



*Crossing the Mississippi on the Ice*

Painting by C. C. A. Christensen. Courtesy of the Brigham Young University Museum of Art.

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## THE MORMON EXODUS

### AS SEEN THROUGH THE HORACE K. WHITNEY JOURNALS

*Richard E. Bennett*

**T**he Mormon exodus of 1846–47 from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Rocky Mountains is a well-documented chapter in American history. Scholars such as Preston Nibley, Wallace Stegner, Ronald Barney, William Hartley, Will Bagley, myself, and others have written extensively on the topic. In doing so, we have relied on a multitude of original manuscript sources including diaries, letters, reminiscences, autobiographies, Church meeting minutes, government sources, and other related records. The Mormon exodus continues to be a topic of enduring interest not only because of the descriptions of life along the trail but also for what it says of a westering America's intent upon finding its own Manifest Destiny. The Mormon exodus, however, as this book is set to tell, is the remarkable story of the expulsion of an entire religious enterprise and of a deeply convicted people committed to finding their way and preserving their faith, no matter the cost.

*Richard E. Bennett is a professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University.*

Nothing quite like it exists in all of American history, and whenever new or—as in this case—overlooked material comes forth that sheds valuable new insights on this story, it is well worth historical consideration.

The Mormons were avid record keepers as per the injunction given to them in the Doctrine and Covenants—a book of visions, revelations, and proclamations received primarily by the Prophet Joseph Smith Jr. As recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, the injunction was given in 1830 on the very day The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized: “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). The Mormons knew they were making history when they began their sojourn into the wilderness and thus kept detailed camp and private journals. The purpose of this chapter is to comment on the specific contributions of the never-before-published overland journals of Horace K. Whitney. These journals have been long housed in the Church History Library of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but overlooked and underappreciated, and I believe they have much to contribute to this remarkable story.<sup>1</sup>

### **A Short Biography**

Horace Kimball Whitney (1823–84) was the son of Newel K. Whitney, the second presiding bishop of the Church, and Elizabeth Ann Whitney. Horace Whitney married Helen Mar Kimball, daughter of Heber C. Kimball and Vilate Kimball, on February 3, 1846, in the Nauvoo Temple one day before the Saints began moving west. Both Horace Whitney and Helen Kimball were children of the Restoration, having lived through the difficult, trying times the Latter-day Saints had experienced in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Young Horace was only twenty-two years of age when the first Mormon wagons rolled out of Nauvoo. Helen bore eleven children, including Orson F. Whitney, who would later serve as an Apostle for the Church from 1906 to 1931. Thus one might say that this young couple had “seen it

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all” and were well aware of the unique teachings and emerging marriage practices of the Church. Helen Mar died in Salt Lake City a half century later on November 15, 1896, twelve years after the death of her husband. Well-educated and an expert musician and mathematician, Horace served as a major in the Utah Territorial Nauvoo Legion. For many years he was a member of the Deseret Dramatic Association at the Salt Lake Theater and worked for many years as a printer for the *Deseret News* newspaper; he set the type for its first edition in 1853.

Both Horace and Helen Mar faithfully kept records throughout their lives. Horace wrote a missionary journal of his labors in 1843 and later on six very detailed, handwritten diaries of his entire Mormon exodus experience. Helen Mar published a series of reminiscences on the Mormon exodus in her later life in the *Woman's Exponent*, a literary magazine aimed at the Mormon female audience, that constitute a fine complement to her husband's diaries. Together, these two records form one of the most comprehensive records of the Mormon exodus extant and certainly the best husband-and-wife account available.<sup>2</sup>

### Scope of Coverage

The Mormon exodus is a complicated affair and is perhaps best understood in five distinct phases:

1. The departure from Nauvoo, Illinois, and the crossing of Iowa Territory, February–August 1846.
2. The Winter Quarters (Nebraska) settlement, fall 1846–spring 1847 (and later in Kaneshville, Iowa, just across the Missouri River).
3. The vanguard company journey of the original Mormon pioneers under the direction of Brigham Young from the Missouri River Valley to the valley of the Great Salt Lake, April 1–July 24, 1847.
4. The original summer settlement in the Salt Lake Valley, complete with building fortifications, planting crops, and establishing colonization priorities, July 25–August 31, 1847.

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5. The return trip of the company of the Twelve Apostles and other Church leaders from the Salt Lake Valley back to Winter Quarters, September 1–October 31, 1847.

Several excellent journals have been published over the years that document the exodus, including the writings of Thomas Bullock, William Clayton, Orson Pratt, Hosea Stout, Erastus Snow, Howard Egan, Norton Jacob, and Wilford Woodruff.<sup>3</sup> Each has its own unique strengths and limitations. The purpose of this study is certainly not to argue that the Whitney journals are any better or more complete than these other fine records; however, it is in comparison to, and in company with, these journals that they take on special significance.

