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Mormon Passage of George D. Watt

Ronald G. Watt

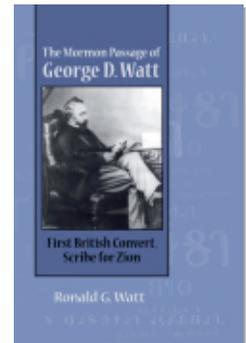
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JOURNEY TO AMERICA AND NAUVOO

We have had a passage of fifty-six days—fine weather, with a kind captain and crew, who allowed us every reasonable privilege. There have been five deaths out of the company, and one sailor who fell from the yard-arm and was killed—brother Yates’s eldest child, sister Cannon, brother Brown’s child, and two children belonging to a man not in the church. We stuck upon the bar at the mouth of the river thirty-four hours.

G. D. Watt to *Millennial Star*, New Orleans, November 13, 1842

The desire to emigrate to Zion was virtually a continuation of conversion to Mormonism. George D. Watt had realized early that linking his fortunes to the restoration of the gospel would take him from his native land to the United States. In fact, two weeks after he was baptized, Watt prophesied that they would all go to America. Heber C. Kimball in 1854, talking about prophecy, commented, “One night we met with a small company of the new members in Preston, Lancashire, and brother George commenced reading the Book of Mormon.” After he finished reading, he said, “The land of America is the promised land, it is Zion and we shall be gathered there, altho’ you have not told us anything about it.”¹

1. Discourse by President Heber C. Kimball, Tabernacle, July 16, 1854, “Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (chronological scrapbook of typed entries of newspaper clippings, 1830–present), Church Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives). The view of America as the Promised Land was common by that period, not only because of its Book of Mormon designation but also from three centuries of romanticization of the New World in European culture.

The Saints had always been a gathering people. Joseph Smith counseled his followers to gather to Kirtland. The Lord instructed the church members to gather to Jackson County, Missouri, but when they were driven out of that state, Joseph Smith reaffirmed they should go to a new place, Nauvoo, Illinois. The poor economic conditions of Britain also encouraged people to emigrate. In four short years, 1830 to 1834, more than twenty thousand left the British Isles for America. When Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, and Orson Pratt arrived in March 1840, they began talking about the gathering.² The first group of forty-one Saints departed in June 1840 on the ship *Britannia*. Early in September one more company left. Brigham Young organized five more companies. The apostles began to contract with ship captains for passage, imposing order on the movement and also safeguarding their unsophisticated flock.³

Most of the British Mormons shared Watt's feelings: they were leaving their native land to become part of the new Zion: an anchor, a refuge, and a field of new opportunities. They quickly adopted the image and the rhetoric of coming out of Babylon and entering Zion, making literal the metaphor that already, for many, explained their conversions.

On September 17, 1842, thirty-year-old Watt, accompanied by Molly and their two sons, five-year-old James and two-year-old Willard, left Britain. They sailed with almost 180 other passengers on the American ship *Sidney* from Liverpool. Unlike his memorable Atlantic crossing in 1851, Watt was not keeping a diary in 1842 and hence did not record his feelings about the departure. He was leaving—for all he knew forever—his mother, a stepfather, a sister, a half sister, two half brothers, and many friends.

The *Sidney*, a three-masted square rigger, was, at 450 tons, a length of 129 feet, and a width of 28 feet, one of the smallest ships used by the Mormons.⁴ The ship sailed twelve miles down the River Mersey, the Liverpool harbor, its first day, then sat becalmed when the wind died. The next day a steam tug pulled it out of the harbor, where the passengers got under sail. By the end of the first week, most of the passengers had found their sea legs. During its first two weeks, the *Sidney* made good time, a notable 224 miles under full

2. Joseph Fielding, Diary, April 18, 1840, typescript, Joseph Fielding Papers, LDS Church Archives.
3. For the best article on the gathering, see Richard L. Jensen, "The British Gathering to Zion," in *Truth Will Prevail: The Rise of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the British Isles, 1837-1987*, edited by V. Ben Bloxham, James R. Moss, and Larry C. Porter (Solihull, UK: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 165-98. For the ships, see V. Ben Bloxham, "The Apostolic Foundations, 1840-41" in *Truth Will Prevail*, 121-62. See also James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker, eds., *Men with a Mission, 1837-1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 136-37.
4. Conway B. Sonne, *Ships, Saints, and Mariners: A Maritime Encyclopedia of Mormon Migration, 1830-1890* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 181-82. A square rigger is a sailing ship with rectangular sails on the mainmast, foremast, and rear mizzenmast.

sail in a single twenty-four-hour period.⁵ On September 29, the ship sailed within twenty-one miles of Santa Maria Island in the Azores. Watt appears in the diary of Levi Richards, the company leader, twice in the first week, offering prayers in the twice-weekly service of hymn singing and praying, supplemented on Sundays by preaching and partaking of the sacrament. Watt preached on the second Sunday he was on the ship.⁶

Levi Richards had joined the church in 1835 in New York after reading a Book of Mormon that his cousin, Brigham Young, had given to him. In 1840 he joined the missionaries in Britain.⁷ Before he left in 1842, Parley P. Pratt asked Richards to be the president of the company. Richards selected John Greenhow, former president of the Liverpool Conference, for his first counselor, George D. Watt as his second counselor, and Richard Harrison as his clerk.⁸

A physician, Richards also treated Molly Watt's head, which was wounded in a fall, by closing the gash with a plaster and later giving her lobelia, which caused vomiting. This type of medical treatment was developed by Samuel Thomson (1769–1843), who was born in Alstead, New Hampshire. Thomson came to believe that cold caused illness and disease should be treated by restoring the body's "natural heat." His methods included taking steam baths and administering cayenne pepper and lobelia to induce vomiting.⁹

In contrast, orthodox doctors, trained in medical school, relied on a theory, almost fifteen centuries old, that illness was caused by imbalanced "humors" (blood, bile, yellow bile, and phlegm), with blood letting as the most common remedy. Sometimes a patient would be bled as much as 1.5 liters of blood, a drastic remedy when the average adult body contained only 5 liters. Another orthodox remedy was calomel, a drug containing mercurous chloride that acted as a violent purgative.¹⁰

Some passengers recall resistance to Richards's leadership. George Cannon, father of George Q. Cannon, future member of the church's First Presidency, noted that Richards did not have the "confidence" of

5. Levi Richards, Journals, 1840–53, September 25, 1842, holograph, Levi Richards Papers, 1837–67, LDS Church Archives.

6. Ibid.

7. Helen Richards, comp., *Levi Richards, 1799–1876: Some of His Ancestors and Descendants* (Logan, UT: Unique Printing, 1973) 111–15.

8. Richards, Journals, October 15, 1842.

9. "Samuel Thomson," in Wikipedia, available online at http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Thomson. See also Robert T. Divett, *Medicine and the Mormons: An Introduction to the History of Latter-day Saints Health Care* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers and Distributors, 1981), 14–20.

10. Joseph Smith's family blamed the death of their oldest son, Alvin, on a fatally large dose of calomel, which made Thomson's medicine popular among the Mormons. For details on the death of Alvin Smith, see Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 53–54.

the company and thought that John Greenhow would have made a better president.¹¹ Even though Greenhow was a very able leader, Richards's longer church experience was the reason for his selection. Greenhow told Richards during the voyage—referring to his feelings about Elder Watt—“that he thought more of him than almost any other man.”¹² However, problems between the two quickly emerged aboard ship after two weeks of calm and congeniality.

