

“You Had Better Let Mrs Young Have Any Thing She Wants”

What a Joseph Smith Pay Order Teaches about the Plight of Missionary Wives in the Early Church

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It was a cold, blustery day in Commerce, Illinois—a town pressed up against the Mississippi River—in November 1839. As the rain poured from the sky, a small skiff appeared on the river, approaching Commerce (later renamed Nauvoo) from Montrose, Iowa Territory. A woman huddled in the vessel, trying to protect a small bundle in her arms from the elements. The rain, coupled with the spray from the river, soaked both the woman and the bundle, which was a two-month-old baby. Despite the rawness of the day, the woman was determined to reach Commerce, hoping to visit the tithing office of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and procure a few potatoes and some flour for herself and her six children, who were sick and living in difficult circumstances in Montrose.

The woman was Mary Ann Angell Young, the wife of Brigham Young, one of the Church’s governing Twelve Apostles. Brigham had left the family two months earlier, making his way to England, where he and other Apostles were preaching the gospel to gain converts to the Church. Mary Ann tried to do the best she could to provide for the family in her husband’s absence, but in the midst of a malaria epidemic and with no money and little food, her situation was grim. In an 1891 biography of Mary Ann, Emmeline B. Wells, who was the general secretary of the Relief Society of the Church of Jesus Christ at the time, commented that women such as Mary Ann were some of the forgotten women of the Church. While their husbands were sent forth to preach, they were “left at home, lonely and unprotected with the heavy burden of a family on their hands, destitute of means and without suitable habitations, in an

ague climate, sickness weighing down their spirits.” These women put their “whole soul, and all [their] energies” into “perform[ing] the part of both father and mother during the husband’s absence.” According to Wells, “they were heroines indeed” for their efforts.¹

Mary Ann Angell Young’s situation reflected the poverty and difficulties these women faced, as well as the efforts the Church made to care for them. On June 15, 1840, Joseph Smith, the prophet and leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, dictated a pay order to his clerk Howard Coray for Mary Ann, asking Newel K. Whitney, a bishop in Nauvoo who was operating a store in the area, to allow “Mrs Young” to obtain “any thing she wants” from him.² This brief, four-line note—published in *Documents, Volume 7* of the Joseph Smith Papers and available on the Joseph Smith Papers website—seems relatively insignificant on its face. Yet digging into the context behind the pay order illuminates the responsibility Church leaders had to care for the families of missionaries, the suffering that these families sometimes experienced, and the economic climate in Nauvoo that exacerbated their difficulties. Exploring the history around the pay order helps to restore Mary Ann’s sacrifices and perseverance to the narrative of Brigham Young’s mission to England and provides texture and nuance to the story.³

1. Emmeline B. Wells, “Heroines of the Church: Biography of Mary Ann Angell Young,” *Juvenile Instructor* 26 (January 15, 1891): 56.

2. “Pay Order to Newel K. Whitney for ‘Mrs. Young,’ 15 June 1840,” in *Documents, Volume 7: September 1839–January 1841*, ed. Matthew C. Godfrey and others, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2018), 292–93 (hereafter cited as *JSP*, D7).

3. A few historians have examined aspects of the financial and social situations of Latter-day Saint missionaries’ wives, both generally and specifically. See, for example, Amanda Lee Hendrix-Komoto, “Imperial Zions: Mormons, Polygamy, and the Politics of Domesticity in the Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2015), 141–76; Carol Cornwall Madsen, *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 6–10, 15–16; Kathleen C. Perrin, “Louisa Barnes Pratt: Self-Reliant Missionary Wife,” in *Go Ye into All the World: The Growth and Development of Mormon Missionary Work*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Fred E. Woods (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), 261–88; Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, “Women in Winter Quarters,” *Sunstone* 8 (July/August 1983): 12, 17; and Jenny Lund, “‘We All Must Be Crazy’: The Plight of a 19th-Century Mormon Missionary Wife” (paper, FairMormon Conference, 2018), <https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2018/we-all-must-be-crazy>. Ronald K. Esplin transcribed a letter from Leonora Taylor to John Taylor to highlight the sickness of the Apostles’ families during 1839–41, and Esplin,

