Introduction

The story of the Mormon exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the valley of the Great Salt Lake still stirs the imagination of writers, artists, historians, and musicians. Letters, diaries, and other manuscript sources that relate to this exciting chapter in history continue to be discovered. When asked to lead a group of professors to revisit the Mormon Trail in 2012, I was frankly taken aback by how many committed scholars continue to discover so much of enduring value on this enduring legacy in Mormon history.

One of the ironies of Mormonism is that although it is an American religion, America has struggled to accept it. In fact, the early history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was a long chapter of rejection and persecution. For years after its restoration in upstate New York under the hand of Joseph Smith Jr. in 1830, the Church was on the run from place to place: first New York, then Kirtland, Ohio; Independence, Missouri; Nauvoo, Illinois; and finally Salt Lake City, Utah. Scholars have long argued over what poisoned the mix. Perhaps it was the radical claim of being the only true and restored church upon the earth. Or its ardent belief in the Book of Mormon and other scriptures besides the Bible. Many Americans came to believe that the allegiance of most early Saints was more to the prophet of their church than to the president of the United States, more to revealed scripture than to the American Constitution. There may have been too much talk of

a kingdom of God for a republic of the people to accept. There was also the matter of a clash of cultures when a large concentration of Latter-day Saint "Yankees" moved to the slave state of Missouri in the early 1830s, and instead of establishing their Zion, they created a climate of suspicion and unrest that eventually led to their undoing. Mormons could not have chosen a more difficult time, a less promising place, and a more unwelcoming people than in Missouri.

The tragic expulsion of the Mormons from Missouri in that cruel winter of 1838–39, under the threat of extermination as decreed by Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, led to the forced three hundred-mile march of some eight thousand Mormons from the far west of Missouri to the eastern banks of the Mississippi to the more accepting state of Illinois. There, for the next seven years, the Mormons finally established a home in their beloved Nauvoo, where they hoped to build a permanent settlement and live and worship as they pleased. By 1844 some twelve thousand Latter-day Saints from the eastern United States, Canada, and Great Britain were crowding into their new surroundings in Nauvoo. And, for a while, their future looked promising.

But by 1844, the Saints were again facing ardent persecution from without and dissension from within. Many in Missouri continued to hold grievances against them and plotted to reclaim the Mormon Prophet. Nauvoo was becoming an economic powerhouse, causing other river towns, like Warsaw, to lose valuable business. And when talk began to surface that Joseph Smith and a few other Mormon leaders were secretly practicing polygamy, many former friends turned suspicious. "Saintly scoundrels" such as John C. Bennett, former mayor of Nauvoo, falsely charged that the city militia—the Nauvoo Legion—was plotting militarily against the very existence of the nation. When Joseph Smith announced in 1844 that he would seek the presidency of the United States, his critics branded him a political and religious megalomaniac, a prophet without constraint. In short, the anti-Mormon press tried hard to label Mormonism as anti-American, anti-Christian, and anti-family—a lethal triplet of unfounded charges

that nonetheless led to the murder of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum in Carthage Jail in June 1844.

While some others laid claim to Smith's mantle of prophetic leadership, Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles eventually held sway. As shrewd a leader as he was sympathetic to the plights of his people, "Brother Brigham" knew that there was no future for the Church in Illinois. By 1845 he was quietly laying plans for a departure west to some new home far away where the Saints could finally live in peace. Faced with the threat of his own assassination; the possible interference with the Saints' westward march by the United States Army of the West, who was suspicious of the people's true intentions; and potential defections in greater numbers, Brigham Young began to lead his people out of Nauvoo in the teeth of a very cold February of 1846. His plan was to reach Council Bluffs on the Missouri River in a matter of weeks, establish farms and way stations at Grand Island and elsewhere in what is today Nebraska, and send a speedy vanguard company of pioneers over the mountains to some large valley all in 1846, the "Year of Decision," as Bernard De Voto once termed it.

But alas, it was not to be. Brigham Young could escape from his enemies, but he could never get away from his followers. Instead of an express vanguard company of one or two hundred handpicked pioneers, some 2,500 Saints crowded around their leader. Such a large, relatively unprepared company hedged up his way, and instead of getting away from their Sugar Creek encampments just across the river from Nauvoo in early March, they languished there until mid-April. When they finally did begin to roll out across Iowa Territory, the rains came, incessant and torrential, so much so that instead of making their planned fifteen miles a day, they barely made one. With wagons sunk to their axles in mud day after day, many began to wonder whose side God was on after all. Desperately seeking his way across a three hundred-mile Iowa mudhole, Brigham Young ordered most of his struggling followers to build way stations or farms at Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah and plant spring crops for the thousands

yet to follow. Later that summer he instructed others to return to Nauvoo to help the "poor camps" of refugees being hounded out of Nauvoo by mad militia mobs intent on destroying whatever vestige of Mormonism that remained. The entire plan of exodus was in disarray, with many people becoming sick from the elements. On the verge of starvation, hundreds would soon die. For a time the very salvation of the Church was at stake.

