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Mormon Passage of George D. Watt

Ronald G. Watt

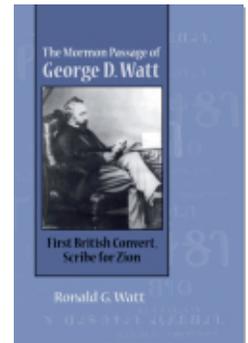
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ACROSS THE WIDE ATLANTIC AND ON TO ZION

I say amen and with all my heart, for after you have done that sir you at once enter into plenty of sea room where you may sail through life with unreefed topsails . . . and sometimes with setting sails you may have to encounter both white squalls and black ones, but if you remain true to Mormonism you will find in it power enough to live in the gale that ever blows.

George D. Watt to Matthews, a sailor, March 16, 1851

George D. Watt's second voyage from Liverpool to Zion in America would take him to the Utah Territory, a place he had never seen before. He had experienced the sea and river voyages, but he would now need to learn the skills of packing a wagon and driving oxen. He knew from reading Orson Pratt's diary that he must travel vast plains, uninhabited barrens, and jagged mountains.¹ This assurance of novelty and, almost certainly, adventure, motivated him to begin a journal that covered from January 28, 1851 to August 14, 1851. Assuredly he planned to publish it, for he exercised his versatile command of English and an almost poetic literary ability in it. In his introductory paragraphs, he explained that "I shall try to keep in view

1. See Orson Pratt, "Interesting Items Concerning the Journeying of the Latter-day Saints From the City of Nauvoo until their Location in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake" *Millennial Star* 11 (December 1, 1849): 362–63 (excerpted from Pratt's journal). The *Millennial Star* serialized the journal, and sections ran from December 1, 1849, to June 15, 1850. Pratt's journal always started on the first page of every issue except for the first one.

the edification of my friends and brethren whom I have left that they may be better prepared to endure the many inconveniences that must be met with any crossing [of] the great waters.”²

Presumably because of his previous ocean crossing, Orson Pratt had designated Watt as president of the ship’s company. Realizing how hazardous the journey was, the British Mission president, who was also the church transportation agent, chartered only the most reliable ships, and not one of their charters crossing the Atlantic Ocean sank. Watt’s ship, the *Ellen Maria*, weighed 678 tons and was 151 feet long and 33 feet wide. An American company in Richmond, Maine, had built the ship in 1849, and this was its first transatlantic voyage with Mormon emigrants.³ Amherst Whitmore, the captain, was “a kind man in his manners and external deportment to the passengers,” Watt wrote, “but very hard in his dealings with his fellow men,” according to the first mate. The “saints thereto have been blessed by his kindness.”⁴

The emigrants’ fare paid also for food, which they cooked and consumed aboard the ship. Most ships provided a basic diet of biscuits (hardtack), soup, potatoes, and fish, usually supplemented by salt pork, molasses, butter, and cheese. In the case of the *Ellen Maria*, it appears that the ship supplied the basics, and the mission provided more. Watt had butter, which the captain later purchased.⁵ Water was rationed, amounting to usually three quarts per person a day. Stored in wooden barrels, it inevitably tasted stale.⁶ Emigrants had to furnish their own mattresses, blankets, and cooking utensils. In 1856 the *Millennial Star* helpfully advised the Saints that, for a few shillings, they could purchase a straw mattress in Liverpool that would last long enough for the sea voyage.⁷

The Mormon companies were generally orderly. If there were problems between passengers and the crew, the captain, whose word was ultimately law, could delegate them back to the company’s president to keep tighter discipline. In 1863 novelist Charles Dickens visited the ship *Amazon*

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2. George D. Watt, Journal, January 28–August 14, 1851, February 8–9, shorthand, holograph, George D. Watt Papers, Church Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives) (transcribed by LaJean Carruth, September 2001). Watt did not mean this journal to be a finished product since it contains numerous cross-outs and insertions. I have ignored deletions and insertions except where I needed to add something to complete a thought.
 3. For information on the *Ellen Maria*, see Conway B. Sonne, *Ships, Saints, and Mariners: A Maritime Encyclopedia of Mormon Migration, 1830–1890* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 65–66.
 4. Watt, Journal, March 1, January 28, 1851.
 5. *Ibid.*, March 15, 1851.
 6. Conway B. Sonne, “Sail to Zion,” *Ensign*, July 1991, 9–10; see also Robert Owen Day, *The Enoch Train Pioneers: Trek of the First Two Handcart Companies, 1856* (Oviedo, FL: Day to Day Enterprises, 2001), 11–12.
 7. “Emigration Department,” *Millennial Star* 18 (January 12, 1856): 24–26.

probably two days before it sailed on June 4 from the London docks. It had already taken on its eight hundred Mormon passengers. In Dickens's essay, the captain tells him that even though most of these people did not know each other previously, they established rules and regulations, and "before nine o'clock the ship was as orderly and as quiet as a man-of-war." Dickens wrote, "Nobody is in an ill temper, nobody is the worse for drink, nobody hears an oath or uses a coarse word, nobody appears depressed, nobody is weeping." This list of negatives gave a handy guide to conditions aboard a regular emigrant ship. Later, he said that these Mormons were "the pick and flower of England." As he left the ship, he wrote with almost disbelief, "I went on board their ship to bear testimony against them . . . to my great astonishment they did not deserve it. . . . I went over the Amazon's side, feeling it impossible to deny that so far, some remarkable influence had produced a remarkable result."⁸

The emigrants tried to arrive on the day the captain advertised that the ship would allow passengers to board. It was important not to arrive too early since dockside merchants and innkeepers usually had no scruples about charging the unsophisticated country folks whatever they could gouge from them. Usually two days before departure, the captain lowered the gangway, and the America-bound passengers boarded, thankfully trading the expense and insecurity on land for the cramped quarters aboard ship.

A Liverpool ordinance forbade waiting passengers to have lights on board in the harbor, and thieves took advantage of easy access to the ships, the lack of good lighting, and the fact that most of the passengers were strangers to each other to steal huge amounts from emigrants. William Dunbar, one of the *Ellen Maria's* Mormons, became the self-appointed, unofficial constable and patrolled for thieves at night. "His energetic, strong, and commanding manner towards the thieves that rushed on board to rob the emigrants of their money and clothing under night's dark mantle saved the unsuspecting saints much sorrow," Watt observed.⁹ Thanks to his vigilance, Mormons aboard the *Ellen Maria* lost no property.¹⁰

Most of the company boarded the *Ellen Maria* on January 30, 1851. According to the ship's roster in the "British Mission Manuscript History," it carried 378 Mormons and 18 non-Mormon passengers, ranging in age from eighty-one to a month-old baby. Most of the men on the *Ellen Maria* were laborers and artisans (16) with various other occupations also represented.¹¹ Besides his wife and son, Watt's mother, Mary Ann Wood Watt,

8. Charles Dickens, "The Uncommercial Traveller," *All the Year Round*, no. 219 (July 4, 1863): 444-49. Dickens and Watt were born just a few months apart in 1812.

9. Watt, Journal, January 30, 1851.

10. Ibid.

11. Passenger list of the *Ellen Maria*, "British Mission Manuscript History," February 1, 1851, LDS Church Archives; see also passenger lists of the *Ellen Maria*, 1850-56, ship emigration records, holograph, Liverpool Mission Office records, LDS Church Archives. Two of



Liverpool to Salt Lake City

and his twenty-two-year-old half sister, Jane Brown, were with him. Four-year-old Martha Bench, who was also on the ship, later became one of Watt's plural wives.¹²

Watt, Molly, and seven-year-old George boarded on January 28.¹³ Most of their luggage went into the hold to await landfall at New Orleans more than two months later. They were allowed to keep a certain amount near their berths such as clothes and other articles which they needed during the journey. Frederick Piercy commented that "the space allowed on ship-board for luggage is ten cubic feet."¹⁴ The poorest found their berths in what was called steerage, a dark, damp, and cramped part of the ship. Sleeping berths here were lined up side by side with only enough space to inch between them and were stacked at least two high. During a storm, the crew locked down the hatches to prevent water from flooding the hold. In a large storm, the captain might lock down all the hatches to

the sailors called themselves mariners.