They centered on different approaches to the preaching sessions. Greenhow wanted an open debate on gospel principles, a method he had used with considerable success in Liverpool, while Watt apparently favored the more traditional congregational style with the preacher declaring his message and the audience listening. Watt had misgivings about Greenhow's method because he had seen problems caused by a similar approach in Edinburgh. The controversy between the two raged for four weeks.

On October 3, Greenhow proposed that the group investigate certain gospel topics and find out all the scriptures about them, then to have individuals speak for and against them. Watt, who was conducting, declined putting the motion forward.¹³ George Cannon, who had been in Liverpool, remembered his earlier experience under Greenhow's direction with fondness: “We came together,” he said, “not to show our wisdom, but our ignorance.”¹⁴

A few days later the two attempted to work out their differences but failed. “Watt became dissatisfied with the spirit Elder Greenhow manifested & [thought] that he inclined too much to continue & cast personal allusions upon his understanding prejudicial to his feelings & influence.” Later that evening Watt told Richards about a curious dream he had had the night before. “He dreamed he saw a man with one foot broke and in putules like pox filled with the most offensive and loathsome matter, he then happened to look on his own feet and one of them was affected in the same way only not quite as bad.” He felt that he was as responsible as Greenhow for the problem.¹⁵

On October 15, Watt lectured that “the elders were not sent out to command the winds and waves or raise the dead,” but that “additional power in the Priesthood would come by and through an ordinance” in the temple. Cannon recorded that Watt did not believe that the dead could be raised or healing could take place. The brethren pretended to have this power, but

11. George Cannon, quoted in John Q. Cannon, *John Q. Cannon, the Immigrant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927), 116. John Q. Cannon wrote this volume except for chapter 15, which is a diary of the voyage written by George Cannon and the source of the quotes in this chapter.

12. Richards, Journals, October 25, 1842.

13. *Ibid.*, October 3, 1842.

14. George Cannon, in *John Q. Cannon*, 115.

15. Richards, Journals, October 12, 1842.

no man had it. Cannon told Richards that if Watt's "doctrine was true he had kicked the ladder from under my feet."¹⁶

With additional material against Watt, Greenhow "offered remarks on the lecture saying if he was presiding over a church & such incorrect teaching should occur he would stop them there & then." Richards asked Greenhow to curtail his criticisms, but he did not. Later that evening Richards ended all preaching sessions because of the dispute between his two counselors.¹⁷

That evening Greenhow said he "did not know why he might not speak for the edification of the Saints." On the evening of October 20, as soon as Richards climbed into bed and fell into "the most grateful sleep," he was soon awakened and again met with the two feuding men. Watt was grieved at Greenhow's comments, but "would humble himself to make confession of any thing in which he might been out of the way & all he wanted was to have Elder 'G' to do the same." Greenhow said that he had spoken in that fashion "because of the remarks 'W' had made about him in private conversation with some of the elders." Watt denied that. Watt, as he left, "stated he would submit to any cause I thought proper & would humble himself to anything like righteousness for the sake of having peace & fellowship restored." Greenhow then turned again to Richards and asked what he should do. Richards, no doubt sleepy and too smart to umpire this ongoing disagreement, finally said, "Settle it between yourselves."¹⁸

Simultaneously with this controversy was the illness of pregnant Ann Cannon, George Cannon's wife, a forty-four-year-old convert who already had nine children. At 4:30 a.m. on October 28, she died. George Cannon later recalled, "I will not attempt to describe the nights in particular which I have passed while watching by the side of one of the best wives that ever man was blest with."¹⁹ Later in the afternoon everyone attended the funeral with Greenhow, an old friend from Liverpool, presiding and giving the sermon.

Just prior to the funeral, Greenhow asked those people near him why he could not preach. Richards, being within earshot, told the group that he had stopped all gospel lectures and sermons because of the quarrel between Greenhow and Watt. Greenhow, who wanted to preach, especially at the funeral of Ann Cannon, an old friend, realized that he had to acknowledge his mistake. He immediately "confessed that he did wrong in speaking as he did evening of 15th," when he had spoken loudly against Watt's lecture. Richards asked someone to find Watt. Once he arrived, he heard about Greenhow's confession. The two men mutually "confessed their wrongs,

16. George Cannon, in *John Q. Cannon*, 116.

17. Richards, Journals, October 15, 1842.

18. *Ibid.*, October 16, 20, 1842.

19. George Cannon, in *John Q. Cannon*, 113.

forgave each, & shook hands as a sign of satisfaction.” Richards cautioned the Saints not to revisit the controversy again “as it was now settled. Let that be the end of it.”²⁰

By November 5, the *Sidney* was crossing the Gulf of Mexico. At the mouth of the Mississippi River, the pilot tugboat accidentally guided the ship into a huge sandbar, where it stuck fast. The *Sidney* could not be dislodged until the next day. It docked in New Orleans on November 11 after a voyage of almost two months. Two days later, Watt wrote the *Millennial Star* a report that summarized the trip’s main events: a journey of fifty-six days with fine weather, a sailor killed when he fell from the rigging, four children and one woman (Ann Cannon) dead.²¹

New Orleans, the most prominent city on the Mississippi River, had a seaport that drew ships from all over the world.²² It is not clear what level of understanding these prospective citizens had of their soon-to-be-adopted country. Originally settled by the French, New Orleans had become part of the flourishing United States in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase. It had also been the site of a decisive battle during the War of 1812, where Tennessean general Andrew Jackson rose to celebrity as the embodiment of frontier virtues, an image that took him to the White House in 1829.

Richards arranged for a steamship, the *Alex Scott*, to take the Mormons up the Mississippi at twenty dollars a person. A large side-wheel paddle steamboat, it was large enough to take all of the *Sidney*’s passengers, including a few non-Mormons. As part of his negotiations, Richards wangled free passage for fourteen of the poorest passengers, which included the Watt family.²³ The *Alex Scott* churned slowly up the roiling muddy waters of the Mississippi past fields and forests. Although seasickness was not a problem, conditions on board were poor. The passengers slept on the deck between machinery parts, chilled by the November wind, with no facilities for bathing or even privacy for changing clothes.²⁴

On November 18, about 300 miles north of New Orleans, the weather turned bitterly cold, and shallow water along both sides of the river froze. Two days later, the boat came to some rapids about 130 miles south of St. Louis and ran aground on a sandbar. Many of the passengers went ashore and built a bonfire to warm themselves. Somebody on board produced bottles of the locally made corn whiskey, another sovereign remedy against

20. Richards, Journals, October 28, 1842.

21. G. D. Watt, letter to the editor, November 13, 1842, *Millennial Star* 3 (January 1843): 160; see also Fred E. Woods, *Gathering to Nauvoo* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2001), 69, 72.

22. John Moon’s 1840 company had made New York its port of entry, but mission leaders had changed the next year to New Orleans since it provided an easier, all-water route to Nauvoo.

