



John Brown

John Brown was an early missionary to Mississippi who led a company of Saints to Pueblo in what is now Colorado.

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A UNIQUE ODYSSEY OF SOUTHERN PIONEERS

David F. Boone

In the April 1980 sesquicentennial general conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Elder Boyd K. Packer paid tribute to “the rank and file of the Church.”¹ In referring to those Latter-day Saints who are “ordinary members, who might be described as obscure,” he noted that because of their faith, devotion, loyalty, and adherence to gospel principles they have always accomplished extraordinary things. One of the most unlikely bands of ordinary pioneer Latter-day Saints was composed of individuals who came from the American South and possessed no unique knowledge, had received no specific training, had never held positions of distinction, and were not, nor would any ever become, General Authorities of the Church.

Although unremarkable by almost any measure, the group, commonly called the Mississippi Saints, possessed one quality few discerned—a commitment to follow prophetic counsel that ultimately

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assisted in, by their own estimation, their success and contributed to their temporal and spiritual survival.²

Beginning with the exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846 and continuing for more than two decades, tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints in dozens of emigration companies found their way to the Salt Lake Valley—their new home. Several factors made the Mississippi Saints unique among the Latter-day Saint immigrants, including the way the company originated and was initially organized, how the company changed over the history of its travel, and what the company ultimately accomplished.

Several essays have been written on this topic, including Warren E. Parrish's work titled "The Mississippi Saints," Norma B. Ricketts's "The Forgotten Pioneers," Donald W. Marshall's "The Mississippi Saints and Sick Detachments of the Mormon Battalion," Carol Ann McQuilkin's thesis, "Journey of Faith: Mid-19th Century Migration of Mississippi Mormons and Slaves," and several pieces compiled from pioneer sources by Kate B. Carter of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers.³ The purpose of this treatise, therefore, is to combine some of the research of the past with sources not available to these former authors to update the information on this brief but important glimpse into the early travel of Latter-day Saint pioneers.

Organization

The unique nature of the company is in part due to the versatile John Brown. Originally from Tennessee, Brown converted to the Church in Perry County, Illinois, in 1841.⁴ He traveled to Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1845 at the call of President Brigham Young to assist in the completion of the temple. Later, Brown served a mission in northeastern Mississippi and northwestern Alabama, where he met and married Elizabeth Crosby. In time, the couple returned to Nauvoo, where Brown built a home and worked as a schoolteacher and in other miscellaneous jobs. His marriage gave him a connection to the Old South,

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where he worked on plantations with slaves and their owners, becoming somewhat of an icon for new southern converts.

Following an interview with Brigham Young in January 1846, Brown obediently left his newly finished home in Nauvoo to complete a special Church assignment in Mississippi. He wrote, "We were instructed by President Young to leave our families here and take those families that were ready and go west with them through Missouri and fall in with the companies from Nauvoo, in the Indian country."⁵ Upon his arrival in Monroe County, Mississippi, Brown left his expectant wife with her mother and began meeting with local Saints, encouraging them in their preparation for an imminent immigration to the West. On April 8, 1846, Brown organized a party of fourteen Latter-day Saint families, consisting of forty-three souls, all new converts, and departed from Mormon Springs, which was located in Monroe County, northeastern Mississippi.⁶ Leonard Arrington noted that these Southern pioneers were "mostly small landowners, stockmen, and frontiersmen," already calloused by hard work and the deprivations of life in a pioneer setting. Further, they "demonstrated . . . their courage" by joining the Church at a difficult time and place and demonstrated their independence by striking out on a perilous assignment.⁷

The company made good time in their travel, due in part to their skill but also because, as they believed, their efforts were blessed, and they were on a spiritually assisted migration. In a reminiscent account, Brown recorded, "There seemed to be a providential care exercised over us all the way and in every emergency the right thing was done at the right time."⁸ They traveled in a northwesterly direction to Memphis, Tennessee, and followed the Mississippi River, crossing at Clay Banks. Further, they traveled up the Missouri River north to Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, where they arrived May 26.

By their own estimation they had traveled a distance of eight hundred miles in forty-eight days, averaging more than sixteen miles per day. Upon their arrival in Independence, Brown noted an unusual and somewhat surprising agitation: "We found a great excitement about

the Mormons who had gone west from Nauvoo. Ex-governor Boggs had gone to California that spring across the plains and the rumor was afloat that the Mormons had intercepted him, robbed the train and killed Boggs.”⁹ This, or similar rumors, led Brown and the Mississippi company to decide “to keep their religion to themselves.”¹⁰

In Independence they replenished their supplies and were also joined by the William Decatur Kartchner and Robert Crow families, two Latter-day Saint families that would contribute their talents to the company throughout the trek. The Crow family was related to John Brown, and Robert Crow recruited his newlywed neighbors, William Decatur and Margaret Casteel Kartchner, to travel with them. Both families seemed eager to leave Missouri. William Kartchner recorded:

The Spring of 1846 came & I lerned some Mormon's was going West. . . . [As] this company was making preparations to start to the Rocky Mountains which exercised my mind gratly. . . . Brother Crow heard that I was used to Camp life & came to See me and offered me a wagon & half a team & me to furnish the other half & haul 1000 pounds for him which caused my brother to truble feearing I was to Leave. . . . I told him I would Rather be a Mormons Dog [and leave the place] than to stay in that country when my People had been Robed Pilliged Murdered.¹¹

