

ELIZABETH WHITEAR SERMON CAMM:
ATYPICAL MORMON PIONEER

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the life of one Mormon pioneer woman, Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, who immigrated to the United States with a specific dream of reaching Utah and living among other members of her faith. Everything went terribly wrong when she crossed the Plains with the Martin Handcart Company, which became one of the worst disasters of the westward migration in American history due to an early winter and scarce food rations. When Elizabeth's husband died during this trek west, her life took a dramatic turn. This study uses firsthand accounts, biographical accounts, and newspaper articles to compare the outcome of Elizabeth's life to that of other women in her age group who also became widowed while crossing the Plains with the Martin Handcart Company. Elizabeth's experience is not typical, and adds new perspective to this event.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Elizabeth Whitear Sermon stood over her husband's shallow grave feeling bewildered by her circumstances. Like thousands of other British people during the nineteenth century, she had embraced the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon) and left her native land to immigrate to Utah, where, in 1847, the Church had established its headquarters. Utah had been designated as the location where the Saints, as early Church members were sometimes called, would work to build Zion, a place of peace where members could fully live their religion among others who shared their faith and moral values, and where they could associate directly with the Prophet, Brigham Young, and other leaders of the Church.¹ The ideal of Zion motivated thousands of Mormons to leave their homes in European nations, mainly Great Britain and Denmark, and immigrate to Utah. This dream of Zion is what inspired Elizabeth, but nothing could have prepared her for the challenges she would face in her life because of her decision to immigrate.

In 1856, Elizabeth became part of one of the worst disasters of the westward migration in American history when she and her family decided to cross the Plains from

¹ Philip A.M. Taylor, "Why Did British Mormons Emigrate," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 22 (July 1954): 252.

Iowa, where they had stayed for a short time, to Utah with the Martin Handcart Company, the name given to the last Mormon party that formed that year. Due to various delays, the Company started their journey late in the year and without adequate provisions. To make matters worse, winter came early, and the travelers got stuck in blizzard conditions in Wyoming, requiring a dramatic rescue.² Before rescuers arrived, the members of the Martin Handcart Company endured both starvation and extreme cold. Unusually large numbers of their party died. Many of those who survived and completed the journey to Utah took months to regain their strength. Some of the immigrants suffered permanent injuries, such as amputations, due to frostbite.

The story of the Martin Handcart Company is somewhat familiar to most members of the LDS Church. These pioneers are held up as examples of extraordinary faith, and their individual stories are retold frequently as a source of strength for current members. The ongoing narrative is that the adversity they endured strengthened their individual relationships with God, and that once these pioneers arrived in Utah, they continued to make any sacrifice necessary in order to remain faithful to the Church, regardless of any challenges. Generally, this narrative appears true for most members of the Martin Handcart Company, as evidenced by statements of faith in their personal accounts or biographical life summaries written by close family members.

² In the Mormon migration, parties of travelers were usually called companies and were called by the name of the captain of the company. The Martin Handcart Company was named for Captain Edward Martin.

Elizabeth's short autobiographical life summary stands out. She not only includes an account of the suffering experienced during her unusually difficult trek west with the Martin Handcart Company, but also expresses doubts she had about some Church leaders. This is not to say that Elizabeth didn't have faith. In fact, Elizabeth vigorously defends her faith in God declaring, "He is a friend that has never failed when asked." However, the bitterness Elizabeth felt toward the men who led the Martin Handcart Company is evident, and expression of these feelings is not common, especially in the accounts of women. After arriving in Utah, Elizabeth continued to face challenges that eventually caused her to leave the Church. This is in sharp contrast to the ongoing narrative of the Martin Handcart Company, and therefore, broadens the historical view this event.

This paper examines the life of Elizabeth Sermon. She is at the core of this study, and her life experience is compared to that of several women who also crossed the Plains with the Martin Handcart Company and unexpectedly became widowed during their harrowing journey. In order to form meaningful comparisons, the women selected for this study are close to Elizabeth's age and journeyed to Utah with her. This research focuses on what happened to these women once they arrived in Utah, and analyzes the ways in which they are similar to Elizabeth, and the ways in which they differ. For example, Elizabeth was insistent that she would not enter a polygamous marriage. Did the other widows share this view or were they open to polygamy? How soon after arrival in Utah did they remarry? Did they continue to live in Utah? Did they remain faithful members of the LDS Church?

Ten other women near Elizabeth's age arrived in Utah as widows, like Elizabeth did, because their husbands died unexpectedly while crossing the Plains with the Martin Handcart Company. Some of these women left an account of their immigration experience, even if it was not written until many years later. In some cases, a child or grandchild wrote a short biographical sketch based on family lore and their own childhood memories. In other cases, children who traveled with these women wrote their own autobiographical accounts of immigrating to Utah, which provide useful information.

Since Elizabeth is at the center of this study, the most important primary source comes directly from her. In 1892, less than a year prior to her death, Elizabeth wrote a letter to her children detailing her life experiences in relation to her immigration to the United States and her journey to Utah. She begins her letter by briefly discussing her life in England and her motivations for leaving. The bulk of the letter describes her journey with the Martin Handcart Company. Elizabeth shares details of the hardships that she and her family personally endured including cold, hunger, exhaustion, frostbite, disagreements with church leaders, and the death of her husband. She then briefly explains how she settled into life after arriving in Utah. Elizabeth lived with her brother, who had immigrated at an earlier date, for a short time before accepting work on a farm. She eventually remarried, and moved with her new husband to help settle the Cache Valley area of Utah in the city of Logan. She mentions that they endured additional troubles in Logan, but does not offer

explanation. She simply states that her children knew of these troubles already, and closes her letter with a prayer for their protection.³

Several years after her death, Elizabeth's grandson, Charles Robertson, delivered a copy of Elizabeth's letter to the LDS Church Archives. He provided a short narrative about Elizabeth's life in Utah that he had written himself based on stories he had heard from his mother, Caroline Camm, and possibly from other family members as well. Caroline was the daughter of Elizabeth and her second husband, Robert Camm. Some of the details in this narrative are questionable, as family stories sometimes are. However, this source is still important because much of the information is still valid, such as descriptions of Robert's career and financial endeavors. Charles describes the events that led Elizabeth and Robert to part with the Church, at least as it was told to him. Some aspects of the story seem exaggerated, and as other sources are identified, it becomes clear that Caroline kept some stories about her parents hidden from her son. However, this source provides valuable insight into the family lore, and provides information about Elizabeth's life that would be lost otherwise.

After arriving in Utah, Elizabeth, unlike many of her peers, was adamant that she would not enter into a polygamous marriage. In a specific effort to avoid such an arrangement, she married Robert Camm, a man she met at her job. He was ten years her junior and had never been married before. Elizabeth thought of Robert as, "a soldier of

³ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

fortune.”⁴ Elizabeth was still grieving the loss of her first husband, but her employer encouraged her to marry Robert, and she judged that he would be able to provide for her financially.⁵ Of the ten women in Elizabeth’s party, near her age, who also lost their husbands, only three others avoided polygamy. The other women either married men who were already married, or who soon married additional women. Of the women who avoided polygamy, only one seems to have purposely done so, as Elizabeth did.

In 1886, Robert and Elizabeth cut ties with the Church and moved to San Francisco. Their grandson, Charles, reports in his narrative that the two had a disagreement with leaders of the Church about the issue of polygamy. However, three articles published in the *Salt Lake Daily Herald* reveal a shocking family secret that offer an alternate explanation for their separation from the Church and subsequent departure from Logan. The articles report that Robert was accused of raping an eleven-year-old girl whose family was renting rooms in his building, and claim that he had been abusing the girl for some time, and had been caught when a woman overheard him making advances on her.⁶ These articles explain the outcome of his case and the reaction of the community.

Without court records available it might be difficult to form a strong opinion about whether Robert was guilty or falsely accused. A short article in the *Utah Journal* that was printed three days after Robert’s arrest states that a newspaper he had formerly worked for,

⁴ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Logan Lines,” *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), October 31, 1886. <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=10683846>.

the *Salt Lake Tribune* had “entirely disowned him in his time of sorrow,” after he had served them well in their anti-Mormon campaign.⁷ This lends support to the idea that the charges against him could have been false, or at least some people thought that he might have been innocent. Regardless of his guilt or innocence, this event was a pivotal point in Elizabeth’s life, and supports the argument that her story is unique. The fact that Elizabeth’s husband was publicly accused of something heinous makes Elizabeth’s life story stand out.

Another aspect of Elizabeth’s life that makes her unique is her exit from the LDS Church. Only one of the other widows in her peer group left the Church. A short biographical sketch about Deborah Blair Chapman’s second husband, Thomas Chapman was included in a book about Harrison County, Iowa. The biography states that the Chapmans returned to Iowa in the mid-1860s. The sketch explains that they are mentioned in the meeting minutes of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS)⁸, a splinter group that was formed after the death of the Prophet, Joseph Smith.⁹ The narrative reports that Deborah was baptized a member of the RLDS Church.¹⁰ While Deborah’s individual motivations for joining the RLDS Church are not documented, most Mormons who left Utah to join the RLDS did so because they either did not believe that

⁷ “Local Points,” *Utah Journal* (Salt Lake City, UT), November 3, 1886, [https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/Local Points](https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/Local%20Points).

⁸ “Thomas Chapman,” in *1891 History of Harrison County Iowa* (National Publishing Company, 1891), <http://iagenweb.org/harrison/bio/geneall16.htm#chapman>.

⁹ Richard P. Howard, “Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS Church),” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1211-1216.

¹⁰ Susan Easton Black, *Early Members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Volume II C-F*, (Provo, Religious Studies Centre, BYU, 1993), 140.

Brigham Young should be the next Prophet, or they disagreed with the practice of polygamy.¹¹ Regardless of Deborah's motives, the circumstances surrounding her exit from Utah are certainly different from Elizabeth's. Also, Deborah continued to practice what she would have considered a form of Mormon faith, while records indicate that Elizabeth did not.¹²

Additional sources that pertain directly to Elizabeth's life are various census, marriage, and christening records, as well as the passenger manifest for the ship, *Caravan*, that carried her family from Liverpool, England, to Castle Gardens, New York. Additionally, Elizabeth is mentioned in John Bond's autobiography. Bond was traveling in the William B. Hodgetts Company, a commercial wagon train that was trailing just behind the Martin Handcart Company. He contrasts Elizabeth's condition at the start of the trek West with her condition toward the end of the journey, and expresses compassion for her suffering and loss.

In an effort to save money, and with approval of immigrants, the Church began using handcarts in favor of wagon trains as an experimental method of travel in the spring of 1856. This was necessary due to dwindling funds to assist those desiring to immigrate,

¹¹ Richard P. Howard, "Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS Church)," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1211-1216.

¹² Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

Note: The LDS Church considers itself to be the only Mormon Church. Many splinter groups call themselves "Mormon," but only those who belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints truly are. In this case, Deborah Blair Chapman probably would have continued to call herself a Mormon as a member of the RLDS Church, but Brigham Young and members of the LDS Church probably would have disagreed with that label.

and immigrants gave their approval. Generally, handcarts were about the same width as wagons, but were only about six to seven feet in length. Each handcart could hold close to five hundred pounds, which would be manually pushed by a handrail at the front of the cart.¹³ This plan would make crossing the Plains more difficult for pioneers, but it would cost less and potentially reduce travel time, which would allow more immigrants to reach Utah.¹⁴

Many historians have studied the Mormon migration, and the handcart companies have specifically been a favorite topic because of the difficult nature of traveling across the plains by this method. Leroy R. and Ann W. Hafen referenced journals and company rosters to document the immigration experiences of Mormon handcart immigrants in their book, *Handcarts to Zion: The Story of a Unique Western Migration 1856-1860*. Because of the intense conditions and the tragic outcome, historians have thoroughly documented the travel experiences of the members of the Martin Handcart Company with the express purpose of holding them up as examples of enduring faith. For example, two of the most current books about the handcart companies are both focused on the spiritual legacy left by the surviving pioneers. Published in 2006, *The Price We Paid: The Extraordinary Story of the Willie and Martin Handcart Pioneers* by Andrew D. Olsen tells the story of the Willie Handcart Company followed by the story of the Martin Handcart Company in two

¹³ Ned Eddins, "Willie and Martin Handcart Companies," *The Fur Trapper*, Accessed April 7, 2015, http://www.thefurtrapper.com/martin_handcart.htm.

¹⁴ Candy Moulton, "Mormon Handcart Horrors," *Wild West* 27, no. 4 (December 2014): 40-47, accessed March 26, 2015, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost.

separate parts. The Willie Handcart Company left Iowa just two weeks before the Martin Handcart Company. The Willie Handcart Company faced many of the same challenges, and fared only slightly better when comparing the mortality rates. Relying on journals and documented personal accounts, Olsen contends that the fact that close to eight hundred of the nearly thousand travelers survived is actually a triumph. Olsen further argues that evidence suggests that the majority of the survivors developed a spiritual strength because of this experience.¹⁵ Shelli Simmons takes a similar approach in the book, *Across the Sea, Across the Plains: The Epic Account of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies from Europe to Zion*. Primarily using personal journals and newspaper articles as sources, Simmons tells the story of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies, beginning with the opening of missionary work in England. In each chapter, the Willie and Martin Companies are labeled separately as Simmons follows the stories of various individuals and families. Similar to Olsen, Simmons concludes that these pioneers were courageous, and that these difficult experiences built lasting faith, which continues to benefit members of the Church today.¹⁶

Because of the availability of journals and personal accounts, some books simply set out to identify the members of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies and establish a timeline of events. These books mainly contain journal excerpts. The book *Emigrating*

¹⁵ Andrew D. Olsen, *The Price We Paid: The Extraordinary Story of the Willie and Martin Handcart Pioneers*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 470-471.

¹⁶ Shelli Simmons, *Across the Sea, Across the Plains: The Epic Account of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies from Europe to Zion*, (Springville, Utah: CFI, 2012), 271-272.

Journals of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies and the Hunt and Hodgetts Wagon Trains by Lynee Slater Turner is one of these. It contains a daily account of the Martin Handcart Company, based on various journal entries, from the time they left England to their arrival in Utah. This book is significant to this study because Turner was the first historian to discover Elizabeth's narrative in the Church Archives and realize that she was a member of the Martin Handcart Company. Elizabeth had previously been left out because most members of the Martin Handcart Company sailed together from Liverpool on the ship *Horizon*, whereas Elizabeth and her family had sailed earlier in the year, staying in Iowa for several months before deciding to go on to Utah.¹⁷ In a similar book, *I Walked to Zion: Stories of Young Pioneers on the Mormon Trail*, Susan Arrington Madsen compiled autobiographical sketches of children who crossed the Plains to Utah. The story of Peter Howard McBride, the son of Margaret Howard McBride, is in this book. Although Peter was only six years old at the time his family immigrated, his memories shed some additional light on the arduous journey of the Martin Handcart Company.

One aspect of Elizabeth's narrative that resonates as honest is her acknowledgement of bitterness, doubt, and hard feelings toward leaders of the Martin Handcart Company and leaders of the Church due to the consequences of making the decision to start the journey to Utah so late in the season. None of the other personal narratives discuss the topic of blame or doubt, but some historians have researched this topic. Howard A. Christy published an article, "Weather, Disaster, and Responsibility: An Essay on the Willie and

¹⁷ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

Martin Handcart Story,” exploring this theme. Christy notes some factors that contributed to the tragedy, including lack of proper wood and experienced craftsmen to make the handcarts, poor planning at the beginning of the trip, and lack of adequate provisions. He concludes that these things were inconsequential overall. Instead, Christy asserts that, in the scheme of things, the whole disaster could have been avoided if they had heeded the advice issued by church leaders in 1847 by staying in Nebraska for the winter, and waiting until spring to begin the trek to Utah.¹⁸ In an article titled, “The Martin Handcart Disaster: The London Participants,” Lynne Watkins Jorgensen asserts that many of the leaders of the Church, Brigham Young included, felt guilty for the many lives lost in this migration. Because of this, most survivors felt that they could not discuss what happened for many years, which is why it took so long to document personal narratives of this event.¹⁹

Elizabeth states that her motives for immigrating were purely religious, which is notable because motivation for Mormon immigration is a topic of debate among historians. One of the earliest arguments appeared in an article by Hamlin M. Cannon in 1947, titled “Migration of English Mormons to America” in which Cannon asserts that the Church had a lot of financial benefits to offer potential converts, and missionaries often used promises of land and employment to entice those of lower economic status.²⁰ Philip A.M. Taylor

¹⁸ Christy, Howard A, “Weather, Disaster, and Responsibility: An Essay on the Willie and Martin Handcart Story,” *BYU Studies* 37, No. 1 (1997): 9-11.

