jolly Oleana, / And grain comes leaping from the ground in floods of golden manna.”⁶ Since immigration was handled by individual states rather than the federal government until the late 1800s, each state needed to handle its own self-promotion abroad. Individual states, beginning with Michigan in the 1840s, even sent promoters and opened recruitment offices to entice European peasants and farmers to come to the “land of opportunity” and seize the chance for upward socioeconomic mobility. Missionaries from Utah were often in competition with recruiting agents from other US states in inviting new converts to immigrate to the US, but, as historian William Mulder points out, “The return of the native [as missionaries themselves] on such a grand scale advertised

Utah more effectively than the literature and efforts of the Boards of Immigration and railroad land agents serving other states.”⁷

Although folkloric anecdotes still circulating in Denmark today allege that missionaries traveled around Jutland showing pictures of flourishing Utah farms as a recruitment agent for illiterate farmers, the most significant difference between the tactics of Utah-based missionaries in nineteenth-century Europe and those of a successful Midwestern recruiting agent like Maximillian Allardt,⁸ who recruited more than a hundred Poles from the Prussian city of Posen to work in the mines of Houghton County, Michigan, was the theological dimension of conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ. Any Dane could immigrate to Iowa or Wisconsin, but Danish Latter-day Saint converts who came to Utah were driven by the desire to live among like-minded believers in Zion rather than simply to live alongside their countrymen on fertile Midwestern farmland. Mulder explains,

Utah’s early invitation to prospective settlers clearly required a special motivation and indoctrination, a mingling of spiritual and practical inducements. For anyone to be content in Zion, conversion—at least conditioning—had to precede emigration. Mormon missionaries were “heralds of salvation” first and only incidentally immigration agents.⁹

Of the approximately 23,500 Danes who converted to the Church between 1850 and 1920, the invitation to gather to Zion after conversion induced about 12,700 of them to undertake the journey to Utah. For some, the balance between religious and economic motivators was clearly weighted toward the latter, with the prospect of financial assistance from the Perpetual Emigration Fund offering an incentive to join the emigrant groups. Although the majority of Danish Latter-day Saint convert-immigrants seem to have committed in good faith to making the journey all the way to Utah, some alleged converts found their enthusiasm for the faith sharply diminished the moment they

disembarked in New York or New Orleans, while others lost heart along the way west, often because of illness and the loss of loved ones, and chose to stay behind in St. Louis, Mormon Grove, or Omaha.

Upon arriving in Utah, Danish converts settled all over the state, sometimes as directed by Church leaders, in other cases at the invitation of missionaries, countrymen, or fellow travelers, but often in communities with a significant Scandinavian population, where they could get assistance from acquaintances in establishing their farms. By 1890, first- and second-generation Danish immigrants made up 10 percent of the population of Utah,¹⁰ making a significant contribution to the growth of both the Church and the territory's economy. The Danish convert-immigrants' pursuit of their dual goals of building Zion and making a living was generally harmonious, as most of them tried hard to assimilate into the community and support themselves; these priorities, however, sometimes came into conflict, particularly when economic success proved more difficult to attain than the pro-America propaganda had led immigrants to expect or was constrained by Church service.

Despite the centrality of his religious convictions in his decision to emigrate, Hans's daybook reveals that his primary preoccupation upon arriving in Utah was to attain economic stability, which proved to be frustratingly elusive. After traveling by rail from New York to Omaha and then across the plains by ox team, Hans arrived at Echo City, Utah, on 22 September 1868. The very next day, he was, as he reports in his daybook, "advised to go down in Weber Canyon to work on the railroad," which was one of the few jobs readily available to new immigrants. Hans worked for the Union Pacific Railroad "on Brigham's Contract for some time," he recalled, but he was ill when he started and grew progressively worse. He quit and made his way to Fort Ephraim, where he stayed with other Danish immigrants while he recovered from his illness. He was bedridden for several weeks, perhaps as long as a few months, but he went back to the railroad once more as

soon as he was able. He got sick again the same evening he arrived there and was counseled by a doctor “to leave Weber Canyon as he said my healt [*sic*] would not do there.” At this point in Hans’s life, the physical toll of working on the railroad outweighed the possible financial benefits.