Caring for Missionaries’ Families

The experiences that Mary Ann Angell Young had in 1839, 1840, and 1841 have a background in the proselytizing responsibilities of male Church members. From the organization of the Church of Christ in 1830, proselytizing—or sending men to inform people that the gospel of Jesus Christ had been restored to the earth through Joseph Smith and his translation of the Book of Mormon—was key to its growth. An early revelation to Joseph Smith told his father, Joseph Smith Sr., that “the field is white already to harvest & lo he that thirsteth [*sic*] in his sickle with his might the same layeth up his store that he perish not but bringeth Salvation to his soul.”⁴ Another revelation in 1832 informed male Church members that it was their duty to warn their neighbors about the impending return of Jesus Christ to the earth.⁵ According to historian Reid Neilson, men thus “took sabbaticals from their worldly responsibilities and devoted themselves to short preaching tours, relying on the financial generosity of others.”⁶ They followed the example of the Apostles in the New Testament, going without purse or scrip.⁷

James B. Allen, and David Whittaker also discussed this in their book on the Apostles’ mission to England. Ronald K. Esplin, “Sickness and Faith, Nauvoo Letters,” *BYU Studies* 15, no. 4 (1975): 425–34; James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker, *Men with a Mission, 1837–1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 267–91. In addition, Stanley B. Kimball explored the condition of Vilate Kimball and her children while Heber C. Kimball was preaching in England, and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has written about Phebe Woodruff’s situation during Wilford Woodruff’s absence. Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 67–69, 74–76; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women’s Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 34–38, 46–56.

4. “Revelation, February 1829,” in *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay and others, *The Joseph Smith Papers* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 13 [D&C 4:4] (hereafter cited as *JSP*, D1). This same declaration was given in several other revelations in 1829. See, for example, “Revelation, May 1829–A,” in *JSP*, D1:53 [D&C 11:3]; “Revelation, May 1829–B,” in *JSP*, D1:57 [D&C 12:3]; and “Revelation, June 1829–A,” in *JSP*, D1:67 [D&C 14:3].

5. “Revelation, 27–28 December 1832,” in *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, ed. Matthew C. Godfrey and others, *The Joseph Smith Papers* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 342 [D&C 88:81] (hereafter cited as *JSP*, D2).

6. Reid L. Neilson, “The Nineteenth-Century Euro-American Mormon Missionary Model,” in Neilson and Woods, *Go Ye into All the World*, 69.

7. See Luke 9:1–4 and “Revelation, July 1830–A,” in *JSP*, D1:159 [D&C 24:18].

The responsibility men had to share the gospel had repercussions on women and children in the Church—the wives and families who were often left alone for extended periods of time, with no real way of generating income or resources.⁸ Preachers in other denominations throughout the United States faced such situations as well, although not to the same extent as Latter-day Saints. Until the early nineteenth century, for example, Methodist circuit riders were generally unmarried, meaning they had no familial ties to worry about while they were on the circuit. Thereafter, most preachers who were married took a couple of different measures to care for their families. Some asked extended family members to tend to the needs of their wives and children; others petitioned friends, neighbors, or fellow congregants to look after their families.⁹ Some, like many Latter-day Saint missionaries, merely left their wives to fend for themselves, expecting them to take care of the children, the farm, and the home in their absence. As one minister explained, “The whole direction of the household” often fell upon the wife.¹⁰ Women and children thus sometimes suffered while their husbands preached. One itinerant preacher’s wife, for example, had “little corn” and a newborn baby while her husband was gone, making her “depressed and discouraged.” Although some “reacted with bitterness to the deprivations that they suffered,” women were perceived as more righteous if they could bear their difficulties “without complaint.”¹¹

In the Church of Jesus Christ, the ideal was to have the Church itself provide for the families of traveling missionaries. A February 1831 revelation outlining the law of consecration stated that the families of elders “proclaiming repentance” were to be “supported out of the property which is consecrated to the Lord.”¹² A general conference of the Church held in October 1831 in Orange, Ohio, explored the problem

8. Church members believed proselytizing was an obligation that stemmed from Jesus Christ’s injunction to the ancient Apostles to go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

9. Peggy Dow, for example, frequently stayed with acquaintances, friends, and even strangers while her husband, Lorenzo, a Methodist preacher, was away. Peggy Dow, *Vicissitudes Exemplified; or the Journey of Life* (New York: John C. Totten, 1814).