<https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/BYUStudies/article/view/6433/6082>.

¹⁹ Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, “The Martin Handcart Disaster: The London Participants,” *Journal of Mormon History* 21, No. 2 (1995): 172-173. <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/mormonhistory/vol21/iss2/1>.

²⁰ Hamlin M. Cannon, “Migration of English Mormons,” *The American Historical Review* 52, No. 3 (Apr., 1947): 437, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1859881>.

also analyzes the influence of economic status on the decisions relating to immigration in his article, “Why Did British Mormons Emigrate?” Taylor studies the economic conditions in England and the professions of the immigrants and concludes that there was no correlation between the two factors. Although missionaries promised members better economic conditions in America, they also informed members of the hard work involved.²¹ Taylor concludes that immigration was driven by forces within the Church and was not solely motivated by economic factors.²²

Some secondary sources can shed some light on daily life in Utah during this era and what life may have been like for Elizabeth while in Logan. The article, “Gentile Impressions of Salt Lake City, Utah, 1849-1870” by Martin Mitchell describes the various reactions of multiple visitors to the city. He comments on the lifestyle of the Mormon people, including work and polygamy, offering a balanced view of both positive and negative comments. Similarly, historian Glenda Riley dedicates a section of her book, *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825 – 1915* to the impressions of visitors to Utah in the late nineteenth century. Primarily relying on journals, Riley reveals the statements of non-Mormon women about plural marriage, but balances their comments with those of Mormon women. Riley then uses this information to draw conclusions about the social standing of Mormon women in this era. The article, “Golden Memories: Remembering Life in a Mormon Village” by Ronald W. Walker relies on Works Progress Administration

²¹ Philip A.M. Taylor, “Why Did British Mormons Emigrate,” *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 22 (July 1954): 258.

²² *Ibid.*, 263.

(WPA) interviews of pioneers to gain insight into daily life in early Utah settlements. Although the WPA interviews were not conducted until the 1930s, Walker asserts that they still offer a reliable source of information. Likewise, the article, “Rural Life among Nineteenth-Century Mormons: The Woman's Experience” by Leonard J. Arrington is an excellent resource for describing the daily activities of Mormon women in early communities in Utah and surrounding states. Although Elizabeth’s life differs in some ways from the lives of the pioneers described by these historians, these sources can be used to help fill in the gaps during the portion of her life that is similar.

Additional sources are available that provide details of events that occurred near Logan while Elizabeth lived there. The Cache Valley Historical Society has compiled a series of articles from the *Logan Journal* newspaper archives about the early history of Cache County, Utah, which includes information about clashes with the Native Americans who lived near Cache Valley. Most of the women mentioned this topic in their personal narratives, and Elizabeth’s grandson states that Robert Camm participated in a famous battle against the Shoshone tribe in Franklin, Idaho. These articles will help provide an understanding of challenges Elizabeth and her family faced in building a home in Logan during early pioneer days.

Information about Elizabeth’s life in San Francisco is not as readily available. Elizabeth’s grandson states that Elizabeth and her husband owned property and rented out rooms there. Their daughter, Caroline, moved there to live with them after her husband

died. After Elizabeth died in 1893, Caroline returned to Utah. Robert Camm remained in San Francisco, where he died in 1907. This means that Robert lived through the earthquake that occurred in 1906, one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history. This also might be one of the reasons that there is little record of Elizabeth's time in San Francisco. Fires caused by the earthquake destroyed much of the city and many records that existed at the time as well.²³

Some aspects of Elizabeth's life are common for a Mormon convert, immigrant, and pioneer, but in other aspects she is unique. The faith to leave the familiarity and comfort of her home in England to seek a peaceful life in Utah was not uncommon. Neither was facing hardships while building a new home in Utah. Even arriving in Utah as a widow with young children was not especially abnormal at that time. However, when compared against her peers among the Martin Handcart Company, Elizabeth's life took a dramatic turn that is different from what anyone else experienced.²⁴ Elizabeth is the only one who left a personal narrative that expresses bitterness toward LDS Church leaders, blaming them for the disaster of the Martin Handcart Company.²⁵ Elizabeth is the only one whose spouse faced serious legal trouble, the only one who left the Mormon Faith entirely, the only one who left Utah under scandalous circumstances, and the only one to settle further

²³ "San Francisco Earthquake, 1906," *Archive.gov*, accessed April 26, 2017, <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/sf>.

²⁴ Note that I have defined Elizabeth's peers as other women within about ten years of her age who became widowed during the trek to Utah with the Martin Handcart Company. There were other women who became widowed also who were older, and other women who were single when the trip started. I have not accounted for these women individually.

²⁵ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

west. Elizabeth differs from her peers, and from any typical Mormon pioneer woman, in unexpected ways, which are unique to her. These unusual aspects of Elizabeth's life will be explored throughout the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

CHURCH HISTORY AND THE GATHERING IN UTAH

When the first official meeting of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) was held on April 6, 1830, in Fayette, New York, most observers would have hardly taken notice. With just six men in attendance, no one would have predicted how rapidly the Church would grow. Its founder, Joseph Smith, claimed to have conversed with Heavenly messengers, who had provided instructions to him for many years. Smith also claimed that an angel gave him ancient records and the means to translate them. The translation later became known as *The Book of Mormon*, revered as scripture within the LDS Church.²⁶

As the membership of the Church grew, nearby communities began to notice, and persecution soon followed. To escape growing opposition, the small congregation migrated from New York to Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831.²⁷ There the Church flourished and continued to grow for several years. However, due to financial problems and mob violence, Smith left for Missouri with a few of his closest associates in early 1838. Many Church members soon followed.²⁸

²⁶ *Truth Restored: A Short History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, (United States: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995), 32.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

Smith had hoped that the Saints could build a modern city of Zion in Missouri, but this was not to be. Instead, Church members faced serious threats as they clashed with their non-member neighbors in Missouri. Many citizens of Missouri were suspicious of the Mormon people, not only because of their religious beliefs, but also because most of them were from Northern states and opposed slavery. As the Mormon population grew in numbers, their neighbors became more alarmed.²⁹ Eventually, both groups turned to the state government for help. The state legislature created Caldwell County for the express purpose of confining the Mormons to just one area. This solution did not work for long. Once the Mormon population grew, they could no longer fit within the bounds of Caldwell County. The fact that some members began living outside of those bounds provoked anger from some, who sent multiple letters of complaint to the Governor, Lilburn W. Boggs.³⁰ These letters contained sworn affidavits claiming that the Mormon people had threatened them, and that the Mormons were planning an uprising in alliance with the Native American people who lived nearby.³¹ The Mormons sent a letter to the Governor asking for protection from “a lawless mob.”³² He replied that he could see no reason to intervene.³³ This allowed the situation to continue to escalate until violence broke out.

²⁹ *Our Heritage: A Brief History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, (United States: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995), 40.

³⁰ “The Missouri Mormon War,” Missouri State Archives, accessed August 8, 2016, <http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/resources/mormon.asp>.

³¹ “Letter from Daniel Ashby, James Keyte, and Sterling Price, of Brunswick, MO to Governor Boggs,” September 1, 1838, *Missouri State Archives*, <http://www.sos.mo.gov/cmsimages/archives/Ashby>.

³² “Petition from Certain Mormons of DeWitt to Governor Boggs,” September 22, 1838, *Missouri State Archives*, http://www.sos.mo.gov/cmsimages/archives/resources/findingaids/fulltext/f23_f01-02.pdf.

³³ “The Mormon War Ended!” *Quincy Whig* (Quincy, IL), November 17, 1838, <http://archive.quincylibrary.org/Olive/APA/OPL/default.aspx#panel=search&search=4>.

Beginning in 1833, mobs entered Mormon communities in Missouri on several occasions, destroying property and attacking prominent Church leaders, leaving them tarred and feathered. In August 1838, a fight broke out when members of the Church were prevented from voting. Governor Boggs sent state militia to keep the peace, but this only made matters worse. Militia officers took three Church members captive, which caused the Church to form its own militia to get them back. Governor Boggs characterized the Mormon people as a group that had established their own government, “independent of and in opposition to the government of this State.”³⁴ In October 1838, he decreed that in order to establish peace in the land, “Mormons must be exterminated or driven from the State.”³⁵ Three days later, the worst act of violence took place at a Mormon settlement called Haun's Mill when a mob carried out a mass shooting that left seventeen men and boys dead, and fifteen others wounded.³⁶

Church members began fleeing Missouri, leaving most of their possessions behind. Close to five thousand of them escaped to Quincy, Illinois, where they were welcomed as refugees. The members of the Church stayed safely among the citizens of Quincy for a few months until they were able to acquire land nearby and establish the city of Nauvoo.³⁷ The Saints lived in peace in Nauvoo for a short period of time. They built a beautiful city,

³⁴ Lilburn W. Boggs, “Extract from Governor Bogg’s Message of 1840,” in *Correspondence, Orders, & C. in Relation to the Disturbances with the Mormons; and the Evidence* (Fayette, MS: Boon’s Lick Democrat, 1841), 9. <http://www.sos.mo.gov/cmsimages/archives/Boggs>

³⁵ Our Heritage, 40.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁷ Jamie Armstrong, “The Town that Rescued 5000 Mormon Refugees,” *LDSLiving.com*, March 28, 2016, <http://www.ldsliving.com/The-Town-That-Rescued-5-000-Mormon-Refugees/s/80468>.

increased missionary efforts, and continued to organize the Church by establishing policies, leadership roles, and organizations such as the women's Relief Society.³⁸

In the spring of 1844, the relative peace the Church had enjoyed came to an abrupt end when the Prophet Joseph Smith, his brother Hyrum, John Taylor, and other members were arrested and taken to Carthage Jail. They were charged with causing a civil disturbance. This was done based on the conspiracy of various civic leaders and citizens' groups who wanted to find a way to destroy the Church.³⁹ On the evening of June 27, 1844, about two hundred men mobbed the jail, shooting and killing Joseph and Hyrum, and leaving John Taylor seriously injured.⁴⁰

Joseph Smith's death did not destroy the Church as the mob had expected. While mourning the loss of their leader, Church members met to determine who should be the next prophet. Although there was some disagreement, and a few people left the Church, most members in attendance experienced significant spiritual feelings while listening to Brigham Young address the congregation. This brought a sense of peace to their hearts, and caused the majority of members to conclude that Young, who had been serving as president of the quorum of the twelve apostles, was the correct choice for the next

³⁸ Our Heritage, 55-61.

³⁹ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 63-64.

prophet.⁴¹ Tensions with neighbors in Nauvoo continued until the Saints were forced out of Illinois in the spring of 1846.

Joseph Smith had already heard about a valley in the Rocky Mountain region and had planned to establish a settlement there. Naturally, the Saints determined to make that place their next home. Young organized them into military-style companies of about fifty families in each, with assigned leaders to supervise and maintain order as they traveled westward. This type of organization was common among most groups migrating west at this time.⁴² In 1846, the Saints made a temporary home in Winter Quarters, Nebraska, and waited for spring before a small party of just one hundred and forty-eight people continued west across the Plains. On July 24, 1847, when Brigham Young first glimpsed the Salt Lake Valley, he famously declared, “This is the right place.”⁴³ Before the year ended, about two thousand members completed the trek.⁴⁴

In subsequent years, Utah became the gathering place for the Saints from all over the world. By 1869, over thirty thousand people had immigrated to Utah from Great Britain.⁴⁵ Their motives for seeking a home in the Salt Lake Valley were different than for those who went before them. These immigrants were not escaping severe persecution.

⁴¹ Our Heritage, 67.

⁴² Glen M. Leonard, “The Exodus, 1844-47,” *Liahona*, July 1979, <https://www.lds.org/liahona/1979/07/the-exodus-184447?lang=eng>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Leonard, “The Exodus, 1844-47.”

⁴⁵ Cannon, “Migration of English Mormons,” 455.

Instead, they were seeking to gather with other members of their faith, and hoping to find place of peace, refuge, and prosperity.⁴⁶ Elizabeth was among their numbers.

⁴⁶ Cannon, "Migration of English Mormons," 444-445.

CHAPTER III

MISSIONARY WORK IN ENGLAND AND IMMIGRATION

Missionary work became an integral part of Mormon doctrine from its founding. Mormon missionary efforts began in England in 1837, only seven years after the official organization of the Church. Seven men selected by the prophet Joseph Smith traveled to England to proclaim the gospel.⁴⁷ Within ten days of their arrival in Liverpool, nine people were baptized, and within a year, church membership in England had swollen to close to two thousand. One reason that the Church grew rapidly is that the missionaries arrived during a period of both economic and religious uncertainty. Many people were searching for stability, and were attending various churches trying to find one that taught doctrines with which they agreed. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints offered doctrines that many people were seeking, including a physical gathering place for believers, which would serve as a place of refuge from the world, a city of Zion. In fact, missionary efforts were so successful in England that by 1851, there were close to thirty-three thousand members in Great Britain.⁴⁸ This number is significant in comparison to the number of members already in the U.S. at that time, which was estimated at about fifteen thousand.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "History of the Church in Great Britain," *LDS Church*, accessed March 28, 2015, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1971/09/history-of-the-church-in-great-britain?lang=eng>.

⁴⁸ Taylor, "Why Did British Mormons Emigrate," 251.

⁴⁹ William G. Hartley, "The Place of Mormon Handcart Companies in America's Westward Migration story," *The Annals of Iowa* 65 (2006), 105. <http://ir.uiowa.edu/annals-of-iowa/vol65/iss2/3>.

During the nineteenth century, British people immigrated to America for many different reasons. Some were seeking a new job, some had a desire to own land, and others were joining family members already living in America. British Mormons migrated to America for many of the same reasons as other immigrants. However, Mormon immigrants usually had other motivating factors as well. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) often provided financial assistance for immigration, which encouraged many to journey to Utah specifically. Perhaps the most influential factor involved a desire to build a city of Zion, a place where members could fully live their religion alongside others who shared their faith and moral values, and where they could associate directly with the Prophet and other leaders of the Church.⁵⁰ In 1856, the ideal of Zion is what motivated Elizabeth Whitear Sermon to leave a comfortable home in London and trek across the United States to reach Salt Lake City, Utah, the designated location of Zion at that time. Of this desire, Elizabeth wrote, “I hungered for the Gospel of Christ. I never left my home for money or material gain. My only hope and desire was to reach the Valley where my children could be raised in the true gospel.”⁵¹ Though her motives were common among Mormons, again, her experience of immigration, fraught with unusual hardship, was exceptional.

Elizabeth did not share her conversion story or explain how she was introduced to the Church other than to say that she joined the Church in 1852.⁵² Elizabeth’s brother, Eli,

⁵⁰ Taylor, “Why Did British Mormons Emigrate.”

⁵¹ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

⁵² Ibid.

was the only other member of her family who converted. A biography of his life describes his conversion. Eli first learned about the LDS Church when LDS missionaries arrived in the area where their family lived in 1851, and a man that they knew joined the Church at that time. Perhaps Elizabeth first heard the teachings of the LDS Church at that time as well. Interestingly, Eli's biography does not mention Elizabeth. His biography states that in 1854, at the age of twenty-six, Eli fell in love with a young woman, Emma Brooks, who lived nearby. Emma joined the LDS Church along with her two sisters, Fanny and Maria, after a missionary came to their town. They immigrated to Utah after their disapproving parents forced them out of their home.⁵³

Eli went to Liverpool to see Emma and her sisters off, but ended up staying for an extended time due to a disagreement with his parents concerning his interest in a Mormon girl. While in Liverpool, missionaries taught Eli the gospel, and he decided to be baptized. Based on the observations of others who had converted before him, Eli knew that his decision would bring persecution that would hurt his father's blacksmith business. Eli also knew his parents would not approve. Therefore, in order to avoid further contention with his family, Eli decided to immigrate to America, arriving in New Orleans in April, 1854. He then had to travel up the Mississippi River and across the Missouri River in order to join a wagon train in Kansas that would cross the Plains to Utah. Sadly, upon arriving in Utah, Eli discovered that Emma had died along with her sister, Fanny, due to a smallpox

⁵³ "Eli Whitear: 1827 – 1908," *FamilySearch.org*, [https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Eli Whitear](https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Eli%20Whitear).

outbreak on board their ship. Eli befriended Emma's sister, Maria, and the two eventually fell in love and married.⁵⁴

Though Eli's biography does not mention Elizabeth, a logical conclusion is that his conversion to the LDS faith probably influenced her. It is unclear whether Eli introduced Elizabeth to the Church directly. However, even if Eli did not talk to Elizabeth about his new religion, knowing that he had accepted the LDS faith probably made Elizabeth more open to listening to the teachings of missionaries, and more comfortable embracing the message they delivered. Elizabeth and Eli had at least three other siblings who lived long enough to learn about the LDS Church, but available records indicate that none of them converted.⁵⁵

British members of the LDS Church began immigrating to the United States in 1840, only three years after missionary work began there. During this early period and throughout the nineteenth century, converts were asked to physically join other members of the church in America to help build a righteous community, which they referred to as Zion.⁵⁶ Elizabeth soon learned that even among well-intentioned individuals, working toward creating this type of utopian community does not come without challenges. Still, gathering the Saints into one place did provide some advantages for most Church members. Living in one community served to build up the church by giving members a collective

⁵⁴ "Eli Whitear 1827 – 1908," *FamilySearch.org*, https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Eli_Whitear.