Instead, Hans returned to the agricultural work he knew from Denmark. He made his way to the Danish community in Pleasant Grove, where he spent the summer of 1869 “in cleaning and making ditches on Daniel H. Wells’ land, a mean work by which I never earned much.” The experience was unpleasant, but necessary in order to earn his keep and pay his tithing. In his daybook, Hans reports,

I stood in cold springwater barefooted every day worked very hard and most of my board was molasses bread and water. In the fall I worked of [*sic*] my tithing on the big Cottonwood Canal 13\$. The following winter I took Chr. Petersens Lillehalls farm on share, down by Jordan, and spent most of the time in attending his animals hauling out manure ectr. [*sic*].

Over the next two years, Hans continued to work at low-paying menial work, making a few attempts to establish his own farm that were thwarted by grasshoppers and a lack of capital. Much of the work he found involved tending livestock and helping local farmers with their harvests, the same sort of work he had done back in Denmark. Brother I. M. Stewart in Draper hired him in the spring of 1870 for \$20 a month, where Hans “had a very good treatment, but had to work most extremely hard.” In the spring of 1871, he worked for John Hansen of West Jordan, who had a contract on Bishop Gardener’s canal.

The lure of the cash wages of railroad work that would enable him to buy land recurs in Hans’s daybook over the next few years, as he alternates working on other people’s farms and stints on the railroad. In the summer of 1871, he worked first for Mr. Cooper and Seven Oaks in American Fork Canyon and then for Thom. Carlisle on the Utah

Southern Railroad. He farmed some rented land in Pleasant Grove and tried to buy a farm in Sevier Valley, but “found it to be dearer than I was able to pay for.” In the spring of 1872, Hans worked for Hans Johansen on his farm in Pleasant Grove, but in the summer, he returned to the Utah Southern Railroad under Thom. Carlisle once more. Hans’s frustration at his inability to acquire land of his own is unmistakable in these entries, evidence of the centrality of his economic circumstances to his concerns.

Hans’s financial circumstances changed for the better in 1872, though his progress toward economic independence was still slower than he had hoped. In March 1872, he married a fellow Dane, Wilhelmine (Mine) Marie Jacobsen Bolvig, who had emigrated to Utah in 1862 with her mother and siblings. Hans noted ruefully that they had to live with her family after their wedding, as “we had yet no home of our own.” Their situation improved when Hans received an inheritance of \$181.57 from his mother’s estate, nearly \$4000 in today’s money. He and Mine used this windfall to acquire two oxen, an old wagon, and a plow, which cost \$208 altogether. Hans was finally in a position to buy his own farm, but taking up residence was delayed first by the birth of their son Henson in late November 1872, and then by injuries to both feet that Hans sustained at around the same time. Hans recalled, “It caused us a trying time, inasmuch as we had to remain in somebody elses house. I had done my very best this year, in order to get so far as to build us some kind of a home but did not succeed this year.” It took him another full year to build them a two-room house, which they moved into on 9 December 1873, “for which we felt very thankfull, althoug [*sic*] the house was not near completed.” They were the proud owners of 2 oxen, 1 cow, and 2 head of young stock, and “felt thankfull for every blessing bestowed upon us so far in our life,” as Hans noted in his daybook.

Although the American dream seemed within their grasp in the fall of 1873, their financial situation remained precarious. Hans and

