

A. [Karolyn] Another thing that is trying to be established is a truck route through Nauvoo so that the grain trucks are not going down Mulholland. The route would go through what is now restoration-owned land. Rumor has it that the NRI will then establish businesses along the truck route, and that is where the tourists will shop because they would be owned by Mormons. Then the concern is what would happen to downtown.

Q. Have you been in any contact with BYU students here?

A. We are used to students walking the streets here. They have been here for as long as I can remember.

Q. [CC] Was it an all-girls school before the Church bought it?

A. Yes, and in later years there were girls that had problems. That school was over a hundred years old. Good Catholic families would send their daughters to school here, but as time went on . . .

A. [Ken] In order for them to keep the doors open, they took students to build up the numbers.

A. [Karolyn] At one time there were some bad students here, ones that would run away and start fires. I haven't heard anything negative about the BYU students here.

Q. What would you like to see happen to Nauvoo in the future?

A. Maintain the small-town atmosphere—this is why I like it here. I don't know what is going to happen. Gossip normally will turn into concerns.

Q. Are there any other comments or observations you would like to make?

A. [Ken] No, I don't think so.

**Florence Ourth**

*Nauvoo, Illinois*

*Birthday: October 1 1906*

Q. [Joella Peterson] How long have you lived in Nauvoo?

A. [Florence Ourth] We moved here in 1923.

Q. How did your family get here?

A. I was born in a suburb of Boston. World War I broke out, and the German submarines were coming closer and closer. My mother [Mabel A. Sanford] had a bad dream—she dreamed Boston had been bombed and was on fire and she couldn't find her three children. So she decided to leave. As soon as we could make arrangements, we moved to Independence, Missouri, where my grandmother lived.

I'm a member of the RLDS Church [Community of Christ], and Independence is where its headquarters are. We were in Independence in 1917 when at a World Conference for our church a resolution was passed that the grounds in Nauvoo should be protected and that the Homestead, where Joseph Smith had lived—which was still standing—should be restored. My aunt and uncle, John and Ida Layton, were sent to superintend the work and to remain as caretakers and guides.

In 1921 my aunt and uncle invited us to come and visit them for a week's vacation. We didn't have a car. We took the train to Fort Madison and came down the river in a paddlewheel steamboat—it was all open water then—and docked just a block from there. As we walked down the gangplank and up the dirt road to the Mansion House to stay there, where they were living, up to the rooms where Joseph and Emma slept, it seemed like we were stepping back in history. We liked it so well, we came the next summer. We got permission to stay in the empty Nauvoo House for a whole month. We fell even more in love with Nauvoo. So in 1923 we came to live here.

Q. What was Nauvoo like when you visited it?

A. There were a lot of the brick homes still standing. It had once been such a large community. We wandered around among them, wondering what it was like when Joseph Smith lived here. Coming from the East, we missed the ocean, and here was the river. We went swimming every afternoon. We just fell in love with Nauvoo.

Q. What was the river like?

A. It was all open. There weren't any of these grown-out places that you see.

Q. Was the Keokuk Dam built yet?

A. Yes. it was. As we came down the river on this paddlewheel steamboat, it made its way around what had once been the islands. You could tell them because some of the trees were still standing. Of course those are all covered up now, and other things are grown in.

Q. What did the Mansion House and the Nauvoo House look like when you first saw them?

A. They were pretty much like what they are now. One of my friends, Florence Smith, lived in Burlington thirty miles from here. She told me that when she read in the church paper that this was going to be restored, her father said, "I'm going to go down to see what this is all about," and she went with him.

She said that the Mansion House was so dilapidated. The paint was peeling, and the windowpanes were broken. Then they made their way through the brush and weeds to the Nauvoo House. The doors were hanging ajar—broken hinges. Fishermen were using it to spread out their nets. The floorboards were broken in one of the rooms, and water had seeped in. Then she said they went up the hill to the Homestead, parting the horse weeds tall as her head to the hook step and found out it was being used as a chicken house. She said she could have gathered two dozen eggs that day if she had a mind to. It wasn't a very impressive site for those who came to see what was once the city and the home of the Prophet.