12. "British Mission Manuscript History," February 1, 1851.
13. Watt, Journal, January 28, 1851. The ship's list in the Liverpool Mission Office records has George D. Watt Jr. as eight years old, but he was only seven. He was born on June 10, 1843. Watt did not comment on shipboard conditions.
14. Frederick H. Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*, edited by Fawn M. Brodie (repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 20.

keep passengers from coming up onto the open deck. Dark, noisy, smelly from seasickness, and a death trap if the ship sank, steerage was a terrifying experience.¹⁵

Since Watt was one of the leaders, he had space on the second-class deck. As he described it, his family had sleeping quarters along a wall of the ship, and the center of the deck was stacked with boxes, luggage, and other articles.¹⁶ Privacy was almost nonexistent. In their sleeping areas, the emigrants had small lanterns to light their paths. Rules aboard the wooden ship forbade the use of candles.¹⁷ Piercy wrote that “these and other precautions to prevent fire were conceived to be most essential, for in truth, no calamity that can occur is so dreadful as a fire at sea.”¹⁸ Either ladders or narrow stairs led up to the main deck.

Air circulation was limited below deck, even when the hatchways were open. Without the possibility of bathing, body odors intensified as the voyage went on. The stale air magnified smells. Most ships only had buckets or chamber pots for toilets, and such facilities were soon overwhelmed by vomiting, diarrhea, and overturned buckets when the ship pitched. According to emigration historian Conway Sonne, Mormon passengers frequently scrubbed their decks, fumigating by sprinkling lime in the living quarters. Their religious leaders also encouraged them to spend time in the open air.¹⁹

Watt remained alert to forestall any flirtations between the sailors and the Mormon girls. At least twice, he and the other leaders suspected that something was happening, but each time it turned out to be inconsequential. In one case, “it was reported to us that . . . one of the sisters was in the forecabin among the sailors.” Arriving at the forecabin, the men “inquired if there were any females there, but discovered we had been misinformed.” This upset the sailors: it “aroused the ire of the sailors against us because we kept a strict look out after our sisters and would not let them be led astray.” Watt thought that these innocent girls were “not acquainted with the deep wickedness of this class of men.” His advice to those who read his account was “let all presidents over companies of saints pay marked attention to this part of their duty, fearing not the frowns of men or the disapprobation of women.”²⁰

Heavy winds kept the ship in Liverpool harbor on the River Mersey until Saturday, February 1, when they finally turned fair. About noon a tugboat came alongside and pulled the ship into the open sea, where it set sail, first

15. Sonne, “Sail to Zion,” 9; see also Conway B. Sonne, *Saints on the Seas: A Maritime History of Mormon Migration, 1830–1890* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), 57.

16. Watt, Journal, February 6, 1851.

17. *Ibid.*, February 9, 1851. He makes no mention of pipes or cigars.

18. Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley*, 24.

19. Sonne, “Sail to Zion,” 8–10.

20. Watt, Journal, February 10, 1851.

through the Irish Sea and then into the Atlantic Ocean. A few of the passengers experienced nausea, but most of them weathered the first days fairly well. However, on the evening of February 6, cross winds caused the ship to roll from side to side and also pitch up and down.

Molly Watt, to avoid being thrown from her upper berth, stationed herself next to a box in the center of the vessel, where there was less motion and she could cling to the ropes lashing down the luggage. Watt, who was now making his third trip across the Atlantic, wrote, "Passed the night not only watching and praying but holding on with my fingernails lest I should suddenly be landed on the floor among pots and pans and boxes that were dancing loose on the deck of a ship." The pitching and yawing were made more unpleasant by the raucous storm sounds: "Outside the wind is heard raging on like the voices of a thousand malignant spirits screaming the requiem of some distant wreck. In it is heard the plaintive cry of an infant mingled with the disagreeable sound of a hundred females, discharging from their discomfited stomachs the provisions they refused to digest and the deep groans of men losing their equilibrium on the bosom of the great deep. . . . This is the kind of vocal and instrumental music old Neptune seems much to delight in."²¹

Watt weathered the rough waters fairly well. He did not complain of seasickness and saw the comic side of two quarts of treacle (molasses) smashing onto the deck. A seaman swabbed up the gooey mess, leaving the wet deck slippery. When a bulldog named Major tried to return to his master, he "found it necessary to hold on with his toenails which by and by was of no use to him." He slipped on all fours in the opposite direction until brought up against some luggage. The dog then tried a more circuitous route but again hit the slick patch and slid in the opposite direction, fetching up against another pile of luggage. "Poor Major looked the picture of despair," Watt summarized. He then explained, "I notice these little incidents because I consider them to be necessary as any, and they portray a voyage across the Atlantic."²²

The next morning Watt commented that "the scene was at once pitiable and humorous."²³ The passengers had to endure the mess until the following day, when, on calmer seas, they cleaned the deck. The leaders persuaded the weakened passengers to take the sun on the main deck: "Our first duty was to get upon deck all the sick men and families." It was an arduous task: "We had some difficulty in accomplishing this . . . however we got them up except for two." When the passengers emerged from the dark, smelly hold, the fresh air revived them, and "joy beamed upon every countenance."

21. Watt, *Journal*, [February 6, 1851]; sometimes Watt forgot to put the exact day in his journal. This entry comes in front of February 7.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, February 7, 1851.

Suddenly, the vessel dipped deeply into the sea, and a shower of seawater blew across the deck, drenching the passengers, who quickly retreated to their berths below.

The Mormons held a formal organizational meeting, sustaining Watt in his already-appointed position as the president of the ship's company with John Toone, Thomas Salisbury, Thomas Bickley, and Henry Garner as his counselors.²⁴ Whether Watt had chosen his own counselors or not, they were an able group. The thirty-seven-year-old Toone had been the secretary of the Liverpool Conference. The other three were young men with Salisbury the oldest at twenty-eight; Bickley was twenty-one, and Garner, only twenty. These men supervised a certain area of the ship and made sure their people had a daily prayer meeting and cleaned the ship.

Orson Pratt also talked to them that day. He "referred to the troubles of those who have to be placed in the steerage. He had three times passed the ocean in the steerage." He had no desire "to be in the same circumstance again." It was his job, though, "to school others placed in similar circumstances." He mentioned other problems that might arise because of the passengers' close proximity: "You will find it important to put up with all the little inconveniences."²⁵

The next day was calmer yet. The passengers had recovered from their seasickness and developed hearty appetites. "The saints are all around their galley, anxious to cook breakfast," Watt wrote on February 9. In addition to the staple biscuits and bread, the *Ellen Maria* offered "salt fish, herring, cabbage and onions or pickles of any kind. Apples, lemons, and oranges were much in demand."²⁶ While they were thronging the ship's galley, Watt described the seascape: the "sea came rolling in majestic swells from the northwest while the surface of the watery mountains and valleys are as smooth as oil. God is seen in his majesty in this world of briny waters."²⁷

For the next ten days, the ship made good time at five to eight knots an hour. Then on February 21, the *Ellen Maria* ran into the worst weather of the voyage. Watt describes winds at hurricane speeds, blowing "the sea into a vast succession of hills and valleys." The dark clouds formed in the distance, and the passengers waited helplessly "for the approach of the distant monster which we expect suddenly to pounce upon us without mercy." Keenly observant, he commented on the contrasting beautiful sunset peeping through "the angry blackness which is fast approaching us."