10. Rev. H. M. Eaton, *The Itinerant’s Wife: Her Qualifications, Duties, Trials, and Rewards* (New York: Lane and Scott, 1851), 45.

11. Samuel Southard, “The Personal Life of the Frontier Minister: 1760–1860,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 5 (Spring 1966): 220–22.

12. “Revelation, 9 February 1831,” in *JSP*, D1:255 [D&C 42:71].

further. At the conference, Frederick G. Williams asked whether “it was the business of this conference to take into consideration the situation of the families of the absent Elders.” Sidney Rigdon responded that “he supposed that it was,” noting that those who were willing to “give up all for Christ’s sake” would “be sealed up unto eternal life.” Williams then explained that Thomas B. Marsh, who had been directed to travel to Missouri to preach in summer 1831, had not yet returned to his family. Thomas’s wife, Elizabeth Godkin Marsh, and their children, Williams related, “were somewhat destitute.” Titus Billings disputed Williams’s assertion, stating that Elizabeth “and her family were provided for as well as her brethren around her.” Joseph Smith then informed the conference “that the Lord held the Church bound to provide for the families of the absent Elders while proclaiming the Gospel.”¹³ It is not known how much in need Elizabeth was or what, if anything, the Church did for her, but this discussion reiterated that it was the Church’s responsibility to care for Elizabeth and her children in Thomas’s absence.

Several weeks after this conference, Newel K. Whitney, a Kirtland, Ohio, entrepreneur who had joined the Church in November 1830, was appointed to the office of bishop. A revelation outlined Whitney’s responsibilities, including administering to the “wants” of the elders. This apparently meant that when elders had temporal needs, they could go to Whitney’s store, which also functioned as a Church storehouse, and obtain goods. In such instances, the revelation stated, elders were to pay for what they received if they could, but if they had no money, “the Bishop in Zion,” who was Edward Partridge, would “pay the debt out of that which the Lord shall put into his hands.”¹⁴

A little over a month later, in January 1832, the Church held another conference in which two revelations were dictated, each appointing a group of men to preach the gospel. One of these revelations reiterated that it was “the duty of the church to assist in supporting the families of those . . . who are called and must needs be esent [*sic*] unto the world to proclaim the gospel unto the world.” The revelation provided a way that such support could come: those assigned to preach could approach other Church members and “obtain places for their families” with these members.¹⁵ Essentially, as preachers in other denominations had done, elders could request that fellow Saints provide for the needs of their families.

13. “Minutes, 25–26 October 1831,” in *JSP*, D2:81, 84–85.

14. “Revelation, 4 December 1831–B,” in *JSP*, D2:151–52 [D&C 72:11–13].

15. “Revelation, 25 January 1832–B,” in *JSP*, D2:162 [D&C 75:24–26].

This was the process that John Murdock followed after his wife, Julia Clapp Murdock, died in Kirtland, Ohio, during childbirth, leaving Murdock with five children under the age of seven, including newborn twins. When Murdock was called by revelation to proselytize in the “eastern countries” in August 1832, the revelation also instructed him to send his children “unto the Bishop in Zion” before departing on his mission. Murdock subsequently arranged for his three oldest children to go to Jackson County, Missouri (the location of Zion), where they were each placed in a different Church member’s home. The newborn twins, meanwhile, had already been adopted by Joseph and Emma Smith. With his children taken care of by the Saints, Murdock was able to pursue his mission.¹⁶ In Murdock’s case, the ideal scenario of the Church and its members taking care of missionaries’ families worked well.

The Mission of the Twelve

In Nauvoo from 1839 to 1841, however, the Church did not quite meet the ideal. In 1838, Joseph Smith dictated a revelation instructing the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to undertake a mission “over the great waters,” departing from Far West, Missouri.¹⁷ Apostles Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde had already opened up England for the preaching of the gospel in 1837,¹⁸ and the mission discussed in the 1838 revelation was to continue that proselytizing effort. However, the Apostles’ departure was delayed because of opposition and conflict the Saints faced from Missourians who were not of their faith. The conflicts ultimately culminated in the Saints’ expulsion from the state of Missouri. In 1839, Church members moved out of the state, many of them into Illinois. Joseph Smith himself was imprisoned for nearly six months in Missouri

16. “Revelation, 29 August 1832,” in *JSP*, D2:273–75; John Murdock, “John Murdock Journal and Autobiography, circa 1830–1867,” MS 1194, September 24, 1832, p. 19, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as CHL).