Most of these pioneer journals cover selected portions of the exodus, as the diagram depicts:

Diarists	Segments (taken from the listed five distinct phases)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Thomas Bullock		x	x	x	
Wilford Woodruff		x	x	x	x
Hosea Stout	x	x	x		
Orson Pratt	x		x		
William Clayton	x	x	x	x	x
Norton Jacob	x	x	x	x	x
Erastus Snow	x	x	x	x	

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<b>Howard Egan</b>			x		
<b>Horace K. Whitney</b>	x	x	x	x	x

A significant contribution of the Whitney journals is that they cover all five segments and give a very complete account of the entire Mormon exodus story. While their scope is more comprehensive than some of the other leading accounts, it is the tone, emphasis, and importance of those matters Whitney feels are of particular significance that his writings take on a particular interest, especially to the more seasoned scholar. I will provide only a few examples from each phase of the exodus, insights that add new understandings to this defining chapter in Mormon history.

### Phase 1: Crossing Iowa

The initial Mormon migration west was to have happened in 1846. Their vanguard companies of approximately 2,500 left Nauvoo in early February 1846. The original plan called for pioneers to cross Iowa in four to six weeks, ferry over the Missouri river in quick time, and then have Brigham Young and a handpicked number of the best pioneers head west and find a suitable valley somewhere in the tops of the Rocky Mountains later that summer and in time to put in late-bearing crops.

However, it was not to be. Brother Brigham might have been able to escape his enemies, but he could never get away from his people. Not far into their journey, in exasperation he soundly criticized his followers who were afraid of being left behind:

The Saints have crowded on us all the while, and have completely tied our hands by importuning and saying: Do not leave us behind. Wherever you go, we want to go, be with you, and thus our hands and feet have been bound which has caused our delay to the present time, and now hundreds at Nauvoo

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are continually praying . . . that they may overtake us and be with us. . . . They are afraid to let us go on and leave them behind, forgetting that they have covenanted to help the poor away at the sacrifice of all their property.<sup>4</sup>

Such crowding, delays, and insufferable heavy rains in that spring of 1846 impeded their progress. Hundreds who were left at Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah hastily erected way stations in Iowa that pioneers established to preserve their health and strength and to put in crops for the thousands yet to follow. Whitney's journal attests abundantly to the trials and travails of crossing Iowa. The entry from April 11 states, "Some of father's teams got stuck in the mud, and had to stop a mile or two back, and none reached us except Joseph Kingsbury with the buggy, the one horse wagon, and Sarah Ann's wagon. Bro. Pond broke his harness in attempting to extricate himself from a mud-hole."<sup>5</sup> And upon reaching the Grand River on May 1, Whitney wrote, "The weather has been so inclement since our arrival that our stay here will necessarily be protracted beyond the time originally intended."<sup>6</sup> Whitney not only speaks corroboratively of their well-known troubles crossing Iowa but offers a farmhand's observations into the building of both Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah, insights not always afforded by other diarists. The following is his description of the early days at Garden Grove: "There are a hundred men assigned to this business, 10 laying up rails, 48 to building houses, 12 to each house—10 herding cattle, 12 digging wells, 10 building a bridge across the river for to pass over on our journey west, 10 stocking ploughs and making drays, 5 or 6 blacksmith shops started, the remainder to attend to the business of farming, etc. etc."<sup>7</sup>

As a result, instead of crossing Iowa in four to six weeks, it took them three months. When Brigham Young and his advanced company finally reached the Missouri on June 14, 1846, it was all but too late to make a dash for the Rockies. Just getting across the Missouri River, then swollen with mountain snow run-offs, would take weeks. And every mountain man and fur trapper knew that unless travelers left

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the Missouri River for the west by June 1, they would never make it over the mountains before the winter snow flew, a lesson the Donner party, and later the Mormon handcart companies of 1856, learned to their chagrin.

And so their only recourse was to winter at the Missouri River, a plan made possible by the call of President James K. Polk and the United States Army for a Mormon battalion of five hundred men to fight in the Mexican-American War. In return, Brigham Young exacted permission to settle his bedraggled people on both sides of the Missouri. Of the 12,500 Latter-day Saints who left Nauvoo in 1846, one-third can be accounted for in Winter Quarters (Omaha) of 1846–47, a comparable number across the river in Council Bluffs, Iowa Territory, and another third scattered across Iowa and as far south as St. Louis.<sup>8</sup>

### **Phase 2: Winter Quarters** **September 1846–April 1847**

The Whitneys' writings reflect the fresh vantage point of a young, highly committed Mormon pioneer couple and lend a unique spirit of anticipation and faith to their observations. Contrasted with some other journals, specifically the writings of Hosea Stout, which tend to be critical, suspicious, and dark, the Whitneys wrote with a certain youthful alacrity.<sup>9</sup> Life lay ahead of them in all its precious excitements and anticipations. The exodus for them was thus more than the story of a religious people; rather, it was a journey of youth, a newly married couple brimming with faith, hope, and promise.

It is also important to note that most of Horace Whitney's entries are contemporary to the experience at hand. Few are recorded more than a few days after the events described take place. Such immediacy gives a more accurate record than one might otherwise expect and lends a certain air of reliability and authority to the journals.