Watt continued writing in his journal, giving a running account of conditions: "Blackness now covers the heavens." The storm "has struck our ship roaring like a thousand thunders through the rigging. Our noble vessel

24. Ibid., February 7–8, 1851.

25. Ibid., February 9, 1851.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

gently leans to itself as if conscious of the superior force against which she has to contend." Concerned whether the sails could withstand the force of the wind, the first-mate's voice "is heard like that of a child's, midst the thunder giving orders to furl in the four top sails." The sailors moved quickly aloft to roll up the sails: "All hands are now seeking their way up the rigging." Watt watched them moving about, high above the deck, admiring their skill. In fact, even on deck "it would be next to impossible for a landsman to keep his feet. . . . We have lost sight of them in the darkness above. We have now three sails up namely the main top which is under double reef, the spencer, and one of the jib sails. The dark waters beneath us are angered by the merciless winds." Reaching for adequate comparisons, he continued that the ocean waves appeared to be "foaming, roaring, and swelling powers in awful majesty as though they had waged war with the furious element beneath them, while our ship is scuttled along through the deep furrows of the ocean like a thief surrounded by the administrators of justice."²⁸

As the storm intensified, the passengers went below. Watt, concerned about the violent tossing, found a rope and tied himself and his family in their berths. Any box or container that was not lashed down was rolling around on the deck. "The men might be seen in their undressed condition chasing their boxes, kettles, bundles, and barrels to secure them again." Nor did he overlook the humorous element of this scene: "When a person thinks he has got his box in his power and at its place, no sooner has he mounted this restless piece of furniture, than the ship gives a lurch, off goes the box like a passenger train carrying the owner with it to another part of the ship."

Watt and Amos Fielding, also a former missionary, had forgotten to tie down their water bottles with this result: "Two water bottles that had not been tied the night before took a notion to dance a reel. A little brown one leaped from its place and danced over the deck. Its large brown neighbor seeing this decided to join in the dance, rolling and tumbling over the deck. Then a provision box introduced its four corners into the reel. This would be called in Scotland a threesome reel." The ending was predictable: the small bottle smashed into the larger one and shattered into pieces, spilling its contents on the deck. A bottle of pickled onions pitched down "to fill up the breach, so down it came to join the dance." The owner put the bottle back, but soon it was again bouncing around. Not long afterward it again found itself on the floor, broken "if not into a thousand pieces into twenty. The onions finding themselves freed from their prison had a fine time at playing rolly polly."²⁹

The darkness in steerage tempted one of the passengers to light his candle. Watt wrote that the day after the storm abated, a Welshman "was

28. *Ibid.*, February 21, 1851.

29. *Ibid.*

put in irons for exposing a naked light in the steerage.” To be an example to all others, “he was set on the deck so as to be exposed to all the passengers and a pair of irons put on his wrists.” Thereafter, all the passengers made “up their minds to do without candles and be contended with the ship lights.”³⁰

The storm blew itself out after more than a day and was followed by a slow, mild wind, which fell off until the ship lay becalmed for four days. “All sail is unfurled and flap against the mast,” Watt wrote.³¹ During the storm, the sailors had, however, caught rain, allowing a more comfortable allotment of water for the rest of the trip. After this storm, Watt’s diary describes the voyage lapsing into monotony. The passengers could see nothing but water from horizon to horizon. The daily latitude and longitude readings meant little without external markers. The women busied themselves by knitting or sewing canvas into the tents they would use on the overland trail. All read scriptures, perhaps a few had other books, and a few just enjoyed the sun.

Pratt preached to the company at every opportunity, usually on Sundays. Watt, always practicing his shorthand, recorded four of the longer sermons: February 15, one of the Sundays between the two storms; March 2, a Sunday when the ship was becalmed; March 9, the day when the ship also celebrated the birth of a baby, Frederick Joseph Robbins; and March 16, approximately two weeks before the Mormons arrived in New Orleans.³²

One Sunday the passengers and crew were amused by a whale that followed them for about two hours. It swam alongside, spouted in front of the vessel, and even dived beneath the ship, appearing on the other side. That day they held their sacrament meeting under an awning rigged to protect them from the sun. Watt “spoke those things that came into his heart. After which Elder Pratt made remarks commending the teachings of the spirit” to the congregation. The congregation enjoyed “a spirit of peace and rejoicing.”³³

On February 9, Pratt presented James Stratten and Frances Clark, both from Cambridge, to the congregation to be married. Since there was no objection, he performed the ceremony, or, as Watt described it in good Anglican language, “Elder Pratt celebrated the ordinance of marriage.” Afterward Watt delivered a sermon on how “a company of people in such confined circumstances all ought to act towards each other.”³⁴ Watt also recorded a second marriage on February 23, a day after the second storm had passed, which was solemnized by David Jones between Edward Williams

30. *Ibid.*, February 22, 1851.

31. *Ibid.*, February 26, 1851.

32. George D. Watt, “Discourses of Orson Pratt,” 1851, pp. [1–7, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20,] shorthand, holograph, Watt Papers (transcribed by LaJean Carruth, January 2001).

33. Watt, *Journal*, March 23, 1851.

34. *Ibid.*, February 9, 1851.

and Ann Morgans, both from Wales. The passengers held no services on deck that day. Instead, Watt went to the sleeping quarters and “preached to the portion of the passengers in steerage about an hour,” where a good spirit prevailed.³⁵

At another preaching service, Pratt gave the sermon, and John Toone and Watt administered the sacrament. Watt followed with a discourse on the duties of husbands and wives and the training of children. He confessed, probably with a humorous twinkle, “his limited knowledge on the subject” since he had only one child.³⁶ The next Sunday Orson Pratt referred to Watt’s remarks in his sermon: “I was much delighted by our Brother Watt last Sunday upon the act of bringing up children by husband and wife.”³⁷ On March 21, the third shipboard marriage occurred, with Pratt performing the ceremony for James Turnbull and Mary Brightwell.³⁸

Four babies were also born en route. Sadder occasions were four deaths—all children. Eleven days after sailing, the six-month-old daughter of Richard and Susannah Preece from Herefordshire, named Sarah, became the first casualty. “The child was sick before it came on board the ship and was expected to die in Liverpool,” Watt wrote. It is not clear what her ailment was.³⁹ At the end of the service, the little shroud was tipped into the depths of the sea. Five days later, the eleven-week-old daughter of John and Emma Toone died, followed on March 8 by two-year-old toddler George Spiser. The last fatality was Mirantha Althera Pratt, the fifteen-month-old daughter of Orson and Sarah Marinda Pratt, who had been ill most of the trip. Because the ship was only ten days out from New Orleans, her body was preserved in spirits and molasses so she could be buried on land.⁴⁰

The first birth was a son, Frederick Joseph Robbins, born to Henry and Emily Robbins. The second was an unnamed son, born to Sarah Spiser, who had just lost her small son, George. She was traveling without her husband, who had stayed in England. Sarah Wild gave birth to a daughter, whose name included that of the ship: Lillian Ellen Mariah Martha Wild. Just before the ship docked in New Orleans, Sarah Lane delivered a daughter, who was unnamed in Watt’s account.⁴¹

35. Ibid., February 23, 1851.

36. Ibid., March 9, 1851.

37. Watt, “Discourses of Orson Pratt,” 1851, p. [8]. This comes from the first extant short-hand notebook from the pen of George D. Watt.

38. Watt, Journal, March 21, 1851. Transcriber LaJean Carruth rendered Mary’s last name as Weed, but only two single women aboard ship were named Mary, and no one had the surname of Weed: Mary Shaw was twenty-four, and Mary Brightwell was thirty. Because the bridegroom was thirty-four, Mary Brightwell seems to be the more probable bride.

