

# Guest Editor's Prologue

LaMar C. Berrett

The Mormon pioneers abandoned their comfortable homes in Nauvoo in 1846 to face a new life-style that entailed hardships heretofore unexperienced by many of the newly converted Saints. What was their destiny? Where were they going? How would they survive? Answers were not clear to the majority, but their faith in God and his representative, Brigham Young, gave them the strength necessary to meet the hardships with undaunted determination. This strong faith was expressed in Oliver B. Huntington's journal when the Saints were faced with enlistment in the Mormon Battalion: "It might seem strange that they should go and fight for a country that would not protect them; but they got well payed [*sic*] for it and only enlisted for one year, but even without that *it was the council [sic] of the heads, and that would make it right.*"<sup>1</sup>

This issue of *BYU Studies* is concerned with the first part of the Mormon pioneer trek to the Great Basin—the Iowa experience. It deals with the movement of thousands of Saints from Nauvoo, Illinois, to Council Bluffs, Winter Quarters, and other "camping sites" along the Missouri River—the crossing of "one" state in the one year—1846.

Lewis Clark Christian's research on the Mormon foreknowledge of the West helps the reader to understand that the "move West" was a concept taught by Joseph Smith. Carefully prepared maps, interviews, and studies helped the Saints have understanding of "where they were going."

Where they did go as well as what trails they were following is meticulously laid out by "trails-master" Stanley B. Kimball.

An account of "nine babies born on the first night of pioneer travel out of Nauvoo" has caused historians to ask many questions. Which was the first night? Did the Mormons send all the pregnant

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<sup>1</sup>Oliver B. Huntington Diary 1842–1847, Part 1, typescript, p. 104, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; italics added.

wives across the Mississippi River on the first day? Carol Lynn Pearson has discovered an answer to this question which has long interested historians.

Susan Easton explains the suffering and deaths in Iowa, as does Leland Gentry, who describes the way stations of Garden Grove and Mt. Pisgah. Here the Saints showed their great industry and cooperative spirit.

Did the pioneers face danger from the Indian population of Iowa? Lawrence Coates discusses this question, as well as Joseph Smith's interactions earlier with these Indians.

While the Mormons were traveling across Iowa, the United States government recruited Mormon males to go to war against Mexico. What was the reaction by the Saints and their leaders to this "call to war"? John Yurtinus answers these questions.

Church Historian Leonard Arrington provides a clearer insight into the life of the non-Mormon friend of the Church Thomas L. Kane, an insight that helps the reader appreciate not only Kane's role with the Mormon Battalion but with the Saints in general.

Knowing the purpose and reasons for the writing of "Come, Come, Ye Saints," the greatest marching song of the Mormon pioneers, will dispel some of the legends surrounding this favorite hymn. The reasons become clearer thanks to the research efforts of Paul Dahl, who first gathered these facts.

The Iowa experience was a "blessing in disguise" explains historian Reed C. Durham, Jr. Although there were hardships, the communities along the way, the help of good Iowans and Missourians, and the available timber, grass, and animals made the Saints' experience bearable as they completed the first leg of the great Mormon pioneer exodus.