His insights are particularly revealing about the trying and very difficult Winter Quarters segment of the Mormon exodus, that



period extending from the fall of 1846 until April the following year. The pioneers' first priority was planting spring crops, hay cropping, branding, and otherwise taking care of the thousands of head of cattle and sheep that were mostly confined in the "rush bottoms" some one hundred miles upriver. The pioneers then turned their attention to fashioning crude living quarters. More than any other observer, Whitney explains how they survived that difficult winter. He informs us on what cabins they built, how the cabins were aligned throughout their makeshift community, and much more pertaining to the social life of their new city.

While many passed the fall and early winter living in tents with wind-torn canvases, in caves dug out of the side of the Missouri riverbanks, or in wagons exposed to the elements, Whitney speaks of the great amount of tireless energy required to build life-saving, if hastily erected, cabins for as many as possible: "Saturday the 7th [of November]: Fine day. Engaged in roofing and sodding the second house into one room of which we [Horace Whitney and his wife, Helen Mar] moved this evening, the other room being occupied by Sister Kimball [Helen's mother] and Mary Kimball. We congratulated ourselves considerably upon being able to live in a house once again, as we have got thoroughly tired of living in tents."<sup>10</sup>

His diaries speak of digging 35-inch-deep wells and building, chinking, and daubing dozens of hastily built log cabins, often one or more in a day. Each cabin was five to seven feet high with sod chimneys, tent awnings supporting dirt-covered roofs with freshly cut wooden shingles, and dirt floors. Such cabins were erected very close to each other and in a "compact body" so that inhabitants might be "better able to defend [them]selves against [American Indian] encroachments."<sup>11</sup>

These lodgings were not only drafty and often cold but were not always the safest places to live. "This evening a fire was discovered under the hearth in Bro. K[imball]'s room," Whitney recorded on January 18, 1847. "We took down the better part of the chimney in order to get at the fire, which we put out, and rebuilt the chimney, this

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taking till half past 4 in the morning. Bro. K. felt very thankful that the fire did not occur in the night when we were all asleep, as there was 5 or 6 lbs of powder in a chest near the fire place, in addition to the danger incurred by the fire otherwise.”<sup>12</sup>

Whitney likewise provides us much information on the construction of the Winter Quarters Council House, which—much like his father’s store in Kirtland, Ohio—served as the mercantile establishment and central gathering place for the Mormon settlement. He also describes the many dances, balls, and festive occasions that they held during that winter, as if to defy and stave off the darkness and sadness of that fateful time. Whitney, a member of the Nauvoo Brass Band, tells of one round of parties after another. “Ellis Eames, a player on the violin, came up from the Point [Council Point],” he recorded on March 1, 1847. “A number of [the] Band including him and myself went round in a sleigh this evening, (Porter driving) and serenaded several places in the town. Bro. K. was along with us. We stopt at Bishop Hunter’s and played a tune and then by invitation of Bro. K., went to his house, where we spent some time in dancing, etc. and retired.”<sup>13</sup>

Yet Whitney was not oblivious to the sufferings and agonies of those around him that fateful winter. Sometimes referred to as Mormonism’s Valley Forge, the Latter-day Saint stay at the Missouri River in the winter of 1846–47 was a testing point of faith. William Clayton’s hymn of sacrifice and endurance—“Come, Come, Ye Saints”—which Clayton wrote while in the mud fields of Iowa, spoke of holding on despite every challenge. His prairie anthem of the exodus, which says in part, “And should we die before our journey’s through, Happy day,” is a foreboding of worse times to come.<sup>14</sup> Because of their long exposure to the elements, their poor and substandard housing, and the outbreak of fatal diseases such as malaria and scurvy, once the Mormon pioneers had reached the Missouri River, they began to perish in epidemic numbers. At least 1,200 died (one in ten) within two years of their arrival at Council Bluffs. These were frightening times among a people who believed they were on God’s errand. And Whitney speaks

much about it, although without criticism, rancor, or disbelief. His accounts of life at Winter Quarters are incomparably rich and detailed and unbelievably positive for such a dire moment, striking a tone of deliberate faithfulness in their furnace of affliction. A good example of this is his characteristically matter-of-fact entry for October 11, 1846:

Commenced raining this afternoon . . . Forgot to mention that Eliza Ann Pierson, a niece of Dr. Willard [Richards] died last evening at his tent. She had left father and mother far behind, to join the saints of God in the wilderness, to suffer and die among them for the gospel's sake. She was a worthy, exemplary young person, and the remembrance of the many happy hours I have passed in her society, together with her sisters and friends, will never be obliterated, while time shall last. She was from Richmond, Massachusetts, where I became acquainted with her during my sojourn in the [eastern] States.

Not content to dwell on such sadness, he ends his entry thus: "This afternoon the brethren drove into camp all the cattle they found during their search yesterday which covered a large space of ground."<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, most of his entries were as cheerful and upbeat as they were relatively brief. For instance, in the midst of profound sickness, serious privations, and enormously hard work, he continually saw the positive, as indicated in the following entry for November 22, 1846: "William, Porter and myself took a walk around the city [Winter Quarters] this afternoon, the first time that we three have had a social walk and 'chat', since we left the city of Nauvoo. There seems to be a particular dispensation of Providence in our behalf; for although, we have had several cold nights and frosty ones, the weather had been remarkably mild for winter, and we have not, as yet, experienced the first snow storm."<sup>16</sup> This silver-lining approach at a time when Whitney knew so many were perishing permeates much of his descriptions.