39. Ibid., February 11, 1851.

40. Ibid., February 16, March 8, 24, 1851.

41. Ibid., March 9, 28; April 2, 1851. The first two children were both born on March 9. Sarah Spiser’s child is rather a mystery. Watt mailed a report to the *Millennial Star* that lists the marriages, births, and deaths. He did not record this birth. Sarah Spiser and her

Near the end of the journey across the Atlantic, Watt received a letter from the second mate, whom he refers to only by one name: Matthews. Matthews and Watt must have been friendly from the earliest part of the voyage since Watt had asked him then if he wanted to be baptized. Matthews refused his invitation. He later wrote that he would “try what I can do with my pen upon a subject that has occupied the first place in my mind for a length of time, more especially since we left Liverpool.” The subject was Mormonism. In his letter, he recounted two earlier encounters with people of the religion: “About twelve months ago or more I was in London, and one Sabbath I was at a friend’s house, where I accidentally met with a [Mormon missionary].” He had a discussion which was close to being argumentative. Later, he met “a young lady of very respectable family connections [who] had embraced the gospel contrary to her parents’ wishes.” She also explained “Mormon principles” to him. Matthews later tried to find her. He decided that “she valued her soul’s salvation above all other things; it was then that the first rays of light began to break through the cloud that hung over me.” Lastly of all, “when I heard the testimonies of yourself and Brother Pratt, the wall seemed to vanish before good sound reason and secure proof. Now Mr. Watt (I cannot call you Brother Watt) it is my desire to become a member of the Latter-day Saint Church.”⁴²

Watt also responded by letter: “Your account which I have just received of how you was first made acquainted with the principles of the gospel of peace gave me much joy.” He encouraged Matthews to follow through and be baptized, exercising his now-considerable store of nautical imagery: “I say amen and with all my heart, for after you have done that sir you at once enter into plenty of sea room where you may sail through life with unreefed topsails. . . . and sometimes with setting sails you may have to encounter both white squalls and black ones, but if you remain true to Mormonism you will find in it power enough to live in the gale that ever blows.”⁴³ Whether this sailor ever joined the church is not known; in his letter, he said he intended to go to the Great Salt Lake Valley.

Beginning on March 20, the weather was extremely hot and humid. Watt only went out on the deck in the evening. The ship was approaching the Bahamas. The passengers expected to see “land tomorrow but the wind

children did not come to Utah. The Spisers could have stayed in New Orleans or St. Louis and never come west. The last name is spelled a couple of different ways. The Liverpool Mission Office ship list spelled it Spiser, but Watt spelled it Spizer in the *Millennial Star* report. Watt also does not list the name of Sarah Lane’s daughter, and I cannot find them in later records. See “Arrival of the *Ellen Maria* at New Orleans,” *Millennial Star* 13 (July 1, 1841): 200–201.

42. Matthews to George D. Watt, n.d. in George D. Watt, Journal, March 16, 1851, shorthand, holograph. Watt attributes the letter to Matthews. Besides identifying the sailor as Matthews, the transcriber, LaJean Carruth, put the letters J/G. Krths/Krts/Krauts[?] at the end of the sailor’s letter, which might stand for his other name.
43. Watt, Journal, March 16, 1851.

having become light it is feared we shall be disappointed.”⁴⁴ The heat made the sleeping quarters so uncomfortable that Watt left his berth and bedded down on some boxes in the center of his quarters, probably in search of better ventilation. Later, he went up to the top deck, and one of the younger women showed him a canvas bed that the captain had made for her from a sail. Eager to try it out, Watt sat and then lay down on it. Within a few minutes, he was surrounded by a group of women who all wanted to try the bed. One of them lay down next to Watt. Although the group was acting in good spirits, Orson Pratt promptly came over and rebuked Watt: “Brother Watt you must allow me to tell you that you are showing the passengers a very bad example and you as the president of the company ought to know better.” This criticism stung Watt deeply. He wrote, “Had Elder Pratt taken me to one side and told me his feeling, I should have thanked him and kept a strict watch upon my position whether laying or sitting in the future. Retired to rest much grieved in spirit.”⁴⁵

On March 22, for the first time since about February 11, when they had sailed clear of the Irish coast, the emigrants saw land: the mountains of Santo Domingo. Three days later, they were off the coast of Cuba.⁴⁶ On the last Sunday aboard the *Ellen Maria*, Pratt gave them “some general instructions how they should act on their arrival at New Orleans.” Pratt commissioned Watt “to charter a steam boat for the company.” On the evening of April 3, they reached the sandbar at the mouth of the Mississippi, where many ships went aground and were delayed for days. They waited until noon on the fourth, when a steam tugboat came abreast and towed them across the bar. The *Ellen Maria* reached New Orleans two days later. Watt seemed glad to be in the United States once again: “Arrived safe in New Orleans.”⁴⁷

New Orleans’s history was a succession of French, Spanish, Native American, and Euro-American influences, and its food and architecture reflected this eclectic mix. Mormon convert Jean Rio Baker came on the *George W. Bourne*, leaving Liverpool on January 7 and arriving fifteen days before the *Ellen Maria*. She penned a lively description of the city: “The roads themselves are not kept in order as they are in London, they are not paved. . . . The city stretches on one side of the river for about five miles as near as I could judge, the whole of which length is one continued wharf or levee, as the French have named it. The ships and steamers lie 4 or 5 deep the whole length, and as close as they can be stowed.”⁴⁸

44. Ibid., March 20, 1851.

45. Ibid., March 21, 1851.

46. Ibid., March 26, 1851.

47. Ibid., April 6, 1851.

48. Jean Rio Griffiths Baker, “By Windjammer and Prairie Schooner,” in *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails 1851*, vol. 3, edited by Kenneth L. Holmes (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark, 1984), 203–81.

In New Orleans, Watt and Orson Pratt chartered the steamboat *Aleck Scott*, which had space for 292 people. Some of the Mormons must have stayed in New Orleans a few days longer and traveled on other boats. Watt had traveled on another steamboat with the same name when he had arrived in 1842. The *Scott* was a large side-wheel paddle boat of 487 tons with one deck, a cabin above, and two stacks. The Mormons left for St. Louis on April 9. The wide Mississippi was always changeable, and the river captains needed daily communication about the conditions.⁴⁹

Later that summer while still on the plains, Watt wrote to his sister, Margaret, and her husband, John Brandreth, living in Preston, almost certainly mailing the letter from Fort Laramie when the company passed it in August. In this lengthy letter of approximately eleven hundred words, replete with vivid and entertaining details, Watt contrasted the ocean and river journeys: “In crossing the sea there is an eternal sameness. Passing up the rivers we were treated to a continual change of scenery of the most beautiful and enchanting degree such as calls to our minds the imagined scenes we have read in fairy tales or seen painted upon the scenery of a theater.”⁵⁰

However, Watt did not feel increased security on the river. He linked both “the journey across the sea and up the rivers” as “fraught with many dangers.”⁵¹ When the boat made its daily stops to take on wood, the passengers strolled along the river or lay on the grassy banks. Watt was horrified that they allowed their children to wander unsupervised: “Some left their children unprotected.” Near disaster happened quickly when the alarm sounded: “Our attention was drawn to the place and we saw William Hawkins, a boy about 10 years of age, the son of James Hawkins, struggling in the water.” Everybody stared, unbelieving, when suddenly “James Freeman, a young sailor from the *Ellen Maria*, boldly leaped into the water and rescued the child from death, a watery grave.”⁵²

This leg of the journey was eventful. Ann Entwhistle gave birth to a son one day out from New Orleans, which the Entwhistles named after their Mississippi River boat, Alex Scott. Fifty-five-year-old Elizabeth Shelley, who was drawing water from the deck, fell overboard and drowned. Her body was never found, and her husband and eleven children had to continue without her. Watt wrote in his journal that the emigrants should “not to suffer their old women and older men and children to draw water from the rapid stream of the Mississippi.”⁵³

49. Watt, Journal, April 7, 1851.

50. George D. Watt to John M. and Margaret Watt Brandreth, n.d., ca. August 1851, shorthand, holograph, Watt Papers (transcribed by Lajean Carruth, September 2001).