23. Richards, Journals, November 13, 1842.

24. George Cannon, in *John Q. Cannon*, 117.

the cold, and some passengers indulged freely, perhaps ten or twenty to the point of intoxication. Levi Richards stayed on board and helped to move the boat up the river. He did not know who drank the whiskey.²⁵

Farther on, about 90 miles south of St. Louis, low water halted the *Alex Scott*. The St. Louis newspaper, the *Missouri Republican*, confirmed that the river “continues unusually low, too low for the deep New Orleans boats.”²⁶ Now the passengers went ashore during the days, foraging for food (squirrels and shriveled grapes) and returning to the shelter of the boat at night. Some of the Mormon men tried to find temporary work but had no luck.²⁷ Two days later on November 21, the *Missouri Republican* reported that, in less than a week, the water level had fallen more than two feet and “the weather, though clear, continues unnaturally cold for the season.”²⁸

Although American men routinely drank liquor—and drank a lot—Levi Richards was indignant at the casual violations of the LDS health code, known as the Word of Wisdom, which forbade the consumption of alcohol, tea, coffee, and tobacco. Cheap gin had been readily available in Great Britain, and the switch to whiskey was easy for some members. Many considered adherence to the Word of Wisdom “advice,” rather than absolute prohibition.²⁹ Some of the Mormons had continued drinking alcohol and using tobacco as they traveled up the river. Richards summoned twenty-eight priesthood holders to a meeting. He “stated that the object he had in calling the council was to ascertain under existing circumstances who were determined to be on the Lord’s side.” He commented that he was determined “not to commend any at Nauvoo that drank intoxicating drinks & used tobacco.” Those in attendance agreed “to the order of the church in those two things.” Watt’s prayer closed the meeting.

The following day, December 1, Richards held another meeting to discuss this subject. Watt proposed that they select a committee “to reprove certain persons (members) for their disorderly conduct.” Richards prudently opposed this idea because some of the company’s officers were among the offenders, and it would clearly be useless for them to reprove others for behavior of which they were guilty. “Every officer present made confession (who had not before) or spoke of his views and feelings in

25. Richards, Journals, November 15–20, 1842.

26. “The River Weather, & c.,” *Missouri Republican*, November 19, 1842, 2.

27. Untitled article, *Missouri Republican*, December 5, 1842, 2.

28. See the following articles in the *Missouri Republican*: “Monday Morning,” November 21, 1842, 2; “Tuesday Morning,” November 22, 1842, 3; “The River Is Falling,” November 24, 1842, 2; “The River, Weather, & c.,” November 28, 1842, 2; and “The River,” November 29, 1842, 2.

29. Paul H. Peterson, “An Historical Analysis of the Word of Wisdom” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972), 38.

regard to the subject before them.” President Richards then called for a show of hands “whether they were satisfied with the confessions and explanations of all others present.” R. Benson was not satisfied with Watt’s explanation. That evening Watt and Benson reconciled their unknown differences. Then Richards appointed George D. Watt, Alexander Wright, Richard Harrison, and Thomas Fairbridge to “wait upon the members & remind them of the order of the church, the [advice] of the council, of their covenants and obligations & c.”³⁰

Leaving his wife aboard ship, Greenhow traveled overland to St. Louis sometime before the first meeting on November 30 and published a letter in the December 2 issue of the *Missouri Republican* describing the plight of the *Alex Scott*, still aground almost 100 miles to the south with many of its passengers destitute of “food and means.”³¹ Richards had a copy of this letter by December 5. He called a meeting of his leaders and asked them to manifest, by a show of hands, if they were in a state of destitution. George Cannon was astonished that only four of the fourteen raised their hands. Cannon realized that many of the fourteen had suffered from lack of food: “I had seen some of these sell things that they could ill spare, to purchase the necessaries of life” and “had relieved some myself from famine, and still they said they were not destitute.”³² Richards felt they always had enough food if they asked him. He composed a letter to the editor, which was written by the clerk, Richard Harrison, rebutting Greenhow’s letter, and it was signed by a “large majority of the council,” including Watt.³³ Nevertheless, whatever way the group defined destitution, they needed food. Alexander Wright found a farmer, willing to sell a hog. Levi Richards gave him the money, and Wright and Watt brought the hog back to the boat, where it was butchered and divided among various families.³⁴

On December 7–8, in a quirk of midwestern weather, the ice disappeared, and the river rose eighteen inches in a single day. On December 10, the *Alex Scott* safely resumed its trip.³⁵ In St. Louis, Greenhow came aboard and scolded everyone who had signed Richards’s letter. He claimed “it had

30. Richards, Journals, November 30–December 2, 1842. The minutes of the meeting were probably kept by Richard Harrison, who was the clerk, and later copied into his journal by Levi Richards.

31. John Greenhow, letter to the editor, *Missouri Republican*, December 2, 1842, 2. On the same page is a long letter about the adventures of another steamboat on the Mississippi. The letter from Greenhow is also described by George Cannon; see Cannon, in *John Q. Cannon*, 117.

32. George Cannon, in *John Q. Cannon*, 118–19.

33. Richards, Journals, December 5, 1842. Richards’s letter cannot be found in the newspaper. The *Missouri Republican*’s issue for December 9 is not extant, and it is probably there. Watt must have signed it because he was a member of the committee.

34. Alexander Wright, Diary, December 2, 1842, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

35. Richards, Journals, December 10, 1842; see also the following *Missouri Republican* articles: “The Weather, River, &c.,” December 8, 1842, 2; and December 10, 1842, 2.

driven him from his employ & was false testimony & c. Making him a liar.”³⁶ The *Alex Scott* did not continue up the frozen Mississippi.

After two days of looking for work and shelter for his company, Richards decided to take the group across the Mississippi to Alton, Illinois, at the mouth of the Missouri River, where housing was cheaper. They spent from mid-December 1842 to April 1843 in Alton. It had a slaughter and packing house that processed thirty-eight thousand hogs that winter, and no doubt many of the Mormon men found jobs there. Wages were low, but food was inexpensive.³⁷ Watt might have worked at the packing plant but also resumed his work as a cobbler. Richards recorded that Watt mended his thin boots at least twice. The Watt family probably rented two rooms for two dollars per month in the large Mansion House, where others of their party also stayed.³⁸

In late December, Richards’s diary records a Watt family tragedy. On December 22, two-year-old Willard came down with scarlet fever, and Richards gave him lobelia. On Christmas Eve, James, his brother, was also feverish. In a few days, Richards stopped at the rooms of the Watt family and found James had a large swelling on his face and his left hand and right arm were swollen. Seven-year-old James died on January 1, 1843. Alexander Wright and his brother, John, made the coffin, and Wright dug a grave in the public burial ground.³⁹ Willard survived until May, dying sometime after the Watt family arrived in Nauvoo.⁴⁰ George and Molly must have been heartsick. They had lost one of their sons and in a short time would lose another. They would never forget their sorrow and feelings of forlornness. Nevertheless, they still believed that their journey for the gospel’s sake was the right thing to do, and they pressed on.

As soon as the Mississippi River became navigable, Levi Richards went upriver to Nauvoo, where he arrived on April 12. Here he convinced the owners of the *Maid of Iowa*, the Mormon steamboat, to go down to Alton and pick up the British emigrants. George and Molly must have come aboard eagerly, anxious to leave behind the scene of such sorrow. On April 25, 1842, the boat arrived in Nauvoo with about sixty passengers. In the crowded city of Nauvoo, Richards helped Watt find a house, although it is not known where.⁴¹

36. Richards, Journals, December 10–12, 1842; Wright, Diary, December 11, 1842. Richards was asleep on the boat when Greenhow first came aboard. He reported what the other passengers told him. He later saw Greenhow on the streets, and Greenhow ranted at him also. See also John Greenhow, letter to the editor, *Millennial Star* (June 1843): 30–31. Greenhow wrote that letter three weeks after he arrived in Nauvoo, which must have been in April. Unlike most of the rest of the company, he did not go to Alton but stayed in St. Louis. He mentions nothing in his letter about the problems he had.