17. “Revelation, 8 July 1838–A,” in *Documents, Volume 6: February 1838–August 1839*, ed. Mark Ashurst-McGee and others, *The Joseph Smith Papers* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2017), 179–80 [D&C 118:4–5] (hereafter cited as *JSP*, D6).

18. Historical Introduction to “Recommendation for Heber C. Kimball, between 2 and 13 June 1837,” in *Documents, Volume 5: October 1835–January 1838*, ed. Brent M. Rogers and others, *The Joseph Smith Papers* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2017), 398–400.

before escaping and joining the Saints in Illinois.¹⁹ At that time, he and other Church leaders began purchasing land in the vicinity of Commerce, Illinois, and across the Mississippi River at Montrose, Iowa Territory, so that the Saints could again have a place where they could gather together.²⁰

The problem was that Commerce—which the Saints would rename Nauvoo—and Montrose were swampy areas infested with malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Numerous Saints became infected with the disease in the summers of 1839 and 1840.²¹ Complicating matters, most Saints had left behind their property and other resources in Missouri, leaving most Church members—and the Church itself—destitute. Moving to the Commerce area required a complete buildup of the community, which, for an already-destitute church, seemed close to impossible with the limited resources available. Church leaders, including Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Hyrum Smith, were forced to contract more than \$150,000 in debt for land purchases in the Commerce area—an astronomical sum for the Church.²² They tried to obtain money to repay the debts by selling lots of land to the Saints, but since so few of the Saints had cash resources, the vast majority of these purchases were made on

19. “Volume 6 Introduction: Joseph Smith Documents from February 1838 through August 1839,” in *JSP*, D6:xxiv–xxvii. For explorations of the Saints’ expulsion from Missouri, see Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987); Alexander L. Baugh, “A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1996; Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2000); and Leland H. Gentry and Todd M. Compton, *Fire and Sword: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri, 1836–1839* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

20. Hancock County, Illinois, Deed Records, 1817–1917, vol. 12-G, p. 247, April 30, 1839, Hancock County Recorder’s Office, Carthage, Illinois; Hancock County, Illinois, Bonds and Mortgages, 1840–1904, vol. 1, pp. 31–32, April 30, 1839, microfilm 954,776, U.S. and Canada Record Collection, Family History Library, Salt Lake City, [cited hereafter as FHL]; “Agreement with George W. Robinson, 30 April 1839,” in *JSP*, D6:439–42; Lee County, Iowa, Land Records, 1836–1961, Deeds (South, Keokuk), vol. 1, pp. 507–9, microfilm 959,238; vol. 2, pp. 3–6, 13–16, microfilm 959,239, U.S. and Canada Record Collection, FHL; “Bond from Horace Hotchkiss, 12 August 1839–A” and “Bond from Horace Hotchkiss, 12 August 1839–B,” in *JSP*, D6:553–56, 557–59.

21. Ulrich, *House Full of Females*, 32–34.

22. “Volume 7 Introduction: Joseph Smith Documents from September 1839 through January 1841,” in *JSP*, D7:xxii.

credit and not in hard money.²³ In these difficult circumstances, several of the Apostles believed they still needed to fulfill the Lord's commandment to serve a mission over the great waters, so they prepared to depart for England in 1839. Between August and September, seven Apostles left the Nauvoo area: Wilford Woodruff, John Taylor, George A. Smith, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Parley P. Pratt, and Orson Pratt.²⁴

The timing of the Apostles' departure was less than ideal for their families, who were completely starting over in the new settlement and had to find shelter and subsistence while facing disease and destitution. Both Phebe Woodruff and Leonora Taylor, for example, moved in and out of various residences while their husbands were gone.²⁵ Meanwhile, Vilate Kimball, without any kind of income, was faced with paying debts that her husband Heber C. Kimball had accrued. "It costs a great deal to support your family," Vilate wrote to Heber. "We are continually on expence, and not earning a cent."²⁶

With their husbands traveling to England, the Apostles' wives were supposed to be supported by the Church and its members. Yet Church leaders had few resources with which to alleviate the poverty. This was in part because of the loss of property in Missouri, in part because of existing debts to merchants in New York for goods sold in Church storehouses, and in part because of the crushing debt incurred through the purchase of land in the Commerce area. Because of these precarious financial conditions, the Church and its members could do little for the Apostles' families. Hyrum Smith informed Apostle Parley P. Pratt in December 1839 that "the families of the Twelve are generally well, but not altogether so comfortably situated as I could wish owing to the poverty of the church."²⁷ Smith and others wanted to do more but did not have the resources.