51. Ibid.

52. Watt, Journal, April 10, 1851.

53. Ibid., April 14–15, 1851.

The *Scott* docked in St. Louis on April 15, which was the end of its run. St. Louis was a giant river port, called the “Gateway to the West.” A bustling commercial town, it had a population of more than thirty thousand. Jean Rio Baker described St. Louis as “a large and fine city, extending 5 miles along the river side, and about half as far inland.” She approved of the markets as “extremely good, they open at four o’clock every morning except Sunday.” She wrote that “all kinds of meat, poultry and fish are very cheap. The fish and meat is good, but not so large and fat as in the English markets. Vegetables and fruits are abundant and of great variety. Groceries, wines and spirits, are very cheap.”⁵⁴

St. Louis had a large contingent of Mormons. Sunday preaching services were held, as reported by Baker, in the “concert hall in Market Street . . . which holds three thousand persons and I could but feel amazed to see that spacious room filled to overflowing, and the staircase and lobby crowded with those who could not get inside.”⁵⁵ The Sunday before their departure, Watt’s group attended services with Pratt speaking in the morning and Watt in the afternoon.⁵⁶

Watt had about \$100, which was not enough to pay his passage up the Missouri River and also buy a wagon and oxen. John Hardy, a fellow English passenger, kindly loaned him £30 (\$150), which Watt used to buy his wagon, tent, and provisions: “I feel myself unworthy of this kindness from the hands of God but how good he is to those who have served him in the work of his ministry.”⁵⁷ Overwhelmed by his gratefulness to God, Watt wrote, “He clothes the lilies of the field. He feeds the wild beasts of the forest and will not suffer his saints to want in good things. When I become this fortunate my heart magnify the name of God who became my friend in a strange land.”⁵⁸

Watt’s group chartered the *Robert Campbell* for the next leg of their journey. This vessel was 190 feet long and 27 feet wide, slightly shorter than the *Scott*. Joined by fellow Mormons from Cleveland, Ohio, the Saints made up most of the passenger list of two hundred. Some of Watt’s former group must have stayed in St. Louis, probably to earn money. Watt stored his newly purchased wagon on the boat.

On April 23, the *Robert Campbell* churned upstream, encountering a sandbar that stretched across the river at the end of the first day. The boat with its passengers and their possessions was too heavy to cross the bar, and so the captain bargained that if he could leave the freight behind, he would transport them to Kansas City in Jackson County, Missouri, give them each

54. Baker, “By Windjammer and Prairie Schooner,” 228–30.

55. Ibid.

56. Watt, Journal, April 20, 1851.

57. Ibid., April 15, 1851.

58. Ibid.

seven bushels of flour, and return for their goods. They agreed and helped unload their belongings. They reached Kansas City on May 1, and the *Robert Campbell* went back downriver for their things.

Watt realized that they were now in the very county from which the Mormons had been expelled in 1833. He reported that “the man who murdered the little boy at Haun’s Mill lives in this place, I am informed, and goes at large boasting of this diabolical murder.” They found housing in several places, but many of the passengers stayed with a Mr. Brewster, who was friendly to the Mormons and had a large log and frame building.⁵⁹

One person died while they were waiting for the return of the *Robert Campbell*: Jane Wild, eighty-one, after three weeks of dysentery. They buried her and Orson Pratt’s baby, who had died aboard the *Ellen Maria*, in the local graveyard.⁶⁰ Almost two weeks later on May 13, the *Statesman*, another steamboat carrying Mormons, arrived and reported that the *Robert Campbell* was stuck on a sandbar downriver. Fifty of the *Campbell*’s passengers, including Orson Pratt, arranged to continue their journey to Kanesville (later Council Bluffs, Iowa) on the *Statesman*. Watt opposed this decision. On May 17, the *Robert Campbell* arrived and picked up the remaining passengers: “The captain was much dissatisfied on hearing that so many of the passengers had left him for he had given them six bushels of flour.”⁶¹ On May 21, the captain, disgruntled over losing so many of his passengers to the *Statesman*, dropped off his Mormon passengers after charging them the maximum amount because of his loss.

The Mormons had first built Winter Quarters on the Nebraska side of the river in 1846, but their agreement with the local tribes lasted only two years. In 1848 they relocated across the river and founded Kanesville. A passing traveler in 1849 described the community as “a scrubby town of 80 to 100 log cabins” situated “three miles from the river in a deep hollow.”⁶² At the height of its existence—about 1852—Kanesville had a population of five thousand.⁶³

Jean Rio Baker, who had traveled up the Mississippi and then by wagon across Iowa, reached Kanesville on July 2, 1851 and described it as “quite a pretty town and the surrounding scenery very beautiful.”⁶⁴ She only stayed there for two days because the last company with John Brown was getting

59. Ibid., May 1, 1851. For the story of what happened at Haun’s Mill, see Beth Shumway Moore, *Bones in the Well: The Haun’s Mill Massacre, 1838, A Documentary History* (Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark, 2006).

60. Watt, Journal, May 9–10, 1851.

61. Ibid., May 17, 1851.

62. As quoted in Richard Edmond Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846–1852: “And Should We Die”* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 217.

63. Thaddeus A. Culbertson, *Journal of an Expedition to the Mauwaies Terres and the Upper Missouri in 1850* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952), 29.

64. Baker, “By Windjammer and Prairie Schooner,” 258.

ready to leave for Utah. To support its growing population and the emigration trade, Kaneshville had a fairly substantial mercantile district, larger than expected for a town of its size.⁶⁵ This core of well-patronized and semi-permanent merchants formed the genesis of what later developed into a thriving community. Kaneshville existed almost exclusively for the purpose of launching Mormon pioneers off on the next leg of their journey across the West's prairies. The presiding church authority in the region was Apostle Orson Hyde, who also edited the *Frontier Guardian*.

Watt was relieved to be at the end of the long and grueling ocean and river journey. However, many storms that spring made Iowa wet and miserable. "The day is wet and very uncomfortable," he wrote.⁶⁶ Things did not look good for him. The roads were very "muddy." The previous ten days had plagued Kaneshville with almost nonstop rain, accompanied by thunder and lightning. In fact, inclement weather continued with few breaks until sometime in July.⁶⁷ On at least one night during the early part of Watt's stay, the thunder and lightning were so severe that, according to Hyde's paper, at times it "appeared to resemble a caldron of molten brass, incessantly pouring its burnished contents in streams, promiscuously toward the earth."⁶⁸

With his wife, son, and mother, and Jane Brown, his half sister, Watt must have thought that he had to have two wagons since he needed one for each family, which meant also oxen for both, and although others had loaned him large amounts, he did not have enough for another wagon and oxen. He had spent everything; now he despaired over his lack of money: "I was without money and had a large amount of luggage to convey to the valley, namely the luggage of two families. One wagon I found to be little to answer my purposes. I must have another wagon or leave part of my folks behind, namely my mother and sister." It is not clear why he felt he needed a second wagon since other families were larger and only used one. Perhaps Molly insisted that Jane and his mother not ride in her wagon. He tried to borrow some money from Orson Hyde from the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF). He even told him he "was sent for by the First Presidency." Hyde told him that "God helps those that help themselves." Hyde probably had run out of his PEF loan fund for the year because he asked Watt to raise more money for that purpose.

Finally, John Hardy loaned him £50 (\$250), James Shelley from the *Ellen Maria* loaned him \$5, and Samuel Patterson, his teamster, loaned him \$16.

65. "Advertisements," *Frontier Guardian* 3 (June 27, 1851), 3-4.

66. Watt, Journal, May 21, 1851.

67. "Suggestion," *Frontier Guardian* 3 (June 27, 1851): 2. The *Guardian* at the end of June printed that it had rained continually for sixty days. For the life of Orson Hyde, who was the leader of Kaneshville, see Myrtle Hyde, *Orson Hyde: The Olive Branch of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Agreka Books, 2000), chaps. 13-14.

68. "Miniature View of the Disastrous Effects of the Late Rains," *Frontier Guardian* 3 (June 27, 1851): 3.

Watt then bought another wagon and a yoke of oxen, and he was on his way to the ferry, about three miles from Kanesville. Before even leaving on the journey, Watt was in debt \$466, including the sum he had borrowed from Hardy in St. Louis.⁶⁹ I have found no records to indicate that he ever repaid it. Hardy had come with him on the *Ellen Maria*, but he does not appear in any records in Utah. Watt must have been exhausted and frustrated over trying to find money, oxen, and a wagon. Then he quarreled with Molly, probably over the attention he was paying to his half sister, Jane. Exactly what Molly took exception to is not known, but the argument was so severe that, smarting from Molly's temper, Watt angrily left the camp on foot.