37. Robert Crookston, *Reminiscence*, p. 6, typescript, LDS Church Archives.

38. Richards, Journal, December 13–20, 1842.

39. *Ibid.*, December 22 1842–January 2, 1843; Wright, Diary, January 2, 1843.

40. George D. Watt to Jannet and Charles Watt, January 16, 1863, shorthand, George D. Watt Papers, LDS Church Archives (transcribed by LaJean Carruth, 2006).

41. Crookston, *Reminiscence*, p. 7; Richards, Journal, May 5, 1843.

Watt was not accustomed to cities with the obvious newness of Nauvoo. In 1839 Joseph Smith had purchased land from Isaac Galland that sloped up from the Mississippi shore to a bluff with a commanding view over a big bend in the river. In the winter of 1838–39, the Mormons had left their homes in northern Missouri, leaving Joseph Smith and five others incarcerated in Liberty Jail. The refugees found a warm welcome in Quincy, Illinois, and in April 1839, Smith and the other prisoners were allowed to escape. They joined their families in Quincy, promptly investigated the property Isaac Galland was offering, and made arrangements for a series of purchases. Smith had hopeful plans for this city on the Mississippi River: as a gathering place, a center of industry, the heart of the church, and a temple city.⁴²

What seemed like providential help arrived in September 1840 in the person of John C. Bennett, a physician and quartermaster general who joined the church, became Smith's confidante, and, perhaps most significantly, helped guide a bill establishing the Nauvoo City Charter through the state legislature. It was a promising beginning, and Bennett became the city's first mayor in February 1841.⁴³ By the spring of 1843, when George and Molly Watt set foot on the dock near the Nauvoo House, the city numbered about nine thousand.⁴⁴ Nauvoo was in a growth phase. The British immigrants must have also hoped to participate in the evident prosperity, but housing was expensive, and many of the new arrivals sheltered temporarily in tents. Their very presence testified to their willingness to endure the hardships of gathering and their desire to associate with their fellow Saints.

Shared religious beliefs obviously smoothed some of the difficulties inherent in blending such a diverse population into one people. More than 50 percent came from the northeastern United States and Canada. About 20 percent came from the southern states, and about the same percentage was from the British Isles. The city also had a few people who had been in the area before the Mormons came. The town lacked an industrial base, and converts from manufacturing centers had great difficulty finding employment.⁴⁵

Joseph Smith organized the church in Nauvoo into three and eventually four wards with a bishop over each to take care of the poor. The church as a whole met in a grove just west of the temple construction since

42. See Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), chaps. 1–7, for information on building the city.

43. Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2002), 177.

44. The Mississippi changed continually as it flowed past Nauvoo, and usually the city had two possible docking places: one in the northern part where a hotel was located, and one in the southern part by the Nauvoo House, a hotel still under construction.

45. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 174–76.

there was no large meeting hall. There Smith and the other leaders of the church preached to the people. In March 1842, a group of women organized a benevolent society for the women. They elected Emma Hale Smith, Joseph's wife, as the first president and named their organization the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo.⁴⁶ Under the direction of William W. Player, another British immigrant, the temple had risen several feet upon the bluff.⁴⁷ Workers had started construction on the temple in the fall of 1840. On April 16, 1841, church leaders laid the cornerstones with Smith offering a benediction at each corner.⁴⁸

Founded with such great hopes and by a persecuted people, Nauvoo was a town devoted to the principles of gathering to Zion. Unfortunately, people began to break apart even before the Watts arrived in May 1843. John C. Bennett, sometime after his mayoral inauguration, began seducing women under the guise of teaching them a secret doctrine of spiritual wifery and assured them that Joseph Smith sanctioned that practice as long as it was kept secret. Smith heard rumors of Bennett's corruption and that he had abandoned a wife in Ohio. Finally, on May 11, 1842, Bennett was excommunicated from the church, and he resigned as mayor.⁴⁹

Bennett might have known something about polygamy, but it is unclear how much he heard from Smith. The practice of plural marriage was one of the causes that would eventually contribute to the city's downfall. Possibly as early as 1831, the Mormon leader said he had received a revelation concerning eternal marriage and the plurality of wives or, as it was more commonly called, polygamy. In 1841 after the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles returned from Britain, Joseph Smith taught a select few and eventually all of them about the principle, and even though many of them were reluctant, these men eventually accepted the doctrine. Smith taught many others about plural marriage also, although he never preached it openly. It became a secret doctrine, practiced by only a few.⁵⁰ However, when Joseph and Hyrum Smith introduced it to the Nauvoo Stake presidency and the high council in August 1843, these men were divided over the issue. William Law and Sidney Rigdon, counselors in the First Presidency, rejected both it and Smith. Emma Smith, Joseph's wife, despite two brief episodes of being reconciled to the practice, ultimately denounced it.⁵¹

46. Ibid., 223–25; Jill Mulvey Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 27–35.

47. Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 128.

48. Ibid., 183–85.

49. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 350–52; Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 262–65; for information on Bennett, see Andrew F. Smith, *The Sainly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

50. See Gary James Bergera, "Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841–44," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38 (Fall 2003), 1–73.

51. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 343–48; also see Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives*

Problems from Missouri also followed Smith. In April 1839, he had, with the connivance of his jailers, fled from their custody and reached the safety of Illinois. Between 1840 and 1843, Smith avoided extradition to Missouri four times, sometimes hiding from the marshals for days.⁵² Another problem involved politics in Hancock County. Before the arrival of the Mormons, the Whigs and Democrats had divided the county almost equally. The Mormons generally voted Democratic, but the Democrats had supported their expulsion from Missouri. The Saints were open to the Whigs. Both Whigs and Democrats assisted them in gaining the Nauvoo Charter. But voting as a bloc, the Mormons satisfied neither party, causing the rise of an anti-Mormon group of both Whigs and Democrats who wanted to drive them out of the state.⁵³

In the midst of these problems, the Watt family arrived in their adopted city. On April 28 and 29, five and six days after his arrival, Watt delivered two lectures on phonography and advertised to teach classes in the subject. The *Nauvoo Neighbor* wrote that “Mr. Watt laid the principles of phonography before his audience in a clear and lucid manner.” He said it was like comparing railway locomotives with stagecoaches: the “one is truth and order, the others are error and disorder.”⁵⁴ Watt worked as a private tutor and did not teach at the Nauvoo University or common school.⁵⁵ It cannot be determined how long Watt taught shorthand students. Perhaps he made so little as a teacher that he had to supplement his income with his old trade of shoemaking.

Although Watt does not talk about the process of settling into the life of the family’s new home, there are indications that he and Molly quickly did so. In mid-July, he purchased a half-acre lot in the southwest quarter of section 32, almost two miles from town, for seventy-five dollars. He built a cabin on the land but never lived there because it was too far from Nauvoo. Perhaps he bought it to farm—not a skill he possessed—or as an investment.⁵⁶ In November, Watt received a high priest’s license from his quorum.⁵⁷

Molly, who had crossed the ocean pregnant—a condition that did nothing to make the voyage more pleasant—gave birth on June 10, 1843, to George D. Watt Jr., probably a couple of weeks after the death of their

of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 594.

52. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 185–87.

53. *Ibid.*, 289–300.

54. “Phonography,” *Nauvoo Neighbor*, May 3, 1843, [2].

55. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 192–97.

56. “George D. Watt,” index cards, Nauvoo Restoration Collection, ca. 1964, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

57. Nauvoo High Priest and Salt Lake High Priest records, November 19, 1843, holograph, LDS Church Archives. This volume recorded the names of the high priests accepted into the quorum in Nauvoo and then was taken to Salt Lake City and used there for the same purpose.

second son, Willard. George Jr. was the only child of this marriage to survive to adulthood.

Freemasonry had come to Nauvoo in 1842 when Grand Master Abraham Jonas, a friend of Joseph Smith's from the Columbus, Illinois, chapter, installed the Nauvoo Lodge on March 15. Smith probably hoped that involvement in Freemasonry would tap into friendship networks for the Mormons; with his enthusiastic sponsorship, the Nauvoo Lodge numbered more than 250 members by the end of 1842. The total membership of lodges in communities around Nauvoo did not total a quarter of this number. On January 18, 1844, Watt applied to be a member and was initiated a month later on February 19. The following day the lodge elected him to the degree of fellow craft Mason, and on March 28, he was promoted to a master Mason. Masons accepted more than a thousand priesthood holders in Nauvoo into their ranks, so it was not unusual for Watt to be admitted. However, he was not, the sources indicate, active in the lodge.⁵⁸ Fearing that this lodge would dominate Freemasonry in the state, other lodges became suspicious of the Mormons and supported the growing anti-Mormon movement.

It is not known whether Watt worked on the temple. He was unskilled in masonry, but the temple also used unskilled laborers. Molly did not join the Female Relief Society. Watt became a member of Captain Isaac Allred's foot company in the Nauvoo Legion. He actively drilled and paraded at musters.⁵⁹ The legion played a colorful role in city celebrations—for instance, at the laying of the cornerstone of the Nauvoo Temple in 1841.⁶⁰

Missouri problems and the lurid exposés of the excommunicated Bennett kept Nauvoo in turmoil after May 1842, increasing tensions with the surrounding Illinois residents. The Law brothers, William (who had been a counselor in the First Presidency) and Wilson (a Nauvoo Legion general), became disillusioned over polygamy and were excommunicated in April 1844, vowing to expose what they felt were corrupt practices. With others they organized the Reformed Mormon Church in April 1844 with William Law as their leader.⁶¹

With pressures from outside and inside Nauvoo, Smith contemplated extension of Mormonism to other areas, perhaps even the Rocky Mountains or Texas. In February 1844, he instructed the apostles to send an exploration

58. Freemasonry Nauvoo Lodge, minute book, January 18; February 19, 20; March 28, 1844, holograph, LDS Church Archives; "George D. Watt," index cards, Nauvoo Restoration. See also Ronald O. Barney, *One Side by Himself: The Life and Times of Lewis Barney, 1808–1894* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2001), 70; and Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 313–21, for information on Lewis Barney's association with Freemasonry.

59. Nauvoo Legion, Order Book, 1843–44, Fifth Regiment, Second Cohort, June 1, 1844, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

60. Flanders, *Nauvoo*, 110–12.

61. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 357–59.

group of twenty-five men to the Far West—California and Oregon—seeking a new location for the Saints. Later, eleven men volunteered for this expedition. The apostles selected nine more men altogether, including George D. Watt. Three days later, Smith met with them, inquiring whether they would volunteer for the exploring expedition. Watt, with characteristic enthusiasm, was the first to say, “I shall go.” Smith described their duties: “I told them I wanted an exploration of all that mountain country.” They should be mounted with both a horse and a mule apiece and be well armed with two rifles, two pistols, a Bowie knife, and a “good sabre.” For a while, the group held weekly meetings with Smith never knowing when they were going to leave.⁶² A poor man could not have assembled the materials, mounts, and weapons Joseph Smith listed. Watt, who had needed financial assistance to travel from New Orleans to Nauvoo, surely did not have enough money to provision himself. Perhaps Smith envisioned a subsidy for those who needed it. As matters turned out, however, pressing events that spring in the city took precedence over this expedition.

The year 1844 was a national presidential-election year, and Watt got an immediate immersion in the processes of American democracy. In October 1839, Smith and other Mormon representatives had presented affidavits of their property losses in Missouri and petitions for redress to U.S. President Martin Van Buren. Although expressing sympathy, Van Buren pointed out—correctly—that this was a local issue and, given the rigorous political emphasis on states’ rights, he was unable to assist the Mormons. Smith felt that the Mormons’ constitutional right to freedom of religion had been infringed. In November 1843, he wrote to potential presidential candidates asking their opinion about issues of interest to the Mormons. Only two responded, and neither one of them promised to intervene in a Missouri-type issue. So the Mormon leader decided to run as a candidate with a broad platform, one plank of which was intervention when the local governments failed to protect citizens.⁶³ Smith needed men to spread the word and campaign for him in the various states. At the April 1844 conference, calls were issued to 338 men. The campaigners had a double purpose: to preach the gospel and gather votes for their candidate, Lieutenant General Joseph Smith.⁶⁴ Watt joined with the men going on electioneering missions and was assigned to the South.

In mid-April, Watt, perhaps because of his shorthand skills, attended a meeting with Smith, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Nauvoo High Council, where William and Wilson Law and Robert Foster, another of

62. “Journal History,” February 21, 24, 1844; see also Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d rev. ed., 7 vols. (repr., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1973), 6: 244, 255–61.

63. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 333–38.

64. “Journal History,” April 15, 1844.

the dissidents, were excommunicated.⁶⁵ Watt had been in Nauvoo for only a year and had no knowledge of polygamy, but because of the Laws' vigorous opposition to plural marriage, Joseph Smith and the apostles discussed the topic at that meeting. It must have been an eye-opening experience for Watt, but he left no record of his reaction.

Although the exact date of Watt's departure is not known, he probably left Nauvoo early in May on his proselytizing/electioneering mission.⁶⁶ To help fund his trip, he sold Mary Gardner a third of his lot for twenty-five dollars.⁶⁷ It is possible that Watt, traveling with others, may have found friends and members with whom to lodge all the way to Virginia. He went to Virginia as the second counselor to Benjamin Winchester in his mission area. He may have traveled with Peter Muir Fife, who was his companion in June 1844 in Marion County, Virginia (later West Virginia).⁶⁸

Shortly after Watt left, the Law brothers founded a newspaper called the *Nauvoo Expositor*, established particularly to expose the practice of polygamy. On June 7, 1844, the first issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor* told its readers that it was "earnestly seeking to explode the vicious principles of Joseph Smith and those who practice the same abominations and whoredoms."⁶⁹ The city council declared the press a public nuisance, and Smith, as mayor of Nauvoo and by order of the council, had it destroyed.⁷⁰ Shocked by this attack on freedom of the press, Joseph Smith's enemies had the excuse they needed. He was arrested and, on June 27, was killed along with his brother, Hyrum, at Carthage Jail.

Meanwhile, Watt and the other missionaries found the people in Virginia unreceptive to their message and teachings. Because they traveled without

65. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 429.