⁵⁵ "Rachel Hedgecock: Facts," *Ancestry.com*, <http://person.ancestry.com/tree/77562613/Rachel>.

⁵⁶ "Mormon Missionary Work: A Brief History and Introduction," *BYU.edu*, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://lib.byu.edu/collections/mormon-missionary-diaries/about/mormon-missionary-work/>.

strength in economics, politics, and spirituality. More importantly, living among a larger group of Church members offered some physical safety and protection from the persecution often experienced by the early members of the Church.⁵⁷ Additionally, some new members hoped to benefit financially, and chose to immigrate to Utah because missionaries promised land and gainful employment, which was an opportunity that many British converts would not have found in England.⁵⁸

Certainly, the hope of greater economic success must have pushed some British converts to leave England, but motives for immigration varied widely from one person to the next. Some people were encouraged to immigrate, either directly or indirectly, by others who left before them.⁵⁹ Many others were primarily motivated by religious factors. Elizabeth Mellor Steward, who traveled to America in 1856, states that she and her family were eager to move to a place where they could practice their religion more freely.⁶⁰ The opportunity for prosperity was never a motivating factor for Elizabeth Whitear Sermon either because she and her family already enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle in England. Her husband, Joseph Sermon, was successful, and had worked for the same employer for many years. In fact, they owned two properties, one of which was used as a rental. Elizabeth

⁵⁷ Richard L. Jensen, "Immigration and Emigration," *BYU.edu*, accessed March 28, 2015, http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Immigration_and_Emigration.

⁵⁸ Cannon, "Migration of English Mormons," 445.

⁵⁹ Taylor, "Why Did British Mormons Emigrate," 252-253.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Mellor Steward, "Autobiography of Elizabeth Mellor Steward," *BYU.edu*, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/Steward>.

clearly states that her faith was the only factor in shaping her desire to go to Utah to be with the Saints.⁶¹

Unlike Elizabeth, many new members of the Church were poor and could not afford passage to America; therefore, the Church began a Perpetual Emigration Fund to provide loans to those members who wanted to immigrate to Utah to join the Saints, as early members of the Church were sometimes called. Initial funding was provided by members of the church in the United States and given to carefully selected immigrants in the form of a loan. Repayments to the fund would then help others immigrate. The fund was used primarily to help those who had needed skills, had been members of the church for longer than 10 years, or who had family members who contributed to the fund.⁶²

Not all the Church members who migrated to the U.S. received assistance from the Perpetual Emigration Fund. Those who could, paid their own way to Utah, or at least to an intermediate location in the US, where they lived and worked until they could earn the additional funds needed to travel to Utah. Eliza Seamons and her family traveled to America on the same ship as Elizabeth in 1856. Eliza records in her autobiography that her family stayed in New York for a short time and then settled in New Jersey, where they lived and worked to save the money necessary to reach their destination. In 1859, the family was finally able to travel to Nebraska, where they spent a year preparing for the

⁶¹ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

⁶² Jensen, "Immigration and Emigration."

journey to Utah. During their time there, Eliza married, delaying her travel plans, but she finally reached Utah in 1861.⁶³

In addition to financing their own immigration, some wealthier members of the Church contributed to the Perpetual Emigration Fund. One notable example, Thomas Tennant, paid twenty-five thousand dollars for a house that Brigham Young had placed for sale in Utah before leaving England. The proceeds of the sale were meant to replenish the Perpetual Emigration Fund.⁶⁴ Tennant traveled to Utah with his wife, their baby boy, his mother-in-law and brother-in-law on the same ship as most of the members of the Martin Handcart Company. Tennant and his family crossed the Plains with the William B. Hodgetts Company.⁶⁵ Sadly, Tennant never saw the house that he purchased. He became ill and passed away during the trip to Utah. He was buried in Fort Laramie, Wyoming.⁶⁶

The number of LDS Church members in Europe heeding the council to gather in Zion was so great that Church leaders found it necessary to assign emigration agents in Liverpool to work specifically with Mormons. Their responsibilities included administering the Perpetual Emigration Fund and assisting members in making travel arrangements. The first groups of immigrants sailed to New Orleans and traveled up the

⁶³ Eliza Seamons, "Autobiography of Eliza Seamons," *BYU.edu*, accessed February 6, 2017, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/179>.

⁶⁴ Olsen, *The Price We Paid*, 227-228.

⁶⁵ "Thomas Tennant," *LDS.org*, last updated September 1, 2016, accessed February 6, 2017, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/pioneers/20698/thomas-tennant>.

⁶⁶ "Jesse Haven to Brigham Young, October 9, 1856," in Brigham Young Office Files 1832-1878, *LDS.org*, last updated September 1, 2016, accessed February 7, 2017, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/sources/Haven>.

Mississippi River to Iowa before crossing the Plains.⁶⁷ This is the same route that Elizabeth's brother, Eli, took when he immigrated to Utah in 1854.⁶⁸ In that same year, Brigham Young sent a letter to the British mission leader, Franklin D. Richards, instructing him to send immigrants through the northern ports of New York, Boston, or Philadelphia. Young hoped that many members would avoid some common illnesses, such as cholera by avoiding travel on the river.⁶⁹ This change coincided with the westward expansion of the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad to Iowa City, Iowa, which served the immigrants well. From this time forward, sailing to these Northern locations became the common practice.⁷⁰

European Mormons wishing to immigrate to the U.S. gathered in Liverpool, where they stayed a few days until a sufficient number could be assembled to charter a boat on which they could sail to the New World together, usually arriving in the city only a few days before departure. Travel arrangements were made with the help of an agent. On average, the voyage usually took about five weeks.⁷¹ The captains of these ships reported seasickness as a common problem, but noted that the Mormons were generally a happy people.⁷²

Life on Mormon ships was generally more regimented than other immigrant ships as passengers adhered to a strict daily schedule. On Mormon ships, individual

⁶⁷ Fred E Woods, "Iowa City Bound: Mormon Migration by Sail and Rail, 1856-1857," *The Annals of Iowa*, Third Series, 65, nos. 2, 3 (Spring/Summer 2006): 163.

⁶⁸ "Eli Whitear 1827 – 1908," *FamilySearch.org*, https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Eli_Whitear.

⁶⁹ Woods, "Iowa City Bound," 163.

⁷⁰ Stanley B. Kimball, "Sail and Rail Pioneers Before 1869," *BYU Studies* 35, no.2 (1995): 23.

⁷¹ Woods, "Iowa City Bound," 166.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 169.

responsibilities were usually assigned by church leaders before the ship left port. The immigrants woke up each day at 5:00 A.M., and prior to breakfast, attended to assigned chores, such as cleaning.⁷³ Prayer services were held daily at 7:00 A.M., after which, passengers spent the day doing productive work, such as sewing tents.⁷⁴ Classes for children and adults were also held on most days. Saints from Scandinavian countries used this time to study English.⁷⁵ However, passengers also took time to relax by playing games, singing, and dancing⁷⁶ before retiring to bed around 8:00 P.M.⁷⁷ Captain H.S. Rich, the captain of the ship, *Enoch Train*, wrote in a letter to a church leader that if all immigrant ships would follow the same rules as Mormon immigrant ships, there would be “far less of sickness and distress at sea.”⁷⁸

For European Mormons, the immigration experience of crossing the Atlantic and arriving in the U.S. stands in stark contrast to that of non-Mormons. Because of the active trade route between Liverpool and New York during the mid-nineteenth century, Liverpool also became Europe’s most active immigration port. Most Europeans who wished to obtain passage to America traveled to that city.⁷⁹ Mormons had a designated agent to help them through the process. This allowed them to arrive in Liverpool only a few days before

⁷³ “The Convert Immigrants,” *LDS.org*, last updated August 1, 2013, accessed November 10, 2016, <https://history.lds.org/article/pioneer-story-the-convert-immigrants-?lang=eng>.

⁷⁴ Fred E Woods, “When the Saints Come Sailing In,” *The Log of Mystic Seaport*, (1997): 13. http://larsenhistory.org/When_the_Saints_Came_Sailing_In.pdf.

⁷⁵ “The Convert Immigrants,” *LDS.org*.

⁷⁶ Woods, “Iowa City Bound,” 169.

⁷⁷ Woods, “When the Saints Come Sailing In,” 13.

⁷⁸ Woods, “Iowa City Bound,” 169.

⁷⁹ James M. Bergquist, *Daily Life in Immigrant America, 1820-1870: How the First Great Wave of Immigrants Made Their Way in America* (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 2009), 62.

departure. Most other would-be immigrants found the task of hiring a trustworthy agent difficult. Generally, most non-Mormons usually had to stay in the city for several weeks, and often fell victim to dishonest tactics of agents and boarding house attendants, who added fake fees at every opportunity. Local authorities did little to resolve these issues, leaving immigrants vulnerable at every step of the process.⁸⁰

Non-Mormon immigrants usually purchased available space in the cargo area of ships and often had to supply their own provisions as well.⁸¹ Travelers were advised to take enough provisions for ten weeks, but in the most favorable conditions, ships could arrive in New York in as little as four weeks, or in the worst of conditions, it could take as long as twelve weeks.⁸² Overcrowding caused a myriad of problems on immigrant ships. Fighting among passengers became so common that captains had to implement rules to forbid shouting or arguing, and establish that all disagreements would be settled by the captain or first mate.⁸³ Diseases such as typhus, malaria, and cholera also spread easily on ships, and some deaths were not unusual during the journey.⁸⁴ Immigrants often complained that crew members treated them badly. Some of the more serious reports included assaults, filthy conditions, and inflating the price of medical treatments.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Bergquist, *Daily Life in Immigrant America*, 65.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

Arriving in New York brought relief to most passengers, but it also brought its own set of challenges. Again, Mormon immigrants had an advantage of church leaders and fellow members to help them with this phase of the journey as well. Non-Mormon immigrants did not, and the chaos of arriving ships often left new immigrants vulnerable. The most fortunate immigrants were greeted by family or friends. Others were fortunate to find members of various charitable immigrant aid societies, which had formed to help protect new immigrants as they transitioned into American life. However, many fell victim to representatives of local boarding houses, known as runners, who preyed on those who had just arrived by seizing their luggage as they were exiting the ship, forcing new immigrants to follow. Runners usually led the newly arrived immigrants to a specific boarding house, which would then charge exorbitant prices. Sometimes immigrants were led to employment agents who offered low paying jobs, or to transportation agents who sold tickets that only took them halfway to their intended destination at a high cost or sold fake tickets on railroads that didn't even exist.⁸⁶ Clearly, traveling in large groups and coordinating with church leaders helped Mormon immigrants avoid many of those traps.

In some ways, Elizabeth's immigration story might sound familiar. It begins like many other British Mormons. Like most European immigrants, Elizabeth and her family sold their property and most of their possessions before leaving their home in London and traveling to Liverpool to obtain passage to America. Elizabeth's husband, Joseph, agreed

⁸⁶ Bergquist, *Daily Life in Immigrant America*, 85-87.

to leave their native land only because Elizabeth's desire to live in Zion was so great that she had considered going alone if necessary. Joseph did not share Elizabeth's interest in relocating to the home of Church headquarters because he had never become a member. Still, he made tremendous sacrifices in order to support Elizabeth in her faith. However, any hopes Joseph had of keeping the family together were dashed before they left Liverpool. Elizabeth's and Joseph's oldest son, Charles, who was only eleven years old at the time, made a last minute decision to stay in England. Elizabeth stated that he returned to London to complete an apprenticeship in his grandparents' blacksmith shop. Elizabeth further stated that she had expected that she would send for him in a few years, but that did not happen as she had hoped, and she never saw him again. Elizabeth did not mention him again in her personal account.⁸⁷

Elizabeth and her family sailed to America on a ship called *Caravan*, which left Liverpool in February 1856. Elizabeth described the *Caravan* as "an almost worn out old vessel," but did not expand on this assessment. Elizabeth said little else about this leg of her journey except to describe it as a "long, rough, uneventful journey."⁸⁸ Both the *Millennial Star* and *Deseret News* briefly reported details of the *Caravan's* forty-one-day voyage after its arrival in Castle Gardens, New York in April, 1856. The ship left Liverpool four days late due to storms, and also encountered storms while at sea. During one particularly violent storm, a sailor drowned after he fell from the front of the ship. The

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

death of one passenger, a child, was also reported, but no details concerning the circumstances were given. Some happy events took place along the way as well. Three babies were born, and one couple got married. To celebrate the wedding, passengers displayed the American flag and rang bells.⁸⁹

Printed reports of *Caravan*'s voyage were confirmed by one of Elizabeth's fellow passengers, Eliza Seamons, who provided further details in her autobiography. Seamons stated that during the four-day delay in Liverpool, the *Caravan* underwent some repairs. This fact may have contributed to Elizabeth's perception that the ship was worn out. Seamons also recorded that the storm they encountered at sea was severe enough to push the ship off course by at least two hundred miles. Because a mast broke and fell on deck, the sailor died. This incident also injured a second sailor who suffered a broken thigh. Passengers were unharmed because they were not allowed on deck during the storm, which lasted three days. In honor of the ship, a baby girl, born to the House family during the voyage, was named Caravan.⁹⁰ Seamons's sister, Rachel Hancey, was one of the women who gave birth during the voyage. She named her baby boy James Sands Hancey. The baby's middle name was chosen in honor of the *Caravan*'s Captain William Sands. Rachel

⁸⁹ "Liverpool to New York: 18 Feb 1856 - 27 Mar 1856: A Compilation of General Voyage Notes," *BYU.edu*, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/176>.

⁹⁰ Eliza Seamons, "Autobiography of Eliza Seamons," *BYU.edu*, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/179>.

Hancey noted that Captain Sands treated them kindly, and distributed soup and vegetables to passengers who were sick and poor.⁹¹

Elizabeth's recollection of crossing the Atlantic as "uneventful" might seem strange in light of the fact that a storm caused the death of a sailor and injury of another. However, earlier in 1856, another ship, the *John J. Boyd*, carrying Mormon immigrants to America encountered a tornado, collided with another ship, and caught fire twice before finally reaching New York sixty-five days after leaving Liverpool.⁹² Difficulties at sea were not unusual during the nineteenth century. Shipwrecks were actually common enough that the fear of being lost at sea kept some Europeans from immigrating. In fact, about ninety ships were lost at sea each year during the early and mid-nineteenth century.⁹³

Many of the immigrants who eventually crossed the Plains with Elizabeth sailed across the Atlantic aboard a ship called *Horizon*. They set sail from Liverpool with at least seven hundred people on board on May 25, 1856, spending five weeks at sea, and arriving in Boston on June 30, 1856. One passenger, Aaron Jackson, remembered that a misunderstanding caused some excitement on one occasion when Captain Read yelled to a sailor to hoist the sails higher, and a passenger thought that he had yelled, "Fire!"⁹⁴ Another passenger, Elizabeth White Steward, provides a more thorough account. Steward

⁹¹ Rachel Seamons Hancey, "Autobiography of Rachel Seamons Hancey," *BYU.edu*, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/Hancey>.

⁹² Woods, "Iowa City Bound," 167.

⁹³ Bergquist, *Daily Life in Immigrant America*, 81-82.

⁹⁴ Aaron Jackson, "Autobiography of Aaron Jackson," *BYU.edu*, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/Jackson>.

states that there were 856 people on board. She remembered one storm, three deaths, and three weddings. Steward stated that food and water, which was poor quality, was rationed. Their diet consisted of hard biscuits, beef, pork, rice, and peas. They passed the time by reading, sewing, dancing, singing, and attending church meetings.⁹⁵

By the mid-1850s, Mormon immigrants arrived in New York, Philadelphia, or Boston. Those with enough money to travel across the country, immediately made their way to Albany, New York, and purchased a ticket on the *Chicago and Rock Island Railroad* to Iowa City, Iowa, which was the furthest western destination of the railroad at that time. This train also made stops in Ohio and Illinois before arriving at its destination in Iowa.⁹⁶ Not all immigrants had all of the necessary funds upon arrival in the U.S. though, and many made a temporary home in the location of their arrival. Elizabeth White Steward noted that some families who sailed on the *Caravan* stayed in Boston to look for work so that they could save money to purchase train tickets for the remainder of the journey.⁹⁷ Likewise, Jemima Seamons Daines recorded that her mother's family stayed in Boston for three years while each member of the family sought employment to earn the money they needed to complete their journey to Utah.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Elizabeth White Steward, "Autobiography of Elizabeth White Steward," *BYU.edu*, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/Steward>.