23. See, for example, "Land Transaction with Jane Miller, 6 March 1840," in *JSP*, D7:203-11.

24. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 67-71, 77.

25. Phebe Woodruff to Wilford Woodruff, April 1, 1840, MS 19509, CHL; Leonora Taylor to John Taylor, September 9, 1839, MS 1346, CHL; see also Esplin, "Sickness and Faith, Nauvoo Letters," 427.

26. Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, December 8, 1840, MS 18732, CHL; see also Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball*, 75.

27. Hyrum Smith to Parley P. Pratt, December 22, 1839, in "Letterbook 2," 81, Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letterbook-2/86>.

In spring 1840, Joseph Smith determined that something had to be done for the Apostles’ families regardless of the Church’s financial situation. He told the wives of the Twelve that if any of them “wish[ed] to live in Commerce,” they could request that a house be built there and the Church would take care of it.²⁸ Accordingly, the Church appointed three members of the Nauvoo high council—Henry G. Sherwood, Charles C. Rich, and Dimick B. Huntington—as a committee “to contract for the building of houses for some of the wives of the Twelve.” At a May 2, 1840, meeting of the Nauvoo high council, the committee also received the assignment to fence in and plow up “the lots on which the houses are to be built.” The labor for the construction of the houses and the development of the lots would be paid for “in town lots in Nauvoo.”²⁹

One of the homes built under the committee’s supervision was for Phebe Woodruff. Unfortunately, it was less than desirable and little better than living outdoors. Phebe informed her husband, Wilford, that after the house was finished, she discovered that it had “no door or window or loft in it” and that “the roof [was] verry [*sic*] poorly laid on.” Because of these conditions, “the snow and rain came in verry [*sic*] plentifully the snow would be a number of inches deep and mostly over the floor.” She lived in the house for two months, but it soon became unbearable, and when a family offered to take her in, she readily agreed. In Phebe’s case, despite the Church’s efforts to supply her with shelter, her living conditions continued to be inadequate.³⁰

The Situation of Mary Ann Angell Young

Conditions were also harsh for Mary Ann Angell Young, Brigham Young’s wife, but she had suffered in Brigham’s absence before. The two married in 1834 after Brigham’s first wife, Miriam Works, had passed away in 1832. At the time, Brigham had two children, Elizabeth and Vilate. Over the next several years, Brigham and Mary Ann had four more children: Joseph A., Brigham Jr., Mary Ann, and Alice, who was born on September 4, 1839, just days before Brigham left for England. In the first five years after Brigham and Mary Ann were married, Brigham

28. Phebe Woodruff to Wilford Woodruff, March 8, 1840, MS 19509, CHL.

29. Nauvoo High Council, Minutes, May 2, 1840, p. 58, MS 3429, CHL.

30. Phebe Woodruff to Wilford Woodruff, September 1, 1840, MS 19509, CHL; Phebe Woodruff to Wilford Woodruff, July 2, 1840, MS 19509, CHL; see also Ulrich, *House Full of Females*, 46.

was absent “about half the time.”³¹ In 1837, when Kirtland, Ohio, was rife with dissension, Brigham, who was one of Joseph Smith’s main defenders, feared that his life was in danger and fled Ohio for Missouri, leaving Mary Ann and their children behind. According to one biographer, Mary Ann “was left alone to struggle as best she could under the complication of adverse circumstances surrounding her, relying upon God for help.” Dissenters searched her house frequently, believing that Brigham was still there, and such searches distressed Mary Ann greatly. In spring 1837, Mary Ann took the children to Missouri. “Worn out with travel and the fatigue of having the sole care of her children,” she finally reunited with Brigham. Her condition concerned him—“you look as if you were almost in your grave,” he reportedly said.³²