Q. When you first came to Nauvoo, what was the city like?

A. It was pretty much as it is now, except on the flat there were a lot more homes that were empty.

Q. Have you seen a lot of restoration happening in Nauvoo?

A. Oh yes, all these homes. The RLDS restored the Mansion House, the Nauvoo House, and the Homestead because of the World Conference in 1917. It was in the 1950s that Dr. LeRoy Kimball came. He bought the Kimball home—his ancestors' home—to restore it. Then he had an open house. Over a thousand people came. I was one of them. When he saw the interest of the people, that is when they got the idea of restoring some of the other homes. The Nauvoo Restoration was started from that.

Q. What was one of your most memorable memories in Nauvoo as you were growing up?

A. [Chuckles] I was a senior in high school. There were only five people in the class. One of them was a young man that later became my husband. His name was Arnold John Joseph Ourth. He had quit school and gone out west to work. Then he thought he should come back and finish. He was two years older than I. Then he began—in those days you called it keeping company—we began keeping company together. We went together for about four years before we were married.

Q. Was he from Nauvoo?

A. His ancestors. In the 1850s the Germans were leaving Germany to avoid conscription in the German army. His grandfather came at that time.

Q. What occupations did your family have?

A. My father [Albert L. Sanford] in the East had been a teacher at a business college. We wanted to come to Nauvoo. A friend said, “I need somebody to help me in my monument job—making tombstones, carving the letters—I need another man.” So he had to learn a new trade. He cut the letters for a lot of these tombstones in the cemetery.

Q. How long did he do that?

A. Probably for five years. By that time they had a home and cows and things. Then he decided to just raise chickens, so we had a poultry farm.

Q. Where was your home—your farm?

A. When we came we could have bought the Taylor home, but it had holes in the roof and there were young trees growing up through the floorboards. So we bought a home in back of that, a block from the Brigham Young home. It’s not standing anymore. It wasn’t one of the historic homes.

Q. Did you have to restore the home?

A. No, it was liveable.

Q. What do you like about living in Nauvoo?

A. The friendliness of the people. We moved in the summertime. My sister and I thought, “When we go to school, everybody will have their own friends. We’ll be outsiders.” But it wasn’t that way at all. They just took us in. It was like one big family—only forty in the high school—they were the happiest high school years. The community is that way—the friendliness of the people.

Q. Is that what you like about Nauvoo now as well?

A. Yes. It's a wonderful community.

Q. What are some characteristics that make Nauvoo unique?

A. One of the things is this community feeling. There are six churches that join together in the Ministerial Association. My son Lee is president of it this year. They provide a Bible school for all the children, they sponsor a food pantry, and biannually put on a Passion play—six hundred involved. They have to present it three times because it's really impressive. It's just the things you do as a community together.

Q. What are some social and cultural characteristics of Nauvoo?

A. When they opened the State Park, they decided we should have a Nauvoo Historical Society. We have a Home and Community Education Association. There are a lot of community things. It is really a busy little community.

Q. What are some challenges of living in Nauvoo?

A. I never thought about that, [chuckles] It's a wonderful place to bring up a family, but when they grow up there's not much employment. I had five sons—I have one of them here now [Lee, who has a twin named Lynn], but he moved back. I have one in California, one in Chattanooga—he's just at the university there, and one in Chicago (an elementary school principal). They're all scattered. Whether you would call that a challenge, I don't know, [chuckles]

Q. I believe it is. What opportunities have you had to serve in the community?

A. When we first moved here, I was a senior in high school. I was elected president of the Girl Reserve Society. There were only five in our senior class—it wouldn't have happened to me in a big school, [chuckles] I've been president of the Historical Society and president of the Home and Community Education Association and things like that.

Q. [Joseph Jay] What year were you a senior in high school?

A. In 1923.

Q. [JP] What do each of those organizations do?

A. The Nauvoo Historical Society supports the Rheinberger Museum and the State Park and also the Weld House uptown, across from the Amoco Station. We keep a lot of records—we've gone back on a lot of records. It's been an interesting experience.

The Home and Community Education—this is just a part of the larger group, the county. It used to be called Home Extension, where you have lessons given out from the university.