⁹⁶ Woods, "Iowa City Bound," 178.

⁹⁷ Steward, "Autobiography of Elizabeth White Steward."

⁹⁸ Jemima Seamons Daines, "Autobiography of Jemima Seamons Daines," *BYU.edu*, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/Daines>.

The Sermon Family arrived in Castle Gardens, New York, in 1856 on the *Caravan*. Elizabeth confirms that they indeed traveled westward to Iowa by railroad.⁹⁹ She does not describe their experience, but some of her fellow travelers depict the accommodations as rough and uncomfortable. Some sections of tracks were uneven, which made the ride bumpy.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, some passengers recalled that rail cars did not have seats, leaving them to sit on their luggage and sleep on the floor.¹⁰¹ Another immigrant, Louisa Mellor Clark, describes their accommodations as “cattle cars, which were thought good enough for Mormons.”¹⁰² Additionally, train travel in this era was often slow and unreliable. In fact, immigrant trains traveled at a pace of only twelve miles an hour, which was less than half the speed of express trains, which could travel at a speed of over twenty-seven miles an hour.¹⁰³

Some Mormon immigrants also experienced harassment along the trip from their arrival point in the U.S. to Iowa City, Iowa. Andrew Smith remembered that local people had gathered to get a glimpse of the Mormons when they arrived on the ship *Enoch Train* in Boston on May 1, 1856. The local people and government officials were surprised to find the Mormon people clean and healthy, and Smith hoped their good impression might help to improve their overall opinion of Mormons.¹⁰⁴ Patience Archer Loader recalled that

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹⁰⁰ Woods, “Iowa City Bound,” 178.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Louisa Mellor Clark, “Autobiography of Louisa Mellor Clark,” *BYU.edu*, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/Clark>.

¹⁰³ Kimball, “Sail and Rail Pioneers Before 1869,” 19.

¹⁰⁴ Woods, “Iowa City Bound,” 170.

a crowd gathered around her family in Davenport, Iowa, “casting slurs”¹⁰⁵ and asking her father if he intended to allow his daughters to become the wives of Brigham Young. These men said that the family should stay in Davenport since there were few women and the men there needed wives.¹⁰⁶ John Southwell states that when he and a group other Mormon immigrants stayed a night in a barn in Cleveland, Ohio, a mob of both men and women gathered outside and stayed for hours, “howling and bombarding with stones and bats” until someone with apparent authority in the community convinced them to leave.¹⁰⁷

As money in the Perpetual Emigration Fund dwindled, church leaders looked for an alternative, less expensive method of travel other than the traditional wagon train. Brigham Young devised a new plan for crossing the plains using handcarts, which was deployed in the spring of 1856.¹⁰⁸ Generally, handcarts were about the same width as wagons, but were only about six to seven feet in length. Each handcart could hold close to five hundred pounds, which would be manually pulled by a handrail at the front of the cart.¹⁰⁹ This plan would make crossing the Plains physically more difficult, but it would cost less and potentially reduce travel time, which would allow more immigrants to reach Utah.¹¹⁰ One traveler, John Bond, recalled that Joseph A. Young stated, “My father

¹⁰⁵ Sandra Ailey Petree, *Recollections of past days: The autobiography of Patience Loader Rozsa Archer*, (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2006), 59.

¹⁰⁶ Petree, *Recollections of past days*, 59.

¹⁰⁷ Olsen, *The Price We Paid*, 229.

¹⁰⁸ Cannon, “Migration of English Mormons,” 453.

¹⁰⁹ Eddins, “Willie and Martin Handcart Companies.”

¹¹⁰ Moulton, “Mormon Handcart Horrors,” 42.

[Brigham Young] is anxious to have as many Saints arrive in the valley as possibly can, and by the hand-cart source more Saints can go that way than with wagons.”¹¹¹

Statistics concerning the safety traveling by handcart have been debated. A recent study concluded that the handcart method of travel later proved more treacherous than traveling by wagon train, which experienced about a 3.5 percent mortality rate on average, including both Mormon and non-Mormon groups.¹¹² Between 1856 and 1860, ten groups crossed the Plains by handcart. The combined mortality rate of 4.7 percent among all ten groups supports the theory that this method of travel was particularly dangerous.¹¹³ However, an earlier study looked at each of the ten groups individually and found that the mortality rate among handcart companies was surprisingly low when compared to wagon trains. In eight of the ten handcart companies, the death rate was estimated at less than 2 percent, although the exact number of people who died in the sixth, seventh, and eighth handcart companies were admittedly unknown. It is especially interesting to note that only one person died during the trek of the ninth handcart company, and all members of the tenth company arrived in Utah safely.¹¹⁴ What skewed the total number of deaths for handcart travel was the high percentage of people who died during the tragic circumstances

¹¹¹ John Bond, “Handcarts West in ’56,” *LDS.org*, accessed March 20, 2015, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&sourceId=5317>, 6.

¹¹² Stephanie Pappas, “Going West Wasn’t So Deadly for Early Mormon Pioneers,” *Live Science*, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.livescience.com/46834-mormon-pioneers-mortality-rate.html>.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Note that many sources estimate different death rates. Many of the personal accounts estimate that as many as 50% of the members of the Martin Handcart Company died. The number cited here is taken from a recent academic study.

¹¹⁴ Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 193.

met by the fourth and fifth handcart companies to cross the Plains. These companies, the Willie and Martin Companies respectively, started late in the season with few provisions, and then met an early winter storm. These were unpredictable circumstances that were not normally encountered by other pioneers, regardless of their method of travel.

Some sources also note that the Martin Handcart Company had fewer healthy men than the other companies that formed that season.¹¹⁵ In fact, three-fourths of the travelers in the Martin Handcart Company were women, children, or elderly. Franklin D. Richards, the British mission president, also noted that several of them were also disabled.¹¹⁶ These details are more significant when considered in light of the fact that, with five hundred and seventy-six people, the Martin Handcart Company was the largest of the handcart companies by far. Five hundred people belonged to the Willie Handcart Company, but of the other eight, the Christiansen Handcart Company was the next largest, with only three hundred and thirty people. If the estimated three-fourths of the Martin Handcart Company really were women, children, elderly, or disabled, then well over four hundred of the immigrants of that company fit into one of those categories. That number is significant considering that it is greater than the number of immigrants in each of eight of the other handcart companies by more than one hundred.¹¹⁷ Certainly having a larger group would make traveling slower, and having a large number of people who might need additional

¹¹⁵ "History of Elizabeth Robinson Telford," *FamilySearch.org*, last updated March 17, 2013, accessed November 2, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/363874>.

¹¹⁶ Olsen, *The Price We Paid*, 243.

¹¹⁷ Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 193.

help could add to the challenge. Elizabeth never mentions the demographics of the Martin Handcart Company in her personal account. However, she may not have known that the previous handcart companies consisted of smaller groups of younger, healthier individuals.

Elizabeth states in her letter to her children that upon arrival in Castle Gardens, New York, they rested, and then took a train to Florence, Nebraska. However, there is evidence that Elizabeth and her family made a temporary home in Iowa before going to Nebraska. In fact, Elizabeth, her husband, and their four children are listed on the 1856 Iowa State Census, residing in Iowa City.¹¹⁸ Mormon wagon trains and handcart companies began their journeys to Utah from Nebraska where they prepared for the trek. While Elizabeth did not specifically remember, a fellow traveler, Aaron Jackson, notes that they left Iowa City to travel the 277 miles to Florence, Nebraska on July 15, 1856.¹¹⁹ Langley Allgood Bailey recalls that some people came out of their houses and jeered as they left Iowa to begin their long journey. Elizabeth did not mention that detail either, but she certainly could not have overlooked it.¹²⁰ So she persisted with her plans and her faith, not knowing of the terrible fate before her.

¹¹⁸ "Iowa State Census Collection, 1836-1925 for Elizabeth Sermon," *Ancestry.com*, accessed March 20, 2015, http://interactive.ancestry.com/1084/IA_Census.

¹¹⁹ Aaron Jackson, "Autobiography of Aaron Jackson," *BYU.edu*, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/Jackson>.

¹²⁰ Langley Allgood Bailey, "Reminiscences and Journal [ca. 1920 -1929]," *LDS.org*, accessed October 25, 2016, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/sources/Bailey>.

CHAPTER IV
THE MARTIN HANDCART COMPANY

Elizabeth had expected to travel west by wagon train. In fact, Joseph purchased a team of mules and a wagon, but he hesitated to leave for Utah. The Sermon family lingered until Elizabeth could convince Joseph to travel to their intended destination.¹²¹ Because of the lower cost, leaders of the Church encouraged members to travel by handcarts rather than wagon trains so that more Saints could reach Utah.¹²² After some discussion on this topic with Church leaders, Elizabeth heeded their counsel. At Elizabeth's urging, the Sermon family sold their wagon and mules, purchased a handcart, and joined the last party that formed that year, the Martin Handcart Company.¹²³ This meant that Elizabeth had to sell most of her personal possessions. Each traveler was allowed just seventeen pounds of personal cargo, which included necessities such as clothing and blankets.¹²⁴

Due to unexpected delays, the Company of around five hundred left on July 28, which was late in the season. People living in Florence and others who had traveled the Plains before tried to warn them of the dangers they would face. Levi Savage, a captain in the Willie Handcart Company, which left Florence only two weeks before the Martin Handcart Company, had traveled the Plains many times before. He warned them that this late in the year, there would be no way to avoid "suffering, sickness, and death," and

¹²¹ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹²² Olsen, *The Price We Paid*, 25.

¹²³ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹²⁴ Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 59.

advocated staying in Nebraska until spring.¹²⁵ Sarah Crossley, who traveled with the Martin Handcart Company, relates that they did not have enough provisions to survive in Nebraska for the winter. So, at the urging of Church leaders, they made a decision to proceed on the ill-fated journey.¹²⁶ In light of this decision, Savage told them, “I will go with you, will help you all I can, ...will suffer with you, and if necessary, I will die with you.”¹²⁷ Savage survived, but dozens of others were not so blessed.

A factor that contributed to the delays that is rarely mentioned is that the ship that carried most of the members of the Martin Handcart Company from Liverpool to Boston left England later than expected. This is partially because fewer ships were available during the Crimean War, which was ongoing at the beginning of 1856. Also, bad weather hindered the arrival of some ships in port at Liverpool, including the *Horizon*, which would carry most the Martin Handcart Company to America.¹²⁸ Additionally, a train accident in 1856 caused damage to a bridge over the Mississippi river that forced the immigrants to take a ferry across the river instead of a train, causing a delay in their arrival in Iowa.¹²⁹

Many of the immigrants expected the handcarts to be ready and waiting for them when they arrived in Iowa City, but this was not the case. They had to build their own handcarts. This task took two to three weeks to complete. Also, the handcarts were made

¹²⁵ Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 96.

¹²⁶ Sarah Crossley Sessions, “Autobiographical Sketch,” *LDS.org*, accessed March 20, 2015, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&sourceId=15545>.

¹²⁷ Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 96.

¹²⁸ Woods, “Iowa City Bound,” 167.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

of inferior materials. Aaron Jackson explains that the wheel axels were made of wood instead of iron, and the boxes were made of leather rather than wood.¹³⁰ This inferior construction caused problems. At the beginning of the journey when the load was the heaviest, the handcart axles could not bear the load, and frequently broke. Within a few weeks, as food supplies began to dwindle and lighten the load, this problem began to resolve itself.¹³¹

Traveling by handcart meant that immigrants had to walk most of the thirteen hundred miles to Salt Lake City. Elizabeth describes the early portion the journey as rough and slow. She also notes that food was in short supply from the beginning. The Company was placed on strict rations of one pound of flour per adult, and one-fourth pound per child per day, but this amount continued to get smaller throughout the journey. From the very start, Elizabeth's husband, Joseph, was a decidedly reluctant traveler, constantly complaining. There was frequent friction between him and the Elders of the Church in their party. He repeatedly expressed suspicion of the Elders, and constantly accused Elizabeth of making the wrong decision to leave England.

Elizabeth displayed a feisty spirit herself. On one occasion, she even had a disagreement with Captain Edward Martin. Elizabeth shares that after they had traveled some distance, Captain Martin emptied one of the food wagons and placed one hundred pounds of flour on each of the handcarts, which gave Joseph more cause to complain.

¹³⁰ Jackson, "Autobiography of Aaron Jackson," *BYU.edu*.

¹³¹ Hafen and Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion*, 99.

Eventually, Elizabeth grew tired of pulling the excess weight, especially while she was hungry and Joseph continued to nag her about the mistake she had made in leaving England. One day, in anger, she threw the flour on the ground and told Captain Martin that she would not pull it any further if she and her family could not eat it, and that she must put the welfare of her family first. Captain Martin replied that she had to be obedient to his instructions or he would leave her on the Plains to be food for the wolves. Elizabeth quickly told him that he should, “leave those two girls you have in your carriage for food to the wolves, not me.”¹³² This is the only time she mentions Captain Martin treating any of the travelers unequally in any way, and she did not explain further. Elizabeth states that she, and others who heard the quarrel, did not have to carry the flour any further. However, Elizabeth admits that this incident hurt her deeply. Later in her letter, she also expresses suspicion that Captain Martin and other Company leaders may have been allowed a larger food ration than others, and felt this was not fair or right. However, an outsider might see this differently. The handful of men chosen to lead the group to Utah had traveled the route before. They knew the way and the dangers. It was imperative for them to stay alive if the immigrants had any hope of reaching Utah in safety. Perhaps, even years later, Elizabeth’s bitterness clouded her view on this particular issue. In spite of these doubts about a few leaders, Elizabeth still believed that she had followed the correct counsel in relocating to Utah.¹³³

¹³² Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹³³ Ibid.

The lack of food caused enough physical weakness that Joseph's health soon began to fail.¹³⁴ Elizabeth had to pull him in the handcart.¹³⁵ John Bond mentions in his autobiography that he could remember seeing Elizabeth struggling to pull her cart along with the help of her young sons, and expresses admiration for the devotion she showed to her husband. Bond comments that even though Elizabeth was weak herself, "She was so faithful to her husband that she gave every care that none but a true hearted wife could give."¹³⁶ Elizabeth notes that a single woman, Caroline Marchant, sometimes helped her pull her handcart, but they lost touch after arriving in Utah.¹³⁷

Conditions continued to deteriorate as the weather turned bitterly cold. On October 19, the Martin Handcart Company crossed the Platte River. Just as they completed the arduous task, a fierce storm arrived that included wind, hail, and sleet.¹³⁸ John Bond records that they made a camp, held a prayer meeting, and buried the dead. Just as the ceremony was closed, Elizabeth approached Captain Martin to ask if he and other elders would administer to her ailing husband. Three men went with her immediately and "prayed fervently to restore his health."¹³⁹ Elizabeth then told the men that both of her sons were suffering frostbite, and asked if they could really expect help to arrive. Captain Martin

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹³⁵ Bond, "Handcarts West," 31.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹³⁸ Simmons, *Across the Sea, Across the Plains*, 167.

¹³⁹ Bond, "Handcarts West," 24.

reassured her that Brigham Young would indeed send help. He then praised her for all the loving care she provided for her husband and children.¹⁴⁰

The storm that had begun as they entered camp left behind two feet of snow that left them stranded in Wyoming for nine days.¹⁴¹ Rations were further reduced to just four ounces per person.¹⁴² As starvation and extreme cold set in, many travelers succumbed to death, including Joseph. His suffering had been so great that Elizabeth referred to death as his friend. He was buried in a shallow grave with eight others. In a letter to her children many years later, Elizabeth notes that remembering the sight of wolves nearby still gave her chills. Elizabeth could not remember the exact location of Joseph's death. However, based on the details that Elizabeth did recall, Joseph most likely died at Martin's Cove, Wyoming, just after a rescue team arrived. Langley Allgood Bailey notes in his autobiographical account that nineteen people died in that location, and were buried in the snow because the ground was frozen. Sadly, Bailey's brother actually saw wolves eating the bodies of the dead as they were leaving the camp.¹⁴³

At one point, a party of missionaries traveling on horseback passed the weary Martin Handcart Company and delivered news of their suffering to Salt Lake City. Brigham Young, the prophet, immediately dispatched a rescue party, which found the

¹⁴⁰ Bond, "Handcarts West," 24.