In addition to the Kartchner and Crow families, a small group of non-Mormon travelers who were headed for Oregon joined the company as the Mississippi Saints crossed the Missouri River and followed the Oregon Trail westward. The company now numbered twenty-five wagons and nearly sixty-five persons and was organized in Mormon pioneer fashion.¹² William Crosby “was chosen captain of the company,” and Robert Crow and John D. Holladay were selected as “his counselors.”¹³ All seemed to work out well for the mixed company until they were well beyond civilization. Brown recorded:

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When we got out into the Indian country, our Oregon friends found out that they were in company with a lot of Mormons. They were a little uneasy and somewhat frightened, and began to think that we did not travel fast enough for them. They left us and next day we passed and left them in the rear. They were a little afraid to go on not being strong enough. . . . At length they traveled with us till we got to the Platte River where we met a company of six men from Oregon and when they saw six men who had traveled the road alone, they took courage, having 13 or 14 men in company. So they left us again and we rested a day for repairs, so we saw them no more.¹⁴

The departure of the Oregon-bound men occurred at a point near Fort Laramie, in present-day Wyoming, in late June or early July 1846.¹⁵

No existing documentary sources indicate that there was a specific site, place, or timetable for the Mississippi Saints to meet with Brigham Young's vanguard company. The instructions given to John Brown for the Mississippi Saints were to leave their homes and families in Mississippi and take the prepared Saints west through Missouri and join the anticipated companies from Nauvoo, which would likely be on their way west.¹⁶ The departure from those instructions came when Brigham Young and the vanguard company failed to arrive as planned.

As they traveled, the Mississippi Saints noted landmarks and places of interest along the trail, including Grand Island, Ash Hollow, and Chimney Rock, all prior to arriving at Fort Laramie.¹⁷ After they passed Grand Island, Brown noted:

We were now a long way beyond the point where we were to meet our brethren. After we passed that point we were virtually out at sea without chart or compass. No instructions as to where we should land. At Ash Hollow on the North Fork of the Platte, two of us crossed [to] the north side and explored the plain to the foot of the sand hills, and searched diligently for the trail of the emigrating saints from Nauvoo as it was quite possible they would pass up

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that side of the Platte, but we could not discover any signs whatever and when we returned to camp and reported, the anxiety increased and the question as to what course to take began to be discussed openly and freely.¹⁸

This wide expanse of open, desolate country, so different than what the Southern pioneers were used to, was something new, curious, and perhaps a little unnerving. Brown noted that there was “nothing to be seen or heard but the movements and noise of vast herds of wild animals on the naked plains buffaloes, antelope, solives, prairie dogs and rattlesnakes, not even a tree or brush on part of the route to vary the monotony. As far as man was concerned, all was dismal and silent as the grave. This solitude produced a wonderful sensation on the inexperienced and nervous, a spirit of uneasiness began to manifest itself in the company, it was quite evident that this little party was alone in this wild waste.”¹⁹

For weeks the Southern pioneers continued to ask those they encountered about the main company of Saints, and wherever they went they looked for signs of their trail west.²⁰ They had no idea of the slow travel of Brigham Young’s company across Iowa due to muddy conditions, nor could they know that the United States military mustered hundreds of Latter-day Saint volunteers into a group known as the Mormon Battalion to serve in the war with Mexico. The Mississippi Saints did not know that, due to these delays, the company under the direction of Brigham Young was unable to continue beyond the Missouri River that year. They would eventually learn that the Saints had stopped at a place at the Missouri River named Council Bluffs, where they would prepare for additional travel the following year.

Consequently, the Mississippi Saints waited for days, having no knowledge of the Saints’ delay or their leaders’ decisions to end emigration for the season. Their first indications that no Latter-day Saints had visited their place of rendezvous came from an eastbound company that camped near them. Brown noted, “We . . . met a company from California, by whom we learned that there were no Mormons on the

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route ahead of us.”²¹ Other travelers were likewise questioned, but obviously no one had any news of seeing them since they had not arrived.

Finally, a French trapper, trader, and frontiersman named John Richards,²² or Reshaw,²³ who arrived at Fort Laramie on his way further south, indicated that he knew where their company could stay for the winter. He further offered to pilot them to a settlement on the east slope of the Rocky Mountains referred to as Pueblo, in present-day southern Colorado.²⁴ The company began their trek southward to Pueblo on July 10, 1846. The chance meeting with John Richards, his invitation to pilot them on the route, and his knowledge of the area and of the American Indians whom they met along the trail were all fortuitous and probably contributed to the Saints’ very survival.

After departing from their camp near Fort Laramie, the Mississippi company traveled south for nearly 350 miles on a route that today roughly follows Interstate 25, finally arriving in Pueblo on August 7—twenty-eight days after their departure from Platte River.²⁵ Pueblo was located within a few days travel of Fort Bent on the headwaters of the Arkansas River, where it intersected with the Sante Fe Trail.