Q. Has your husband served in any positions in the community?

A. Yes. Of course, he passed away in '55. It seemed like if there were things to do, they'd call on him to do it. But he wasn't mayor—he was treasurer of the city for a while.

Q. Are there any other activities that your family got involved with in Nauvoo?

A. There are always the tourists coming, so we've all served as guides to the people who have come here. My mother is the author of a book, *Joseph, City Beautiful* a novel that she has written based on Nauvoo. She also wrote *Lands Shadowing with Wings*. It has to do with the Book of Mormon. My father, having been a teacher, was drafted to be the president of PTA and things like that.

Q. What are some groups that lived in Nauvoo that stand out in your mind?

A. When we came, the Germans had left Germany to come. They heard about this empty city where the Mormons had been driven out. You could buy the houses for back taxes—a dollar thirty-seven cents, two dollars twenty cents—and it became the largest German-speaking community in the state. My husband's grandfather was a German. When we came there were a lot of people that talked just German. They left their impression. Of course, the Icarians came in 1849, and they were quite an interesting group.

Q. What were they like?

A. Their leader, Etienne Cabet, had been in the House of Deputies in France. He was so outspoken on behalf of the middle class people, he became a nuisance to the king, and the king said, "Leave the country or go to jail." So he went to England. There he wrote this book, *Voyage to Icaria*, which pictured an idealistic community with a communal

way of living—a Utopian way. It became a bestseller, over 400,000 copies. They persuaded him to come to America to put in practice what he had written. First they went to Texas, but they were swindled in their land deals. Then they heard about this empty city and came here.

The temple had been burned, but they bought that and they were going to restore it, but a tornado took down what was remaining of it. They did build a dining hall that would seat four hundred. For ten years they practiced communal living. Then it kind of broke up, but some of their descendants are still here. Dr. Lillian Snyder, she keeps the Icarian history alive.

Q. Are there any other groups that stand out?

A. Those were the main groups that seemed to have an influence in the community.

Q. What about the RLDS Church?

A. When they came to restore these homes—when my aunt and uncle came—there were no RLDS members at the time—they were the first ones. So they invited neighbors to come and to meet in their home for meetings. Then gradually the time came when they bought what was called the first ward schoolhouse—it's not standing anymore—and made it into a church. Now our church is on Water Street.

Q. What are some individuals that stand out in your mind that have been important in Nauvoo?

A. We had a mayor, Lowell Horton. He was the one who finally got the state park going. He was always pushing Nauvoo. He would probably be an outstanding one. A lot of people have contributed their little bit, but he probably was one of the most recognized ones,

Q. How have some of the groups that live in Nauvoo today helped to contribute to make Nauvoo what it is?

A. I was thinking of the different churches. It was a largely Catholic community. The Catholic had a parochial school for their children. The Lutheran church just celebrated its one hundred fiftieth year. Each church—the Presbyterians also—has made its contribution. For a while, when we first came, there was a great division between the Catholics and Protestants. They would hardly speak to each other. But gradually that has been overcome; now they are all united into a Nauvoo Ministerial Association.

Q. How do you think they overcame that division?

A. Each person contributed by being friendly.

Q. What do you know about how Nauvoo was founded?

A. This was once an Indian village of Guashquema, with 450 lodges of Sauk and Fox Indians. The first pioneer settler that came here was Captain James White, a keelboat operator. He had a thriving business between the lead mills at Galena and St. Louis, but he would stop here and do fur trading with the Indians. One day he offered them two hundred sacks of corn for this land. Of course, by that time, it was the Louisiana Purchase. The Indians knew they would probably have to leave, so they accepted the offer and moved across the river. Then the second pioneer settler was Davidson Hibbard. I live in the house where he lived. County history says that when his daughter married the son of Captain White. Chief Blackhawk and Chief Keokuk were among the wedding guests.

Joseph Smith, in his memoirs, tells of when the Mormons first came to Nauvoo that Mr. Hibbard was the first neighbor they met, and they bought a cow from him. Joseph III tells how she [the cow] was a very erratic creature. She was always running home; she ran home twice before he got her milked. That's all in his memoirs.