Writing for December 7, 1846, he makes reference without elaboration to the tragedy that struck Stillman Pond, who lost his wife and four children at Winter Quarters: "Rather cool today. Today Abigail

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Pond died, her two sisters, Harriet and Jane died a day or two ago.”<sup>17</sup> Writing months later of a time when hundreds of others had perished, Whitney records: “Fine day. Nothing of importance to-day. . . . There is a disease, called by the folks here, the ‘black-leg,’ getting quite prevalent in the camp. It commences with a sharp pain in the ankles, swells, and finally the leg gets almost black, and in many cases it proves fatal. There have a great many died, within the last month. It is caused, in a great measure, by the want of vegetable food, and having to eat salt food.”<sup>18</sup>

Several of the other pioneer diaries record the deaths and the sufferings of the Saints in as rich, if not more complete, detail than Whitney. They also speak of the faith of their people in these trying times. But few, if any, of the others have the same tone of youthful carefreeness that Whitney manifests. He was not oblivious to these challenges but was simply not bothered by them. It says much about his faith and the faithfulness of his people. While readers may regret the lack of intense emotion in his diaries, one senses from them a sheer determination not to surrender to the darkness and discouragements closing in around the pioneers. Their everyday efforts at survival drive off the page any lengthy gloomy ruminations of how bad things had become.

### **Phase 3: To the Valley of the Great Salt Lake**

**April–July 1847**

Whitney was one of Brigham Young’s 148 handpicked pioneers who left Winter Quarters in April 1847, and his account of their journey west to the valley of the Great Salt Lake is no better nor worse than other accounts. It lacks the scientific observations of Orson Pratt’s and the topographical details of William Clayton’s. One of Whitney’s strengths lies in his fascination with the American Indian, including descriptions of the Otoe, Omaha, Ponca, Pottawattamie, Pawnee, Sioux, Shoshone, and Ute Indian tribes. He speaks in a fair-minded

way of their habits, tribal warfare, trading practices, lodgings, hunting patterns, fears, and frustrations and occasionally of how they were mistreated and misunderstood. For example, the following entry tells of the government payments made for certain American Indian land properties back at the Missouri River: "Bro. [Clayton] informs me he never saw such a swindling operation as that practiced on the Indians down there, they receiving their payments in money and then followed by a gang of sharpers who watch their opportunity, get them drunk and then gamble with them and cheat them out all their money. Bro. John Kay came down here from the Punkaw [Ponca] nation. He has been out with them hunting since he left here and will rejoin them in 6 weeks from this time."<sup>19</sup> Whitney includes this very sad observation on December 12, 1846: "This evening, the [Omaha] Indians encamped near Brigham's, had a great powwow among them, screeching and yelling in a horrible manner on account of their having just received intelligence that a large number of their warriors, who went on the hunting expedition a short time since, having been killed off by the Sioux."<sup>20</sup>

The Mormons made a calculated, risk-bearing decision to make their own trail on the north side of the Platte rather than follow the California and Oregon Trail on the south side.<sup>21</sup> This brought them square into Pawnee country and right through the heart of the Pawnee Indian villages. The pioneers believed that it was better to make peace with them upfront. Writing on April 22 near the Pawnee Indian villages on the north side of the Platte, Whitney recorded: "Pres't Young . . . said that if we had an attack from Indians, it would be from the Sioux, not the Pawnees, for the latter knew that the former were in the country and were watching them—that the Sioux when they came to make an attack, always [down] a little ravine that lies north-east of us."<sup>22</sup>

Upon reaching the Pawnee village, Whitney describes it thus: "Orson and myself went and took a view of the ruins of the Pawnee village which was an interesting sight, indeed, and gave me singular

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feelings. The village is situated on the northern bank of and immediately fronting the river—it is irregularly formed, or laid out, is 1¼ a mile in extent and comprised upwards of 200 lodges, a great share of which have been burnt down by the Sioux.”<sup>23</sup> The Mormons had brought a cannon to scare off possible American Indian attacks—attacks that never came.

While traveling through Nebraska and Wyoming, Whitney offered daily insights on the weather, the Platte River, buffalo (“the plain is perfectly black with them”),<sup>24</sup> hunting expeditions, accidents along the trail, camp life, Sunday sermons, daily mileages, and multiple creek and river crossings. As with most other overland trail journals, he gives ample attention to such trail landmarks as Ash Hollow; Chimney Rock (which they reached in late May); Scott’s Bluff; Fort Laramie and its chief proprietor, James Bordeaux; Independence Rock; South Pass; Fort Bridger; and ultimately the Salt Lake Valley.