Upon their arrival at Pueblo, the Saints found a community largely populated by trappers and their Spanish and American Indian wives. Although it served as a trading post on the “Trapper’s Route” between Taos and Fort Laramie, Francis Parkman described it as a “wretched species of fort, of most primitive construction, being nothing more than a large square inclosure, surrounded by a wall of mud, miserably cracked and dilapidated. The slender pickets that surmounted it were half broken down, and the gate dangled on its wooden hinges so loosely, that to open or shut it seemed likely to fling it down altogether.”²⁶ The Mississippi group determined to move across the river, a short distance from the existing settlement, for privacy and to distance themselves from their boisterous trapper-frontiersman neighbors. There the newly arrived Saints began building houses for protection from the approaching winter. The Latter-day Saint settlement came to be known as Mormon Town.²⁷

On August 17, ten days after their arrival, Margaret Casteel Kartchner delivered a baby daughter, whom the couple named Sarah Emma. Years later, Sarah was honored as the first white child born in present-day Colorado.²⁸ Also, on September 1 the company leaders and presidency—John Brown, William Crosby, George Bankhead, Daniel M. Thomas, William H. Lay, James Smithson, and John D. Holladay—departed the settlement to rejoin their families in the South.²⁹ The departure of these leaders was in keeping with the instructions given by Brigham Young when he called John Brown to lead the company. Once the company leaders arrived in the South, they would prepare to bring their families and others who desired to immigrate to the undisclosed gathering place in the West in the spring of 1847. The departure must certainly have been a difficult and emotional separation. Brown noted, “When we parted with those we left behind, many tears were shed. At that time they expected to pass the winter without any other company and to be left in that lonely retreat, no telling how long. It was quite a trial to part with those in whom they had confidence and had led them safely to that place.”³⁰

Brown further recorded:

We counseled the brethren to prepare for winter to build them some cabins in the form of a fort. . . . The mountaineers said they would let them [Mississippi Mormons] have supplies, corn for their labor [building cabins for the mountaineers]. . . . We organized the company into a branch and gave them such instructions and counsel as the spirit dictated, telling them to tarry here until they got word from head-quarters where to go. They were much disappointed as they expected to get with the main body of the church. We comforted them all we could and left our blessing with them.³¹

While traveling to be reunited with their families and about ten days east of Pueblo, these returning leaders fortuitously met the Mormon Battalion marching en route to Sante Fe, Tucson, and other points west.³²

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There was a joyful reunion, since earlier in Nauvoo and in missionary service there had been numerous associations between the men in the battalion and those now returning to Mississippi. In addition, it was a most providential meeting since, in all probability, neither of the two groups had known of the existence, much less the location, of the other. From the battalion men, Brown learned that general Church leaders had interrupted their westward migration until the following spring, which is why the Mississippi Saints did not find them on the plains near Fort Laramie along the North Platte River only weeks earlier.

From the Southern leaders, the members of the battalion learned that there was a settlement of Mormon pioneers on the east side of the Rocky Mountains at the headwaters of the Arkansas River. Through this serendipitous meeting, the history of both the Southern Saints in Pueblo and the Saints in the battalion were each significantly impacted.

After the chance meeting, Brown and his travel companions continued “down the Arkansas River to the old Santa Fe Trail, thence east to Independence, Missouri” without mishap, arriving at their homes in the Deep South in November 1846, after “having traveled almost continuously for seven months.”³³ Within three weeks after their arrival, “messengers [Charles Crismon and Bryant Nowlin] from the Quorum of the Twelve at Council Bluffs arrived with instructions . . . to remain still another year and send some able bodied men to them [the Saints camped at Council Bluffs and Winter Quarters] with proper outfits to go with them as Pioneers to the Mountains to select a location for the saints.”³⁴ Brigham Young was undoubtedly informed about their circumstances and location as a result of their meeting with the battalion.

In response to the new instructions, Brown recorded: “A council was called and after consideration it was decided that we would send six men. It was also decided that I should go and take charge of this expedition and in order to be at the Bluffs in time to start early in the spring, a land journey of over a thousand miles had to be performed in the winter. We fitted up and started with a mule team on the 10th

of January, 1847. I had one white man and four colored, who were slaves and servants.”³⁵ Brown and a small group, including new arrivals Crismon and Nowlin, traveled from Mississippi to the Council Bluffs–Winter Quarters area, arriving about April 1 to help President Young prepare for the trek west.³⁶

Mormon Battalion: Sick Detachments

Meanwhile, back in Pueblo, the Mississippi Saints in Mormon Town remained unaware of the existence and location of the Mormon Battalion for some weeks yet to come. However, Brown and his traveling companions informed the Battalion of the Saints settled near Pueblo.³⁷ The knowledge that there was a community of Latter-day Saints at Pueblo who could care for and provide assistance to the battalion’s sick provided a solution that blessed the lives of many among the battalion and the Mississippi Saints, as will be discussed further.

The first group of sick soldiers was detached near the crossing of the Arkansas, as they and others were impeding the speed of travel.³⁸ This first detachment, under the command of Captain Nelson Higgins and consisting of seventy-five men, eight women, and an undetermined number of children, was instructed to continue on the Sante Fe Trail to Bent’s Fort and then to the encampment of the Mississippi Saints at Pueblo. They departed on September 16 and arrived in Pueblo in mid-to late-October. Their orders were to “settle the [military] families at Pueblo before rejoining the Battalion in Sante Fe.”³⁹ Upon their safe arrival, the soldiers who were able-bodied assisted in preparing housing. Their leaders then returned to their company, which had already passed Sante Fe, New Mexico.