In the midst of sparsely populated Iowa, he accidentally happened on the house of Robert Williams, one of his missionary companions in Manchester. Williams wrote in his autobiography eight years later that "George came tramping by my house. I was very sick and boy [his son] as well." When Watt walked into his house, he found only a log for a chair and Williams lying sickly on his cot. "Says I George you are welcome to my humble fair." After a short discussion, "George told me of his words with his wife and he remained with me 2 weeks hid up, to try to make his wife better in her feelings for she was a rip with a tongue but a good wife to him and a kind hearted woman." (Watt probably did not spend anymore than a week with Williams.) Watt convinced his old friend to emigrate to Zion and promised to transport Robert and his nine-year-old son, Alfred, in his own wagon.⁷⁰

Probably while at Williams's house, he read the June 11 edition of the *Frontier Guardian*. On the last page, he came across a riddle in poem form entitled "Rebus by Amicus." A rebus is a riddle made up of symbols whose names resemble intended words or syllables. He must have read it carefully.

REBUS
BY AMICUS

Eight letters does my whole contain,
And three my first will spell,
A boundless, wide, sublime do-main;
The veriest child may tell.
It boasts the grandest works of art,
The mightiest earthly power;
To man it wealth, and woe imparts,
Each anxious passing hour.

69. Watt, Journal, May 22, 1851.

70. Robert Williams, *Autobiography*, 1859, pp. 120–21, microfilm of holograph, LDS Church Archives. It is unclear what happened to Williams's wife. He married her in Nauvoo, but his writing jumps between narrating events and describing religious feelings. He talks about death and seems to connect her and a child in death. He also talks about her in connection with a William Smith and his wife, who had "concealed away my wife." He also comments that he was abused by William Smith and his wife. It's easy to conclude that Williams was not always rational. See *Autobiography*, pp. 93–100.

My second is a living thing,
 A creature useful, strong;
 And sometimes wealth and honor brings,
 To whom it doth belong.
 My whole's a monster that is rarely seen.
 My 6 5 7 2, the choicest flower amid the green;
 My 1 5 6 8, is painful, tiresome, filthy, mean,
 My 3 1 7, an ill-famed brute, indeed, I ween,
 My 7 2 8 6, as good a man as e'er has been;
 My 4 5 1 8, a garment made without a seam,
 My 4 5 2, a tool oft used at morn's first gleam,
 My 7 4 5 6 2, a place of wind, of wet and steam,
 My 2 3 6, a member useful, truthful, lean.

[An answer requested]⁷¹

Since the author requested a reply, Watt decided that he would solve the rebus. He must have studied it diligently and written down his answer. He then carefully composed his own poem answering the riddle, which was published two weeks later in the *Frontier Guardian*.

ANSWER TO REBUS IN OUR LAST
 BY G. D. W.

Your first, the boundless ocean wide
 Your second a horse, the Indian's pride;
 Your whole a SEA-HORSE
 Which solves your rebus, right I ween
 Your 4, 5, 1, 8, a scotchman's hose,
 Your 6, 5, 7, 2, an English rose,
 Your 7, 2, 8, 6 will name a seer;
 Your 2, 3, 6, the human ear;
 Your 4, 5, 2, a gardener's hoe,
 Use it well, your gardens sure to grow,
 Your 7, 4, 5, 6, 2, the sea-shore,
 Your 1, 5, 6, 8, a painful sore;
 Your 3, 1, 7, a slave to his glass,
 A poor, silly, simple, drunken ass.

Feeling quite proud of his answer, Watt dropped it off at the newspaper's office, and sure enough Hyde published it.⁷² Perhaps Watt, if he saw it, was surprised at his own success.

By the time Watt returned to the emigrant camp, Molly, who had not seen nor had any news about him since he had stalked out in a temper, was perhaps feeling remorseful, rather than angry, and the two reconciled. Now he had to prepare for his journey. Meanwhile, the last company, under the

71. "Rebus," *Frontier Guardian* 3 (June 11, 1851): 4.

72. "Answer to Rebus in our Last," *Frontier Guardian* 3 (June 27, 1851): 4.

direction of Captain John Brown, was rendezvousing on the plains and hoping to leave early in July.⁷³ It is possible that Watt's wagon and family were already at Ferryville at the Missouri River crossing when he left them and found Williams. When he returned, someone probably helped him yoke up his oxen, and they crossed the river.

An urban Englishman, Watt had logged thousands of miles of travel by foot, rail, carriage, and ship, but he had never handled oxen before. At the riverbank, probably with Patterson's help, Watt managed to hitch the four yoke of oxen to his wagons. "I drove off, hoping to arrive at the river before the emigration had all left for their journey across the plains," he wrote. The next day one of his oxen was lame, so "I hitched the three yokes of cattle on to one wagon, drove a short distance, and then went back with the cattle and brought up the other wagon." (He later sold the lame ox.) He explained that he was no more than two hours from the camp. His oxen promptly balked and would only move if he yelled at them. He "worked faithfully and shouted at the cattle for two days, and I was almost used up." For unknown reasons, he did not know to drive by using a whip. Then the oxen got stuck in a mud hole; no prodding or coaxing would move them. "I had been coaxing the cattle for an hour, to get them to pull the wagon out, but they seemed perfectly satisfied to stay where they were," he complained.

Sixteen years later, as Watt was returning to Britain, he relived this experience and published it in the *Deseret Evening News*. He cast his experience in a comic light: "I sat down on the bank a little while, to rest and take a calm survey of my situation, when an officer of the company came riding up on the charitable mission of hunting up stragglers. 'Why Brother Watt, what are you doing here?' 'I am trying to go to Zion, but I cannot get these stupid creatures to take the wagon out of that mud.' He took my whip, and out came my wagon, apparently with very little effort."⁷⁴ Although the newcomer or greenhorn was a staple character in American humorous writing and Watt used that convention, he also took pains to explain that he was inexperienced, not incompetent. To his sister, he wrote very seriously in 1851, "The Americans have been trained to use oxen to plow, to travel with and for every purpose. Horses are used only to ride. An American feels quite at home with a whip and two or three yoke of oxen by his side." In contrast, "if ever a young man felt himself far from home it is when he has to commence, whip in hand, to drive and manage oxen. This is a lesson of no small magnitude."⁷⁵ He also added revealingly, "People do not know

73. "John Brown Emigrating Company Journal," introduction, holograph, LDS Church Archives. The clerk, Preston Thomas, starts by discussing the tardiness of the various groups and then, after the organizational meeting, begins with July 5, 1851.

74. George D. Watt, letter to the editor, February 25, 1867, *Deseret Evening News*, April 3, 1867, 109.

75. *Ibid.*

what kind of temper they got until they have to drive and manage a team of stupid oxen.”⁷⁶

Watt arrived in camp with three yoke and an odd ox. Lyman O. Littlefield, a resident of Kanessville who had been a member of Zion’s Camp and a missionary to Britain in the late 1840s, gave him three yoke of young cattle and a cow still giving milk.⁷⁷ Altogether now Watt had thirteen oxen—three yoke per wagon—and one milk cow roped on the back.

Watt had expected to travel with Orson Pratt, who was assigned to the James W. Cummings Company. However, the difficulties of finding and then learning to drive his oxen had consumed so much time that the company had left on June 23 while he was still near Kanessville. Shortly before July 4, he learned that John Brown was going to form a company from the “fragments” of those still remaining. “I shall join this company as I am indeed a fragment,” he commented. It was comprised of those who had not been able to leave before, including the poorest group of English converts.⁷⁸ This company had the great advantage of being captained by John Brown, an experienced frontiersman, who was thirty years old and came from Tennessee.⁷⁹

Brown organized his company at first into three groups of ten: the first ten was captained by Preston Thomas, who later was a probate judge in Utah County; Joseph Chatterley, who in 1853 went to Iron County to mine and process iron, headed the second ten; and the inexperienced Watt was captain of the third. A day after the company was organized, on July 4, Alexander Robbins, who had been the president of the St. Louis Conference, arrived with a small group of twenty-three and asked to be taken into the company. Brown asked a committee, which included Watt, to inspect the wagons, teams, and loads to see “whether all were in a fitting condition for crossing the Plains.” The committee recommended that Robbins leave behind five thousand pounds of freight and one wagon. Robbins agreed, and his group was admitted to Brown’s company with him serving as captain of this fourth ten.⁸⁰

76. Watt to John and Margaret Brandreth, ca. August 1851.

77. Watt, Journal, May 22, 1851. The last date in his journal before July 4 is May 22. From that date until July, he summarizes what took place, leaving out his experience with Robert Williams.