The Whitney journals are unexceptional in their daily accounts. Thomas Bullock, official camp clerk, provided much more detail. Their major contribution, however, is providing us with an understanding of the organization of the companies of the Saints and the doctrinal underpinnings surrounding it. As the son of Presiding Bishop Newel K. Whitney, Horace Whitney was a trusted secretary to Brigham Young and knew well the inner operations of the Church. Thus he was tasked by Brigham Young and other prominent leaders to keep their records, provide secretarial services, and record carefully and legibly the comings and goings of the Saints. For instance, it was Whitney who recorded one transcription of Joseph Smith’s revelation on eternal or celestial (plural) marriage (now section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants). Having grown up in the Church, he and his wife knew the personalities of Church leadership firsthand, were highly trusted, and were well seasoned in the doctrine, culture, and family practices of Mormonism.

Whitney’s journals are not given to the spiritual ruminations that the Wilford Woodruff journals sometimes are. As a laborer,

shepherd, and all-around construction worker, Whitney was much closer to the hands-on, everyday, basic survival activities of the camps. These routine, but essential, duties included herding sheep and cattle, working with the various American Indian tribes, hunting and fishing, putting in crops, and undertaking a myriad of other life-sustaining responsibilities.

Yet the careful observer will also see much more in the Horace Whitney diaries than merely Whitney's descriptions of the physical, for carefully tucked away within them are keys to a remarkable understanding of unique Mormon doctrines and practices as they were beginning to play out on the outer edges of the great American wilderness. Joseph Smith Jr. had introduced the concept of the eternity of the marriage covenant shortly before his death in 1844 and along with it the practice of "celestial," or plural, marriage, (both of which were associated with the Nauvoo Temple) and its attendant doctrines of baptisms for the dead and endowments for the living. Such are well known by historians today. Not nearly so well understood was the law of adoption, revealed in Nauvoo and played out along the Mormon Trail.<sup>25</sup>

The principle of adoption had both a doctrinal underpinning and a social application. The law of adoption was based upon the belief that salvation in the next life was dependent upon being sealed to someone who held the power or priesthood of God and more specifically to someone who held such priesthood keys and authorities. As with their trek west, which demanded the help and cooperation of all in camp, salvation was arguably less an individual concern and more a group or family matter. As they wended their way west, it was, as William Clayton reminded them in his hymn, always a matter of "*we'll* find the place" and "should *we* die" rather than one going it alone. For these Mormon pioneers, they either made it in this life and in the next in the company of others, or they did not make it at all.

The law of adoption was an early expression of this group salvation concept. The uniquely Mormon doctrine of baptisms for the

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dead, practiced in Nauvoo since 1840, was based upon the belief that families must somehow be linked together in one great family chain extending back into the mists of earthly time and that such extended and extensive earthly families could be welded together by priesthood authority and ordinances for eternity. As Joseph Smith revealed, “The earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the [ancestral] fathers and the children, upon some subject or other—and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead” (D&C 128:18). To speak of baptisms for the dead without intergenerational family sealings is to miss a critical point of Mormon doctrine.

A problem in the developing doctrine of Mormon salvation at this very early formative time was that deceased ancestors and ancestral families had died and gone on without the saving power of the priesthood. To be sealed to a man who had not had the gospel in his life and who had never received the priesthood was not yet clear or convincing in Mormon thinking. In fact, it would not be until 1877 in the St. George (Utah) Temple that endowments for the dead and intergenerational family sealings began.<sup>26</sup> Until then, Latter-day Saint understanding was that the dead should be sealed, or adopted, into priesthood families represented best by Church leaders or General Authorities, living or dead.

The essential thing was for the male household head of the family and his plural marriage wives and families to be sealed to, or adopted by, those priesthood leaders over him who held the keys of authority and eternal life in what might be seen as a vertical, interconnected chain of priesthood-based, assured salvation. The practice of plural marriage, by which multiple wives were sealed or married to the same man, was an extension or appendage to this doctrinal understanding, the horizontal branches to the ever-expanding kingdom or tree of family salvation. And for a man to be an adopted son of such a family or a woman to be sealed through being married (through plural marriage, if need be) into it, provided an expectation of a more economically secure living



in this world and the assurance of an eternal one hereafter complete with family and friends. It is small wonder that such practices were of great importance to this growing number of Latter-day Saints, many of whom wondered if they would survive the coming exodus west.

The practice of the law of adoption impacted dramatically both the social order of the Winter Quarters community and the travel patterns of the exodus. The law of adoption often dictated social spheres of influence, one's circle of friends and associates, and even the locale of tents or cabins. One's place in the family hierarchy provided some kind of social stratification. Those in Brigham Young's expanding family lived fairly close to one another, as did those in Heber C. Kimball's, Wilford Woodruff's, Willard Richards's, and other prominent Church leaders. And the expectation was that in return for spiritual blessings and eternal inheritances due their spiritual fathers, adopted sons and families owed them physical support.