One of the battalion’s aims was to effect a very difficult march across the desert of the Southwest. To accommodate the trek, leaders determined to further reduce the number of sick soldiers as well as pare down the number of women and children who remained under their command. The battalion’s new commander, Colonel Philip St. George

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Cooke, ordered James Brown to lead a second sick detachment, consisting of eighty-six soldiers deemed unfit to march and twenty women and their children, to Pueblo.⁴⁰ The orders sending James Brown differed from the earlier group in that Brown was “instructed . . . to retain his detachment at Pueblo until further orders.”⁴¹

This group departed from Santa Fe on October 18, 1846, and arrived one month later (November 17) at their new home in Pueblo. A major military concession also accompanied the second detachment. A decision was made to not split up families, so the able-bodied husbands of the women also marched to Pueblo with their wives.⁴² Later, Cooke further ordered Lieutenant William Willis to lead a third and final sick detachment to Pueblo while the main body of the battalion continued on to the West Coast. The third detachment left the battalion at Williamsburg, New Mexico, and initially comprised fifty-five men. Additional men joined them as they walked back toward Santa Fe, New Mexico, where they arrived on December 1. The sickness of the men, the lack of necessary food, and the onset of winter weather hampered their progress. After a very difficult trek, which included extreme hunger and frostbite, the leaders of the group arrived in Pueblo. Days later a rescue party left Pueblo to find stragglers and assist them. This latter group arrived in the Mormon settlement on January 15.

By most accounts the winter of 1846–47 in Pueblo was relatively serious. Deep snow and extreme freezing conditions were reported by the incoming soldiers in the mountains in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. Further, the extreme weather slowed the rescue and increased the suffering of those stragglers.⁴³ However, when comparing the winter weather experienced by the Mississippi Saints in Mormon Town and the gathering men from the battalion to the winter endured by Saints in Nebraska (Winter Quarters and Council Bluffs), Pueblo was rather mild. In addition to the contrast between winter temperatures, there was also a major contrast in the availability of good, wholesome food. In southern Colorado, the Saints enjoyed an

abundance and a wide variety of nutritional and excellent-quality food that their Nebraska-Iowa counterparts did not have.

Not only did the sick detachments' departure assist the battalion with food rationing and faster pace but it helped many of the sick to heal that may not have had they remained. It also enabled battalion members to arrive in Salt Lake City and thereby reunite with family sooner than if they had remained with the former company.

Life in Pueblo

After John Brown and the other leaders departed for Mississippi, the remaining Saints and their newest additions thrived. With good health they continued the building program initiated by their departed leaders. Lecompte described the results of their building program: "Their town [Mormon Town] was in a broad and well-timbered bottom of the Arkansas [River]. A single long street was lined with houses, each about fourteen feet square, built of cottonwood logs laid horizontally and chinked with mud."⁴⁴ As the sick detachments arrived, they continued to add to the number of houses. A small church building was also built, which served as a school house and social hall.

Gardens of the Mormon settlers flourished throughout the winter in Pueblo. Cooler-weather crops such as turnips and other greens prospered, but settlers also successfully cultivated some of the more traditional warmer-weather crops such as pumpkins, melons, and beans.⁴⁵ Corn was plentiful from the previous season's harvest, and the Mormon settlers were often paid by the mountaineers and trappers with corn (at a rate of three dollars per bushel) for their work in blacksmithing, constructing buildings, and so on. The corn the Saints earned for payment could be ground and provided significant nutrition to the people.⁴⁶

There was a wide variety of animals to hunt, including turkey, geese, venison, elk, antelope, and even bear and buffalo. Many in the community excelled in and enjoyed the adventure of hunting.⁴⁷ The variety in their diet was healthy, which was noted by many of the journalists.

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As a result of the quantity of wild game available, the pioneers were often able to retain their cattle and other livestock, which thrived on the natural grasses. The survival of their animals would prove a considerable blessing to the pioneers when they continued west and wild game was no longer available. Animal hides likewise were a valuable commodity to be used for clothing, home furnishings, and other accessories or to be traded as a means of exchange.

In addition to what was available to them naturally, the battalion men in Mormon Town were eligible to requisition food and other supplies and provisions from the commissary at Bent's Fort. The Mississippi Saints, as civilians, were not eligible for the government issue, but they could trade with the soldiers for the goods. The military quartermaster not only issued supplies but in some cases also wagons and teams to transport them back to Pueblo. In addition to transporting supplies, wagons and teams were further used by the settlers in their private efforts to make a livelihood and would yet prove to be an even greater asset when the time came to continue westward.⁴⁸

The men typically worked outside. They mostly farmed, but many built houses. They also constructed a large building (thirty by twenty feet) that was called a tabernacle or temple by some of their neighbors. It was used as a chapel, school, and social hall. Work for hire was plentiful. William D. Kartchner traveled approximately seventy miles to Bent's Fort, where he worked as a blacksmith for two dollars per day. Others found work in Pueblo, and several men were hired by the trappers and frontiersmen to dig a canal, for an undisclosed purpose.⁴⁹

Cultural and recreational activities for the Saints ranged from good-natured interaction between the people to more organized activities, including dances. Dances were by far the most preferred activity of the Saints, soldiers, and neighboring mountaineers. Initially, when the Mississippi company arrived, a few of the girls would go to Fort Pueblo across the river to a fandango,⁵⁰ or dance, sponsored by the trappers, traders, and mountain men. The Mormon girls did not typically enjoy the fandangos because of the rough and rude treatment

they received from the men. Most Mormon girls discontinued their attendance, not because they didn't like to dance but because they were not accustomed to such crude antics from their cultured, Southern upbringing. In time, the Southern Saints organized their own dances. One of the young women explained:

It was certainly a blessing to us that the detachment of Capt Brown came to Pueblo to protect us from the mountaineers and trappers who were in a fort across the river. They were determined that we should mingle with them in their wild living. Some of them had squaws with whom they were living; also some Spanish women were there. We attended a dance in their hall on one occasion. That was enough for us. We refused to go again, or to associate with them. They became resentful . . . when the Battalion boys arrived an end was put to all this [then] we had peace and protection.⁵¹