¹⁴¹ Linda Dekker and LaRene Porter, "Go and Bring Them In," *LDS.org*, last modified December 2006, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2006/12/go-and-bring-them-in?lang=eng>.

¹⁴² Simmons, *Across the Sea, Across the Plains*, 167.

¹⁴³ Bailey, "Reminiscences and Journal [ca. 1920 -1929]."

James G. Willie Company first. One rescuer, Daniel W. Jones, relates that after seeing their severe suffering, he realized how urgently they needed to find the Martin Handcart Company.¹⁴⁴ Jones, with the help of Joseph A. Young and Abel Garr, found the Company on October 28th in Devil's Gate, Wyoming.¹⁴⁵ Another rescuer, Ephraim Hanks, relates that he would never forget "the starved forms and haggard countenances of the poor sufferers" who rejoiced when he arrived.¹⁴⁶ One of Elizabeth's fellow travelers, Patience Loader Archer, marveled, "What brave men they must have been to start out from Salt Lake City in the middle of winter in search of U.S. poor folks. They did not know how far they would have to travel in the snow before they would find us."¹⁴⁷ She also recalled that new rescuers arrived every day with wagons of food, clothing, and quilts.¹⁴⁸ With this help, the Company arrived in Salt Lake City on November 30, 1856, where they were met with hundreds of people eager to see them.¹⁴⁹

Many of those who survived the journey bore lifelong scars due to all that they endured. Elizabeth's sons were so severely affected by frostbite that she had to cut dead portions of their feet off with scissors. By the time they arrived in Utah, her youngest son, Robert was so severely affected by frostbite that both of his legs were amputated just below

¹⁴⁴ Albert Philips, "As I Remember," *Salt Lake Telegram* (Salt Lake City, UT), August 31, 1926. <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=17808530>.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson Kingsford, "Leaves from the Life of Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson Kingsford," *LDS.org*. Archives, MS 11796.

¹⁴⁶ Ephraim Hanks, "Journal entry: Martin's Cove," *LDS Church*, accessed March 20, 2015, <https://history.lds.org/article/pioneer-story-martins-cove-ephraim-hanks?lang=eng>.

¹⁴⁷ Petree, "Recollections," 88.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁴⁹ "Edward Martin Company," *LDS.org*, accessed April 2, 2015, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/companyDetail?companyId=192>.

the knees.¹⁵⁰ He was not alone in his plight. Bailey describes seeing a young woman who, “left the blood prints of her heels and toes on the snow.” He later heard that her legs were amputated after she arrived in Salt Lake City.¹⁵¹ Circumstances were so grim for the Martin Handcart Company that one recent study estimates that the death rate reached over sixteen percent, although some other sources estimate the rate may have been higher.¹⁵² Statistics concerning amputations or other lingering illnesses and injuries are not readily available.

Upon arrival in Salt Lake City, immigrants usually gathered in Union Square, also known as Public Square. Before immigrants parted ways, a dismissal meeting usually took place which included religious speeches, sometimes from the prophet, Brigham Young, himself. People already living in Salt Lake City often gathered to greet the new immigrants to offer assistance in the form of food, medical care, or employment. When possible, immigrants were taken to the homes of family and friends where they could stay for a few weeks until they could get settled.¹⁵³ Others camped at the Square until they could find employment.

When the Martin Handcart Company arrived in Salt Lake City, many took immigrants into their homes. Elizabeth remained on the Square until she saw an old friend

¹⁵⁰ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹⁵¹ Bailey, “Reminiscences and Journal [ca. 1920 -1929].”

¹⁵² Pappas, “Going West Wasn’t So Deadly for Early Mormon Pioneers.”

¹⁵³ Fred E. Woods, “The Arrival of Nineteenth-Century Mormon Emigrants in Salt Lake city.” In *Salt Lake City: The Place Which God Prepared*, edited by Scott C. Esplin and Kenneth L. Alford, 203-230. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011.

that she recognized. He took her, along with her children, into his home for the night. Elizabeth notes that the bishop, the leader of her friend's local congregation, came to minister to her that night. He instructed Elizabeth to place her feet in tar, and she believed this treatment saved her toes because she was able to move them the next morning.¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth's brother, Eli, had immigrated to Utah two years earlier. He was shocked to learn of her presence there as he did not know that she crossed with the handcart companies. Eli lived in a small one-room house with his wife and baby, but he took Elizabeth and three of her children in and nursed them back to health.¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth's older son, John, only nine years old, stayed in Salt Lake City to apprentice as a blacksmith.¹⁵⁶

Like so many other immigrants, Elizabeth moved forward and built a new life for herself. She faced some initial struggles that may have been more difficult than most other immigrants. Upon arriving in Utah, Elizabeth found herself newly widowed and mother to a son who became physically disabled when his feet were amputated due to frostbite. Elizabeth states that he adjusted well to his new disability, and as her own health improved, she realized that she needed to find a way to support herself. After about a year with her brother, Elizabeth accepted work on the farm of Thomas and Eliza Irvine, who had immigrated and traveled to Utah with the Joseph W. Young Company in 1853.¹⁵⁷ Elizabeth felt more comfortable living with them since they had a large farm, nice home,

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹⁵⁵ "Eli Whitear: 1827 – 1908," *FamilySearch.org*, [https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Eli Whitear](https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Eli%20Whitear).

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

and only one son living with them.¹⁵⁸ This decision set the stage for everything else that followed in Elizabeth's life.

¹⁵⁸ "Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel 1847 – 1868," *LDS.org*, accessed October 27, 2016, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/companies/333/joseph-w-young-company-1853>. Note that Elizabeth called her boss Thomas, but records indicate that his name was John. Thomas was the name of their son.

CHAPTER V

JABEZ ROBERT CAMM AND ELIZABETH'S LIFE IN UTAH

While living and working on the farm of Thomas and Eliza Irving, Elizabeth met a man named Jabez Robert Camm, who was also employed there. Camm was also a British Mormon convert who had emigrated from England. Elizabeth called him Robert, and encountered him mostly at meal times. She noted that he was cheerful and kind to her and her children. Although ten years her junior, Elizabeth labeled Robert, a perpetual bachelor, as a “soldier of fortune.”¹⁵⁹ Robert liked Elizabeth, but she had truly loved her first husband, and as a grieving widow, she was not in a hurry to move on.¹⁶⁰

There is very little record of Robert's life before meeting Elizabeth. Records indicate that he was the fourth child and third son in a family of eight children in Gloucester, England.¹⁶¹ There is no record of his conversion to the LDS Church, but all of the information at hand suggests that Robert was the only member of his family to convert. Records also indicate that Robert never married, and he left England as a single man. The LDS British Mission Emigration Register (BMR) indicates that he accepted help from the Perpetual Emigration Fund to finance his move to America.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ “Jabez Robert Camm,” *FamilySearch.org*, <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/2S2L-66F/details>.

¹⁶² “Jabez R. Carn: Liverpool to New York,” *BYU.edu*, accessed September 25, 2016, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/passenger/Carn>.

Other sources have not previously identified the record of Robert's immigration to the US. This is probably due to discrepancy in the spelling of his name. The LDS British Mission Emigration Register (BMR) lists a man named Jabez R. Carn aboard a ship named *The Samuel Curling (S.Curling)*, which departed Liverpool on April 22, 1855, and arrived in New York exactly one month later.¹⁶³ Since no immigration record exists for a Robert or Jabez Camm, and this Jabez R. Carn is the correct age, this must be the correct record. Additionally, the BMR lists the occupation of Jabez R. Carn as "shoemaker."¹⁶⁴ The 1860 United States Census also records Robert Camm's occupation as a shoemaker.¹⁶⁵ This is enough evidence to conclude that Jabez R. Carn is Jabez Robert Camm. The BMR is the only known individual record of his immigration to the US.

The *Millennial Star* reported that the ship *S. Curling* left Liverpool under the leadership of Israel Barlow with the last group of immigrants in 1855.¹⁶⁶ They encountered a few small storms while en route, but overall, those on board reported a relatively smooth trip. The most common complaints included sea-sickness and other stomach ailments.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ "Liverpool to New York: 22 Apr 1855 – 22 May 1855," *BYU.edu*, accessed September 25, 2016, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/voyage/notes>.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ "1860 United States Federal Census for Robert Canine," *Ancestry.com*, accessed July 20, 2016, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/1860 US Census>.

¹⁶⁶ "Departure of the S. Curling," *Millennial Star* 17, (1855): 280, accessed March 4, 2017, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/MStar/id/17221>.

¹⁶⁷ Matthew Rowan, "Journals of Matthew Rowan," *BYU.edu*, accessed March 4, 2017, <https://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/mii/account/Rowan>.

There were three births on board, no deaths, and all passengers arrived in New York in good health.¹⁶⁸

Having arrived in the U.S. prior to the use of handcarts, Robert experienced immigration in a significantly different way than Elizabeth. In 1855, just one year prior to Elizabeth's arrival, Mormon immigrants who landed in New York could not take a train directly to the location where Mormons gathered to prepare to cross the Plains, as Elizabeth and others did just one year later. In 1855, immigrants still had a long journey ahead before they could join a wagon train. Mormon immigrants typically took a train from New York to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Then they traveled by steamboat down the Ohio River and the Mississippi River to St. Louis, Missouri, where they boarded another steamboat in order to reach their desired destination of Atchison in the Kansas Territory. After arriving in Atchison, in a small area known as Mormon Grove, the immigrants prepared the wagon trains that carried them across the Plains to Utah.¹⁶⁹

No records have been found that specify which wagon train Robert Camm joined. However, there are records that describe the various wagon train companies that formed in 1855. Based on the dates, and the records of others who sailed on the *S. Curling*, Robert most likely traveled with the Seth M. Blair and Edward Stevenson Company, Moses Thurston Company, Charles A. Harper Company or the Milo Andrus Company. The Seth

¹⁶⁸ "Foreign Correspondence," *Millennial Star* 17, (1855): 399, accessed March 4, 2017, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/MStar/id/17221>.

¹⁶⁹ "Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel 1847 – 1868," *LDS.org*, accessed October 27, 2016, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/companies/305/moses-thurston-company#description>.

M. Blair and Edward Stevenson Company was traveling from Texas to Utah with eighty-nine people. About forty-four passengers from the *S. Curling*, a mix of immigrants and returning missionaries, joined them when they stopped in Atchison, Kansas. A cholera outbreak began only a few days into their trek toward Utah, which eventually claimed the lives of twenty-nine people. The remaining wagon trains dealt with less dramatic problems that were common that season. There was very little grass for their oxen along the trail, and some did not survive. Buffalo herds caused stampedes among the immigrants' cattle, causing damage to their property. The U.S. was at war with the Sioux Indians, and the threat of violence caused concern.¹⁷⁰ Delays were sometimes caused by broken axles on wagon wheels or difficulties crossing the high waters of rivers.¹⁷¹ Still, all of these companies reached Salt Lake City before the end of October, and the hardships they endured pale in comparison to those endured by the Martin Handcart Company.¹⁷²

Presumably, Robert found a job on the Irvine Family farm in Farmington when he arrived in Utah. There is no record to indicate whether the Irvine Family hired him immediately, but Elizabeth indicated that Robert was already employed at the farm when she began working there in 1857. Elizabeth liked some aspects of Robert's personality, and she noted that he had saved some money. Still, he had to propose several times.

¹⁷⁰ "Charles A. Harper Company (1855)," *LDS.org*, accessed March 8, 2017, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/companies/143/charles-a-harper-company#description>.

¹⁷¹ "Milo Andrus Company (1855)," *LDS.org*, accessed March 8, 2017, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/companies/52/milo-andrus-company#description>.

¹⁷² "Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel: Full Company List," *LDS.org*, accessed March 8, 2017, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravel/companies>.

Clearly, Elizabeth hesitated to accept, but her employer encouraged her, advising her that the union would be good for her. Eventually, Elizabeth did marry Robert, and in 1868, they moved together to the Cache Valley area of Utah along with twenty-five other families, where Robert had been granted forty acres of land. Later, the area they settled became known as the city of Logan.¹⁷³

Most of Elizabeth's life in Logan seems normal for anyone on the outside looking at an overview of the basic details. Elizabeth and her new husband established themselves in their new home while remaining actively involved in the Church. Robert found moderate success in all of his endeavors. The 1870 U.S. census lists Robert's occupation as a farmer,¹⁷⁴ but his grandson reports in his biographical letter that Robert also owned a general store.¹⁷⁵ By 1880, the U.S. census indicates that Robert had returned to his roots, listing his occupation as a shoemaker, which was his former profession in England.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps this required a storefront, and this is what Robert and Elizabeth's grandson meant by a general store. Robert's grandson also states that Robert quarried rock and made adobe bricks, which eventually enabled him to build two homes, as well as help in building the temple and tabernacle that are still in use in Logan today.¹⁷⁷ No record has been found to confirm his contribution, but there is a record that states that Robert donated adobe and

¹⁷³ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹⁷⁴ "1870 United States Census," *Ancestry.com*, accessed April 13, 2015, [http://search.ancestry.com/1870 US Census](http://search.ancestry.com/1870US Census).

¹⁷⁵ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

¹⁷⁶ "1880 United States Census," *Ancestry.com*, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/1880 US Census>.

¹⁷⁷ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

almost twenty dollars to help build schools in Logan in 1870.¹⁷⁸ While there is no census record for 1890, a city directory lists Robert as a landlord in Logan.¹⁷⁹ This is particularly interesting because he had left town by this time, but it is possible that he still owned property in Logan. Also, the information that Robert and Elizabeth's grandson provided to the Church archives indicates that they did not leave town together, and did not specify when Elizabeth joined Robert in their new home.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, Elizabeth could have still lived in Logan in 1890.

One common aspect of pioneer life that Elizabeth shared with her non-Mormon peers was that of contending with Native Americans. Women migrating west commonly feared encounters with Native Americans because of rumors they had heard about the fierceness of attacks. While attacks were rare, rumors of those that took place were widespread, and artwork depicting the events fueled the fears of women traveling west.¹⁸¹ These fears influenced their actions as they traveled west, and as they settled in their new homes. Often, while traveling, women felt nervous and interpreted every sound as a possible attack. One woman records that one night, what she thought was the sound of an imminent attack turned out to be the sound of rope splashing on the water. In an effort to mitigate danger in the event of an attack, some men began carrying out drills. Instead of

¹⁷⁸ Willard Conrad Jensen, "History of Logan," (Master's Thesis, University of Utah, 1927), 63-64.

¹⁷⁹ *Utah Directory, 1890: Salt Lake City, Logan, and Provo*. Provo, UT: *Ancestry.com*, accessed March 21, 2017. <http://search.ancestry.com/Utah Directory>.

¹⁸⁰ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

¹⁸¹ Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Pioneer Women: The Lives of Women on the Frontier* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 34-36.

helping women feel safer, they reacted to drills by screaming and hiding under wagons, and some women even fainted. However, when wagon trains encountered Native Americans in reality, most women managed to remain calm.¹⁸² Once settled in their new homes, the threat of violence from Native Americans still loomed, but the fears of women waned as they gained the shooting skills needed to protect themselves and their homes. Additionally, women often established relationships with Native American women, and began trading trinkets, clothing, and food.¹⁸³

Mormon immigrant women frequently mention tensions with Native Americans in their life stories as well, and Native Americans certainly factored into the lives of those living in the Cache Valley area. Elizabeth and Robert were not unaffected. The Shoshone, a large nomadic tribe, inhabited the Cache Valley area of Utah, which was located on the migration route of the tribe. The Shoshone generally saw the settlers as intruders, taking over lands where they hunted and fished. When Mormons first settled in the area, the Shoshone commonly came into the towns and stole horses and cattle. Elizabeth's grandson, Charles, notes that she had some encounters with the Native Americans. They began coming to the house in war paint, while the men were working in the fields, and demanding sugar and other items. Charles states that his mother, Caroline, Elizabeth's

¹⁸² Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier*, 99.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 170.

youngest child and only child with Robert Camm, remembered being afraid during these confrontations.¹⁸⁴

To defend themselves, the settlers formed a militia that they called “Minute Men,” as they would need to be ready to fight with only a moment’s notice. Brigham Young gave them direction to try to avoid violence, but to be firm in their stance in defending themselves.¹⁸⁵ However, the situation continued to escalate. In December of 1862, a tribe that had camped near Franklin, Idaho, in the Cache Valley area, shot at a small group of miners who were returning home, killing one of them. U.S. Army Colonel Patrick Edward Conner and his infantry, stationed in Salt Lake City, marched to Franklin to engage in battle with the Native tribe. Very few of the tribe survived this battle. This incident ended most of the troubles that settlers in this area had with Native Americans.¹⁸⁶ Charles notes that Robert was at this battle.¹⁸⁷ He did not say in what capacity, but an article recounting Cache Valley history suggests that many of the settlers tended to the wounded soldiers or helped transport the dead back to Salt Lake City.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

¹⁸⁵ “Cache Valley Indian Troubles,” *mendonutah.net*, compiled by M.R. Hovey, accessed June 9, 2016. http://www.mendonutah.net/history/cache_county/55.htm.