Occasionally large adopted-family or tribal-family meetings convened in Winter Quarters and along the trail for instructional purposes. Brigham Young, who was then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and effective leader over the entire Church (and later made President of the Church in late 1847), remarked as follows in one such meeting: "Those that are adopted into my family[—] . . . I will preside over them throughout all eternity and will stand at their head. Joseph [Smith] will stand at the head of this Church and will be their president, prophet and god to the people in this dispensation. When we locate [in the mountains] I will settle my family down in the order and teach them their duties. They will then have to provide temporal blessings for me instead of my boarding from 40 to 50 persons as I do now, and will administer spiritual blessings for them."<sup>27</sup>

Here, then, is another reason why the Horace Whitney diaries take on increasing significance. His biological father and the presiding bishop over the entire Church was Newel K. Whitney, who, in turn, was an adopted son—in the priesthood lineage sense described above—of Apostle Heber C. Kimball, who, coincidentally, was also

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the biological father of his wife, Helen Mar Kimball Whitney. Horace Whitney identifies by name a large number of three or four dozen men and their families who belonged by the law of adoption to Heber Kimball: Jackson Redding, Asa Davis, Howard Egan, Dan Davis, Ellis Sanders, J. M. Grant, and Alfred Randall, to name but a few.<sup>28</sup> He even spent most of one day and part of the next in early January making out a list of the entire Kimball clan.<sup>29</sup> Many of the Kimball family log cabins were erected in close proximity one to another, a Kimball enclave within an already tightly-drawn Mormon wilderness community. And, by extension, the whole of Winter Quarters was “family-ized” in similar fashion. Whitney’s diaries, therefore, provide a whole new understanding of the complicated social order among the Latter-day Saints and of developing doctrines and practices attendant to the exodus.

The original plan of the Mormon exodus from Winter Quarters to the Salt Lake Valley was supposed to have followed after this tribal pattern. In their wintertime deliberations in mid-January at the newly constructed Council House, Brigham Young drew up plans to have the first company or “division” of one hundred be drawn from his adopted (or spiritual) family, the second hundred from Heber C. Kimball’s, and so forth.<sup>30</sup> Though this plan was eventually discarded in favor of a handpicked crew of well-skilled teamsters, farmers, fishermen, surveyors, explorers, and other pioneers, several of those even in the vanguard company identified themselves as belonging to one family clan or another.

In unofficially recording the essence of some of these large adopted family meetings, Whitney provides invaluable insights into the need for such adoptions and the intergenerational linkages they entailed. Said Apostle Heber C. Kimball after listening to comments from his adopted son, Presiding Bishop Newel K. Whitney:

Bro. Heber [Kimball] arose and said, I have been much edified by the conversation of Brother Whitney, and we always had the same feelings in common

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and our views always met, and our thoughts flow in the same channel. . . . I am your head, your lawgiver, and king, and will be, to all eternity, and I am responsible to my head and President and you are responsible to me, your file leader. I believe that some of my old progenitors, of whom I have no knowledge, will appear and tell me when the time shall come for me to rise up and administer in the ordinances for them, and I shall receive a great deal of knowledge from them. . . . I want to have power, when I see my brother and sister, to tell Death to depart.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, from time to time, whether at Winter Quarters or at resting places along the trail, Whitney provides profound doctrinal insights into Mormon thought and social practices as they were developing along their way to their new mountain Zion.

### **Phase 4: The Salt Lake Valley Settlement**

**July 25–August 31**

Unfortunately, upon reaching the Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1847, Whitney says nothing about what Brigham Young said when he first saw the future home of the Mormon people. Of that fateful day he simply writes, “Going down several steep descents, we at length emerged from the pass (having come 4 miles) and were highly gratified with a fine view of the open country and the ‘Great Salt Lake’, whose blue surface could be seen in the distance with a lofty range of mountains in the background.” Not given to hyperbole, Whitney stoops to discover something closer by, something that will later come to discomfort the Mormon settlements like little else would: “One thing I omitted to mention, viz. there are numerous black crickets of an enormous size to be seen here.”<sup>32</sup>

Reaching the floor of the valley on his twenty-fifth birthday, Whitney speaks of the need for immediate irrigation efforts, early scouting expeditions, Brigham Young’s satisfaction with the valley as their promised land, edifying sermons in celebration of finding their place, hunting expeditions, floating on the Great Salt Lake,

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and the feverish pace of planting crops in soil better than they had anticipated—all with the excitement of a young child on Christmas morn. He also tells of surveying their new city under the direction of Henry G. Sherwood; fencing and building stockades, adobe houses, log cabins, and a bowery; and their first encounters with the Shoshone and Ute Indians.