The situation was not much better when the Saints were expelled from Missouri in the winter of 1838–1839. With Joseph Smith in prison, Brigham Young bore much of the responsibility of directing the Saints’ exodus from the state and helping them gain temporary shelter at different locations. Mary Ann recalled that during that winter “I kept house in eleven different places, previous to arriving at the place of destination on the banks of the Mississippi river.”³³

Once the family reached Montrose, Mary Ann’s difficulties did not end. Even before Brigham left for England, Mary Ann and her children were sick and suffering.³⁴ With his departure, the situation did not improve. A later history of Brigham Young stated that when Brigham left Montrose on September 14, 1839, Mary Ann was “sick, with a babe only ten days old, and all [his] children sick and unable to wait upon each other.”³⁵ They were living in an “old military barracks” in Montrose with families of other Apostles and had few resources on which to draw.³⁶ These circumstances meant that Mary Ann and her children

31. Lisa Olsen Tait and Chad M. Orton, “Take Special Care of Your Family,” in *Revelations in Context: The Stories behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Matthew McBride and James Goldberg (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), 243.

32. Emmeline B. Wells, “Heroines of the Church: Biography of Mary Ann Angell Young,” *Juvenile Instructor* 26 (January 1, 1891): 18–19; see also Tait and Orton, “Take Special Care of Your Family,” 243–44.

33. Wells, “Biography of Mary Ann Angell Young” (January 1, 1891): 19.

34. Leonora Taylor to John Taylor, September 9, 1839, MS 1346, CHL; see also Esplin, “Sickness and Faith,” 427.

35. Manuscript History of Brigham Young, book B, 35, CR 100 150, box 1, CHL.

36. Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 29.

suffered greatly in Brigham’s absence. One history notes that Mary Ann frequently had to cross the Mississippi River to Nauvoo in order “to obtain the barest necessities of life.” She would use an open skiff for such crossings, taking baby Alice with her and leaving her other children in the charge of her stepdaughter Elizabeth, who was only fourteen years old. “These journeys were sometimes made in storms” that would drench Mary Ann and the baby, but they resulted in “a few potatoes and a little meat or flour”—at least something to provide nourishment.³⁷

On one of these trips, Mary Ann visited the home of a Latter-day Saint woman in Nauvoo. This woman later recalled:

On a cold, stormy November day Sister Young came into my house in Nauvoo, with her baby Alice in her arms, almost fainting with cold and hunger, and dripping wet with the spray from crossing the river in an open skiff. I did not question her, but made her a cup of tea immediately and gave her something to eat; we had very little ourselves, but she was glad to have even that. I tried to persuade her to stay, but she refused, saying, “the children at home are hungry, too.” I shall never forget how she looked, shivering with cold and thinly clad. I kept the baby while she went to the tithing office. She came back with a few potatoes and a little flour, for which she seemed very grateful, and taking her baby with the parcels she had to carry, weak as she was from ague and fever, wended her way to the river bank.³⁸

To obtain money for such necessities, Mary Ann sewed and washed clothes, but such work never produced much income. In spring 1840, she received a lot of land in Nauvoo, and Church members helped her fence it off, plow the ground, and plant a garden, although she was still living in Montrose and had to cross the Mississippi River each day to take care of it. Church brethren eventually built a small house on the lot, but, much like Phebe Woodruff’s, it left much to be desired. According to Mary Ann’s nephew Joseph W. Young, the structure consisted of a “body of a house . . . without doors, or windows”—barely a semblance of a shelter. Because of their poverty, Mary Ann and the children were also

37. Wells, “Biography of Mary Ann Angell Young” (January 15, 1891): 56.

38. Wells, “Biography of Mary Ann Angell Young” (January 15, 1891): 57. This story has been related in at least two other publications: Tait and Orton, “Take Special Care of Your Family,” 245–46; Rex G. Jensen, “Indomitable Mary Ann,” *Ensign* 23 (July 1993): 40–43.

forced to subsist mainly on “corn-meal bread & the milk of one cow, and the few vegetables they got from their garden.”³⁹

It is unclear how much Brigham Young knew about the condition of his family. He gleaned some information from letters that were written to him and to the other Apostles. Vilate Kimball, for example, informed Heber C. Kimball that Mary Ann’s home “could hardly be caud [called] a shelter,” information that made Brigham “fee[l] bad.” Although he stated to Mary Ann that he had “not ben [*sic*] concerned about” his family because “the Lord said by the mouth of Brother Joseph; that they should be provided for, and [he] believed it,” Brigham still clearly worried about them.⁴⁰ On June 11, 1840, he dreamt he saw and embraced his daughter Elizabeth, kissed Mary Ann, and was told that his other children were enjoying school. At the end of the dream, Mary Ann told him, “We feele well but you must provide for your own familes for the Church are not able to doe for them.”⁴¹ The dream made a significant enough impression on Brigham that he recorded it in his journal, including Mary Ann’s admonition. His family was in need, yet there was little Brigham could do, and Mary Ann was doing all in her power. The situation was bleak.