¹⁸⁶ “Indian Warfare at Battle Creek, Idaho,” *mendonutah.net*, compiled by M.R. Hovey, accessed June 9, 2016. http://www.mendonutah.net/history/cache_county/56.htm.

¹⁸⁷ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

¹⁸⁸ “Indian Warfare at Battle Creek, Idaho,” *mendonutah.net*, compiled by M.R. Hovey, Accessed June 9, 2016. http://www.mendonutah.net/history/cache_county/56.htm.

Most of the other records that exist concerning Robert and Elizabeth reveal precious little about them. These records include standard census data and city directories¹⁸⁹, both of which list Robert's occupation as a farmer, which brings into question the validity of the information provided by Elizabeth's grandson concerning Robert owning a general store.¹⁹⁰ Records indicate that Robert had some involvement in the community. A court record from 1878 shows that Robert asked for compensation when a county road was built on his property, and he was referred to the state road commissioner.¹⁹¹ Later, in 1882, he and two neighbors petitioned the court to ask that a neighbor be required to comply with a previous ruling, and remove a fence to open a road to traffic. The court considered testimony from all involved and came up with an alternate solution that benefited everyone.¹⁹²

The records examined so far only mentioned Elizabeth's husband, and provide only limited insights into the lifestyle of pioneers in Utah. However, since many Mormon pioneer women kept journals or wrote memoirs, it is possible to piece together a general view of what daily life must have been like for Elizabeth during her time in Logan. Elizabeth mentions caring for her children as a primary concern of hers. Already two of

¹⁸⁹ Robert W. Sloan, *Utah Gazetteer and Directory of Logan, Ogden, Provo, and Salt Lake Cities, for 1884*, (Salt Lake City, UT: for Sloan & Dunbar, by the Herald printing and publishing company, 1884), 335. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015027936361;view=1up;seq=13>.

¹⁹⁰ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

¹⁹¹ "A County Book of the County of Cache, Organized April 4, 1857," *Utah State University*, Bear River Historical Watershed Digital Collection: 327, accessed January 20, 2017. <http://digital.lib.usu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/Bear/id/8969/rec/4>.

¹⁹² "Proceedings of the City Council," *Logan Leader* (Logan, UT), May 12, 1882. <http://digital.lib.usu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/utahj2/id/31469/rec/6>.

her children had left home at an early age.¹⁹³ Also, one had died in infancy long before she left England.¹⁹⁴

Most pioneer women lived on farms in isolated areas, and this fact required them to develop a wide variety of skills. Most women took responsibility for growing food for their own families. They also raised chickens for consumption and for eggs. Men usually took care of keeping the barn clean, but women milked cows and tended to animals. Additionally, women took responsibility for domestic tasks, such as churning butter, making cheese, cooking, cleaning, spinning wool, sewing, washing clothes, and taking care of the children.¹⁹⁵

Mormon pioneer women were remarkably similar to their non-Mormon peers in carrying out the tasks of daily life. Mormon pioneer women generally focused on serving family, the Church, and the community. Most Mormon pioneer women took care of the home, kept a garden, cared for young children, participated in church activities, and helped their husbands with various farming tasks. They made fabric from wool, cotton, or silk, and sewed quilts and clothing. Women often plowed fields and harvested crops, while their husbands tended to other labor-intensive chores on the farm.¹⁹⁶ Women also tended to the sick and disabled, and delivered babies, which motivated them to study medicine.

¹⁹³ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

¹⁹⁴ "Elizabeth Whitear," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed March 21, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/KWJ4-8FX/details>.

¹⁹⁵ John Mack Faragher, *Women & Men on the Overland Trail*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 50-57.

¹⁹⁶ Arrington, "Rural Life Among Nineteenth-Century Mormons," 240-244.

Some women even obtained formal medical training at the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia, and women of the Church supported them by raising money to cover the cost of tuition.¹⁹⁷

Mormon pioneer women participated in some activities that were unique to their culture. For example, they began a system of food storage. They worked together collectively to grow wheat. A portion was used to distribute to the poor, and the remainder was stored for a future date in case of crop failure.¹⁹⁸ Mormon women also helped manage business ventures, such as general stores, dairies, and telegraph offices in the form of cooperatives. These were overseen by male church leaders, but women handled almost all the day-to-day tasks, even bookkeeping and manufacturing.¹⁹⁹

Perhaps the most important aspect of life in Utah that set Mormon pioneer women apart was their ability to participate in politics. In 1869, after Wyoming, Utah became the second territory in the U.S. to grant women the right to vote.²⁰⁰ Leaders of the women's organization of the Church, The Relief Society, quickly organized classes to teach women about the political process so that they would be prepared to vote in the next election,²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Arrington, "Rural Life Among Nineteenth-Century Mormons," 242.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 242.

²⁰⁰ Marc Haddock, "Utah Women Voted Earlier Than Most in US," *Deseret News*, (Salt Lake City, UT), February 8, 2010. <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/Utah-women-voted-earlier>.

²⁰¹ Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Woman Suffrage," in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* 1992, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 1572.

which took place in 1870, making Utah the first location in the U.S. in which women exercised this right.²⁰²

Some evidence indicates that Elizabeth may have become involved in politics, at least in support of her husband's interests.²⁰³ This fact becomes an important part of her life story. In fact, politics might even be what led Elizabeth and her husband, Robert, out of the Church since the party they supported, the Liberal Party, stood in direct opposition to Brigham Young's economic policies.²⁰⁴ Still, their grandson reports that polygamy was the issue that drove them out of the Church and out of Utah, and as such, an assessment of the validity of his claims is warranted.²⁰⁵ In the end, evidence suggests that both politics and polygamy most likely played an important role in the lives of this Mormon couple.

²⁰² Arrington, "Rural Life Among Nineteenth-Century Mormons," 242.

²⁰³ William H. Holmes, "The People's Column: A Trip North," *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, UT), July 20, 1872. https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/People's_Column.

²⁰⁴ Ron Walker, "Godbeites," Utah History Encyclopedia, accessed June 9, 2016.

http://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/g/GODBITES.html/cached.

²⁰⁵ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

CHAPTER VI

POLYGAMY AMONG WIDOWS OF THE MARTIN HANDCART COMPANY

Elizabeth and Robert continued to live in Logan, Utah, until life took a dramatic turn in 1886 that led them to leave the Church and Logan. Elizabeth and Robert's grandson reported that polygamy became an issue when Robert was asked to marry three newly immigrated young women. Elizabeth refused and threw them out of her home. When Elizabeth and Robert returned to church, someone made a disparaging remark about her. Robert got into a physical altercation with the man who made the comments, and this led him to write a letter of resignation from the Church for himself and Elizabeth.²⁰⁶ Although this story is not impossible, some elements of the story are questionable. Although the practice of polygamy in the early Mormon Church is famous, relatively few members ever took part in the practice, and no one was ever forced into a polygamous situation.²⁰⁷

Elizabeth certainly expresses concern about the issue of polygamy in her autobiographical account in her letter to her children. While she did not oppose the practice of polygamy, Elizabeth clearly hoped for a better situation for herself. Her comments, nevertheless, imply that she felt at least some pressure to enter a polygamous marriage, or

²⁰⁶ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

²⁰⁷ "Plural Marriage in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *LDS.org*, accessed March 26, 2015, <https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-the-church-of-jesus-christ>.

feared that she might be left with no choice but to enter into one. This might be one reason why she agreed to marry Robert Camm even though she had doubts about the match, and felt she was not yet ready to move on.²⁰⁸ Official statements of the LDS Church regarding its history with polygamy report that women always had freedom to choose their circumstances in marriage, and retained the right to divorce if the marriage caused distress.²⁰⁹ If this assertion is true, Elizabeth's fears about polygamy may have been exaggerated. However, the number of women Elizabeth knew who did enter polygamous marriages may have contributed to her heightened fears. Given the high death rate among the men of the Martin Handcart Company, many of Elizabeth's peers arrived in Utah newly widowed, just as she did. It is possible that the number of women in Elizabeth's acquaintance who entered polygamous marriages was greater than average. With this in mind, a review of Elizabeth's peers, other women near her age with young families who became widowed while traveling with the Martin Handcart Company, might help shed some light on the issue and make Elizabeth's viewpoint easier to understand.

Personal accounts of the other women provide a detail of the suffering and dire circumstances of the members of the Martin Handcart Company that support Elizabeth's account. Most of the women did not record their experience crossing the Plains until at least thirty years after the fact, but their vivid memories of the difficult travel conditions

²⁰⁸ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

²⁰⁹ "Plural Marriage in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *LDS.org*, accessed March 26, 2015, <https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-the-church-of-jesus-christ>.

are all remarkably similar. Their stories share themes of extreme cold and hunger, with descriptions of sleeping on wet, snow-covered ground, and strict food rations that allowed them to consume only a miniscule amount of gruel each day. Margaret Howard McBride and her husband both became so ill that their children had to pull them in their hand cart most of the way to Utah. One of their sons, Heber McBride, who was just thirteen years old at the time, shares in his autobiography that his family often reached camp after dark, which made finding wood to burn for warmth more difficult. On some nights, they had to gather and burn buffalo chips instead.²¹⁰

Some personal accounts bring up new questions. For example, Alice Fish Walsh relates that her oldest son, Robert, became ill soon after the trek began. For reasons she did not explain, he was not able to eat the ration of flour that they were provided. Alice's husband decided to find a settlement in which to sell a blanket to obtain additional food. He traveled a long distance out of the way to accomplish this task, but he did so in vain. The food did not help their son recover, and he died before the Company reached Devil's Gate, Wyoming.²¹¹

As tragic as Alice's story sounds, it brings to light the fact that settlements were within walking distance, even if that distance was not convenient. However, none of the

²¹⁰ Heber Robert McBride, "Heber Robert McBride Autobiography," in *Against Great Odds* by Darvil B. McBride and Bruce L. McBride, (1988), *Surnames.com*, accessed June 14, 2016.

http://www.surnames.com/documented_websites/arminta/heber_robert_mcbride_fifth_child.htm.

²¹¹ Arlie Campbell, "The Life of Alice Fish Walsh," *The Jacob Strong Family Organization*, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://jacobstrongfamily.org/histories/Alice%20Fish%20Walsh%20by%20Arlie.php>.

other women mention going to get more food. Perhaps not everyone was aware that towns were within reach, or perhaps they believed it would not help. Certainly, due to the large size of the Martin Handcart Company, a small settlement would not have had enough supplies for everyone.

In many ways, the journey was more difficult for men. Men had the extra burden of taking turns keeping watch over the camp every other night, which increased their exposure to the cold.²¹² Food rations did not take into account that the men had this added task. Men and women were each allotted one pound of flour per day,²¹³ and some of the men chose to give their portion to their families.²¹⁴ The death rate among the men of the Martin Handcart Company, even those who were relatively young, was unusually high.

Each of Elizabeth's peers became widowed due to starvation, sickness, or exposure to the extremely cold temperatures. Because the ground was frozen solid, none of those who died received a proper burial. A few of the women remember starting a fire to thaw ground just enough to dig a foot or two.²¹⁵ Others, such as Alice, simply buried their dead under the snow.²¹⁶ Conditions were so harsh, and the death rate so high, that mass graves

²¹² Campbell, "Alice Fish Walsh Strong," *The Jacob Strong Family Organization*.

²¹³ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

²¹⁴ Molly Farrow Grimshaw, "Mary Ann Barton Allen History 1842 - 1914 – step-daughter of Mary Ann Taylor Barton," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed June 10, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts>.

²¹⁵ John Kirkman, "Sketch of the Lives of Robert Kirkman and his Wife Mary Lawson and Family," (Speech, Meeting of the Aaron Johnson Camp, March 13, 1930).

²¹⁶ Campbell, "Alice Fish Walsh Strong," *The Jacob Strong Family Organization*.

became normal. Elizabeth buried her husband, Joseph, with eight others,²¹⁷ and Alice's husband was left with the bodies of nine others who had died on the same night.²¹⁸

To the joy of those still living, rescue teams began to arrive just as food ran out.²¹⁹ Most of the members of the Martin Handcart Company were so severely injured by starvation and frostbite by this point that rescuers worried that they would not survive the journey on foot.²²⁰ They decided that the immigrants should leave most of their few remaining possessions at Devil's Gate, and one of the rescuers would stay for the remainder of the winter to watch over the goods. This was done so that as many of the travelers as possible could ride the rest of the way to the Valley. One drawback of that decision was that leaving possessions behind meant that immigrants arrived in Salt Lake City with only the clothes on their backs, and in need of a lot of assistance from fellow Church members in order to get settled.²²¹

Arrival in Utah marks the point where the life experiences of Elizabeth and her peers begin to diverge. Those who did not have any family members living in Utah were assigned to the home of an active member family by Church leaders.²²² Like Elizabeth, all of the women spent the first several months in Utah trying to recover physically and

²¹⁷ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

²¹⁸ Campbell, "Alice Fish Walsh Strong," *The Jacob Strong Family Organization*.

²¹⁹ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

²²⁰ Bond, "Handcarts West," 32.

²²¹ Alice Fish Walsh Strong, "Alice Walsh Strong Autobiographical Sketch," *The Jacob Strong Family Organization*, accessed January 27, 2017, <http://jacobstrongfamily.org/histories/Alice%20Walsh-autobiography.php>.

²²² Campbell, "Alice Fish Walsh Strong," *The Jacob Strong Family Organization*.

emotionally from their unusually taxing journey, and trying to figure out what to do next. Elizabeth and all of her peers had planned to immigrate to Utah with their husbands. For each of them, the new marital status of widowhood brought an unexpected change in life plans. For some of the women, this is how polygamy became part of their lives.

While Elizabeth is the only woman who openly states that she purposely avoided polygamy, four of the other women within her peer group sustained monogamous marriages as well. Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson married a widower, William R. Kingsford, who never took part in polygamy. In fact, Horrocks indicates that the two were compatible, and that she was happy in this union.²²³ Jane Howard Barnes married her first husband's brother, William. Records indicate that Jane was his first wife and remained his only wife throughout his life.²²⁴ Hannah Rhodes Peel married twice after arriving in Utah, and escaped the fate of polygamy both times. In Hannah's case, avoiding polygamy did not help her avoid hardship. Both of the men Hannah married preceded her in death. Hannah spent the last seventeen years of her life as a widow.²²⁵

Of all of Elizabeth's peers, Deborah Bushnel Blair Chapman might have the most in common with her. Deborah did not leave a personal account of her life, but one anonymous biographer implies that she may have disagreed with the practice of

²²³ Kingsford, "Leaves from the Life of Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson Kingsford."

²²⁴ "William Barnes: Life Sketch," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed March 23, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/KWJ7-3RR/details>.

²²⁵ Bonnie Atkinson, "History of Hannah Rhodes Peel," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed June 16, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Atkinson>.

polygamy.²²⁶ Since members of the Church began practicing polygamy prior to 1856, Deborah would have known about it before making the decision to immigrate. However, Deborah avoided polygamy when she married a widower named Thomas Chapman in 1857. Deborah, like Elizabeth, had reasons to feel bitterness for the hardships she endured. Deborah not only lost her first husband on the Plains, but her youngest baby died as well. Her trials continued in Utah when, in 1860, her youngest daughter died at the age of nine.²²⁷ Without a personal account, it is impossible to know how these events impacted her.

In 1864, one event clearly changed Deborah's life dramatically. Her new husband became a member of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS),²²⁸ the largest splinter group that formed after the death of the Prophet, Joseph Smith. There is currently no record available to explain what specifically led Thomas Chapman to this decision. However, after the death of the prophet Joseph Smith, some members had rallied for his son, Joseph Smith III, to become the new prophet and leader of the Church when he reached the appropriate age. Some of these members organized their own church, and in 1860, Joseph Smith III agreed to be their leader. Some members in Utah were enticed to join them, especially those who disagreed with polygamy or any other doctrine taught by Brigham Young.²²⁹ According to RLDS records, Deborah

²²⁶ "Deborah Jane Bushnell Chapman: Find a Grave Memorial# 87364164," *findagrave.com*, https://www.findagrave.com/Deborah_Chapman.

²²⁷ "Died," *The Mountaineer* (Salt Lake City, Utah), February 9, 1861, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=5887843>.

