

Early Mormon Imprints in South Africa

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David J. Whittaker

The appearance in Cape Town, South Africa, on 8 June 1835 of *Some of the Principal Doctrines of Belief of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* marks the printed beginnings of the Mormon missionary effort in that area of the world. Its author, Jesse Haven, was the first president of the South African Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Called during a special missionary conference in Salt Lake City on 28–29 August 1852, Elder Haven and his companions, Leonard I. Smith and William Holmes Walker, made their way to Cape Town via Liverpool, England, arriving on 18 April 1853. One month later (on 23 May) the trio officially organized the Church “in the Cape of Good Hope.” On the day they organized the Church in South Africa, Jesse Haven was appointed mission president. The first branch was organized at Mowbray on 16 August, and a second branch was established at Newland on 7 September. Within six months they had baptized at least forty-five persons into the Church, and by the time the missionaries left in December 1855, they had organized six branches and baptized about 175 people.¹

Not much is known about the details of Jesse Haven’s early life. He was born 28 March 1814 in Holliston, Massachusetts. He was baptized on 13 April 1838 and ordained an elder by Brigham Young on 10 January 1839. After gathering to Nauvoo in the 1840s he was called on several missions for the Church, was married to his first wife, and was ordained one of the presidents of the 14th Quorum of Seventies in Nauvoo. He appears to have been a schoolteacher by profession. After serving another mission to the eastern states, he returned to Utah in 1850 and was living in the Salt Lake Valley in 1852 when he was called on this mission to South Africa.

Jesse Haven was a moody person, often to the point of melancholy, and his diaries are filled with his poetry, which often served as a vehicle for the release of these feelings.²

Between the time Elder Haven arrived in Cape Town and when he left in mid-December 1855, he was responsible for publishing eleven items—the major portion of the sixteen works printed by the Church in South Africa before 1865.

Once in South Africa, the trio advertised their presence in a local newspaper and visited the officials of Cape Town. Within a week mobs and several anti-Mormon newspaper articles threatened to undermine their initial efforts. To counter these attacks the missionaries distributed tracts

they had brought with them from England and attempted to get printed in the local papers specific replies to their critics' arguments. When they ran the out of pamphlets and after the local papers refused to print their articles, Elder Haven wrote and printed his own tracts. He had taken the lead in writing the articles for the local papers, and when these were refused, he expanded several of these rejected pieces into pamphlets.

The first pamphlet, reprinted on page 410–416, was prepared on 11 May 1853 for a local paper, but when it was rejected, Elder Haven expanded the piece into a small pamphlet on 18 May. At the same time he was writing a reply to a newspaper attack on the Mormon doctrine of plural marriage. As with the earlier work, the newspapers refused to print his reply, so he expanded it into a pamphlet which he titled *Celestial [sic] Marriage, and the Plurality of Wives!* . . . He wrote most of the material between 25 and 27 May, examined the proofsheets between 13 and 15 June, and received the finished copies about 17 June 1853. Jesse Haven came to South Africa as the husband of two wives, and even though his marriages troubled him while he was on this mission, he was a consistent defender of plural marriage. Since the pamphlet was an answer to slanderous reports relating to the doctrine, its orientation was defensive. Several items in the work were mentioned in his first tract, and almost three pages were taken directly from Orson Pratt's 29 August 1852 discourse which had announced the doctrine for the first time publicly.³

His third tract, *On the First Principles of the Gospel*, was produced primarily because the missionaries were running short of printed literature by August 1853. Published in the form of a letter to his brother, the Reverend John Haven, he began composing this tract in March 1853, but the final manuscript was not completed until 6–7 September 1853—hence the September date in the pamphlet. Copies of the pamphlet were in his hands by 15 September and distribution began immediately. This work proved to be his most popular. Addressed to his brother, who was an active pastor in the Congregational Church in Charlton, Massachusetts, this tract sought to examine the “gospel” which true ministers should preach when they use the Bible as their standard. His longest work (fourteen pages), it outlined the “first” principles of faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind, repentance of sins, baptism by water and the Holy Ghost. It then suggested the signs and gifts that follow those who believe. Using the New Testament as his text, he sought to show his brother that only among the Latter-day Saints could the true church and true gospel be found. In January 1855 this tract was translated into Dutch, and a second English printing appeared in November 1855.⁴

By the end of September 1853, President Haven had prepared another work for the printer. Entitled *A Warning to All*, this two page tract is perhaps

the rarest of the early Mormon imprints in South Africa. While the names of Haven, Smith, and Walker appear at the end, Haven's journal and correspondence make it clear that he composed it. Printed twice in English and once in Dutch, the tract was an announcement of warning to persons in South Africa to repent and be baptized into the restored Church. It defended the character of Joseph Smith and warned all who read it that most of what the local press was saying about Mormonism was not to be trusted.⁵

In 1855, President Haven had three other works printed. On 31 March, he obtained from his printer the Dutch translation of excerpts of Lorenzo Snow's *Voice of Joseph*.⁶ The last two appeared on the eve of his departure from South Africa. On 30 May he began distributing a broadside of William Clayton's poem "Resurrection Day,"⁷ and on 4 December, his *Epistle to the Saints in Cape of Good Hope Mission* was off the press.⁸ Eight days later he boarded the ship *Cleopatra* and several days later sailed for London.