From that time forward, the Latter-day Saints sponsored dances, which were held in Mormon Town. Outsiders were invited to participate, but with restrictions. Often Captain Brown, a senior officer of the battalion, would talk to a visitor before he or she was allowed inside. At other times the presiding priesthood leader, Porter Dowdle, preached to them. The guests had to listen if they wanted to attend, and then if they did not choose to behave appropriately, there were three detachments of military personnel that could enforce whatever the leaders had stipulated.⁵²

After the battalion's sick detachments were all safely gathered to Pueblo, there were 364 Latter-day Saints in the community.⁵³ There were births, weddings, deaths, and other events—the same as would be found in most any community. In addition to the birth of Sarah Elizabeth Kartchner, mentioned previously, Pueblo historian Mary L. Scarcello identified the names of at least nine additional children birthed in the community before the Saints departed the following spring. She likewise enumerated four or five weddings that took place in the Latter-day Saint settlement, one between a couple who met

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in Mormon Town but who married later along the trail west.⁵⁴ The majority of weddings were between Mississippi Latter-day Saint girls and soldiers from the three Mormon Battalion detachments. Most of these couples in time joined the Saints in the Salt Lake Valley.

Death was also a reality among the Mississippi Saints and others in Pueblo. Scarcello identifies at least twelve Latter-day Saints who died during the Mormons' stay there. Some of these would be among the battalion's sick who, in some cases, were near death when they arrived. When an individual died in the community, nearly everyone participated in the rites to honor them. If it was one of the soldiers, full military honors, including men in uniform (if they had them) in a procession with arms and volleys of musket fire and so on, were afforded in respect for the deceased, and often a more religious service was conducted. Historian John F. Yurtinus noted, "If the deceased was a faithful Church member, he was interred in a white robe, . . . cap, shoes and other ceremonial articles."⁵⁵

With or without the deaths that occurred, there were bound to be differences in opinion or open quarreling, even among those who were voluntarily connected for religious purposes. Recorded instances of misunderstandings show that during the Mormons' time in Pueblo, friction existed at some intervals, but reports of them were more often within the battalion than among their families and the Mississippi Saints.

Joining Brigham Young's Vanguard Company

After the main body of Saints endured a long, difficult, and severe winter in western Iowa and in what is eastern Nebraska today, President Young was interested in pushing west once travel was again possible. On Monday, April 5, Heber C. Kimball moved out with six teams, which motivated others to leave their homes earlier than they may have done otherwise. Nine days later (April 14), Brigham Young and additional members of the Quorum of the Twelve joined those who had gathered to make a start west. Among the 143 men, 3 women, and

2 children who made up the vanguard company was John Brown, the leader of the Mississippi Saints who had preceded Brigham Young along a portion of the trail a year earlier.⁵⁶

When the vanguard company of Saints arrived at Fort Laramie on June 1, 1847, Robert Crow and seventeen family members of the Mississippi company were there to meet them, having already waited two weeks for their arrival. They left Pueblo sometime after mid-April in order to arrive at Fort Laramie when the vanguard company did. On Monday, May 24—more than a month later—the battalion members who had also wintered in Pueblo left Pueblo en route to the rendezvous point along the Oregon Trail followed by Latter-day Saints. Most of the remaining members of the Mississippi Saints accompanied the troops. The soldiers were delayed because their military pay for service in the Mormon Battalion had not yet arrived.⁵⁷

President Young expected the trailing soldiers and other Mississippi Saints to intersect the Oregon Trail and turn west toward the Salt Lake Valley and not travel east to assist either their families or other pioneers. There would be time later for them to meet and assist others on the trail, so for now their efforts were needed in the Salt Lake Valley. Amasa Lyman was sent to meet the company, resolve any concerns, and accompany them on the remainder of their trek. He accomplished his instructions to the letter. The soldiers were corrected for their temporary insubordination and one recounted, “Elder limon gave us all a good whipping . . . and a great deel of good council in relation to the corse we should take.”⁵⁸ When the battalion arrived at Fort Laramie on June 16, they turned to the west and followed their ecclesiastical leaders toward the Salt Lake Valley.⁵⁹

Regarding the vanguard company, Mr. James Bordeaux, the proprietor of Fort Laramie, remarked, “This was the most civil and best behaved company that had ever passed the fort.”⁶⁰ This compliment was significant when contrasted with what the same host said about ex-governor Boggs and his party of Missourians who had visited Fort Laramie the previous year. Wilford Woodruff remembered

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a conversation with Bordeaux: “Boggs and his fellow travelers had acted so ungentlemanly and irresponsibly while at the fort that he [Bordeaux] had been relieved to see them go. . . . Boggs’ company was quarreling all the time and most of the company had deserted him.” Bordeaux finally told Boggs and company, “Let the Mormons be as bad as they would, they could not be any worse than he and his men were. . . . He also spoke in high terms of Bro. Crow that has camped by him several days.”⁶¹

At some point after the battalion arrived at Fort Laramie, James Brown sent thirteen of his battalion members with instructions to overtake the vanguard company. They caught up with them on Sunday, July 4, and continued with them until they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. No information was given as to the reason for this move or importance of the information they carried, but it did notify Church leaders that the soldiers had made the expected choice at Fort Laramie and were literally following their leaders into the Salt Lake Valley.

Entry into the Salt Lake Valley

After the vanguard company departed from Fort Laramie on June 4, it took them another fifty days to arrive at their destination in the Great Basin. The remainder of the Mississippi Saints and the battalion detachments arrived at Fort Laramie on June 16. Following the advanced company, it only took the next group forty-three days to make the same trip.⁶² A significant part of the faster travel was due to the fact that the vanguard company was identifying and improving the trail and also provided strategic help crossing rivers and other material assistance along the way.