78. Brigham Young organized the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF) in 1850 to help poor emigrants. The PEF raised money by donations from the generosity of other church members. At first the church loaned money to emigrating families primarily to purchase oxen but expected them to buy their own wagons. The poor, who signed promissory notes for these sums, were expected to repay the rest of their loan with interest once they were established in Utah; these sums were then used to finance the travel of other poor Mormons. See Gustive O. Larson, *Prelude to the Kingdom: Mormon Desert Conquest, A Chapter in American Cooperative Experience* (Francestown, NH: Marshall Jones Company, 1947). This book is an expanded version of his MA thesis on the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company.

79. See “John Brown,” in Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901): 511–12.

80. “John Brown Emigrating Company Journal,” July 5, 1851.

The next day Edwin Rushton, a native of Leeds, arrived with another group of twenty-four, including Jean Rio Baker, and Brown also admitted this group into the company.⁸¹ On July 6, the following day, the company encountered a group of Oregon travelers who had lost some cattle to a stampeding herd of buffalo, and “some of them who had teams sufficient asked the privilege of joining us.”⁸²

Brown added the eight wagons and twenty-seven people to the original three groups of ten, which included Watt, and now the company included five captains of ten and 292 people.⁸³ Watt’s responsibility thus grew to a total of forty-nine people, including some non-Mormons as well. The wagon train left on July 7. Realizing that weather could cause a problem, Brown was probably anxious to start since he knew the trip would take at least two and a half months. To his sister Margaret, Watt wrote in August 1851, “We cross these plains in wagons drawn by oxen. We have two large wagons and thirteen head of cattle. We have three yoke of oxen to each wagon and one cow.”⁸⁴ Samuel Patterson, his teamster, drove one of his wagons, and Watt, who undoubtedly had to take some lessons on driving oxen, drove the other.⁸⁵ According to the “John Brown Emigrating Company Journal,” he also had a dog that accompanied him to the valley.⁸⁶

The wagon train quickly fell into a daily rhythm on the trail. In Watt’s letter to his sister and brother-in-law, he commented, “We sleep in our wagons and eat victuals from the broad prairie table covered with its natural, crazy carpet.” They made a steady “fifteen to twenty miles per day six days a week and rest our cattle and our men on the seventh.” He sketched a small circle with an opening on the left to illustrate the “corral” formed nightly so “we can drive our cattle in there and protect them from Indians, if there is any danger and also protect ourselves.”⁸⁷

According to the diary of Emily Smith Hoyt, who was forty-five years old and traveling with her husband, Samuel, they pulled their wagons into a circle at night, unhitched the oxen, and usually let them graze inside the circle if the grass was sufficient. After about a month, they let the animals graze out of the circle to find enough feed. Those with tents staked them down every night and dug ditches around them in case it rained. Sometime after dinner they chained the oxen to the wagons. If the immigrants slept in

81. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1851.

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*

84. Watt to John and Margaret Brandreth, ca. August 1851.

85. Williams, *Autobiography*, pp. 120–21. Williams said that Watt had to drive his own wagon.

86. “John Brown Emigrating Company Journal.” Right after July 24, 1851, the clerk records the names of all those who traveled with the company and itemizes their wagons, oxen, cows, horses, and dogs. Watt had no horses, but he had a dog.

87. Watt to John and Margaret Brandreth, ca. August 1851.

their wagons, which the Watt family did, the movement of the oxen during the night jiggled the wagons, interrupting their slumber. Each morning a bugle sounded at daybreak, or else the watchman came round and woke up the teamsters by rapping on the wagons. The teamsters began hollering and calling their animals, usually to wake up the cooks. After breakfast the oxen were yoked and hitched to the wagons, and the company started off.⁸⁸ This happened every traveling day, and the Watt family, undoubtedly, became acquainted with this daily routine of the trail.

At first the Nebraska road was wet because of summer rains, and the travelers encountered frequent storms, though not enough to force them to lie over. A few days after the Brown company left, the *Frontier Guardian* reported that “our latest accounts from the plains are favorable: grass is good, and plenty of it, and a superabundance of water.”⁸⁹ At times the travelers, unable to ford the swollen creeks, had to build bridges. On July 8, one of Watt’s oxen, traveling loose, plunged into a swollen stream. A teamster quickly jumped in to stop it and was himself almost swept under until others came to their joint rescue.⁹⁰

Another weather-related adventure occurred on July 17, when the wagon train stopped at a creek. Four of the five groups of ten crossed, but the fifth was still on the east side. “About sunset the heavens looked black and angry and about half past ten a tremendous thundershower struck with vivid and continued lightning,” Watt described.⁹¹ The gale-force wind blew down almost all the tents in the camp and sent some of the wagons ten feet from where they had stopped. The lightning, thunder, and hail were terrific. Robert Williams, Watt’s former missionary companion, agreed about the terrifying force: “A mighty storm came up, the Laws of Nature angry, it thundered, lightned [lightninged], hailed, and blew, tore the waggon covers off, tents flying up in the air, as if the Laws of Nature was changing.”⁹²

Watt, even though he was a leader, was so frightened that he refused to leave his wagon bed to help others but instead called on Williams, who was traveling in one of his wagons, for assistance: “Oh! Robert come and save my wagon. I run and held to the cover untill my fingers were numed with Cold[.] I only had my shirt on, as naked as Adam[.] the Hail Pelting my Bear head.” He prevented the cover from blowing away and probably spooking the animals in the corral. Williams complained to others about the way Watt treated him. When Watt heard, he approached Williams, “What do you mean by this you Scamp[.] Take your trunk[.]” Williams and his son,

88. Emily Smith Hoyt, *Reminiscence and Diary*, July 22, 1851, microfilm of holograph, LDS Church Archives.

89. “Summary of News &c.,” *Frontier Guardian* 3, no. 12 (July 11, 1851): 2.

90. Watt, *Journal*, July 8, 1851.

91. *Ibid.*, July 17, 1851.

92. Williams, *Autobiography*, 1859, pp. 120–21.

Alfred, left as Watt's traveling companions. Edwin Rushton invited them to travel with him.⁹³

The Brown company members primarily ate flour products with bread and water gravy probably being the staples for the trip, but they varied their diet with game or wild fruit harvested along the trail. About two weeks out on the trail, they sighted buffalo. Although it was a Sunday, the Oregonians "went out and killed five buffalo and left them on the prairie to rot not having the means to bear them away." The next day, July 28, Brown sent out Mormon hunters to kill some buffalo for their meat. This time the Mormons, under the direction of Alexander Robbins, left four carcasses to rot.⁹⁴ Disgusted, Watt commented, "This is a sin and a shame" and described how "hundreds of pounds of this meat is left to rot on the plains and be devoured by the wolves which are very plentiful." He did not go on the hunting party, but "I helped cut up a bull about four years old. The buffalo is larger than our common ox considerably and the meat is much finer."⁹⁵ He wrote to Margaret and John Brandreth, "Were you to have a buffalo beef steak placed before you on your own table at home and you kept ignorant of it you would say you never ate a more delicious piece of meat in your life."⁹⁶

The travelers saw buffalo continually over the next few days, encountering a gigantic herd on July 30 that surrounded them for at least two days and fifty miles. "The plains were black with these monstrous [creatures] as far as our eyes could see," Watt wrote.⁹⁷ They had to stop a few times to let the buffalo go across their path and were unnerved as "large herds from the River Platte galloping at full speed, threatening destruction of our cattle and wagons."⁹⁸ Brown finally sent men "forward on horseback to divide the herds that we might pass through the plains."⁹⁹

