

# The Historians Corner

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## A LETTER TO ENGLAND, 1842

William Clayton

In the year 1837, William Clayton, a clerk in a large factory in Penwortham, England, was converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Heber C. Kimball. He rose fast in the Church, and a year after his baptism he quit his job and began to devote his entire time to building the Kingdom in England. Through his efforts, the branch in Manchester was organized, and he soon became a counselor to the president of the British Mission. He was placed in charge of the branch at Manchester.

Recently, Brigham Young University acquired the missionary diary of William Clayton which covers the period from January 1, 1840, to February 1842. This diary is now being edited and annotated for publication. Its pages reveal the intimate relationship of William Clayton to the new Mormon converts in Manchester. Clayton was only twenty-three years of age when he began to keep his diary, but he was responsible for all of the activities of the Church in that city. Late in 1840, Clayton decided to leave England, and he recorded in his diary a vivid account of one of the earliest Mormon groups to make the trans-Atlantic odyssey from Liverpool to Nauvoo, Illinois.

Clayton was one of those who attempted to establish a settlement across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo, at a place called Zarahemla, Iowa. This settlement did not succeed, however, and he eventually moved back to Nauvoo. At the

same time, he became a secretary and scribe to Joseph Smith and was apparently an intimate disciple. He kept financial and temple records, helped write Joseph Smith's Journal, and did many other things to assist the Mormon Prophet in his administration of Church affairs. In later years, Clayton became a noted song writer and provided a number of the hymns still sung in the Church.<sup>1</sup>

In connection with the many problems involved in establishing a new Mormon community at Nauvoo, Joseph Smith became involved in the land business. In doing so, he sometimes combined his personal financial affairs with those of the Church, and it was difficult to unravel them, even after his death. It is apparent that some of the land business helped provide an income for Joseph himself, although both he and the high council of Nauvoo determined that he should try to find some other source of income.<sup>2</sup> These business affairs, however, provided fuel for considerable criticism of the Prophet. As a close associate of Joseph, William Clayton was undoubtedly affected by this criticism and felt a compelling desire to express his own feelings regarding it, which he did on March 30, 1842, in a heartfelt letter to William Hardman, one of the men he had baptized in Manchester. Since Clayton's diary reveals him to be a man who had great concern for telling the truth, it cannot be doubted that this letter expresses his genuine feelings about Joseph Smith, the Church, and other matters. The letter was published in the *Millennial Star* on August 1, 1842, and it is reproduced here as an example of one British immigrant's reaction to his experiences in America, and with Joseph Smith.

Dear William,<sup>3</sup> My heart rejoices while I write to inform you that on Sunday evening last, the steamer Ariel landed

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<sup>1</sup>For a sketch of the life and activities of William Clayton, see Paul E. Dahl, *William Clayton: Missionary, Pioneer, and Public Servant*, (2nd ed. Provo, Utah: J. Grant Stevenson, 1964).

<sup>2</sup>An illuminating discussion of Joseph Smith's financial activities is found in Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo, Kingdom on the Mississippi*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1965), pp. 116-178. Joseph's activities as a land jobber are discussed on pages 119 to 127.

<sup>3</sup>This is William Hardman, whom William Clayton baptized in Manchester. Church records show that Hardman was baptized on June 21, 1840, although Clayton's diary indicates that he baptized Hardman on June 14, "Manchester Branch, Record of Members, Early to 1852," Brigham Young University Library microfilm #488, Serial #13656, part 43, p. 39, entry 661; William Clayton, "Journal," hand-written MS, Brigham Young University Library, June 14, 1840. Hardman was later cut off from the Church.

at Nauvoo, loaded with Saints from England. About five o'clock the boat was seen coming up the river, the whole deck crowded with Saints. I went to the landing place along with Elder John Taylor, his wife, and others.

As we went along, we were delighted and astonished to see the number of Saints on their way to meet the boat. When we arrived, the scene was affecting; I could not refrain from weeping.<sup>4</sup> I looked round, and I suppose there was not less than from two to three thousand Saints on the shore, all anxiously interested in the scene. Many were there who wanted to give the strangers (yet brothers) a hearty welcome; others panting betwixt doubt and hope, lest their friends should not be there, others waiting to ascertain if any former acquaintance was in the company—myself amongst the number; and many, whose hearts throbbed with joy, and their eyes wept tears, expecting to see their mothers, their fathers, their children, and other relatives, &c., &c. While all this bustle was going on on shore, the boat was now within three hundred yards, coming directly for the shore; the confusion was so great I could but faintly hear those on the boat singing a hymn (I believe, "The Latter-day Glory").

At this period my heart almost melted, the boat moving majestically, every head stretched out, and all eyes gazing with intensity. A few moments more and the boat was landed, and the joyful acclamations and responding welcomes would have made a heart of stone acknowledge, that whether there was any religion or not, there was a great quantity of love—the purest essence of religion. I soon recognized sister Davies, from Cookson-street, Manchester, and a sister Martha<sup>5</sup> who lived with them; also James Burgess and family,<sup>6</sup> Richard Hardman and family,<sup>7</sup> Rbt. Williams<sup>8</sup> and

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<sup>4</sup>William Clayton, along with all the other immigrants, undoubtedly felt a great deal of joy at their reunion with old friends from England. It became common for English converts to immigrate in large numbers to Nauvoo, where they could unite with the saints in the Promised Land. In Clayton's diary, in fact, one gets the impression that they now considered America, rather than England, their home. In the midst of his own rather harrowing voyage, Clayton had recorded, on September 22, 1840, "As soon as the bustle subsided the wind began to blow and were again on our way home."