Just four days after Brigham Young’s dream, Joseph Smith evidently also had a feeling that the Church needed to do more for Mary Ann. On June 15, 1840, Smith had Howard Coray, one of his clerks, write out a pay order to Newel K. Whitney, who was one of the Church’s bishops. As mentioned above, Whitney had owned a store in Kirtland that served as a Church storehouse, and it appears he had been put in charge of a similar store in Nauvoo. Following the 1831 revelation that instructed elders in need to obtain goods from the storehouse and charge it to the Church,⁴² Joseph Smith and other Church leaders would sometimes issue pay orders for the store. These orders would request that goods be provided to individuals and charged to the account of Smith or other leaders. In such cases, Whitney would at times write on the back of the

39. Joseph W. Young, *Autobiography*, 23, Joseph W. Young Papers, 1849–1872, MS 1529, CHL; see also Tait and Orton, “Take Special Care of Your Family,” 246.

40. Brigham Young to Mary A. Young, October 16, 1840, MS 6140, CHL; see also Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, September 6, 1840, MS 3276, CHL; Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 399, 402.

41. Brigham Young, *Journal*, June 11, 1840, CR 1234 1, CHL.

42. “Revelation, 4 December 1831–B,” 151–52.

pay order what goods were provided to the individual and their value.⁴³ The pay order for Mary Ann Angell Young was brief and to the point: “Sir, It is my opinion, that you had better let Mrs Young have any thing she wants, that so doing will be well pleasing in sight of God.” Coray signed Joseph Smith’s name and then noted that this was done “per H Coray.”⁴⁴

Two days after the order was prepared, Mary Ann delivered it to Whitney. Despite her great need, and despite the order stating she could have “any thing she wants,” she procured only three items: nutmeg, a shawl for herself, and a pair of shoes “for man.”⁴⁵ Nutmeg was sometimes used in the preparation of botanical medicines for diarrhea and dysentery, indicating that sickness may have still been prevalent in the Young household.⁴⁶ The shoes may have been for one of Mary Ann’s boys, although they might also have been for Brigham. The three items were valued at \$0.10 for the nutmeg and \$1.50 apiece for the shawl and the shoes, for a total of \$3.10. It was a meager amount. Although Mary Ann could have used much more, she obtained only some of the bare necessities for her family. Why she did not procure more from the storehouse is not clear, but part of it could have been out of a desire not to be a burden on the Church. In October 1840, for example, Brigham told Mary Ann that he wished his family had enough “food and rament,” but he realized “that the church is poor and it is as much as they can doe to attend to without doing enything for my famely.”⁴⁷ Although not explicitly stating it, Brigham was implying that he did not wish for Mary Ann to burden the Church with her situation, something that Mary Ann may have believed as well.

43. See, for example, “Pay Order to Oliver Granger, 15 April 1840,” in *JSP*, D7:264–65; Hyrum Smith to Newel K. Whitney, May 8, 1840, Newel K. Whitney Papers, MS 10480, CHL.

44. “Pay Order to Newel K. Whitney for ‘Mrs. Young,’” 293, underlining in original.

45. “Pay Order to Newel K. Whitney for ‘Mrs. Young,’” 293.

46. L. Meeker Day, *The Botanic Family Physician* (New York: By the author, 1833), 15; Elisha Smith, *The Botanic Physician: Being a Compendium of the Practice of Physic, upon Botanical Principles* (New York: Murphy and Bingham, 1830), 488; “Milk Porridge,” *Southern Botanic Journal* 1 (March 4, 1837): 47.

47. Brigham Young to Mary A. Young, October 16, 1840; see also Allen, Eplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 401.