²²⁸ Susan Easton Black, *Early Members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Volume II C-F*, (Provo, Religious Studies Centre, BYU, 1993), 140.

²²⁹ Howard, "Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS Church)," 1211-1216.

followed Thomas in his decision to leave the LDS Church in favor of the RLDS, and was baptized a member of that church in 1865. The couple then moved to Iowa, where they lived for the remainder of their lives.²³⁰

The remainder of Elizabeth's peers took part in polygamy at some point during their lives in Utah. In 1857, Margaret Howard McBride married a man who was widowed and still single, Samuel Ferrin. However, Margaret did not permanently avoid polygamy. By 1860, Ferrin had married two other women, which placed Margaret in a polygamous marriage.²³¹ Alice met the man she would marry when she first arrived in Utah. She and her children were assigned to the home of Jacob Strong and his wife, Sarah. Less than a year later, in 1857, with permission from Sarah, Alice became Jacob's second wife.²³² Another of Elizabeth's peers, Mary Ann Taylor Barton, left England to escape religious persecution from within her extended family. Sadly, her husband became ill before they even left Iowa. To make matters worse, he then gave his food rations to his family during their long trek, and did not survive for long. After arriving in Utah, both Mary Ann and her step-daughter became involved in polygamous marriages.²³³ Elizabeth Wylie Steele remarried within a year of her arrival in Utah, just as Elizabeth did, but unlike Elizabeth,

²³⁰ Black, *Early Members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Volume II C-F*, 140.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² "Alice Fish," *The Jacob Strong Family Organization*, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://jacobstrongfamily.org/getperson.php?personID=13&tree=jacobstrong1>.

²³³ Grimshaw, "Mary Ann Barton Allen History 1842 - 1914 – step-daughter of Mary Ann Taylor Barton."

Steele entered a polygamous marriage. She became the second wife of David Wood, who acquired two additional wives before the end of his life in 1871.²³⁴

When Caroline Garstone Williams Blakely arrived in Utah, she was experiencing widowhood for a second time, in spite of her relatively young age. Her first husband died after only five years of marriage. Now her second husband died while en route to Utah, leaving her with two young sons. Caroline married Charles Price, becoming his third wife. Price had been married to his first wife for many years. Then just three weeks before marrying Caroline, he married a young widow whose husband died while crossing the Plains with the Willie Handcart Company. Price family records indicate that Brigham Young asked Charles to marry a couple of the newly arrived widows in order to provide for them and care for their families. While possible, there is no documentation to support that claim.²³⁵

Mary Lawson Kirkman and her family almost stayed in Iowa for the winter after her husband received a job offer, but several fellow immigrants convinced them not to delay their journey to Utah. Mary's husband also gave up his rations for his family, which explains his death.²³⁶ Like Elizabeth's sons, two of Mary's sons were permanently injured by frostbite. One lost both of his feet and the other lost two toes. After settling in

²³⁴ "David Wood," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed April 20, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/KWJW-3L2/details>.

²³⁵ "History of Charles Price," *FamilySearch.org*, Last updated January 22, 2015, <https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Price>.

²³⁶ Kirkman, "Sketch of the Lives of Robert Kirkman and his Wife."

Springville, Utah, Mary married Charles Hulet, who married another woman on the same day. Hulet later married a third woman prior to his death in 1863.²³⁷ Mary remarried fairly quickly after Charles died, again into a polygamous situation. This marriage lasted only about one year before Mary filed for divorce. Mary remained single the rest of her life, dedicating her days to taking care of her family and serving the Church.²³⁸

Maria Jackson Normington barely survived the treacherous journey across the Plains after she began giving her own food rations to her children. When her feet began to hurt so badly that she could no longer walk, she crawled. She passed out about the time the rescuers arrived, and, perhaps mercifully, could not remember the remainder of the trip to Utah. Rescuers placed her in the wagon of John Parker, the man she eventually married as his second and plural wife.²³⁹

When Mary Taylor Upton arrived in Utah, both of her legs were black because of severe frostbite. She was taken into the home of an older couple, William and Amanda Simmons, who lovingly nursed her back to health. After Upton recovered, she married William, with Amanda's approval. After he died, a man who had attended church with the family, Joseph Lee Robinson, felt that he should marry Upton to help care for her. At first Robinson felt trepidations about the prospect of marrying Upton because he already had

²³⁷ "Charles Hulet: Life Sketch," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed April 11, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/KWJ5-GGV/details>.

²³⁸ Kirkman, "Sketch of the Lives of Robert Kirkman and his Wife."

²³⁹ Annie Hilton Bishop, "Sketch of the Life of Maria Jackson Normington Parker, My Mother's Mother," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed April 12, 2017, <https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Bishop>.

four wives, but in time, he grew to love her and her children, and he did his best to provide for them.²⁴⁰

In the 1880s, polygamy became the center of political debate in Utah as the U.S. Congress passed a number of laws aimed at ending the practice.²⁴¹ Upton moved to Idaho to escape the persecution that polygamous families sometimes faced in Utah. Robinson made the long trip to see her often, but they were never able to live in the same town again.²⁴² Unlike Elizabeth, Upton's exit from Utah was not an escape from the Church. To the contrary, Upton left Utah so that she could continue living her religion openly, more specifically, so that she could continue practicing polygamy in peace,²⁴³ a practice that Elizabeth adamantly wanted to avoid.²⁴⁴

While Elizabeth most likely did not know all of these women, their circumstances do reflect the culture that would have affected her perceptions. These women represent only a few of those who were affected by polygamy. There were many others who had traveled with the Martin Handcart Company who were older and became widowed or who were already single. Many women in the Willie Handcart Company faced similar circumstances as well. While the high number of deaths among the men of the Willie and

²⁴⁰ Cleo Jones Johnson, "A Sketch of the Life of Mary Taylor," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed June 10, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Johnson>.

²⁴¹ Jessie L. Embry and Lois Kelly, "Polygamous and Monogamous Mormon Women: A Comparison," in *Women in Utah History*, ed. Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), 5.

²⁴² Johnson, "A Sketch of the Life of Mary Taylor."

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

Martin Handcart Companies left a higher amount of women single than normal, throughout the years of immigration to Utah, it was not unusual for women to travel alone. Elizabeth's sister-in-law, Maria, is an example of this. Women who arrived in Utah without a husband tended to marry quickly, and commonly entered into polygamous marriages. While Elizabeth did not express outright opposition to the practice of polygamy, she felt strongly that she could not personally endure that arrangement. Understanding that Elizabeth would never find happiness in a polygamous union, and yet acknowledging polygamy as a common occurrence among her acquaintances, makes Elizabeth's heightened fears understandable. Even though Elizabeth did feel some cultural pressure to conform to this lifestyle, she persisted in her perceptions of polygamy, and remained true to herself on this topic.

While polygamy had a clear influence on the course of Elizabeth's life, politics played a pivotal role as well. Elizabeth's involvement with the Liberal Party is a noteworthy aspect of her life that sets her apart from her peers and requires further investigation.

CHAPTER VII
POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND LEGAL TROUBLE

In the 1860s, Brigham Young began establishing economic policies among members of the Church in Utah, which included establishing businesses as cooperatives and prohibiting the mining of precious metals. One prominent member of the Church, William S. Godbe, began questioning these policies, and held meetings for any others who wished to discuss their concerns. This allowed him to meet other men who were becoming skeptical of their faith as well. Eventually, Godbe and his group began publishing a magazine, *Utah Magazine*, to voice opinions in opposition to Brigham Young. As the magazine published articles that were increasingly critical of Young's leadership, the men were excommunicated from the Church.²⁴⁵

Godbe and his followers, known as Godbeites, formed a new church, naming it *Church of Zion*. The organization of the *Church of Zion* closely resembled that of the *LDS Church*, but this new church never attracted more than a few hundred members. This is due to the fact that the focus was never on religion. The leaders preferred to focus on spiritualism, and accept a broad range of beliefs, rather than centering doctrine on widely accepted Christian beliefs. In the end, their political beliefs had the greatest impact. Their

²⁴⁵ Walker, "Godbeites."

political movement became the Liberal Party, which remained strong until Utah became a state. *Utah Magazine* became the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Utah's first secular newspaper.²⁴⁶ The Liberal Party consisted of former Church members, sometimes called Apostates. Initially, the Liberal Party tried to unite with Baptist and Methodist Utah residents who also opposed the Church, but differences in religious ideology kept them from any long-term agreements. The People's Party, which primarily consisted of active members of the Church, served as the opposing party, and generally supported conservative ideas.²⁴⁷

In 1872, a visiting politician wrote a short article in the People's Column in the *Salt Lake Tribune* describing his tour of Utah. During his visit, he made a stop in Logan, where he attended an event in the local park hosted by the Liberal Party. Afterwards, everyone was invited to a "bountiful lunch spread" by a "genial, laughter loving apostate, Mr. Camm, and his good wife."²⁴⁸ Since Elizabeth did not leave a record of her political involvement, it's difficult to know whether she agreed with the Liberal Party or simply supported her husband. However, the article went on to state that the "worst forms of polygamy" could be found "running rampant" in Logan.²⁴⁹ No further explanation is provided to define the worst forms of polygamy. Elizabeth had stated clearly at a much earlier time that she disliked polygamy. Therefore, it is believable that Elizabeth might have supported a

²⁴⁶ Walker, "Godbeites."

²⁴⁷ Kathryn L. MacKay, "Women in Politics: Women in the Public Sphere," in *Women in Utah History*, ed. Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher, (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), 370.

²⁴⁸ William H. Holmes, "The People's Column: A Trip North," *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, UT), July 20, 1872. <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/People's Column>.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

political party that fought against polygamy, especially if there is any truth to the story her grandson shared that the Church had once asked her husband to take additional wives.

Elizabeth and Robert clearly held some beliefs that were different from those advocated by leaders of the LDS Church. Specifically, they differed on their views of polygamy and economic matters. However, it is unclear which specific issue caused them to split with the Church, or when that happened exactly. Her grandson claims in his narrative that the couple left the Church after a disagreement with other members concerning Elizabeth's refusal to take part in polygamy, and that Robert was run out of town after the situation turned violent.²⁵⁰ However, a newspaper article about the life of Elizabeth's son-in-law, J. R. Edwards, reports that about a hundred members of the Church in Logan were excommunicated in 1874.²⁵¹ Although the article does not state the specific reason, many members were involved in political unrest in the 1870s.²⁵² Since Elizabeth and Robert were involved with the Liberal Party it is possible that they left the Church at this time, either by their own choice or through excommunication.

Another possible explanation for Elizabeth's exit from the Church appears in three articles published in the *Salt Lake Daily Herald* in 1886. These articles reveal a shocking

²⁵⁰ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

²⁵¹ A. J. Simmonds, "J.R. Edwards: Owner of the Valley's Finest Saloon," *Valley Magazine*, August 13, 1976. *FamilySearch.org*, accessed October 29, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/Edwards>.

Note: This article was shared on the Family Search website. It was originally published in a periodical called *Valley Magazine* which is physically housed at the Merrill Cazier Library at Utah State University. No digital copy has been found except on the Family Search website

²⁵² MacKay, "Women in Politics: Women in the Public Sphere," 368-370.

family secret that offers an alternate explanation for Elizabeth's and Robert's departure from Logan. The articles report that Robert was arrested for raping an eleven-year-old girl whose family rented rooms in his building. The article claims that he had been abusing the girl for some time, and she did not tell anyone for fear that he would kill her. Robert was caught when an unnamed woman overheard him making advances on the girl, and the woman informed police. When Robert realized that he had been caught, he tried to leave town, but he didn't get far before police found him and placed him in jail.²⁵³ Unable to post bail, Robert remained in jail for almost two months. At the trial, Robert pleaded not guilty, but his lawyer worked out a plea bargain. Since Robert had not been caught in the actual act, he was able to plead guilty to a lesser offense which carried a punishment of only a \$50 fine or fifty days in jail, of which Robert had already served forty-seven days.²⁵⁴ The *Salt Lake Daily Herald* expressed outrage over the outcome reporting that most people felt he should have gone to prison for life for his crime.²⁵⁵

The *Salt Lake Daily Herald* certainly made no effort to present an unbiased report of Robert's legal troubles. When reporting his arrest, the *Herald* refers to Robert as a "sly old fox" who was "universally disliked."²⁵⁶ The article also notes that Robert previously worked for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, a secular and often anti-Mormon newspaper. The Herald

²⁵³ "Logan Lines," *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), October 31, 1886.

<https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=10683846>.

²⁵⁴ "Logan Lines," *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), December 17, 1886.

<https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=10680711>.

²⁵⁵ "Before Judge Henderson," *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), December 14, 1886.

<https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=10687783>.

²⁵⁶ "Logan Lines." *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), October 31, 1886.

<https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=10683846>.

concludes, “So you can guess the character of the brute.”²⁵⁷ The second article, reporting on the trial, labeled Robert, “the Logan rapist.”²⁵⁸ By comparison, the *Ogden Herald* printed a summary of what took place in court that day that simply reports what happened without interjecting any opinions on any of the cases presented to the grand jury.²⁵⁹

Other Utah journalists took notice of the lack of professionalism displayed by the writers at the *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, and even took pity on Robert. The editors at the *Utah Journal* commented on November 3, that the *Salt Lake Tribune* should have defended him. Instead, they abandoned him after he had served “long and faithfully in the interests of the anti-Mormon clique.”²⁶⁰ On December 17, the *Salt Lake Daily Herald* continued its campaign against Robert, alleging that for years he had been “guilty of some of the meanest and most sneaking tricks that any person could be guilty of.”²⁶¹ Editors at the *Herald* criticized the prosecuting attorney for allowing the plea bargain.²⁶²

These articles do not provide enough evidence to determine whether Robert Camm really did commit the crime of which he was accused. It is possible that these accusations were false and stemmed from a personal grudge. The editors at the *Salt Lake Daily Herald*

²⁵⁷ “Logan Lines,” *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), October 31, 1886, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=10683846>.

²⁵⁸ “Before Judge Henderson,” *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), December 14, 1886, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=10687783>.

²⁵⁹ “First District Court,” *Ogden Herald* (Ogden, Utah), December 13, 1886, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/Camm_Trial.

²⁶⁰ “Local Points,” *Utah Journal* (Logan, UT), November 3, 1886, https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/Logan_Local_Points.

²⁶¹ “Logan Lines,” *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), December 17, 1886, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=10680711>.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

certainly made no effort to hide their personal disdain for him. Perhaps he had other enemies as well. On November 3, the *Utah Journal* reported that a man passing through Brigham City was arrested for attempting to assault an eleven-year-old girl on October 29, one day before Robert was accused and arrested.²⁶³ This fact seems like an odd coincidence, and almost lends strength to the theory that perhaps an enemy heard about the case in Brigham City and used details of that case to falsely accuse Robert. Additionally, an earlier report describes Robert as jovial.²⁶⁴ Elizabeth even found him kind and somewhat charming.²⁶⁵

While impossible to know for sure, if the reports of Robert's character in the *Salt Lake Daily Herald* were correct, Elizabeth may have suffered in an abusive relationship. In her letter to her children, Elizabeth doesn't say much about her life after her marriage to Robert. She simply reminds her children that they all knew about that part of her life, and that it had not been easy. She further states, "Great trouble came to U.S. later in Cache Valley."²⁶⁶ She does not elaborate, but the discovery of the articles that detail Robert's legal problems shed light on that statement. Regardless of Robert's guilt or innocence, or the nature of their relationship, this episode had to be extremely painful for Elizabeth to endure. In some ways, the hardship she endured while her husband was jailed on charges

²⁶³ "From Box Elder: Two Cases in the Police Court," *Utah Journal* (Logan, UT), November 3, 1886, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=20888468>.

²⁶⁴ William H. Holmes, "The People's Column: A Trip North," *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, UT), July 20, 1872. <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/People's Column>.

²⁶⁵ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

of sexual abuse of a child may have been even more difficult than crossing the Plains on foot, starving in freezing weather. This might be one reason why Elizabeth did not document this event, and chose instead to keep it private.

Elizabeth's grandson reports in his narrative that Robert left town suddenly due to a threat of violence after the polygamy incident.²⁶⁷ However, in light of the new information regarding Robert's arrest in 1886, it seems more likely that the threat of violence stemmed from the allegations of sexual assault, and dissatisfaction with the outcome of his trial among some of his neighbors.²⁶⁸ Elizabeth's grandson records that after a neighbor warned Robert of a mob gathering, he left suddenly with only his horse and a small amount of money in his pocket, changing the course of his life, and Elizabeth's, for good.²⁶⁹

Robert worked at various railroad construction sites and continued moving west until he reached San Francisco, California.²⁷⁰ This seems a natural choice for work for Robert. With the railroads booming, jobs were abundant, and Robert had at least some experience in construction and was no stranger to hard work. This line of work probably afforded Robert an opportunity to start over, anonymously blend in while earning money, and see other places while deciding where to settle. Once Robert reached San Francisco,

²⁶⁷ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

²⁶⁸ "Logan Lines." *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), December 17, 1886. <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=10680711>.