On Tuesday, July 13, 1847, while camped at the head of Echo Canyon, “Orson Pratt [in the vanguard company] was appointed to take twenty-three wagons and forty-two men⁶³ and precede the main company of Pioneers into Great Salt Lake Valley.”⁶⁴ This group became known as the advanced company. John Brown of the Mississippi Saints was appointed to join them. It does not appear after this point that either

the vanguard company or the advanced company were operating under the company system, since different individuals from different companies were assigned to travel together for the remainder of their trek.

The following Monday, July 19, Pratt and Brown climbed to a high prominence, where they had “the first view of any of the Pioneers . . . [of the] Salt Lake Valley.”⁶⁵ John Brown recorded, “We went . . . as far as at the top of the big mountain. Here we had a view of the valley for the first [time]. Went on to the mountain to the right and saw what we supposed to be one corner of the [Great Salt] lake, which intelligence we carried back to the camp causing all to rejoice.”⁶⁶ Brown, the leader of the Mississippi Saints, was one of the first two individuals to have a view of their future home.

Two days later, Wednesday, July 21, Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow entered the Salt Lake Valley, the first of three parties to do so. Two days later, President Young, still weak from the effects of Rocky Mountain fever, was driven into the valley that he had seen in vision prior to his arrival and that was to be the home of Latter-day Saints for decades to come. The following week, on Thursday, July 29, the final remnant of the Mississippi Saints, along with the detachments of the Mormon Battalion, also entered the valley.

The small, Southern pioneer company, known since as the Mississippi Saints, was distinctive in all of Church history. They began their trek hundreds of miles further east than the major exodus from Nauvoo. Consequently, they traveled further and over a longer period of time than any other pioneer company. Further, they had accomplished this feat without general Church leadership or participation, except for the initial instructions given to John Brown in January 1846. Brown crossed the continent thirteen times in answer to the call to provide support for the exodus west. He and about a dozen Southerners entered the Salt Lake Valley with the advanced company.

All of the Mississippi Saints were new converts, and as “the rank and file” company, they had acted independently and courageously and

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their accomplishments have never been replicated. Little known to the general Church membership and rarely cited in the Church's histories, several of these Southern converts brought with them their slaves. More than forty African Americans were brought west by the waves of emigrants from the South, three of which figured prominently in the first pioneer company to enter the Salt Lake Valley. These were joined by other black Saints: former slaves and free men and women of color.⁶⁷ Some continued for a time in slavery, most contributed to the Church and to the community, and others joined the general colonization efforts of the Saints and moved elsewhere.

Aided by their slaves, the Mississippi Saints colonized the first communities outside of Salt Lake City proper: Cottonwood and Holladay, about ten miles southeast of the center of Salt Lake. In 1851 many of these Southern converts helped in the initial colonization of a new community in San Bernardino, California, and other communities were likewise benefitted by their presence in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and Idaho. In addition to their contributions to colonization, Southerners have had a disproportionate impact, considering their numbers, on other areas of building up the Church and the West in education, literature, and missionary work, to name but a few.

The Mississippi Saints were anxious to serve, eager to lead out, and dependable. Their contributions continue to bless Latter-day Saints and their neighbors today. They accomplished everything that had been asked of them and much, much more.

Notes

1. Boyd K. Packer, "A Tribute to the Rank and File of the Church," *Ensign*, May 1980, 62–64.
2. Ironically, not all the Mississippi Saints were natives or settlers from Mississippi. Some came from Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and other areas. The reason that the group became

known as the Mississippi Saints is probably because some of the company's leaders were from the northeastern part of that state, and they departed from Mormon Springs, Monroe County, Mississippi.

3. William E. Parrish, "The Mississippi Saints," *Historian* 50, no. 4 (August 1988): 489–506; Norma B. Ricketts, "The Forgotten Pioneers," *Crossroads* 8, nos. 2–3 (Spring/Summer 1997): 5–10; Donald W. Marshall, "The Mississippi Saints and Sick Detachments of the Mormon Battalion, Winter 1846–1847," *Thetean* (April 1968), 2:33–41; Carol Ann McQuilkin, "Journey of Faith: Mid-19th Century Migration of Mississippi Mormons and Slaves" (master's thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 1995); Daughters of Utah Pioneers, "Mississippi Saints," in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, ed. Kate B. Carter (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958), 2:421–76; "Women of the Mormon Battalion and Mississippi Saints," in *Heart Throbs of the West*, ed. Kate B. Carter (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1940), 2:65–87.
4. John Brown, the son of John and Martha Chapman Brown, was born on October 23, 1820, in Sumner County, Tennessee. He was baptized a member of the Church in July 1841 in Perry County, Illinois, by George P. Dykes and later served a mission in northeastern Mississippi and northwestern Alabama. *Biographical Sketches, 1891–2013*, Church History Department (2008–); Historical Department (1972–2000); Historian's Office (1942–1972); Family and Church History Department (2000–2008), CR 100 18, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
5. *Autobiography of Pioneer John Brown: A Member of the Original Company of Utah Pioneers of 1847*, ed. John Zimmerman Brown (Salt Lake City: Publisher's Press, 1941), 66. See also Parrish, "Mississippi Saints," 493.
6. Mormon Springs, Monroe County, Mississippi, was a well-known landmark to the earliest Latter-day Saint converts in Alabama and Mississippi. The site is located about five miles south of U.S. Highway 278 on Wolfe Road and just over ten miles north of Caledonia, Mississippi. It was at this site that many Latter-day Saints were baptized and very near the site where the Buttahatchie Alabama Branch of the Church was organized