Mine's second son was born in August 1874 and a third in August 1876, adding mouths to feed, but in 1875 the family lost both of their oxen, which was a major setback. The one ox "had to work hard on scanty food and as a consequence gave out," Hans recorded, while the other got hurt so badly while grazing in the hills "that he afterwards was of no use, and I sold him for a trifle." Without the cash to replace them, Hans had to try to farm without a team, but he found it nearly impossible to continue to farm his own land. He tried to get a winter job as a coal burner in Rush Valley in late 1876, but without success. Throughout 1876, 1877, and 1878, Hans supported his family by hiring out to work for other farmers, for which he was paid largely in crops. As he noted in 1876, "I earned most of our breadstuff by cradling for others this year." The next year, he noted, "Earned most of our bread by working for others, by cradling and by the threshing machines," and in 1878, the year their fourth son was born, "This year I spent as the foregoing ones in working for other folks, as I yet had no team of my own." This dependence clearly galled Hans, but he reminded himself in the daybook that, despite breaking his right arm in June 1877, "the healt [*sic*] of my family is good, and we have to the present time enjoyed every needfull [*sic*] blessing temporal as well as spiritual." Although they had not yet achieved the economic independence Hans longed for, his long-term religious perspective provided some emotional comfort. He was at least able to work and provide for his family and contribute to the Church, as evidenced by the fact that his tithing for 1878 consisted of "6 Bushels of Wheat, 2 – Barley, 18 lbs of dried bacon, 6 lbs of Butter, and 2 Hens," while Mine "paid a new quilt 1 pair of socks, and a shirt." In addition to tithing, their "Territorial, City & Schooltax was 4\$ 95 cts" and their "herdbill amt to 14\$ 60 cts."

Still, as he noted in his diary in 1879, Hans was determined to acquire his own team, so as to be able to work for himself once more. He had a colt and bought a "poor horse" to break to the plow, but they didn't work out well, so he turned them loose in the canyon and

“went to work as usual.” That summer, Hans raised thirty-eight bushels of wheat on his own and earned another forty by cutting wheat for other farmers and hiring out as a day laborer, but that didn’t generate enough income to buy a team. It was at this point that Hans decided to take a job working on the construction of the Utah & Pleasant Valley (U&PV) Railway line up Spanish Fork Canyon in August 1879, leaving Mine at home to run the farm and care for their four small children. The venture paid off financially, for Hans was able to earn \$50 cash for his two months’ labor, but at the same time, it proved to be a physical, emotional, and spiritual trial for both Hans and Mine.

THE LURE AND DANGER OF THE RAILROAD

Hans Jørgensen’s two-month stint working on the U&PV Railway in the fall of 1879 seems to have been Hans and Mine’s first prolonged separation in more than seven years of marriage. During this time Hans wrote a series of letters home to his wife, and she responded with the first letter she had ever written to her husband. Their correspondence is neither particularly eloquent nor deeply profound, but by its very simplicity and occasional banality, it offers valuable, authentic firsthand insight into the everyday lives of foreign settlers, in particular the trials faced by young Danish immigrant families trying to carve out a life for themselves in the unsettled American West. Moreover, it illuminates how working on the railroad represented both an economic opportunity and a spiritual/emotional danger to convert-immigrants like Hans Jørgensen and, by extension, the Latter-day Saint population of the Utah Territory more generally.

The railroad had a decisive effect on the economic lives of early settlers in Utah. The construction of the transcontinental railroad through the center of Utah in 1869 made it much faster, cheaper, and safer for immigrants and goods to make their way to Utah, rendering the rigors and dangers of crossing the plains in wagons and with handcarts a

thing of the past. Recognizing this opportunity, as well as the inevitability of the railroad's arrival, Brigham Young signed a contract with the Union Pacific Railroad in 1868 and subcontracted out the work to local members of the Church.¹¹ The theological benefit of facilitating immigration to Zion was obvious. As Kentucky-born convert and railway worker Andrew Jackson Allen, born 1818, noted in his journal, "The saints feel well to see the highway cast up for the gathering of the lost sheep of the house of Israel."¹² The railroad also had a direct economic effect on the territory, providing access to expanded markets for Utah's agricultural products and offering employment opportunities, albeit often temporary. The railroad, which was integral to the development of the mining industry throughout the region, offered an alternative to agricultural labor, access to the mineral wealth of the Utah Territory, and a rare chance to earn cash income, which proved attractive to many settlers. In his index of Latter-day Saint memoirs, historian Davis Bitton lists dozens of men who worked on various railway projects around Utah during the 1860s and 1870s.¹³