More optimistic than he had been in Winter Quarters, there is a spirit of redemption that permeates his entries, a promise now fulfilled, a place sought after and now discovered. To that end, Whitney records in detail the sermon his father-in-law, Heber C. Kimball, gave on August 22, 1847, including the following: “I wish to God, we had not got to return. If I had my family here, I would give anything I have. This is a Paradise to me. It is one of the most lovely places I ever beheld. I hope none of us will be left to pollute this land.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Phase 5: Return to Winter Quarters** **September–October 1847**

But they had to return. While some Mormon settlers returned east in piecemeal fashion, the account of the return of 108 men, including Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and most of the other leading authorities of the Church, is not well covered in other leading Mormon exodus journals. It is, however, amply documented in Whitney’s writings, as Whitney was among the few directed to return. Leaving the valley on August 26, 1847, the return company made much faster mileage going back than they ever had coming out. They often covered twenty-two to twenty-eight miles per day, compared to fifteen on the outbound journey, on account of knowledge of the trail, few if any wagons, the use of horses rather than oxen, knowledge of the best camping spots, and shallower creeks and rivers because of the lateness of the season. Among the highlights of their return trip was meeting the so-called emigrant camp, or “Big Camps,” of Mormons heading west to the valley under the direction of Parley P. Pratt and John Taylor.

Upon reaching Winter Quarters on October 30, Whitney in his matter-of-fact style ended his journal with the following:

An expression was then taken whether we should all remain in a body, horse-men and all, and go into town together or otherwise; which resulted in the affirmative. Pres't Young and Bro. Heber then spoke briefly, stating that they were satisfied with the conduct of the Pioneers during the journey of the past season, and blessed them in the name of the Lord; and soon after we were dismissed with the injunction to provide plenty of cotton wood for our horses during the night. Bro. Heber let me have a little flour to-night, as my provisions had all given out.<sup>34</sup>

### Gender Inclusivity

The diaries of Horace and Helen Mar Whitney are valuable for yet another reason: they are the only record of its kind to which the writer's wife added her published insights and commentaries. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney was herself an eyewitness to the exodus. She departed Nauvoo with her husband, lived at Winter Quarters, and in 1848 left for the Salt Lake Valley after her husband's return to the Missouri River. Years later she published a very detailed, reflective commentary on her husband's exodus journals. In doing so, she added thereto important details, human interest elaborations, and doctrinal insights from a uniquely feminine perspective. Helen Mar's writings were first published serially in the *Woman's Exponent* from 1880 to 1886 and later in edited book form by Jeni and Richard Holzapfel in 1997.<sup>35</sup> Although relying heavily on her husband's journal, Helen Mar's commentaries also include various Church documents and comments from the writings of her father, Heber C. Kimball, as well as from Brigham Young, Thomas L. Kane, John Taylor, and more. Helen Mar's additions thus bring to life rather mundane series of entries, provide color and tone, and argue for the importance of what was happening from a retrospective and female position.

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For instance, speaking of the delays in leaving Nauvoo, Helen Mar wrote, "In the first exodus there was such a great desire among the people and such a determination to emigrate with the first company that there were hundreds started without the necessary outfit. They could neither procure sufficient teams nor provisions, which retarded our progress, and was the cause of a greater amount of suffering than there would otherwise have been. And my father, in speaking of it, said, under the circumstances it would take years to reach the mountains."<sup>36</sup>

Her accounts of the cabins at Winter Quarters take on a more fulsome aspect than those of her husband's:

On the 8th of Dec. Horace mentions being engaged "mudding up his room," his brother Orson assisting him. This, like the majority of the houses, was covered with sod, and the chimneys were built of the same. Each room had one door and a window with four panes of glass, but no floor. I was rather unfortunate, first, in having a chimney that seldom drew the smoke, particularly when the weather was cold enough to need a roaring fire in front of a good sized back-log, and then being prostrated on my bed from the 23rd of January till along in March; it gave me the opportunity of cultivating the qualities of patience and calmness under new vicissitudes, from which there was no alternative, only to endure them with as good grace as possible, for many of the Saints were still without a roof to cover them. . . . our floors we managed to cover with canvas or pieces of carpeting, which had outlived the storms and the wear and tear while journeying from the states. We made curtains serve as partitions to divide the bedrooms, repositories, etc., from the kitchen. Our . . . cupboards and bedsteads [were] attached to the house, also tables, chairs and stools, and an occasional rocking chair, relics of other days . . . I was fortunate in having one of the latter, which I had brought with me. And here I received my "setting out" in crockery ware, etc., which, though not very extensive, was deemed quite immense for those times. Our marriage taking place just as we were about starting from the states, the presenting of these articles was postponed till a future time. . . . Two or three pieces I have still, which I keep

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in memory of the various and peculiar scenes through which we have passed together; as well as the loved ones who have passed away.<sup>37</sup>

And it takes a woman's frame of reference to discuss plural marriage at Winter Quarters in ways that her husband never thought of doing. Referencing his rather spare entry for February 9, 1847, she elaborates as follows:

The same evening he makes mention of my father's calling his wives together, who had infants, for the purpose of blessing them, which was done in my mother's room, by B. Young, father and Bishop Whitney, Dr. Richards acting as clerk. There were seven in number—four had been born at Nauvoo, one at Richardson's Point, Iowa, and two at Winter Quarters. The eldest was my mother's son, Brigham Willard, born January 29th 1845. The names of those mothers were Sarah Peck, Clarrissa Cutler, Emily Cutler, Sarah Ann Whitney, Lucy Walker. The Two latter were the wives of the Prophet Joseph, whom father had taken for time only.<sup>38</sup>

Other accounts from Helen Mar's writings could be added here but what is included provides a sense of her unique perspectives, family details, and added value. Her commentaries are therefore a veritable treasure of feminine insights to Mormon doctrine and social practices as well as the everyday accounts of the exodus.