<sup>5</sup>"Sister Davies" was probably either Mary Davies, who was baptized on March 21, 1839, or Elya Davies, who was baptized on July 14, 1839. Both women lived on Cookson Street in Manchester, while Clayton presided over the branch, and both immigrated to America. "Manchester Branch Records," page 22, entries 323 and 325. The branch records do not mention a Martha Davies; but two men, Benjamin and John Davies, also lived on Cookson Street and may have been brothers. The only mention of a Sister Davies in Clayton's missionary journal is on January 25, 1840, in connection with some personal problems in the branch. A Brother Jackson was apparently having an argument with a leather cutter, and Sister Davies reported that the leather cutter said to her that one of their Latter-day Saints had turned "latter-day sinner."

<sup>6</sup>This probably refers to James Burgess, who lived on Pollard Street in Manchester and immigrated to the United States. A Brother Burgess and his

wife, and several others whom I know. They soon discovered me, and we quickly felt each other's hand, and had a time of rejoicing together. Teams were soon in waiting to carry their luggage to houses until arrangements could be made for their final accommodation. The company were in good health and spirits.

Amongst the number who went to see them land, I may mention, president Joseph Smith, B. Young, Willard Richards, John Taylor, of the twelve; and many others in high standing, although the distance was nearly two miles.

Now, dear William, let me say I am neither dead, sick, nor dissatisfied, but am rejoicing to hear from my old friends. My faith in this doctrine, and in the prophet and officers is firm, unshaken, and unmoved; nay, rather, it is strengthened and settled firmer than ever.<sup>9</sup>

You say you are almost wearied with the lies, &c. This is what we must expect in these days, for this is a lying and wicked generation; even many, in whom we may have great confidence, when we see them brought into trial, give way to an evil spirit. Old Mr. B—and daughter like many others, were assailed by the apostate crews, who lay scattered on the banks of the river; and all manner of evil reports were sounded in their ears, until they became discouraged; and, finally, almost denied the faith before they came near Nauvoo.

People coming here with their minds thus prejudiced, will naturally construe every thing they see and hear into evil, and will imagine evil where there is none. In this state the B—ton family came, and were something like spies, afraid to be spoken to by any one, least they should be

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family appear frequently in Clayton's missionary journal, and they were apparently quite active in the Church. On one occasion, William Clayton attempted to convert Burgess's two brothers to the Church but apparently with little success. "Manchester Branch Records," page 7, entry 124; Clayton, "Journal," February 15, 1840.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Hardman was baptised in 1838, lived on Colton Street in Manchester, and later emigrated to the United States. "Manchester Branch Records," page 38, entry 643. There are several Hardmans listed in the branch records, and William Clayton's Journal shows a very close association with the Hardman family. He frequently stayed at the Hardman home and often ate with them. This is particularly significant in view of the fact that Clayton was apparently traveling without purse or script and relying entirely on the members of the branch to provide a livelihood for him while he was conducting his Church responsibilities in Manchester.

<sup>8</sup>No Robert Williams is listed in the Manchester Branch Records, but this may have been the Rob Williams who appears frequently in Clayton's Journal. Williams was apparently very ill, and Clayton frequently records praying with him and anointing him with oil. On February 18, 1840, Clayton wrote a letter for R. Williams to his father in London.

<sup>9</sup>This is a very significant statement for Clayton to make, for he had suffered considerable illness and hardship on his voyage across the ocean, and in his efforts to settle on the banks of the Mississippi. He had even lost a little child in an outbreak of malaria in 1841, and he had seen some of his friends die. Such a faith in the face of hardship is indeed impressive.

ensnared, and especially afraid to meet Joseph Smith, lest he should want their money. After remaining a short time here, they went back to Warsaw, where some of the greatest enemies reside, and, I am sorry to say, have joined in the general clamour and business of circulating evil reports, some of which I, MYSELF, KNOW POSITIVELY TO BE FALSE.

For me to write any thing concerning the character of president Joseph Smith would be superfluous. All evil reports concerning him I treat with utter contempt; but because I esteem you highly as a friend and brother, I will say a few words on this subject. Joseph Smith is not the "treasurer for all the Saints," and has no more to do with their money than you or me; every man just does what he pleases with his money, and neither Joseph, nor any one of the officers, ever attempt to control any one, or their property either.

The church have appointed Joseph Smith trustee, in trust for the church, and as such, upon him devolves the important duties of buying lands, that the Saints may have somewhere to gather together, and he is responsible for the payment for these lands. How can he do this without means? If those who have money will not assist by purchasing lands from Joseph Smith, and paying him money for it, how is the church to be built up, and what is to become of the thousands of poor who are continually pouring in from all quarters?

With regard to J. Smith getting drunk, I will say that I am now acting as clerk for him, and at his office daily, and have been since February 10th, and I know he is as much opposed to the use of intoxicating drinks as any man need be.—I have never seen him drunk, nor have I ever heard any man who has seen him drunk since we came here. I believe he does not take intoxicating drink of any kind: our city is conducted wholly upon temperance principles. As to his using snuff and tobacco, I KNOW he does no such thing. To conclude, I will add that, the more I am with him, the more I love him; the more I know of him, and am sorry that people should give heed to evil reports concerning him, when we all know the great service he has rendered the church.

## COLONEL THOMAS L. KANE ON MORMON POLITICS

J. Keith Melville

When the Thirty-first Congress met in December of 1849, a major item to be considered was the organization of ter-