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- in 1843. Both states supplied volunteers for the emigration company referred to as the Mississippi Saints.
7. Leonard J. Arrington, "Mississippi Mormons," *Ensign*, June 1977, 51.
 8. John Brown, "Sketch of the Life of John Brown," Church History Library, MS 15998, box 1, folder 17, frames 763–70, 5.
 9. Brown, "Sketch," 4. This would not be the last time on their trek that they would be confronted with rumors about the ex-governor of Missouri. Since Boggs had preceded the Latter-day Saints across the plains, rumors persisted and resurfaced as both the Mississippi Saints and later Brigham Young's vanguard company traveled west.
 10. Richard E. Bennett, *We'll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846–1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 173.
 11. William Decatur Kartchner, "Reminiscences and Diary, 1878–1884," 27, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.
 12. In a revelation given to Brigham Young and recorded as a section in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Latter-day Saints "and those who journey with them [should be] organized into companies. . . . Let the companies be organized with captains . . . with a president and his two counselors at their head, under the direction of the Twelve Apostles" (D&C 136:2–3). It will be realized that John Brown was complying with instructions seven months before they were issued as a Church directive. It is not known whether Young directed this organization in his earlier discussion with Brown or if Brown learned it from another source.
 13. "Mississippi Saints," in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 2:426.
 14. Brown, *Autobiography*, 67.
 15. Brown, *Autobiography*, 67; Arrington, "Mississippi Mormons," 48.
 16. Brown, *Autobiography*, 66.
 17. Fort Laramie was considered to be "about half way between Nauvoo and the Salt Lake Valley and was inhabited at the time of the Saints' arrival and was previously known as Fort William after William Sublette and later extensively remodeled and named Fort John." R. Don Oscarson and Stanley B. Kimball, *The Travelers' Guide to Historic Mormon America* (Salt

- Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 76. In 1846, it was described by Orson Pratt: "The walls . . . were built of clay or unburnt brick, being about 15 feet high, . . . measuring on the exterior 116 by 168 feet. Ranges of houses were built in the interior and adjoining the walls, leaving a central yard of about 100 feet square." B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1930), 3:192. See also 3:192n1 for an earlier description of the fort.
18. Brown, "Sketch," 4.
 19. Brown, "Sketch," 4.
 20. Brown, *Autobiography*, 67, 70; Brown, "Sketch," 4.
 21. "Mississippi Saints," *Pioneer Heritage*, 2:427.
 22. Arrington, "Mississippi Mormons," 48. Richards appears to be the anglicized version of his French name.
 23. Bennett, *We'll Find the Place*, 173.
 24. Colorado became the 38th state of the Union on August 1, 1876, as a result of a population explosion caused by the discovery of gold.
 25. Brown, *Autobiography*, 69–70.
 26. Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: Society on the High Plains, 1832–1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 176.
 27. Lecompte, *Pueblo*, 180.
 28. Mary Lindenmuth Scarcello, *Mormon Pioneers in Pueblo, Colorado, 1846–1900* (Pueblo, CO: Mary Lindenmuth Scarcello, 1993), 44. Scarcello has done extensive work on Latter-day Saint colonization in Colorado. Her work has been honored and reported by the media. She has brought significant attention to the role of the Mississippi Saints in the settlement of the state.
 29. There was one additional traveler, Wales Bonny, who departed along with the other Latter-day Saint leaders. John Brown left the following description: "There were seven of us including a man from Oregon. We had one wagon and several riding animals." The Oregon traveler was a non-Mormon who was traveling with the others for protection from the Indians, companionship, and so on. This group, in turn, joined with yet a larger group of teamsters, undoubtedly for the same reasons.

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- Bonny left the Mississippi leaders at Independence, Missouri. Brown, "Sketch," 5.
30. Brown, "Sketch," 5.
 31. Brown, *Autobiography*, 70.
 32. Brown, *Autobiography*, 71. Specifically named in Brown's journal were two emissaries of President Brigham Young, John D. Lee and Howard Egan, who were following the battalion and collecting money from the soldiers for the men's families and the Church. When Lee and Egan returned to Winter Quarters, they undoubtedly provided the first information available to Brigham Young and general Church leaders concerning the location of the Mississippi pioneers.
 33. Brown, "Sketch," 6.
 34. Brown, *Autobiography*, 71; Brown, "Sketch," 5–6.
 35. Brown, "Sketch," 6. Despite the fact that some of these African Americans died as a result of exposure, cold, and ill-preparation for the arduous nature of this trip, the arrival of those who survived must be seen as the beginning of what became a significant population of blacks, some of whom were Latter-day Saints, in Salt Lake City and consequently other western states.
 36. Brown, "Sketch," 6.
 37. John F. Yurtinus, "A Ram in the Thicket: The Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1975), 1:261. Historian Yurtinus concluded that "it was the news from William Crosby and John Brown and the other migrants that led Lieutenant Andrew Jackson Smith, commander of the Mormon Battalion, to dispatch the first detachment of ailing soldiers to Pueblo."
 38. Yurtinus, "Ram in the Thicket," 2:261.
 39. Yurtinus, "Ram in the Thicket," 1:261–62.
 40. The names of the battalion soldiers participating in the second detachment to Pueblo are listed in Daniel Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War, 1846–1847* (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1969), 169–70.
 41. Yurtinus, "Ram in the Thicket," 1:265.