In summary, the Horace K. Whitney journals are a treasure in Mormon and American history. They have a freshness and vitality that are highly attractive. While given to the pragmatic details of common, everyday living, they also provide remarkably candid insights into the peculiar Mormon ways of living and believing. While discussing the negative and the forlorn, they maintain a cheerful, youthful tone and contemporary perspective. A fuller, deeper understanding of the Mormon exodus in all its phases and complexities is impossible without consulting them. They will be a lasting tribute to those men and

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women who made so many sacrifices in the cause of their faith and in the hope of a new life “far away in the West.”<sup>39</sup>

### Notes

1. Housed for over a century in Salt Lake City in the Church History Library of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Horace K. Whitney journals have never been published, although a transcription of the journals was prepared in the 1970s by Edyth J. Romney and has been available for years.
2. Helen Mar Whitney is also of interest to Mormon history for another very particular reason. In May (or June) 1843 at the age of 14, she married, or was sealed, to Joseph Smith Jr. in Nauvoo as the youngest of his many wives. In later years she reverently referred to this episode as a spiritual highlight of her life and was ever a staunch defender of the practice of plural marriage, long a staple characteristic of the Mormons in Utah. She was in a unique position to speak of, and defend, the “principle,” and she continued to do so until her death in 1896.
3. See *The Pioneer Camp of the Saints: The 1846 and 1847 Mormon Trail Journals of Thomas Bullock*, ed. Will Bagley (Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark, 1997); William Clayton, *William Clayton's Journal: A Daily Record of the Journey of the Original Company of "Mormon" Pioneers from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake* (Salt Lake City: Clayton Family Association, 1921); *The Orson Pratt Journals*, comp. and arr. Elden J. Watson (Salt Lake City: Elden Jay Watson, 1975); *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1861*, ed. Juanita Brooks, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964); The Journals of Erastus Snow, typescript, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; *Pioneering the West, 1846 to 1878: Major Howard Egan's Diary*, ed. Wm. M. Egan (Richmond, UT: Howard R. Egan Estate, 1917); *The Mormon Vanguard Brigade of 1847: Norton Jacob's Record*, ed. Ronald O. Barney (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005); *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898 Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983–84).



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4. Journal History of the Church, May 3, 1846, Church History Library.
5. Horace K. Whitney journals, April 11, 1846.
6. Horace K. Whitney journals, May 1, 1846.
7. Horace K. Whitney journals, April 27, 1846.
8. Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri: Winter Quarters, 1846–1852* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 90.
9. For the best study of Hosea Stout, see *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout*.
10. Horace K. Whitney journals, November 7, 1846.
11. Horace K. Whitney journals, December 13, 1846.
12. Horace K. Whitney journals, January 18, 1847.
13. Horace K. Whitney journals, March 1, 1847.
14. William Clayton, “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 30.
15. Horace K. Whitney journals, October 11, 1846.
16. Horace K. Whitney journals, November 22, 1846.
17. Horace K. Whitney journals, December 7, 1846.
18. Horace K. Whitney journals, March 18, 1847.
19. Horace K. Whitney journals, November 6, 1846.
20. Horace K. Whitney journals, December 12, 1846.
21. Richard E. Bennett, *We’ll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846–1848* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 124–25.
22. Horace K. Whitney journals, April 22, 1847.
23. Horace K. Whitney journals, April 24, 1847.
24. Horace K. Whitney journals, May 6, 1847.
25. For a good introduction to the law of adoption, see Gordon Irving, “The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830–1900,” *BYU Studies* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1974): 291–314. See also Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri: Winter Quarters, 1846–1852*.
26. For much more on this subject, see Richard E. Bennett, “‘Line Upon Line, Precept Upon Precept’: Revelations on the 1877 Commencement of the

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- Performance of Endowments and Sealings for the Dead,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 38–77.
27. John D. Lee, journal, February 16, 1847, as quoted in Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri: Winter Quarters, 1846–1852*, 192.
  28. Horace K. Whitney journals, October 19, 1846.
  29. Horace K. Whitney journals, January 1–2, 1847.
  30. Horace K. Whitney journals, January 18–22, 1847.
  31. Horace K. Whitney journals, February 14, 1847.
  32. Horace K. Whitney journals, July 24, 1847.
  33. Horace K. Whitney journals, August 22, 1847.
  34. Horace K. Whitney journals, October 30, 1847.
  35. Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, eds., *A Woman’s View: Helen Mar Whitney’s Reminiscences of Early Church History* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1997).
  36. Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *A Woman’s View*, 343.
  37. Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *A Woman’s View*, 420–21.
  38. Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *A Woman’s View*, 430. Helen Mar’s accounts attest to Joseph Smith’s having several polygamous wives and are therefore highly important for a fuller understanding of the origins and extent of polygamy in Joseph Smith’s teachings.
  39. Clayton, “Come, Come, Ye Saints.”