Q. How did the city get built up?

A. They sent their missionaries out all over—to Canada, United States, England, Scotland, Wales—and people just flowed in. Four thousand came from England alone. The charter ship would come to New Orleans, and they would come up the river by paddlewheel steamboat. It became the largest city in Illinois—the tenth largest in the United States.

Q. What made Nauvoo different from any other city?

A. Probably its culture. These pioneers that were coming west were a little more educated. That was probably the reason.

Q. Why was religion so important to so many of the early Nauvoo citizens?

A. It was the religion that brought them here. It was the missionaries that preached, and we had the zionic idea of gathering.

Q. There were a lot of conflicts that arose between the people that were called the Mormons and people in surrounding areas that eventually caused the Mormons to leave Nauvoo.

A. As much as anything, they thought the Mormons would hold the political situation—they could put in their



own officers—and I think that was one of the greatest things.

John C. Bennett was only a member for two years, and then he was excommunicated. But he had introduced and persuaded the Masonic Order to get started. I have copies of the minutes of the Masonic Order. It shows how they met for two weeks steady for morning, afternoon, and evening when they should have been working on the temple. Joseph moved up in rank so fast that the Warsaw lodge was kind of jealous of them. A lot of trouble came from Warsaw and the people there.

Q. What have you heard about what the Mormons may have done to provoke actions against them?

A. I think it was more the political situation.

Q. Are there some interesting stories that you know about that time period?

A. Only the things that I read in history.

Q. Did you have any ancestors who lived in Nauvoo before?

A. No.

Q. What do you know about the anti-Mormon newspaper that was printed?

A. From Warsaw? That is what stirred up all the trouble. It was too bad. They just kept that alive, and they even came to drive them out. It was a bad situation.

Q. What do you know about Joseph Smith?

A. I know how they feel about him. Recently—well, it was quite a few years ago—CBS decided to do a documentary called *Legends of the Land of Lincoln*. They chose three figures: a gospel singer from Chicago. Carl Sandburg, the poet, and Joseph Smith. I thought with all the famous people there were, that was something. Then they wanted a contemporary person with each of these, as they were going to film it. So they stopped at our visitors' center and inquired if there were any descendants of the Smith family here, and of course there are not any here now.

When the members found out what CBS was doing, they said, “There is a woman who has lived here for sixty years.” So I was chosen to be the contemporary character, [chuckles] And they had me do all kinds of things. I said, “Can I send you some material?”

They said, “Oh no, our tables are full of material.” I really prayed that the Spirit would be with them. They were very fair to both churches, and it was very well done about Joseph Smith.

Q. What did Joseph Smith do as a leader in Nauvoo?

A. He was the leader. All the things that were done were probably the result of his leadership.

Q. What do you know about his martyrdom?

A. I know that now they know it was the Warsaw lodge. They were the ones that formulated the plans and were in the mob that broke in the jail and killed them. When Joseph and Hyrum were assassinated, they were brought back and lay in state in the Mansion House all day. Thousands passed through to pay their respects. That night, Emma had heard rumors that a ransom was offered for their bodies. So she had the bodies taken out of the caskets and secretly buried.

It wasn't until 1929 that Frederic M. Smith, president of the RLDS Church, thought the time had come to find the bodies and give them a proper burial. I remember how they had trenches dug all around the Mansion House and the Homestead—they hadn't been successful. Some of the men thought they should give up because it was getting to be winter. The engineer was a high priest in our church. He told my mother that when he was here in '21, he had a feeling that he would be asked to do that. When he was back in '24, that feeling was even stronger. Then just before he was asked to do it, he was asked to move a cemetery in KansasCity where a highway was going through. As they moved these bodies, he thought it was all preparation for finding and excavating the bodies.

So he wasn't about to give up so easily. He came to our congregation and asked us to have fasting and prayer. I remember how he said that the next morning he got up really early with his flashlight and went up and down those ditches. Where should he dig? He said he didn't have a vision, didn't hear a voice, but he believes the Lord divinely led him to gesture his flashlight to a place where they hadn't dug before.

Now seventeen years before that, Joseph Smith III had been here. He told his sons, “If you ever need to find the bodies, they will be under a brick floor of what they called the spring house.” Of course the spring house was gone and nobody remembered about it.