The United States Army did indeed come, as earlier feared, but instead of interfering, it came inviting. With President James K. Polk anxious to declare war against Mexico to ensure the annexation of California, Captain James Allen asked for five hundred of the strongest, healthiest Mormon men to enlist. At first reluctant to serve a nation many felt had driven them out, the Mormon Battalion ultimately joined in with General Stephen Kearney's Army of the West and embarked upon one of the longest overland marches in military history: from Fort Leavenworth to San Diego, where many were honorably discharged, having never fired a shot in hostile action. A few reenlisted, headed north, and participated in the finding of gold at Sutter's Fort near Sacramento. Yet instead of staying on and making their fortunes, they headed east to join their families somewhere back on the trail.

Meanwhile, back in Iowa, Brigham Young and his vanguard company finally reached the Missouri River in mid-June, much too late (as every trader and mountain man knew well) to make a dash for the Rocky Mountains, a sad truth that the Donner party would learn that same year. With the reluctant permission of military officials for them to settle on the west banks of the Missouri River in what today is Omaha, the Mormons established their Winter Quarters settlement in the fall of 1846, Nebraska's first city. By the end of the year, four to five thousand were hunkering down for the winter in Nebraska, a comparable number across the river in Council Bluffs (which they renamed Kanesville), and another three to four thousand strewn all across Iowa clear back to the Mississippi. Some stayed in St. Louis and

in other Missouri river towns. While some murmured and defected, the great majority of Mormons stayed faithful to the leadership of Brigham Young.

The long-hoped-for spring of 1847 finally arrived, and Young wasted no time in leading his handpicked, hearty band of pioneers to find a new home in the West. His pioneer company of 148 left the Elkhorn River in early April and pioneered their own trail north of the Platte River so as not to interfere with the more crowded Oregon and California Trail followers on the south side. Enjoying much better weather than the year before, they reached Chimney Rock on May 27, Fort Laramie by June 2, and Independence Rock by June 21. Then they followed the South Pass down and across the Green River to Fort Bridger. From there they decided to travel down Echo and Weber Canyons to scout out the valley of the Great Salt Lake where, on July 24, 1847, Brigham Young, though sick with Rocky Mountain spotted fever, declared it to be "the right place. Drive on!" Their long journey now at an end, the word soon went out for all to come. And come they did by the hundreds, the thousands, and eventually by the tens of thousands as new Mormon converts from Great Britain, Scandinavia, and elsewhere found their way by ship and wagon or even handcarts to their new mountain Zion.

The Mormon exodus story is that of an entire believing people fleeing out of Babylon to a new mountain home "far away in the west" (to borrow William Clayton's phrase) where they could worship without fear of persecution. They came to believe that they would find their place if they followed their God. In the process, they forged a character that to this day sets the Latter-day Saints apart from the rest of America, if not in a cultural way, then certainly in a religious one. It is within this rich and unfolding drama that this present study must be placed and understood.

This book is divided into three sections: the Mormons' forced departure from their Nauvoo homes in 1846–47, the Mormons' experiences along their sojourn to the Rocky Mountains, and what the

Mormon Trail has come to mean in more recent times and how it has been interpreted. In part 1, Douglas Seefeldt of Ball State University presents a stunning cartographic representation of the American West as seen by many different explorers and mapmakers over a long period of time leading up to the Mormon exodus. Alexander Baugh, best known for his studies of Mormon Missouri history, demonstrates how Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders relied upon John C. Fremont's published narratives and maps even before they quit Nauvoo. Nauvoo historian Susan Easton Black discusses the economics of Nauvoo and brings into focus the enormous financial sacrifices the departing Mormons made as they abandoned their beautiful city on the banks of the Mississippi River. Wendy Top, an independent historian, sheds new light on the rescues of the so-called poor camps of departing Mormons after being driven out of their homes by militia mobs in the fall of 1846.

In part 2, Terry Ball's article discusses the Wasatch Range environment prior to the coming of the Latter-day Saints. My own contribution to this volume is a study of the soon-to-be published Horace K. Whitney journals, one of the little-known gems of Mormon exodus history. Horace K. Whitney's journals tell the story of the entire Mormon exodus from February 1846 until the summer of 1847. David F. Boone has contributed a piece on the migration of the Mississippi Saints (complete with their slaves) to the Mormon Deseret. Hank R. Smith's piece on Cache Cave, east of modern Utah, tells of Brigham Young's little-known first overnight encampment in the present state of Utah.

Part 3 features four articles on post-1847 Mormon history. Kenneth L. Alford, an army colonel and leading military historian, writes of Utah's role in protecting emigrant trails during the Civil War, when the Latter-day Saints, although more or less politically neutral, chose to support initiatives of the federal government. Richard O. Cowan examines how the Mormon Trail influenced the route of the transcontinental railroad, which, coincidentally, many Mormons

helped to build. J. B. Haws has chosen to write on the enigmatic Wilford Wood, whose untiring efforts have led to many modern preservation efforts. Last of all, Scott C. Esplin addresses various modern-day efforts at memorializing and marking of the Mormon Trail.

What follows, I believe, is a highly readable, very worthy scholarly contribution to the ongoing study of the Mormon exodus in all its many facets.

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