There were five other items published before 1865. One of Haven's missionary companions, William Holmes Walker, was responsible for three of them, and William Forheringham and his missionary associates printed a broadside of D&C 87 in December 1861 in both English and Dutch.⁹

Walker's first publication was a broadside reply to an anonymous article that appeared in the *Port Elizabeth Mercury*, 20 October 1855. Although unable to get his reply printed in the *Mercury*, William Walker did get it printed in the *Port Elizabeth Telegraph*; this newspaper also printed five hundred copies of it in the form of a broadside addressed "To the Intelligent Public." It appeared about 26 October 1855.¹⁰ About one month later he authored a seven-page pamphlet with the same title, *To the Intelligent Public*, the first copies of which appeared just as he was leaving South Africa with Elders Haven and Smith.¹¹ This pamphlet contained a discussion of the meaning of the "Rock" (revelation) upon which the Church was to be built and the offices that through revelation are to govern and lead the Church established by Christ's Church.

The item reprinted at the end of this article is the first pamphlet Mormons printed in South Africa. Jesse Haven, like many of his contemporaries in other places of the world, found that the press was an important weapon in the missionary arsenal.¹² Like other early Mormon tracts, this one tried to introduce the message of Mormonism to non-Mormons by briefly summarizing its main doctrines. Clearly an extension of the earlier "Articles of Faith," this work gives us a type of window into the beliefs and understanding of the early missionaries.¹³ While not to be considered an "official" declaration or even a complete statement of creed, it does compactly summarize in thirty-three paragraphs the "principal" doctrines of Mormonism through one man's eye in the 1850s.

Elder Haven had written the pamphlet on 18 and 19 May 1853. He had delivered his manuscript to the printer, W. Foelscher, early in June, examined the proofsheets on 7 June, and received the first one hundred copies of the finished work on 8 June. He tried to borrow money to pay for the cast of printing it, but when this failed he solicited donations.¹⁴ With these donations and some money collected from the sale of the pamphlet itself, he was able to meet the cost of having it published. President Haven provided more details on its composition in a letter he wrote to the First Presidency of the Church on 14 January 1856:

I had 1,000 copies printed. Nearly one half of it I took from the belief given by Joseph Smith, found in the "Times and Seasons," Vol. 3, p.709 [1 March 1842]; the remained was my own composition; mostly on principles that have been made public since the death of the Prophet.¹⁵

The last two pages reprinted Eliza R. Snow's "Stanza on the Presentation of the Book of Mormon to Queen Victoria," an item composed in 1841. Here Haven is clearly addressing the poem to the English-speaking British population in South Africa. He probably obtained the poem from an early issue of the *Times and Seasons*.¹⁶

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1. A convenient overview of the history Mormonism in South Africa is given in Farrell Ray Monson, "History of the South African Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1853–1970" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1971). For a more recent study, see Lawrence E. Cummins, "The Saints in South Africa," *Ensign* 3(March 1973): 4–10. Much of what I have to say here is summarized from my as-yet-unpublished essay, "Jesse Haven and the Defense of Mormonism in South Africa, 1853–1855."

2. There are five volumes of Haven journals (covering 1852–1892) and a folder of Haven papers in the Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter referred to as Church Archives). Also available is *Life Incidents and Travels of Elder William Holmes Walker and His Association with Joseph Smith the Prophet* (n.p.: Published by Elizabeth Jane Walker Piegrass, 1943; reprinted by the John Walker Family Organization, 1971). Also in the Church Archives there are files on the South African Mission, Records of Mission Funds, and a Record of Members. There are numerous letters published in the *LDS Millennial Star* from Jesse Haven and his missionary companions. Some biographical information on Jesse Haven is in Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Published by the author, 1936), 4:378–79.

3. Jesse Haven had been at the August 1852 conference when Orson Pratt gave this sermon, and his journal records his regular habit of reading Elder Pratt's works. The quoted material corresponds to that in *Journal of Discourses* (1853), 1:58–59, which deals primarily with the relationship of Adam and Eve. In his later report to the First Presidency (see fn. 15) Elder Haven reported: "As there was a great stir about the

'Plurality of Wives,' etc., and much persecution and ridicule brought upon us on account of the people not having any understanding of the subject; I wrote a small tract on the same . . . got 1000 copies printed. This tract done good. It turned the minds of the people." Copies are at Church Archives and at Harvard. The copy at Harvard has a cover that was added to it by one of the LDS Circulation Tract Societies in England.