66. The Nauvoo Legion records show Watt was fined for absenteeism for the first three meetings in May: May 4, May 11, and May 18. Possibly he did not attend those drills because he realized that he would soon be leaving Nauvoo. Or he may have left in early May without informing his officer. See Nauvoo Legion, Order Book, May 4, 11, 18, 1844.

67. "George D. Watt," index cards, Nauvoo Restoration. When Norton Jacob, who would be part of the vanguard company to Utah in 1847, left on his mission with Charles C. Rich, an officer in the Nauvoo Legion, they stayed with friends and members most of the way. When they arrived, they printed five thousand copies of Joseph Smith's "Views of the Powers and Policy of Government." See Ronald O. Barney, *The Mormon Vanguard Brigade of 1847: Norton Jacob's Record* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), 32–36; see also Leonard J. Arrington, *Charles C. Rich: Mormon General and Western Frontiersman* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), chap. 8.

68. D. L. Shin to Brigham Young, July 2, 1870, holograph, incoming correspondence, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Church Archives. Shin remembered Watt preaching in Marion County. "Journal History," April 15, 1844, lists Watt as Benjamin Winchester's second counselor in Virginia; Peter Muir Fife, Reminiscence, typescript, in author's possession.

69. See "Preamble," *Nauvoo Expositor*, June 7, 1844, [1]; and William Law, "Affidavit," [2], in the same issue.

70. For a summary of the events and controversy surrounding the *Nauvoo Expositor*, see Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 362–63.

purse or scrip, they often went without food. Few received them or their message, and they could not find work. When Watt heard of Smith's death is unclear, but he had learned the dreadful news at least by early August. His activities are not clear for the next few months. The next record that mentions him is his purchase of some beef in Nauvoo from Brigham Young on November 13.⁷¹ Almost certainly he was also worried about finances, hence his return to Nauvoo.

On December 1, Watt was in Quincy, Illinois, about ninety miles south of Nauvoo, looking for employment, but his wife was not with him. He spoke on "the order of the Church of God." He must have had a good job lead because during the next week, he asked the Quincy branch members to accept him into full fellowship. They unanimously agreed,⁷² but the promising lead never materialized. By the end of the month, he was back in Nauvoo.

Watt had left Nauvoo in 1844 with Joseph Smith as the head of the church. He returned with the city in religious and political disarray. He probably missed the August conference when Sidney Rigdon, attempting to establish himself as the church's "guardian," was rejected.⁷³ During the fall, however, he undoubtedly heard of the claims of James J. Strang, a recent, but charismatic, convert, who preached gathering to Wisconsin. Watt totally rejected Strang. His sympathies were strongly with the apostles who had converted him.

Watt was in desperate economic straits as 1845 began. He had spent all of his available funds on his mission and again faced the old specter of poverty that had haunted him in England. He wrote to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on December 31, 1844, confessing he would not have written were it not that "my present situation has put me to my wits end, so that I know not which course to steer. . . . I have no work, in consequence of which I have nothing to eat, and no where to dwell, my wife lives about two miles out of town and I live no where." He asked for their advice, "for I always have and still do consider myself, and all I possess at your disposal, and trust to the dictates of that wisdom of which your Quorum is the embodiment."⁷⁴

A few days later on January 2, 1845, Watt attended a party at Willard Richards's home. Sixteen converts from Preston were at this gathering,⁷⁵ and Richards suggested that Watt use his shorthand skill to record important speeches of the day and earn his living by teaching classes. Richards's

71. Brigham Young, Account Book, 1836-46, November 13, 1844, holograph, Young Papers.

72. Quincy Branch records, minutes, December 1, 7, 1844, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

73. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 438.

74. George D. Watt to the Twelve Brethren, December 31, 1844, incoming correspondence, holograph, Young Papers. Molly Watt must have been living in a cabin on his property.

75. Willard Richards, Journal, January 2, 1845, holograph, Willard Richards Papers, LDS Church Archives.

suggestion was exactly what Watt needed. Shortly thereafter he began teaching phonography to a few pupils.

At the April 1845 General Conference, Watt began a significant career of recording speeches by church authorities. The church could now record and publish speeches of its leaders, especially of the president, thus disseminating this word to the world. Brigham Young provided Watt with a desk in the historian's office, where he joined Willard Richards and Thomas Bullock, a fellow Englishman. On April 10, George A. Smith, an apostle he had known in Britain, noted in his history that Watt "read a proof of President Young's sermon on the first day of the conference. It was the first reporting he had ever done and showed the great benefit of the art of phonography."⁷⁶ The *Times and Seasons* mentioned that his services "are highly appreciated."⁷⁷ Watt's record of Young's address of April 1, 1845, appeared in the local LDS periodical, the *Times and Seasons*, on July 1, 1845. The *Times and Seasons* later published four more sermons recorded by Watt: two by Heber C. Kimball, one by Orson Hyde, and the last by John Taylor. Watt also began using his shorthand in meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. On April 10, 1845, he took notes at the conference's morning, afternoon, and evening meetings.⁷⁸

Also in April, he began teaching a second round of phonography classes, with each meeting starting at 7:00 a.m. and lasting until noon. The length of the class was because shorthand was essentially a memorization and practice skill, and longer sessions were more effective at training the memory than short ones. It is not known how many took the class, but some of the leading men of Nauvoo attended at least a few classes, including Brigham Young, George A. Smith, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, Lucius Scovil, John D. Lee, and Amasa Lyman.⁷⁹

Early in May 1845, Watt again advertised for students, this time offering thirteen lessons for a dollar per student and volunteering to teach in any part of the city where a class could be arranged. Three such locales were the Seventies Hall, the second floor of Joseph Smith's red brick store, and Orson Pratt's home.⁸⁰ The textbook cost \$1.50. He had nineteen pupils, including Miles Romney, George Miller, Andrew Cahoon, Thomas Bullock, and Charles Wesley Wandle, who also worked in the office with Watt. In July

76. George A. Smith, History, April 10, 1845, holograph, George A. Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives. See also "George A. Smith Papers," in *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 1 (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2003), DVD 32 and 33.

77. "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 6 (April 15, 1845): 871.

78. Historian's Office, Journal, vol. 4, April 10, 1845, Historian's Office records, LDS Church Archives.

79. *Ibid.*, April 25, 1845.

80. "Phonography," *Nauvoo Neighbor*, May 7, 1845, [3]; "George D. Watt," index cards, Nauvoo Restoration.

Watt began another class of at least eleven. Fourteen more signed up for the class that started in July and finished on October 14. The records show that only two women signed up for the class: Nancy Davis Hunt and Constantia Elizabeth Clementine Hutchinson.⁸¹

The class influenced Young's ideas and resulted in the development of the Deseret Alphabet, a phonetic alphabet originated by the Mormons. Sir Isaac Pitman, who had devised the shorthand system that bears his name, also promoted a longhand system called phonotype, which had an alphabetical symbol for every sound in English. Watt suggested to Young that English orthography needed to be revised so that each sound had its own alphabetical symbol.

In May 1845, Watt interrupted his classes and began using his skills in the services of the church by recording the proceedings at the trial of the five accused murderers of Joseph and Hyrum Smith.⁸² Because anti-Mormons feared that the church would use the record for its own purposes, they searched those leaving the courthouse daily, including Watt. He thwarted their plan by secretly passing his notes out of a window to friends hourly and thus had no paper on his person when he left the courthouse each day.⁸³ The trial finished on May 30 with a verdict acquitting all five defendants. When Watt transcribed his notes several months later, they totaled more than a hundred pages, a remarkable accomplishment for a junior reporter.⁸⁴ Young was so pleased that he arranged for Watt to be given a lot, had a house built for him, and employed him as the church reporter.⁸⁵ Watt was very seldom, while he was in Nauvoo, absent from official proceedings after that.