Railway construction in the Utah Territory was an ongoing, somewhat speculative affair, as the history of the U&PV line illustrates. After rich coal deposits had been discovered in Pleasant Valley in 1875, the mine owners decided to build a railroad line to facilitate delivery of their coal to customers. The nearest junction was with the Utah Southern Railway near Springville, so the Utah & Pleasant Valley Railway Company was organized in December 1875 to build a fifty-mile narrow-gauge railway from the town of Provo down to Springville, then east through Spanish Fork Canyon along the Spanish Fork river up to the town of Thistle, then up Soldier Creek to Tucker, where it turned to follow Starvation Creek down to Backswitch and then finally headed south into Pleasant Valley. After sufficient capital had been raised, work on the railroad began in the spring of 1877, with the first track being laid in August 1878. Due to an iron shortage in the summer, work on the Pleasant Valley line dragged on well into the fall of 1879, when very

cold temperatures made the men miserable. The segment connecting the Pleasant Valley mines to Springville was completed on 5 November 1879, and the connection from Springville to Provo opened in October 1880.

Although the coal deposits in the valley were good-sized and of high quality, the large transcontinental railroads controlled their delivery monopoly with a firm hand, which made it a tough market to break into. While the American Fork Railroad, built in the early 1870s, was forced to close down after only a few years in operation because of unprofitability, the Utah & Pleasant Valley Railway was initially able to remain in business by reaching agreements with the Utah Southern and the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway companies to maintain the price of coal at an inflated level. In the end, however, the independent railway could not compete effectively, and the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway bought the U&PV Railway in 1882 in order to incorporate part of it into their narrow gauge mainline between Salt Lake City and Grand Junction.

Conditions in the temporary railroad camps were often harsh and the work itself laborious. As subcontractors of varying degrees of reliability came and went, there was little guarantee that the men would always get paid for the work they did, though most contractors did provide food and lodging. Most laborers, like Hans, were hired to lay rails, which was such back-breaking work that turnover was high. Hans changed employers at least once during his two months working on the U&PV, explaining to Mine: "The man I am now going to work for only pays 1 dollar and 10 cents a day, but he pays cash and provides excellent food. He lays rails and his people ride the train to and from work and he is not as bad of a slave driver as the man I am coming from. People had to work incredibly hard there, but I endured it pretty well, although there were some people who left him each day."¹⁴ Other railroad workers like John Bartlett, another Latter-day Saint worker on the U&PV Railway, attained a more skilled position that carried over to a

job on the finished line, working as a switch tender, machinist, boiler repairer, and engine repairer.¹⁵

Hans approached his railroad job with optimism, despite the health problems he had experienced on previous railroad stints. In his first letter to Mine, written from the Condie & Burto Camp in Spanish Fork Canyon on 24 August 1879, Hans describes his initial difficulties in reaching the railroad camp, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and the physical challenges of the primitive working conditions, but he quickly reassures his wife that “we get good food and plenty of work.” He complains a bit about the unseasonably cold weather and remarks wistfully, “I could really use my sweater and my old trousers, but it is risky to send them here.”¹⁶ It is unclear whether the risk he refers to would be of the clothes getting lost in transit or being stolen in camp, but either way, life in a railroad camp meant less physical safety and comfort than he was used to at home. In his next letter, he gives Mine explicit instructions about having new shoes made and sent to him:

I'd like to ask a favor of you, if you will do it. That's a good girl. It is to go to Frank Beers and ask him to make me a pair of new shoes for when I come home (of the best kind he has), Nr. 11, but without nails all over the soles. Everything is so incredibly expensive here that it is not worth buying anything, since I only earn such a small daily wage. Would you please get a flat box from him and put the shoes in it, along with a piece of Castile soap and a comb and my sweater and a pair of socks and my old gray trousers and mittens. I need all of this quite desperately as it is very cold here in the mornings and my shoes are completely worn out. Put all of it in a flat box of some sort—a sack can fall off the cars they use here too easily. Will you please send it as soon as possible? Nail the box together well and get someone to write the enclosed address on the box itself very clearly, not on paper, for when the paper is gone, the box is lost. Ask for a receipt when you drop off the box if you can get one.¹⁷

Hans's physical discomfort in the camp in an unseasonably cold autumn is evident from this passage, as is his methodical approach to mitigating the risk of sending packages up the canyon. His concern about the price of goods in the camp in comparison to what he expected Mine to have to pay in Pleasant Grove, particularly with regard to the "small daily wage" he was earning, \$1.10 per day, indicates a keen awareness of the value of each dollar he earned.