But as they dug that morning, first they came to a foundation. Then going down a little farther they came to a brick floor. Carefully removing the brick, they first came across the skull of Hyrum. He could be identified because he had been shot in the cheekbone. He said, “Only the Lord knows why there was a stone—about eighteen inches square—above his skull protecting him.” Next to his body was Joseph's, not as well protected. But they were able to get all the bones, except about four inches of Joseph's right arm. They knew where Emma was buried, so her body was taken up so she could be with her husband.

My father had helped with the work. When I had come home from teaching school one night he said, “Today we found the body.” He said, “You must go down and see—this is history.” It was very moving.

As I looked at that hole in the skull, I thought, “Since it had to happen, wasn't it providential that there was a mark or identification?”

They had the businessmen come down from town, and after they went over all the details, they signed affidavits that stated they believed these were the bodies. So they were reinterred in the family cemetery.

Q. [JJ] How did you feel when you were seeing the bodies?

A. It was very sad. Extremely sad. When you thought about all that they'd gone through in their lives.

Q. [JP] What did they look like?

A. It was just the bones.

Q. [JJ] How many people were viewing the bones?

A. Quite a few of the townspeople; all the businessmen came down. Of course it made news in the paper, headlines, and then more and more people began coming. They used to have just one little building on the corner of the Mansion House; now we have this wonderful visitors' center. Last year there were over seventy thousand visitors. You just have to marvel at it.

Q. So were you here in 1991 when they redid the Smith Family Cemetery?

A. The stones were there. My father had cut the stones. They had taken the slab off of Emma's grave, which was full-length, and cut it into three pieces. My father had turned it over and cut the letters for each of them. Of course now it is fancier—newer stones.

Q. How long did the project take?

A. I think it must have been about three weeks.

Q. How do you feel about that period of Nauvoo's history?

A. I feel it is very interesting, very moving, very important. It's what made them do what they did.

Q. Do you have any stories or thoughts about those people?

A. I work with the chamber of commerce. I was a step-on guide for these chartered buses that came. One day, one of my passengers said to me, “I’d like to come back again.”

I said, “I hope you can. You can’t see everything in one afternoon.”

She said, “I wouldn’t come back for what I see, I’d come back for what I feel. Our family was having problems, and that’s why I took this trip.” I could tell she had been ministered to.

Then my neighbor used to run a motel, and they’d call me to babysit the motel sometime. I was there one night when a woman came in. She said, “Oh, you were our guide last year.” She said, “When things get more than I can take, I come to Nauvoo.”

Then I came across an article another person had written about her experience here. She said as soon as she entered the city, it just seemed like peace came over her like a mantle. She wondered how this could be in a place where there had been violence and martyrdom and problems. It stayed with her, and she even prayed about it. Finally, she said, like a burst of light it came to her: it was because of the sacrifice of the people that lived here. They had hallowed the ground. She said, “What a blessing it was there.” Different people have spoken about the peace that they feel here.

Q. What did you do as a tour guide?

A. I went to all the places the tourists would see. Sometimes it was an all-day tour. Sometimes it would be a boat that would come into Burlington, thirty miles from here. We were expected to talk to them all the hour while they were coming here. I’d tell them some of the things that I’ve told you and the history of the different homes that they’d go to and things like that.

Q. How long were you a tour guide?

A. Quite a while. After I retired from teaching—about twenty years. Then when my husband and I were first married, we bought the William Marks house, just a block beyond the Homestead. We lived in it; that’s where Lee was born.

When the Depression came, my husband was laid off work. My brother was working in Kirtland on a millionaire’s estate, and he said there was an opening. So we went to Kirtland. My husband became farm manager of one of these estates. We were there for eight years. Then we came back. We always knew we were going to come back to Nauvoo someday.

Q. When did you teach? What did you teach?

A. It had always been my ambition to be a teacher, but there wasn’t enough money in my family for me to go to college. The county had a two-day examination. If you could pass that, you could get your certificate. I was praying—all my congregation was praying for me—and I passed it. Only eight out of fifty-two. So you know the Lord was really

blessing me. Then I was able to get a country school where you have all the grades. It was just two miles from town, so that was fortunate. Then later I came to town and taught first and second grade in the city schools.