Following the trial, Watt threw himself into his classes, teaching one every two or three days and organizing, in July, a phonographic society to promote shorthand.⁸⁶ He also energetically recorded speeches by church leaders. On

81. Nauvoo Temple, Daybook, Building Committee entries, July 5, 1845, holograph, LDS Church Archives. This is an accounting daybook and the entries are arranged as they happen each day.

82. According to Smith et al., *History of the Church*, 7: 421–23, Watt was at the trial in Carthage. However, the first thirty-three pages of the minutes are in Daniel Mackintosh's handwriting. It is possible that Watt did not get there the first day and Mackintosh had that assignment.

83. Ibid.

84. Watt, who had been staying in Carthage, returned to Nauvoo the next day. He must have made some rough drafts of his notes, but he did not transcribe them completely for several months. The manuscript transcription is cataloged as George Darling Watt, ["Report of the Trial of the Murderers of Joseph Smith,"] 1845, LDS Church Archives. The shorthand notes are not extant. See bibliographic note in Dallin Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 228.

85. Smith et al., *History of the Church*, 7: 425. There is, however, no evidence that the church built a house on this lot.

86. "Constitution of the Phonographic Society of the City of Nauvoo," *Nauvoo Neighbor*, July 16, 1845, 3: 465.

August 17, he recorded a speech by William Smith, Joseph Smith's youngest brother. Smith told his congregation that this day he wanted to teach some basic principles of love your neighbor—"men and some women"—and do good to them, especially the widows.⁸⁷ Watt reported sessions of the October conference, but no records have survived. In November Watt recorded minutes for the fortnightly city-council meeting.⁸⁸

Because Young had hired him, Watt's salary and expenditures were credited on the Temple Committee's financial daybooks and ledgers from July 1845 to February 1846. From those financial accounts can be pieced together some of the purchases he made for his family. In that period, Watt drew from the store 169 pounds of beef, 199½ pounds of flour, 22½ bushels of wheat, and 21 bushels of corn. In December 1845 and January 1846, he purchased 51¼ pounds of pork. In August and September, he supplemented the family's diet with melons and even got ten cents worth of peaches. In November he purchased two bushels of turnips and one of beets and carrots. In November he drew out of the store twelve pounds of salt, perhaps to preserve some of the beef. He purchased sugar periodically. He also bought a gallon of molasses twice in July and another in early September. He acquired a cow and a calf for nine dollars in July, which must have materially improved the family's diet. The cow and calf survived on grass until early December, when he purchased 2,850 pounds of hay for \$9.26.

The committee store also supplied his professional needs: four pencils in November, quills in January (suggesting that he was now using ink), and a quire of paper (four sheets folded once) five times. He also bought an unspecified number of books for \$.76—probably on shorthand, although their titles are not given. He also drew out \$.99 in cash, perhaps for stamps to send letters back to England. He purchased a box of ague pills as a remedy for the malaria that afflicted so many in Nauvoo. Since it is not known if these pills contained quinine, it is unclear if they helped. On September 16, he bought a quart of whiskey for \$.10 and, on February 27, two quarts of wine for \$.75.

He also partly furnished his house from the storehouse: six chairs, one bed coverlet, and some candles. In mid-August, he purchased a stove for \$16.00, but it must not have worked correctly or Molly did not like it because he returned it on January 3, 1846.⁸⁹ The Temple Committee clerk also credited his account for \$97.70 in the "property and labor-tithing" column for

87. William Smith, "The Gospel According to St. William," August 17, 1845, Report of Speeches, ca. 1845-85, holograph, Historian's Office records, LDS Church Archives.

88. Historian's Office, Journal, vol. 3, January 6, 8, 1846.

89. George D. Watt account 352, 492, Nauvoo Temple, ledger, Building Committee entries, July 1845-February 1846, holograph, LDS Church Archives. Financial accounts started with a daybook or journal, where transactions were recorded daily as they took place. These accounts were then posted to a ledger under the individual's name or account number.

“preaching in the mission field.” The clerk added the note that Watt had preached for eight months and been sick for four.⁹⁰ Since he was not gone more than six months maximum (May to November) on his electioneering trip, this notation is somewhat mysterious unless Watt had done something else that is unknown.

After the death of Joseph Smith, the Mormons’ enemies allowed them a reprieve for more than a year, thinking that the leaderless community would fray apart and perhaps also be shocked by the extreme step of murder. However, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stepped into the void for those who remained in Nauvoo. By the end of April 1845, the workmen at the temple had completed framing the second floor, and work continued to progress well through August, when these same laborers added the tinned dome to the top of the tower.⁹¹

Watt was in Nauvoo when the Illinois Legislature repealed the Nauvoo City Charter in January 1845. Without a charter, Nauvoo had no police force, so church officials divided the city into quorums of twelve deacons with a bishop at their head. Many Mormons lived outside of Nauvoo. If hostilities developed, their families would be the first to suffer. Beginning in January 1845, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles advised these families to move into Nauvoo, where they would be safer. In February 1845, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles sent Watt on a short mission to Adams County, just south of Hancock County, advising the Mormons there to move.⁹² Some Latter-day Saints moved into the city, but most, realizing their farms would be untended, decided to stay where they were as long as possible.

In September 1845, a vigilante group burned the village named for Kirtland member Isaac Morley, several miles south of Nauvoo. In four days, more than forty buildings went up in flames. It was a strong signal that the Mormons would not be allowed to stay. People in Nauvoo helped the refugees move in. Before the month’s end, Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles negotiated a truce: the Mormons would leave in the spring as soon as the grass was long enough to sustain their animals in exchange for a cessation of hostilities. The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had studied the reports of the expeditions of John C. Fremont and Lansford W. Hastings’s *Emigrant Guide*.

Watt took shorthand reports of the meeting held on October 5–6, 1845, on the first floor of the temple, when Brigham Young dedicated the unfinished temple in general and that assembly room in particular. Parley P. Pratt told the congregation that they should leave Nauvoo as a place “that will be

90. Trustee-in-Trust, donation records, 1846–52, rec. no. 3, February 11, 1846, p. 22, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

91. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 250–52.

92. Warren Foote, *Autobiography*, n.d., p. 66, typescript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

a monument of our industry and virtue.” George A. Smith commented that the Mormons were “seeking a place where we can enjoy the fruits of our labors and God himself be the sole proprietor of the elements.” Watt also listened to the passionate talk of Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of church founder Joseph Smith, who endorsed the decision to abandon Nauvoo and move west.⁹³ It was a nostalgic farewell since she had earlier told Brigham Young that she wished to be buried next to her husband, Joseph Smith Sr.