A lack of ready cash seems to have been Hans's primary motivation for working on the railroad, despite the hardships it entailed. The financial worries plaguing him are evident from his request that Mine tell "Chipman and Dunkley in American Fork that I will pay them as soon as I am finished here." James Chipman had founded a store in American Fork in 1872 that would become the largest department store in Utah County by the early twentieth century, so it is likely that Hans was referring to a tab at Chipman's store that he would settle with some of his railroad earnings. In his letter of 15 September 1879, in which he congratulates Mine on her 30th birthday, he apologizes for his penury, "If I had anything, I would gladly give it to you as a birthday present, but I don't have a cent."¹⁸ One of the financial risks of working on the railroad, however, was being paid in scrip instead of in cash, as Hans fretted to Mine in his second letter. The president and general manager of the U&PV in 1879 was Milan Packard, a shrewd Springville merchant. He was so notorious for paying his railroad workers in scrip for goods from his own store that the U&PV became known as the "Calico Railroad."

For someone trying to earn some cash money to buy a team, the scrip system was not ideal, but it was a common practice in a cash-poor society that resembles in some way a labor trade system in use among settlers in Pleasant Grove in the same period. Hans seems to be relying on this aspect of his economic calculus for his family's well-being when he instructs Mine in the same letter, "Ask Peter Sellebak if he will

bring the horses down if they are turned loose before I come. He knows where they go and I will either trade him work with my team or pay him.”¹⁹ Lars Peter Sellebak Jensen was a Dane from the same part of Denmark as Mine and a fellow settler in Pleasant Grove who features prominently in the couple’s correspondence as a friend they turn to when in need. About a week later, Hans followed up on this request, asking Mine to “write to me and let me know if you are all healthy and if you can find someone to bring the cows and horses down out of American Fork Canyon. If you can’t find anyone to do it, I can probably get permission to come home, but otherwise I would like to stay here until the railway is finished, unless I get ill. I have not felt completely well for several days.”²⁰ Even while on the railroad, the needs of his farm and livestock were clearly on Hans’s mind.

Another, more pernicious danger of working on the railroad was the alienating effect of socializing with men whose values differed from Hans’s own. Railroad crews were known for their coarse language and rowdy behavior, including drinking heavily, gambling, and fighting. An article in the *Cincinnati Commercial* on 10 May 1869 describes the railroad worker tent settlement of Corinne Station, about seven miles from Brigham City, Utah, which had a “floating population of fifteen hundred or two thousand souls” at the time. In addition to the challenge of freighting goods two miles (and across the river) from the train tracks to the town, the establishment of “a good many large gambling-houses in town” was causing troubles for residents:

The gamblers enjoy a good deal of sport when they draw a Mormon into their game, and they generally manage to gull the poor ‘saint’ out of everything he has. There is no law here to protect a person against these gambling houses, and very frequently when persuasive powers fail, they do not fear to resort to threats and even open violence to rob their victim. They have a controlling power in the police force and, if arrested, they do not fear justice being executed against them.²¹

For Latter-day Saint pioneers trying to establish farms near the railroad lines or, like Hans, to earn some cash money by working on the railroad, the lure of gambling and the unscrupulous behavior of local gamblers posed a threat to both their financial stability and their spiritual health. While Hans does not mention gambling in his letters, he does lament to Mine in mid-September about his coworkers' swearing, commenting sadly, "When one has to live among such people as are gathered here and constantly listen to their terrible oaths, one begins to long for his little home and his loyal friend. When I am alone I feel like someone who is weighed down and subjected to heartache, but if all goes well I hope to see you again."²² For Hans, the contrast between the coarse behavior of his fellow railroad workers and the emotional and spiritual safety of his own home was particularly painful.