Q. What were the names of the schools where you taught?

A. It was the Columbia School. It's gone now. [chuckles] I had five pupils in five grades, [chuckles]

Q. What was it like to live in Kirtland?

A. That was really a privilege, because at that time the meetings were held in the Kirtland Temple. As you went, you sat and thought about all the history that was involved in there. It was a wonderful experience. My husband was chosen to be the leader there for a year before we left.

Q. How did the wine industry start in Nauvoo?

A. When the Germans came from Germany in the 1850s, they planted out six hundred acres of vineyard and built about forty wine cellars. They shipped a lot of wine until the Prohibition came. Then the wine cellars were empty. That is how our bleu cheese industry got started. In France they use curing caves to make cheese. They knew about the wine cellars and decided to use them to make bleu cheese.

Q. When did the bleu cheese industry start?

A. It started after the Germans were here. I'm not sure what the date was.

Q. What have you heard about the restoration that has been happening in Nauvoo?

A. It depends on who you talk to. Some people want to see things stay as they were. There is always that group. But others are quite interested—economical development—and realize that it is going to bring people to town. I think people are interested.

Q. What have the Mormons done in Nauvoo in the last couple of decades?

A. When they decided that they were going to restore these homes, they not only restored the homes, but they beautified the grounds around them. Durell Nelson—I don't know whether you have met him—he's the one who has had a lot to do with that. When I would be on these buses, people would talk about how beautiful the grounds were. They beautified the grounds. In our Doctrine and Covenants, section 107 talks on how Nauvoo is one of the cornerstones and how someday it will be polished with the refinement of the temple. I think that it's that refinement that is going on—beautifying.

Q. Do you think the changes of all the restoration that has happened in the last couple of decades are good or bad?

A. I think they have been good. They have restored some of these homes that were gradually going down. A lot of the brick homes—have you been to the brick yard and seen how long it takes to make a brick? They decided it was easier to take the bricks from these homes and use them rather than make them. That is why a lot of these brick homes that were standing are gone.

Q. What was your reaction to the announcement that they were going to rebuild the Nauvoo Temple?

A. I thought it was wonderful, [chuckles] These sunstones—there were thirty of these sunstones—one of them for a long time was in our park. Then there were only three left. The Smithsonian Institute paid \$100,000 for one. That was interesting. Now they have been put up—have you noticed? The last paper had said Moroni had arrived. It had pictures of Moroni being on the top of the temple.

Q. How do you think the temple will affect Nauvoo once it is completed?

A. Since it is going to be a working temple, I don't think that it is going to bring people here to live particularly. There will be people coming, of course, so that will make a few more tourists. That will be good economically.

Q. For the past few years there have been a lot of students from Brigham Young University, like myself, who have come to Nauvoo. Have you had any association with any of them?

A. No, you are the first ones. I knew they were here because I had heard they were. I had been asked to speak at a meeting, and there were a lot of them there that came up and introduced themselves—BYU students.

Q. What has your overall impression of them been?

A. Very good.

Q. What do you see for the future of Nauvoo?

A. Maybe I'm not being very realistic, but the scriptures talk about how a city on a hill cannot be hid. "Let your light so shine that people may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" [see Matthew 5:16]. So many people are coming here, I just think about that scripture.

Q. Do you think Nauvoo will change?

A. I don't see how much change can take place. I don't think there is anybody coming in with business. A lot of our men have to go other places—to Fort Madison, Keokuk—to work.

Q. Do you have any other comments or observations about Nauvoo?

A. I just know that I am glad that I live here, [chuckles] I love the river. The people are so friendly. It is a wonderful community to live in.

Q. [JJ] If you had any message to give to people who come to Nauvoo in future generations, what would you say?

A. Nothing that I can think of.

Q. [JP] Thank you so much for letting us come.

## **Lee and Carmen Ourth**

*Nauvoo, Illinois*

*Lee's birthday: November 27, 1933*

*Carmen's birthday: May 3, 1934*

*Interview on November 19, 2001,*

*at the Joseph Smith Academy by Joella Peterson Kristelle Moore also present*