Nauvoo now became a community of packing. Wagons and draft animals from the entire region became high-priced items, just as property values plummeted to nothing. By the end of 1845, the church leaders had decided that the Great Salt Lake Valley was their destination, even though no public announcement had been made.⁹⁴

Watt had heard about plural marriage while he was in Nauvoo. He had heard and probably concluded much from the trial of the Law brothers when he had taken shorthand notes. He had probably heard it also in meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, where again he had acted as reporter. The only church authority who could have possibly taught him about polygamy was Willard Richards, and it had to have been early in December 1845, just as the temple was sufficiently finished that members could receive their endowments. It is not known how he felt about the practice of polygamy. Many thought that the very idea of taking more than one wife was abhorrent to their Victorian principles. Watt, though, had associated with the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles since his baptism in Preston, and he knew them as men of God.⁹⁵

For unknown reasons, he requested that he be allowed to return to Britain on a mission. He wrote to Brigham Young, asking to take a mission to Scotland. His father’s family lived in Gatehouse, Kirkcudbrightshire, and

93. *Times and Seasons* 6 (November 1, 1845): 1010–12. Watt was at the meetings, but none of his reports were published.

94. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, chap. 17.

95. There are two sources for Watt’s knowledge about plural marriage in Nauvoo. They are both after the fact. In 1858 Robert Williams wrote about his experience with Watt when they crossed the plains together in 1851. There is a slight hint in his autobiography that Watt had been taught about plural marriage before he left Nauvoo. Williams, who was angry at Watt when he wrote, said that he might have had his blessings in Nauvoo if he had stayed, but he was “cast out. He would not take a spaid on which to help build the House of our god. He was taken with the chills and beged to travel to England.” Watt was endowed and sealed in the Nauvoo Temple, however, and so his situation did not mean he did not receive his temple blessings. Perhaps Williams meant that Watt could have received the blessings of plural marriage. Instead, Watt returned to Britain. See Robert Williams, *Autobiography*, 1859, pp. 119–25, holograph, LDS Church Archives. The second source is a letter Watt wrote to Mary Asenath Richards in about 1865, where he describes witnessing the plural marriage of Willard and Nanny Longstroth Richards in the Nauvoo Temple. George D. Watt to Mary Asenath Richards, n.d., ca. 1865, shorthand, typescript, George D. Watt Papers, LDS Church Archives (transcribed by Lajean Carruth, 2005).

he felt that he could convert them. The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles also desired that he be more proficient with shorthand and hoped he could take lessons from Sir Isaac Pitman and other experts in Britain. In mid-December, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles approved his request, and on Christmas Day 1845, Young notified Watt of their decision.⁹⁶

On December 10, 1845, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles began to administer temple endowments to the Mormons in Nauvoo. The system of instructions and covenants conferred sacred knowledge that would guide the obedient to the highest degree of heaven—the celestial kingdom—and commit the faithful even more firmly to the church, rallying them as individuals and as a people to meet this newest challenge they were enduring. A continuation of the endowment was a sealing of husband and wife that united couples, not only for this life but eternity. On December 22, 1845, with confirmation of his mission pending, George D. and Molly Watt received their endowments.⁹⁷ A month later in the temple, they watched Willard Richards and Nanny Longstroth be sealed as husband and wife in a plural marriage on January 25, 1846; then Watt and Molly were “adopted” by Willard and Jennetta Richards and sealed as husband and wife.⁹⁸ At this time, part of the higher law was for Mormons to be adopted by priesthood hierarchy and thus grafted into a patriarchal order that linked them in an unbroken line back to Adam.⁹⁹ When Richards approached him about becoming his adopted son, Watt quickly consented.¹⁰⁰ The temple closed in February.¹⁰¹

While their neighbors were purchasing oxen and building wagons, George and Molly Watt were readying themselves to return to Britain. On February 4, about two weeks before Young departed from Nauvoo, Watt received his official mission notice, in which the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles recommended him to the people of Britain and also to Wilford Woodruff, the mission president, to preach in Britain, especially the western counties of Scotland.¹⁰² Watt was then helping Richards, other staff, and relatives to pack all of his records and office materials, as well as personal belongings, for the westward migration.¹⁰³

96. Brigham Young to George D. Watt, December 25, 1845, holograph, outgoing correspondence, Young Papers.

97. Nauvoo Temple, Endowments for the Living, 1845–46, December 22, 1845, microfilm of holograph, Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Family History Library).

98. Nauvoo Temple, Sealings and Adoptions for the Living, 1846–57, January 25, 1846, microfilm of holograph, Family History Library; George D. Watt to Mary Asenath Richards, n.d., ca. 1865.

99. Gordon Irving, “The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830–1900,” *BYU Studies* 14 (Spring 1974): 294–95.

100. Historian’s Office, Journal, vol. 7, January 10, 1846.

101. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 573.

102. Brigham Young to Wilford Woodruff, February 4, 1846, holograph, Watt Papers.

103. Willard Richards, Diary, February 4–7, 1846, holograph, Richards Papers; Historian’s

In January 1846, personal threats to Brigham Young intensified. An advanced group led by Charles Shumway left Nauvoo with fifteen wagons on February 4, and it became a city in transition. Parley P. Pratt and his family crossed the river on February 14, and Brigham Young and his families followed the next day. Most residents left between March and April 1846. Some of the very poor and sick did not leave until August, when the vigilantes forced them out.¹⁰⁴

Missionaries usually did not take their families with them, but Watt's experience on his first Scottish mission and his trip to Virginia had made him reluctant to be without Molly and their son. Because of the exodus from Nauvoo, church leaders allowed them to go to the mission field as a family unit.

Watt first crossed the Mississippi with the Saints who left Nauvoo in February and camped on Sugar Creek. In a letter to the *Millennial Star*, he mentioned that when he arrived, "several thousand Saints had already crossed the mighty Mississippi, and were encamped in the wilderness, then made dreary and cold by a recent snow storm." The condition of the Saints when he left, "and for some time previous, were at once animating and heart rending, calculated to force a sigh accompanied with tears from the hearts of those who know how to sympathise with suffering humanity." Even though some seemed to have lost hope previously, "a brightness of hope beamed from every countenance." He mentioned that all were recovering their health and "seemed nerved with fresh life and vigor." He painted an optimistic picture of their future: "Could you have seen that camp smiling in the rays of the moon's silver beams, could you have emerged at once into the place and pervaded the silent valley at an hour when animated nature slept, and while contemplating the scene, would not your cogitations at once embrace the gloomy past, the interesting present, and the glorious future."

Since he was writing this in Liverpool, he commented that thousands were now on their way: "Thus they are leaving the city of their exile, built up by them in the midst of poverty and want, which they have beautified and adorned with many noble buildings, which would do honor to any of the large and opulent cities of that country." He then finished by echoing the sentiments of Parley P. Pratt and George A. Smith: this people "have crowned the whole with a magnificent temple which by this time is nearly finished if not quite, which will stand as a monument of Mormon industry, talent, perseverance, and grandeur to the latest generation."¹⁰⁵

On March 10, the Watt family set out for New York City, probably traveling by boat through the Ohio River basin. Watt had been in America about three and a half years but had only spent 70 percent of his time in Nauvoo.

Office, Journal, vol. 3, February 5, 1846.

104. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 618.

105. George D. Watt, letter to the editor, *Millennial Star* 7 (June 15, 1846): 199.



Courtesy of LDS Church Archives

The Nauvoo Temple on a hill

He had arrived in Nauvoo in May 1843 and left a year later in May 1844 as a missionary to Virginia. He had returned to a Nauvoo without Joseph Smith but led by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He had known these men earlier in England and trusted them. In the next year, he had made a niche for himself as a conference reporter, but he was now ready to return to his native land, once more to proselytize among his relatives and fellow Britons.