42. Yurtinus, "Ram in the Thicket," 1:267.
43. Not all accounts are in full agreement regarding the mildness or intensity of the winter of 1846–47 in the Colorado mountains. Daniel Tyler reported that those of the Willis detachment feared "that the snow was so deep we could not cross the mountains and some resolved not to attempt it. . . . We continued, . . . traveling through snow from two to four feet deep, with continued cold, piercing wind." He continues, "I marched at the head of the column to break the road through enormous snow banks. It was with the greatest exertion that we succeeded, and some were severely frost-bitten." Tyler, *Mormon Battalion*, 193. Seemingly in contradiction, award-winning Colorado author Lecompte notes, "On the whole, the winter at Pueblo was a good one for the Mormons as the more honest and cheerful would admit." *Pueblo*, 181. Yurtinus notes that for the "saints who spent the uncommonly mild winter of 1846–47, at Pueblo, life was relatively comfortable and pleasant." "Ram in the Thicket," 1:291. An explanation that would fit all of these scenarios would suggest that the valley where Pueblo is located was largely protected from the intensity of mountain storms surrounding it.
44. Lecompte, *Pueblo*, 180.
45. Arrington, "Mississippi Mormons," 49.
46. Scarcello, *Mormon Pioneers in Pueblo*, 46.
47. Southerners were often selected as camp hunters in the pioneer companies. They were experienced hunters as a result of their culture and excelled at it, to the benefit of others who relied on the success of their ability.
48. Lecompte, *Pueblo*, 46.
49. Yurtinus, "Ram in the Thicket," 1:292.
50. A fandango was usually a spirited social activity that included dancing and refreshments, but fandangos typically got out of hand and often resulted in a drunken brawl. *Fandango* is a Spanish term meaning a lively Spanish dance in triple time. In Pueblo, unfortunately, the fandango instigators were too often frontier Americans who would "seize their partners with the grip of a grizzly bear and whirl and twirl, jump and thump, whooping

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- unearthly yells as they stamped through an Indian scalp dance.” Behavior was always intensified by the effects of liquor. Lecompte, *Pueblo*, 61.
51. Sarah J. Brown Lowry, December 17, 1846, in Yurtinus, “Ram in the Thicket,” 1:294.
 52. Lecompte, *Pueblo*, 182.
 53. Scarcello, *Mormon Pioneers in Pueblo*, 119.
 54. Scarcello, *Mormon Pioneers in Pueblo*, 155–56.
 55. Yurtinus, “Ram in the Thicket,” 1:297.
 56. John Brown had returned home, according to counsel, to outfit his family and begin again to immigrate west. In late October or early November, however, Brigham Young sent messengers to advise the Mississippi Saints to wait an additional year but send able-bodied men to assist in the move to the Great Basin. Brown arrived in Winter Quarters only days prior to the company’s departure with six men, three of them African American (slaves to their Latter-day Saint Southern masters). “It was the severest trip I had undertaken,” remembered Brown. The adverse conditions cost the lives of two slaves who were sent to assist the Saints but were joined in Winter Quarters by another from Nauvoo. In the vanguard company, John was made captain of the Thirteenth Ten. The men he brought and the experience he had from his overland journey the previous year proved invaluable to the company’s progress and success. Charmaine Lay Kohler, *Southern Grace: A Story of Mississippi Saints* (Boise, ID: Beagle Creek Press, 1995), 58–59. Accompanying Brown on his second trip west were three African American slaves, supervised by Brown and sent with him to assist by their masters. Hark Lay belonged to William Lay, who traveled West with the Mississippi Saints in 1846 and again with his family in 1848. William never joined the Church but he supported his wife and family who did. Hark died in California, where the Lay family helped to colonize in San Bernardino. “William Crosby also went to California, and took his servant Oscar Crosby, along with him . . . where the latter died.” The third slave was Green Flake, furnished by James Madison Flake to assist the pioneers. After receiving his freedom, Green lived for years in Idaho and later at Fort Union, Utah. Green was an honored guest at the

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- fiftieth anniversary celebration of the pioneers' entry into the Salt Lake Valley. Brown, *Autobiography*, 73.
57. Yurtinus, "Ram in the Thicket," 1:321.
 58. Joel Judkins Terrell Diary: Account of activities as a member of Company "C" of the Mormon Battalion under the command of Captain James Brown, June 20, 1847, as cited in Yurtinus, "Ram in the Thicket," 1:324.
 59. Yurtinus, "Ram in the Thicket," 1:321, 325.
 60. Elden J. Watson, comp., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1846–1847* (Salt Lake City: Elden J. Watson, 1971), 557.
 61. Bennett, *We'll Find the Place*, 176, 178.
 62. While still at Fort Laramie, "a party of four men arrived from St. Joseph, Missouri, having made the journey in seventeen days." They reported having passed two thousand wagons in multiple companies. Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 3:194. It had taken the vanguard company fifty-three days to cover the same distance.
 63. The names of all forty-two members of the advanced company under the leadership of Orson Pratt, including nearly two dozen members of the Mississippi Saints, who were the first company to enter the Salt Lake Valley are named in Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 3:228–29.
 64. Andrew Jenson, *Church Chronology: A Record of Important Events Pertaining to the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1899), 33.
 65. Roberts, *Comprehensive History*, 3:214.
 66. Brown, *Autobiography*, 78.
 67. Parrish, "Mississippi Saints," 504.