Despite the real dangers, Watt greatly enjoyed the distinctive scenery of "the endless plains covered with grass and flowers of every grade and hue from the rose to the common unassuming daisy." In buffalo country, their own cattle found the native buffalo grass excellent feed. Close to the streambeds were "thousands of acres of the best kind of rye grass that you have seen grow in the parks of England. Cattle wade into [it] up [to] their bellies."¹⁰⁰

Slowly but surely, they traveled mile after mile, using the only conveyance they had. On July 9, Watt commented, "After great exertion we reached the

93. Ibid.

94. Watt, Journal, July 27, 1851.

95. Ibid., July 28, 1851.

96. Watt to John and Margaret Brandreth, ca. August 1851.

97. Watt, Journal, July 30, 1851.

98. Watt, Journal, July 27-30, 1851.

99. Watt to John and Margaret Brandreth, ca. August 1851.

100. Ibid.

Platte with worn down teams and worn out bodies. All the camp was in the corral before sun down. Traveled ten miles.”¹⁰¹ A month later, on August 12, they passed Chimney Rock in western Nebraska. On August 16, they reached Fort Laramie in Nebraska Territory (now western Wyoming), their last chance short of Fort Bridger, Wyoming, to mail letters. Here Watt finished writing to his sister, Margaret, and brother-in-law, John Brandreth. He concluded on an appreciative note: “We have been preserved through all these dangers for which we render thanks to our Great Father who art in Heaven.”¹⁰²

The experienced Brown seems to have had a goal of traveling a hundred miles a week and, if possible, resting on Sundays. Sometimes, however, the travelers had to move to find better grass for their oxen. On seven of the twelve Sundays, they rested, though on one Sunday, they also repaired wagons. Of the five Sundays they traveled, the farthest they went was thirteen miles, which was almost a full day’s trip.¹⁰³

Of the seven Sundays when they rested, only once did they not hold preaching meetings. On August 3, one of the Oregonians traveling with them rose and complimented them on their good order, good feeling, and brotherly kindness toward each other.¹⁰⁴ That night all must have gone to their wagons much cheered and comforted. On one of the Sundays, August 31, Watt preached on what was called “the New Birth,” but no diarist explained more than the title.¹⁰⁵ These breaks in the routine, coupled with the spiritual refreshment, probably reinvigorated the company, allowing them to continue their travels with new energy and enthusiasm.

On a trip of this length, the pioneers had to make continual repairs to their wagons, which wore down with the jarring and jolting. The Brown company was not an exception, but it did not need to make lengthy stops for repairs. Iron tires became the company’s largest problem; they came loose because the men had fitted them in the rainy weather of Iowa, and, in the dry weather of Wyoming, the wooden wheels shrunk. Watt’s own equipment seems to have been relatively sound. He mentions only one breakdown—a wagon tongue—about two weeks out from Kanessville, which he or his teamster repaired.¹⁰⁶

In August the company passed a couple of Pawnee villages with considerable apprehension. Word had reached them that the James W. Cummings Company, which had left on June 24, had been robbed traveling through Iowa. On August 15, a large number of Indians—men, women,

101. Watt, *Journal*, July 9, 1851.

102. Watt to John and Margaret Brandreth, ca. August 1851.

103. See both Elias Smith, *Journal*, LDS Church Archives; and the “John Brown Emigrating Company Journal.”

104. Hoyt, *Reminiscence and Diary*, August 3, 1851.

105. “John Brown Emigrating Company Journal,” August 31, 1851.

106. Watt, *Journal*, July 21, 1851.

and children—approached the company, many of them offering to shake hands. The next day, before the wagons began their onward trek, a large number of Indians came into the camp.¹⁰⁷ Elias Smith apprehensively wrote that the Indians “were thick about our train all day and after we camped.”¹⁰⁸ When some of their stock turned up missing, the emigrants immediately concluded that the Pawnees had driven them off, but they found them grazing a short distance west of camp.¹⁰⁹

Watt’s diary ends in mid-August because presumably he had become tired. On August 1, after traveling under a hot sun and on a heavy, sandy road, Watt and the company stopped their animals for lunch at a “splendid spring of cold water about 300 miles from old Winter Quarters.”¹¹⁰ On August 4, he and his mother were ill with unspecified symptoms. Five days later, both he and Molly were ill.¹¹¹ He made a point on August 9 to describe the only tree they had seen for miles: “It is destitute of leaves and seems scrubby and unhealthy but it is a tree.”¹¹² On August 10, he commented that they “camped on the banks of a beautiful flowing spring.”¹¹³ However, his journal complains even more frequently about the sand that made travel so difficult. He also became discouraged because his stove broke when it fell out of his wagon.¹¹⁴ At this point, Watt, Molly, and his family had been traveling for more than six months. His energy was sapped, and he was weary. He made his last journal entry on August 13, three days before the company reached Fort Laramie.¹¹⁵

Although the Mormons spaced departing wagon trains by at least a few days, bad luck, inefficiency, or weaker animals meant that some clumped together. Sometimes non-Mormon trains also traveled with or near Mormon ones. On August 18, two other wagon trains were traveling with Brown’s company. Elias Smith wrote that all the companies were traveling close to each other until you could not tell where one ended and another began: “As we wound over the hills all together we made quite a splendid show.”¹¹⁶ Emily Hoyt observed that there were so many wagons on the trail that they extended as far as a person could see.¹¹⁷

In late August near the Sweetwater River, Watt’s group encountered ninety Snake River warriors. Preston Thomas wrote apprehensively, “Today we met warriors of the Snake Indians to gether with the Agents of the

107. Hoyt, *Reminiscence and Diary*, August 15, 1851.

108. Smith, *Journal*, August 15, 1851.

109. Hoyt, *Reminiscence and Diary*, August 16, 1851.

110. “John Brown Emigrating Company Journal,” August 1, 1851.

111. Watt, *Journal*, August 4, 10, 1851.

112. *Ibid.*, August 9, 1851.

113. *Ibid.*, August 10, 1851.

114. *Ibid.*, August 3, 1851.

115. *Ibid.*, August 13, 1851.

116. Smith, *Journal*, August 18, 1851.

117. Hoyt, *Reminiscence and Diary*, August 18, 1851.

government of the U. States on their way to attend a treaty at Fort Larimie on the first of September next.”¹¹⁸ Jean Rio Baker commented appreciatively, “They made a grand appearance, all on horseback and gayly dressed; some with lances, others with guns or bows and arrows, also a number of ponies carrying tents.”¹¹⁹ Despite the emigrants’ anxiety, the company traveled safely the entire distance.

On September 1, the company was at Independence Rock. Nine days later, on September 9, they crossed South Pass, but because of weakened animals, they did not reach Fort Bridger until September 19.¹²⁰ About a week and sixty miles out from the Salt Lake Valley, Brown’s company moved five miles and waited for Joseph Chatterley’s ten to catch up, camping in a mountain valley near Cache Cave. While they were there, Watt and others climbed the hill to the cave, and, with some sharp implement, he carved his name, “G. D. Watt,” into the soft sandstone on the west side about waist high as many had done before and hundreds would do after him.¹²¹ It snowed on the overlanders on September 27 but only lightly. They followed the route of the 1847 Mormon vanguard company by starting down Echo Canyon, climbing laboriously up Big Mountain, and then descending Emigration Canyon. On September 28, they camped on the bench at the mouth of the canyon overlooking the Salt Lake Valley. The next day they reached the city. Some found relatives and friends awaiting them, but probably the Watt family did not.

Still, his spirits must have been high: George D. Watt had finally arrived in Zion. He now had not only a spiritual home but a physical one, too. At thirty-nine, the first stage of his life was over. He had served his Lord and his church. Now he was ready to live in Zion, raise a family, and carve out his chosen vocation.

118. Smith, *Journal*, August 28, 1851.

119. Baker, “By Windjammer and Prairie Schooner,” 266.

120. “John Brown Emigrating Company Journal,” September 1, 9, 19, 1851.

121. The name is still there; the author saw it on June 17, 2006.