The railroad brought with it many secular influences, including cheap manufactured goods and sectarian groups that threatened to undermine the settlers' utopian vision of a self-contained theocracy. An article in the *World* on 5 May 1869, the eve of the completion of the transcontinental connection, speculated that the arrival of the railroad would solve the problem of polygamy by enabling rich Church members to gratify their pride through conspicuous consumption of luxury goods rather than by the size of their domestic establishments:

When the Mormon women acquire, as they certainly will, a taste for expensive personal adornment, when they come to covet elegant furniture and aspire to pay visits in coaches, it will be found that the income even of the richest men is not adequate to support the burden of polygamy. . . . When other objects of expense become accessible and cheap, there will be a great revolution in the tastes and mode of life of the Mormon community. When the women imbibe a passion for finery, and the men come to feel more pride in the appearance of their wives than in their number, polygamy will break down under the weight of expense which will then be entailed upon the master of a household.²³

Although the *World's* dire prediction of corruption through commercialism did not lead to the immediate demise of polygamy, the railroads did aggravate a number of other temptations that destabilized the homogeneity and sobriety of Utah society, in particular excessive alcohol consumption. The abovementioned Andrew Allen Jackson, an American-born Latter-day Saint who worked on the transcontinental railroad in 1868–69, wrote in his journal about the presence of outsiders who didn't respect Church behavioral norms, noting, "I was in S.L.C. The streets were thronged with Gentiles, setting up liquor shops, drunken men on the right and on the left."²⁴

Hans's prolonged absence from his family took a physical and emotional toll on all of them, but it had the unexpected benefit of motivating Mine to write the first letter she ever sent her husband. It is a brief note, dated 26 September 1879, in which Mine reports that "the children are all healthy. I am not, but I hope that I will be soon."²⁵ She explains that because it took ten days for his letter of 15 September to arrive, she had decided not to send him the clothes he'd requested. Instead, she expresses her hope that he "will have come home before the clothes could reach you. Little Daniel wants Papa to come home." A few weeks later, in mid-October 1879, shortly before the U&PV was completed, Mine and little Daniel got their wish.

CONCLUSION

Working on the railroad didn't solve all of Hans's financial challenges, but it did help him get back on his feet for a time. With the money he earned from working on the railroad, Hans was able to acquire a new team in 1880, which allowed him to farm nearly fifty acres of land that year, raising a "tolerable good crop of both grain and of lucerne [alfalfa]." His immediately increased prosperity is apparent in the increase of his tithing payments from 1879—when he paid \$4, along with seven bushels of wheat, some potatoes and chickens, and other

things—to 1880, when he paid \$25. He and Mine welcomed their fifth child, a little girl they named Minnie after her mother, in April 1880, and they seemed once again poised to achieve the kind of financial independence and economic stability they dreamed of.

In March 1881, however, Hans received a mission call from Church President John Taylor, asking him to return, at his own expense, to his homeland to preach the gospel once more. Torn once more between the competing demands of business and religion, Hans accepted the call by return letter, assuring his ecclesiastical leader that “I would willingly respond to any place you may assign me and do the best I can, because I believe our religion to be of God, and can therefore with the best of feelings advocate it to any people.” Yet, he also made a point of addressing the economic costs of this choice to obey, noting, “But another thing is my circumstances; they are not the very best; that is, my family has up to the present had to rely on my labours for support, and shal [*sic*] therefore miss me, when my team is sold and I am gone.” His concluding words express his awareness of the delicate balance between faith and finances: “Nevertheless, I will go at your request, if I can raise the necessary means, and trust in the Lord for the future.” To raise the money for his journey, Hans sold his team, which he described as “a hard task,” for \$65—“about half of what it was worth”—and went off to serve as a missionary in Denmark for three years, from 1881 to 1884. In his absence, Mine took charge of the farming, which she managed quite successfully with assistance from a network of fellow Danish settlers in Pleasant Grove, including the above-mentioned Peter Sellebak, and wrote letters to her husband once or twice a month, reporting on her efforts to stay faithful and solvent.²⁶