²⁶⁹ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Elizabeth eventually joined him.²⁷¹ It is unclear whether Elizabeth believed in her husband's innocence and followed him out of Utah by choice, or if she was trapped in an abusive relationship and followed because she didn't feel she had another option. Regardless, these events forced Elizabeth to once again leave a comfortable home, sell many of her personal possessions, and create a new life in another unfamiliar place.

San Francisco had a lot to offer Robert and Elizabeth. The city had expanded significantly during the late nineteenth century. Between 1870 and 1890, the population of the city almost doubled.²⁷² Several factors contributed to the city's economic growth. Railroads, ocean ports, and inland river routes, made the city easily accessible.²⁷³ Various civil projects and landmarks were constructed including the city hall, the Palace Hotel, and cable cars.²⁷⁴ Manufacturing of a full range of products also flourished in the 1880s, and as a result of this growth, both Chinese and European railroad workers often settled in San Francisco, as there were many jobs available that matched their skills. In spite of these positive factors, San Francisco was not free from economic turmoil. Several labor disputes and strikes took place during this time.²⁷⁵ Still, San Francisco presented desirable opportunities for immigrants and transients, like Robert.

²⁷¹ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

²⁷² "San Francisco Population," *San Francisco Genealogy*, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.sfgenealogy.com/sf/history/hgpop.htm>.

²⁷³ M. Louisa Locke, "What was San Francisco like in 1880?" *M. Louisa Locke*, last updated June 17, 2012, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://mlouisalocke.com/2012/06/17/what-was-san-francisco-like-in-1880>.

²⁷⁴ Oscar Lewis, *San Francisco: Mission to Metropolis*, San Diego: Howell-North Books, 1980, 156-161.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Robert was most likely introduced to San Francisco through his job with the railroad. With his background and skills, the city would have provided opportunities for employment. Also, the size and large population would have offered enough anonymity to allow Robert and Elizabeth to start over. This might be one of the reasons that there is little information about their lives during this time. Their grandson's narrative serves as one source. He states that after settling in San Francisco, Robert worked as a fireman, "on the shipping in and out of San Francisco."²⁷⁶ His meaning is unclear, but perhaps this means that Robert served at one of the ports. Additionally, Robert and Elizabeth purchased four apartments and made money by renting out three of them. A mortgage transaction appeared in the *Daily Alta California* in 1890 that supports this claim. They borrowed two thousand three hundred dollars at seven percent interest, to be paid back over the course of just one year.²⁷⁷ Their daughter, Caroline, came to live with them in San Francisco after her husband died, and stayed until Elizabeth passed away in 1893. Caroline then returned to Utah.²⁷⁸

Robert stayed in San Francisco, continuing to earn money by renting out rooms, until his death in 1907.²⁷⁹ This means that Robert was living in San Francisco during the deadly earthquake on April 18, 1906, one of the most widely studied earthquakes to occur in California to date. Though the epicenter struck near San Francisco, the quake was

²⁷⁶ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

²⁷⁷ "Mortgages," *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), July 15, 1890, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/CammMortgage>.

²⁷⁸ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

²⁷⁹ "1900 United States Census," Ancestry.com, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://trees.ancestry.com/tree/77562613/person/36371391407>.

violent enough along the San Andreas fault that people experienced shaking from Oregon to Los Angeles, and as far east as Nevada.²⁸⁰ In downtown San Francisco, fires broke out in the immediate aftermath of the quake that burned for three days, destroying about five hundred city blocks, killing about three thousand people, and leaving about half of the city's residents homeless.²⁸¹ While there is no known record of Robert's experience of this event, it is certain that he was affected, even if he did not live in the downtown area.

²⁸⁰ "The Great 1906 San Francisco Earthquake," *USGS.gov*, accessed April 25, 2017, <https://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/events/1906calif/18april/>.

²⁸¹ "San Francisco Earthquake, 1906," *Archive.gov*, accessed April 26, 2017, <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/sf>.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION – ELIZABETH’S LEGACY

When Elizabeth left Iowa with the Martin Handcart Company, she and her peers started on a similar life course. Elizabeth was different in that her husband, Joseph, was not a member of the Church, but in most other aspects, they were similar. They had all left their native lands and extended families with hopes of finding peace in Zion. As they crossed the Plains, they suffered through the same conditions, and all met the same fate of starvation, frostbite, sickness, and eventual widowhood. As Elizabeth and her peers arrived in Salt Lake City, her path began to take a different course than that of her peers.

While Elizabeth and her second husband, Robert, eventually obtained financial security, many of her peers did not. Alice Walsh Strong, for example, had to learn to spin and weave wool in order to make cloth so that she could make clothes for herself and her children. Additionally, Alice spent most of her life living in a log cabin that had a dirt roof that did not adequately shield her when it rained.²⁸² Elizabeth Horrocks also prospered financially throughout her life in Utah. In her autobiography, Horrocks states that she had been blessed with an “abundance of this world’s goods.” However, unlike Elizabeth,

²⁸² Campbell, “Alice Fish Walsh Strong,” *The Jacob Strong Family Organization*.

Horrocks firmly believed that the financial blessings she received were the direct result of the sacrifices she had made in reaching Utah.²⁸³

Elizabeth's peers do not express doubt or anger toward Church leaders, as she did, because of the hardships they endured while crossing the Plains. Arguably, other women had as many reasons to blame Church leaders for their losses as Elizabeth, but they did not do so. Jane Howard Barnes's husband, George, was assigned guard duty two nights in a row as a punishment for leaving his post during watch to seek medication for Jane while she and their baby were sick. He died due to exposure to cold as a result.²⁸⁴ Maria Jackson Normington lost both her husband and her youngest child, who was less than two years old. Maria had to ride in a wagon with the baby's body for the remainder of the day until they stopped to camp for the night and had time to bury him.²⁸⁵ According to Maria's children, she never complained about her challenges or blamed anyone for the hardships she endured. Maria simply kept a positive attitude and kept moving forward in life.²⁸⁶ Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson awoke during the night to discover that her husband had died, and had no choice but to remain by his side until morning. No one describes the loneliness of that loss more vividly than Horrocks. She confides, "I had become despondent. I was six or seven thousand miles from my native land...the ground covered with snow...and I with three fatherless children with scarcely nothing to protect them from the merciless

²⁸³ Kingsford, "Leaves from the Life of Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson Kingsford."

²⁸⁴ Shirley May Clegg Holder, "Jane Howard Barnes: A Biographical History," *findagrave.com*, accessed June 14, 2016, <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=47962044>.

²⁸⁵ Bishop, "Sketch of the Life of Maria Jackson Normington Parker, My Mother's Mother."

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

storms.”²⁸⁷ Horrocks shares that, in this state of mind, she dreamed about her husband, who told her, “Cheer up, deliverance is at hand.”²⁸⁸ This provided the hope she needed to survive until rescuers arrived. Instead of bitterness, Horrocks expresses gratitude for the many blessings she received later in life because of those hardships she endured.²⁸⁹

Many of the women received praise for their faith and endurance through the years, especially from their children and grandchildren. In 1924, Alice Walsh Strong’s son wrote a letter to her commending her for the sacrifices she made for her faith, noting the happiness she must feel in knowing that her children and grandchildren have a much better life with better opportunities than she had.²⁹⁰ That same year, soon after her death, Alice was also featured as “Our Pioneer” in a special weekly column in the *Ogden Standard Examiner*. The author notes all of the hardships Alice experienced throughout her life, while remaining faithful to her religion, and quotes Alice only a few months before her death, “I have passed through many trials, but I have never regretted coming to Zion.”²⁹¹ Life in Utah presented many challenges for Hannah Rhodes Peel also. For example, on one occasion, while chopping wood for the stove, a splinter flew into Hannah’s eye and caused her to lose her sight in that eye. Still, Hannah’s two daughters remember her bearing her burdens with patience. She taught them that, “They who carry no cross will receive no

²⁸⁷ Kingsford, “Leaves from the Life of Elizabeth Horrocks Jackson Kingsford.”

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ John Walsh, “My Dear Mother,” *The Jacob Strong Family Organization*, accessed January 27, 2017, <http://jacobstrongfamily.org/histories/John%20Walsh%20Letter.php>.

²⁹¹ “Our Gallery of Pioneers: Mrs. Alice Walsh Strong,” *Ogden Standard Examiner*, after August 9, 1924, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://jacobstrongfamily.org/showmedia.php?mediaID=39&medialinkID=228>.

crown.”²⁹² By contrast, Elizabeth had to defend her faith to her children. She tells them that she never lost her faith in God, and that she prays that she will always trust Him. Elizabeth continues, “He is a friend that has never failed when asked. You may perhaps say, ‘Why not have asked him to save you then when you needed it?’ I did and He spared me through many trials to my family.” Elizabeth then reassures her children that she did the best that she could for them in her circumstances.²⁹³

Elizabeth passed away in on February 1, 1893, at the age of seventy-three. She was buried in Odd Fellows Cemetery in San Francisco, but in the 1930s, all of the graves in that cemetery were relocated to Greenlawn Memorial Park. Unfortunately, records of the exact location of Elizabeth’s grave were lost at that time.²⁹⁴ However, there is a headstone that serves as a memorial to Elizabeth and her first husband, Joseph, in the Logan City Cemetery in Logan, Utah.²⁹⁵ Neither of them is buried in that cemetery, but three of their children are.

Perhaps Elizabeth’s children represent her greatest legacy, and like her peers, sharing her story and wisdom with them seemed important to her. John Lloyd Sermon married the daughter of the family who took him in as an apprentice when he first arrived in Salt Lake City. He is the only one of her children who remained an active member of

²⁹² Atkinson, “History of Hannah Rhodes Peel.”

²⁹³ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

²⁹⁴ “Elizabeth Whitear Sermon,” findagrave.com, accessed April 26, 2017, [https://www.findagrave.com/Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm](https://www.findagrave.com/Elizabeth%20Whitear%20Sermon%20Camm).

²⁹⁵ “Elizabeth Whitear Sermon,” *billiongraves.com*, accessed April 26, 2017, https://billiongraves.com/grave/person/4000016#.

the Church throughout his life. John also attended a good school with his brother, Robert, in Salt Lake City. Due to the circumstances of his immigration experience as a child, Robert suffered the greatest long-term physical effects of Elizabeth's children.²⁹⁶ Severe frostbite caused irreversible damage that required both of Robert's legs to be amputated from the knees down. Still, as an adult, he lived independently. Robert worked in a telegraph office in Salt Lake City for several years, but eventually decided that he would prefer the peace of the outdoors and the country. He bought land in Idaho, and became a farmer. Robert enjoyed taking care of the land himself for as many years as his age and health would allow.²⁹⁷

Elizabeth's daughter, Marian, married J.R. Edwards in 1869. Edwards provided for Marian by working for the Utah Northern Railroad. They remained actively involved in the LDS Church until the summer of 1874 when Edwards was one of a hundred church members in the Logan area to be excommunicated, presumably for association with the Liberal Party, which stood in outright opposition to Brigham Young and some doctrines of the Church, but the source does not state this as the specific reason. Marian and her husband then became respected members of the Methodist church in Logan. In spite of the Methodist involvement in the temperance movement, Edwards opened a saloon, and advertised in every local newspaper possible. He found great success in this business

²⁹⁶ Elizabeth Whitear Sermon Camm, Letter to her children, March 16, 1892.

²⁹⁷ "Robert Sermon: Per Sermon Family Records," *Ancestry.com*, accessed October 28, 2016, https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/collection/Robert_Sermon.

venture.²⁹⁸ In fact, his name remains on the building near the corner of Main and Center streets in Logan that served as the site of one of his saloons, which is now the home of a Hallmark store.²⁹⁹ Marian and Edwards had five children together, but only their oldest daughter, Rachel, lived to adulthood. Sadly, Marian died in 1889, four years before Elizabeth.³⁰⁰ Edwards sold his saloons in 1910 and moved to California, where he passed away in 1917.³⁰¹

Caroline Camm returned to Utah after Elizabeth's death in 1893. She married Thomas J. Irvine, the son of the couple who employed Elizabeth and Robert when they first arrived in Utah.³⁰² A newspaper article published in 1915 notes that Thomas and his parents were among the first to settle in Logan.³⁰³ This means that Caroline would have known Thomas all her life. Thomas's obituary notes that he had served on the city council. By profession, Thomas worked in road construction and irrigation. His obituary states that he had remained a devoted member of the LDS Church all of his life.³⁰⁴ This is interesting

²⁹⁸ A. J. Simmonds, "J.R. Edwards: Owner of the Valley's Finest Saloon," *Valley Magazine*, August 13, 1976. *FamilySearch.org*, accessed October 29, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/Edwards>.

²⁹⁹ "Logan, Utah: Street View, June 2016," *google maps*, accessed April 24, 2017, <https://www.google.com/Logan/Edwards/Saloon>.

³⁰⁰ "Marian Elizabeth Sermon," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed October 29, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/KWVS-BNZ/details>

³⁰¹ Simmonds, "J.R. Edwards: Owner of the Valley's Finest Saloon."

³⁰² "Caroline Jane Camm," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed December 7, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/tree/person/LZQT-FMT/details>.

³⁰³ "Dinner Given for Mother," *Logan Republican Newspaper*, May 27, 1915, <https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Irvine>.

³⁰⁴ "Thomas Irvine Obituary," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed April 26, 2017, https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/Thomas_Irvine_Obit.

because all available records indicate that Caroline never affiliated with the Church after her parents left the faith in her childhood.³⁰⁵

In her letter to her children, Elizabeth states that her oldest son, Charles, made a last minute decision to stay in England and return to the home of his paternal grandparents to complete a blacksmith apprenticeship in their shop. Further research reveals that this information is incorrect. Whether Elizabeth wrote the information incorrectly or it is simply a transcription error is unclear. Available records indicate that Joseph's parents had passed away before this time.³⁰⁶ According to an 1861 census record, Charles was living with Elizabeth's sister, Eliza, and her husband by the time he was seventeen. He had completed his apprenticeship, and was working as a blacksmith.³⁰⁷ Charles more likely lived with his maternal grandparents after his parents left. However, both of Elizabeth's parents passed away within just a few years after she left England, which explains why Charles was later living with his aunt.³⁰⁸ Even though Elizabeth never saw her son again, records do indicate that he returned home safely, lived with her extended family, and

³⁰⁵ C. E. Robertson, Letter to Church Archives, after 1921.

³⁰⁶ "England Deaths and Burials, 1538-1991," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed July 20, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JZ1X-5T1>.

³⁰⁷ "1861 England Census," *Ancestry.com*, accessed July 20, 2016, <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/1861EnglandCensus>.

Note that Charles is indexed as Chas Simmons, but viewing the record shows that he is recorded as Char Sirmon. He is listed as the nephew of Eliza and Lloyd Bread, who is age seventeen, and working as a blacksmith. All other details match up. This is definitely Charles Sermon.

³⁰⁸ "England and Wales Death Registration Index 1837-2007," *FamilySearch.org*, accessed July 20, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:2N2L-QCN>.

completed an apprenticeship as a blacksmith. Certainly Elizabeth would have at least heard from Charles again and been assured of his safety.

Elizabeth's immigration story is truly remarkable, even in comparison to other Mormon immigrants. While most immigrants came to America seeking opportunities and financial gain, Elizabeth left financial security in London seeking safety and peace in a community with other members of her faith. Elizabeth faced some challenges that were common to most immigrants, but she also faced some obstacles that were more difficult and unique. Her journey, which should have been similar to other westward immigrants, proved unusually arduous as she suffered extreme cold, starvation, and the death of her husband along the way. Like all immigrants, Elizabeth had to seek new opportunities and make a new life for herself in a foreign land. However, Elizabeth had the added challenge of arriving in Utah unexpectedly widowed and caring for a child who was newly disabled due to frostbite. Elizabeth remarried and settled into a new life for a short time. However, Elizabeth and her new husband soon found themselves on the outside when some of their personal beliefs differed from doctrines of the Church. Elizabeth's problems escalated later when her husband faced charges of a heinous crime which forced her to leave her home, and start over again late in her life. Though her story resonates with many other immigrants, Elizabeth's unique circumstances stand out against the backdrop of the stereotype of a faithful Mormon pioneer. Even when compared to other women who shared her background and religion, Elizabeth is anything but typical.

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