4. In his report to the First Presidency, 14 January 1856, he wrote, "As we had not many tracts on the First Principles of the Gospel, and what few we brought with us, were already distributed, I got 1000 copies printed of a letter that I wrote to my brother on these principles, in the State of Massachusetts. This tract sold so well among the people I had it afterwards translated into the Dutch language [30 January 1855], and 1000 copies printed in that language. Afterwards I had 1000 more printed in English [13 November 1855]." He wrote in his journal on 11 March 1853: "Today I finished a lengthy letter that I have been writing to my brother on the first principles of the gospel. My brother is a Congregational Minister, in the State of Massachusetts." Although Alder Have told the First Presidency he could get only one printer to do his work, the 1853 copy of his *On the First Principles* in the Church Archives gives the printer as Van de Sandt de Villius and Tier. I presume that W. Foelscher printed the others. The dates in brackets are the dates the other printing came off the press. The dates are based on the entries in Haven's journals. No copies of his Dutch tracts are known to exist

5. The first English printing was written 30 September and 1 and 2 October 1853; on 4 October Jesse Haven took it to the printer in Cape Town; on 6 October he examined and corrected the proofsheets; and on 8 October he obtained 1000 copies of this edition. The Dutch translation was the work of Thomas Weatherhead, a convert (baptized 24 July 1853), who began the work in June 1854 and finished it by the middle of July. On 24 July, Lesse Haven wrote S. W. Richards that the small tract he had written "is now translated into the Dutch language, and already for the press, and I expect to get it printed this week" (*Millennial Star* 16 [23 September 1854]: 604). President Haven recorded in his journal the same day, "While in [Cape] Town, I took the translation in Dutch of the 'Warning to all' to the printer and ordered 1000 to be printed." On 3 August 1854 he picked up the finished product.

The second English printing was ordered by Jesse Haven on 30 January 1855. He ordered some 500 copies of this printing on 8 February 1855 (see his journal for these dates; see also his journal 16 May 1854, wherein he defends the contents of *A Warning to All* against attacks by a Reverend Belson, a minster in the church of England).

6. On 16 April 1855 Jesse Haven wrote to Franklin D. Richards: "I have got translated and printed in the Dutch language, 1000 copies from the 'Voice of Joseph,' to the paragraph on the 6th page, where it speaks of the organization of the Church. The paragraph ends as follows—'And although they were the feeble things of the earth, they became mighty by the Holy Spirit.' It cost twelve shillings to get it translated and £38s. to get 1000 copies printed." (*Millennial Star* 17 [8 September 1855]: 572) He later summarized his work with the Dutch-speaking peoples of South Africa: "Many tracts have been circulated, and some preaching has been done among the Dutch in Cape Colony, but only a few have yet received the Gospel" (*Millennial Star* 18 [22 March 1856]: 189).

7. William Clayton's poem first appeared in the *Deseret News*, 24 January 1852, p. 21, and was reprinted in the *Millennial Star* 15 (22 January 1853): 63. In 1856 it was included in *Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Church of Jesse Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 11th ed. (Liverpool, 1856), p. 390. It appears in our current hymnal under the title "When First the Glorious Light of Truth," Hymn 198.

8. While no copies of this "epistle" are known to exist, the text was copied into his journal on 26 November 1855. Briefly, it thanks both members and nonmembers who

have rendered him assistance and support during his mission and further encourages the members to support their priesthood leaders and, when possible, to gather to Zion. Jesse Haven took the manuscript to the printer on 27 November, examined the proofsheet on 29 November, and obtained the final copies by 4 December (see his journal for these dates).

9. A copy of this rare item (in English) is in Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (see also letter of William Fortheringham to [G.Q] Cannon, dated Port Elizabeth, 15 February 1862, in *Millennial Star* 24 [19 April 1862]: 251–52).

10. A copy of this broadside is in the Church Archives. William Walker wrote in his diary on 26 October 1855: “I wrote a reply to some false statements about the Latter-day Saints, published in the *Port Elizabeth Mercury*, which the editor would not publish. We succeeded in getting it published in the *Port Elizabeth Telegraph*. Also 500 copies struck off in the form of a circular.” A copy of this circular was undoubtedly the source of the printing in the *Millennial Star* 18 (15 March 1856): 172–73.

11. In the introduction of his seven-page tract, William Walker clearly suggests that this work was a follow-up to his circular. His diary notes that on 17 November he began writing it, and that between this date and 27 November, when he boarded ship for London, he finished writing this work and had ordered 500 copies printed. But upon receiving the proofsheets (twice) he found too many errors and was only able to make the final arrangements for printing before he sailed. He was to have received 25 copies just before he sailed. A photocopy of this tract, also printed by the *Telegraph*, is in the Church archives.

12. For the larger picture see David J. Whittaker, “Early Mormon Pamphleteering,” *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977): 35–49.

13. The “quest” for and development of the “Articles of Faith” is beyond the scope of this short note, but while Haven’s list is one of the longest in early Mormon literature, it is only one of many.

14. See Haven’s journal for these dates; see also the dates of 26 May and 1 June 1853.

15. This report was copied into his journal on this date. Jesse Haven summarized his publishing activities in a letter to F. D. Richards, 25 February 1856, in *Millennial Star* 18 (22 March 1856): 190.

16. This poem had been printed, first in the *Times and Seasons* 5 (1 January 1844): 398–99, after which it appeared in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* 1 (17 January 1844): 1, and the *Millennial Star* 4 (April 1844): 184–85. I am grateful to Maureen Ursenbach Beecher for these references, any one of which could have been Haven’s source.