What Hans Jørgensen’s experiences of working on the Utah & Pleasant Valley Railway reveal is that the lure of Zion for European converts to the Church was twofold—spiritual redemption and economic improvement—and that those goals sometimes competed with each other for priority in the settlers’ lives. Although religious con-

viction motivated Danish converts like Hans and Mine Jørgensen to immigrate to Utah, the demands of their temporal survival dominated their day-to-day experiences and thoughts. Moreover, the elusive, often disheartening pursuit of the American dream of land ownership, social mobility, and financial stability sometimes challenged the convert-immigrants' faith and posed obstacles to living the gospel they had embraced, just as it does for many members of the Church today. Hans Jørgensen's decision to work on the U&PV in order to raise enough cash to buy a team of oxen to enable him to farm his own land and attain economic self-sufficiency is unique to his own situation, but his family's situation has enough in common with their neighbors' to serve as a useful case study of how Danish convert-immigrants navigated between their spiritual and economic goals in territorial Utah. Acknowledging the intimate connection between financial and religious concerns in the lives of Danish convert-immigrants allows us to better appreciate the complexity of the early Saints' lives and their efforts to build Zion, adds nuance to our understanding of their lived religion, and corroborates the fundamental similarities between their lives and ours, however different the trappings of those lives may seem.

NOTES

1. Kendrick Charles Babcock, "The Scandinavian Element in American Population," *American Historical Review* 16, no. 2 (January 1911): 304.
2. All biographical information is taken from Hans Jørgensen's Daybook 1845–1883, privately printed copy of typescript in my possession.
3. Bruce H. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 40.
4. Hans Jørgensen to Anders Hansen, Skovsgaard, Denmark, 9 September 1859.
5. Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, 27.
6. Theodore C. Blegen, "The Ballad of Oleana: A Verse Translation," *Norwegian American Studies* 14 (1944): 117, http://www.stolaf.edu/naha/pubs/nas/volume14/vol14_5.htm.
7. William Mulder, "Scandinavian Saga," in *Peoples of Utah*, http://historytogo.utah.gov/people/ethnic_cultures/the_peoples_of_utah/scandinaviansaga.html.

8. Ceil Wendt Jensen, "Agents of Change: Recruiting for Industrial America," <https://blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2015/05/28/agents-of-change-recruiting-for-industrial-america-in-1800s/>.
9. Mulder, "Scandinavian Saga."
10. Richard L. Jensen, "Danish Immigration and Life in Utah" in *Utah History Encyclopedia*, https://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/d/DANISH_IMMIGRATION.shtml.
11. For a detailed account of Young's interactions with the Union Pacific Railroad, see Thomas M. Stevens, "The Union Pacific Railroad and the Mormon Church, 1868–1871: An In-Depth Study of the Financial Aspects of Brigham Young's Grading Contract and Its Ultimate Settlement" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, July 1972).
12. Andrew Jackson Allen, Journal 1834–1884, microfilm of 147-page typescript. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Library).
13. Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1977).
14. Hans Jørgensen to Mine Jørgensen, 24 August 1879.
15. John Bartlett, Autobiography 1876–1925, typescript, 3pp. (Salt Lake City, LDS Church Archives).
16. Hans Jørgensen to Mine Jørgensen, 24 August 1879.
17. Hans Jørgensen to Mine Jørgensen, 15 September 1879.
18. Hans Jørgensen to Mine Jørgensen, 15 September 1879.
19. Hans Jørgensen to Mine Jørgensen, 15 September 1879.
20. Hans Jørgensen to Mine Jørgensen, 23 September 1879.
21. "Letter from Utah," *Cincinnati Commercial*, 10 May 1869, 2.
22. Hans Jørgensen to Mine Jørgensen, 15 September 1879.
23. "The Pacific Railroad and Mormon Polygamy," *World* 9, no. 2818 (5 May 1869).
24. Allen, Journal 1834–1884.
25. Mine Jørgensen to Hans Jørgensen, 26 September 1879.
26. Julie K. Allen, "Double Jeopardy in Pleasant Grove: The Gendered and Cultural Challenges of Being a Danish Mormon Missionary Grass Widow in Territorial Utah," in *Beyond Biography: Sources in Context for Mormon Women's History*, ed. Rachel Cope, Amy Easton-Flake, Lisa Olsen Tait, and Keith Erikson (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017), 185–208.