Part of Mary Ann's reluctance may have also stemmed from the notion that good, faithful women should trust in God, not complain, and not worry about the future. Had not Jesus told his disciples to take no thought for food, drink, or clothing, for God would provide (Matt. 6:31–32)? Perhaps Mary Ann believed that if someone was truly trusting the Lord, they should bear their situation without burdening others or the Church. Even when she hinted that things were not as good for her and the family as they could be, Mary Ann focused on what she did have. In an April 1841 letter, for example, she told Brigham that she wished she had “a better house,” but she was grateful that she had been able to obtain “a comfortable shelter from the storm.” She thanked God “for all the blessings” he had given her, although admitting she was “constantly fatagued” from the responsibilities she bore.⁴⁸ This attitude of not wanting to complain about what she lacked and to bear her burdens silently may have also affected her decision of what to take from the store. Whatever the case, Joseph Smith paid Whitney for the items about a week after Mary Ann procured them, settling the account.⁴⁹

As a window into Mary Ann Angell Young's poverty, the brief pay order to Whitney is poignant. It also highlights the sacrifices that families of missionaries made. Brigham Young and Willard Richards wrote to Joseph Smith in September 1840 about the impoverished individuals they encountered in England, stating that their hearts were “pained with the poverty & misery of this people.” They had “done all [they] could to help as many off as possible, to a land where th[e]y may get a morsel of bread.”⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the families of the Apostles themselves were largely languishing in hunger and destitution in the absence of their husbands and fathers, and the Church itself did not have the resources to alleviate these conditions.

Brigham Young finally returned to Nauvoo on July 1, 1841, reuniting with Mary Ann.⁵¹ The nearly two-year absence had been difficult for her, but she had tried her best to care for the family. Given her health and the heavy burdens she had borne, it was probably a relief to have her companion back. Just nine days after Brigham Young arrived in

48. Mary Ann Angell Young to Brigham Young, April 15, 1841, CR 1234 1, CHL.

49. “Pay Order to Newel K. Whitney for ‘Mrs. Young,’ 15 June 1840,” 293.

50. “Letter from Brigham Young and Willard Richards, 5 September 1840,” in *JSP*, D7:392.

51. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 304–6.

Nauvoo, Joseph Smith dictated a revelation stating that the Lord no longer required Young “to leave [his] family as in times past.” The revelation instructed Young to “take special care of [his] family from this time henceforth and forever.”⁵²

This revelation likely came in part because of the suffering of Young’s family during his mission to England. It also reflected the increasing responsibilities that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were assuming in Nauvoo. In August 1841, at a conference of the Church, Joseph Smith stated “that the time had come when the twelve should be called upon to stand in their place next to the first presidency, and attend to the settling of emigrants [*sic*]” in Nauvoo. Smith continued “that it was right that they should have an opportunity of provididing [*sic*] something for themselves and families”—recognizing again the burdens that the wives and families of the Twelve had borne.⁵³

As the president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Brigham Young had opportunities to think more about his family’s sacrifice and the condition of the families of preaching elders. As early as October 1840, he had told his brother Joseph Young, one of the seven presidents of the Seventy, that more missionaries were necessary in England but that he did not want individuals who could not provide for their families. “We doe not want men to leve there [*sic*] families to suffer for we can see enupth [enough] of poverty here with out here [hearing] of it from home.”⁵⁴ Brigham Young’s counsel went further in April 1843, when he and other members of the Quorum of the Twelve held a conference “to ordain elders, and send them forth into the vineyard to build up churches.” After numerous individuals were assigned to preach outside of Nauvoo, Young addressed the group and told them not to depart “on their mission, until they have provided for their families.” According to Young, this meant that the families would have “a comfortable house,” as well as “a lot fenced, and one year’s provisions in store, or sufficient to last his family during his mission.” Young further stated that the Twelve “left their families sick and destitute” when they went to England, with

52. “Revelation, 9 July 1841,” in *Documents, Volume 8: February 1841–November 1841*, ed. Brent M. Rogers and others, Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2019), 188 [D&C 126:1–3] (hereafter cited as *JSP*, D8).

53. “Discourse, 16 August 1841, as Reported by *Times and Seasons*,” in *JSP*, D8:228.

54. Brigham Young to Mary A. Young, October 16, 1840; see also Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 403.

nothing but the Lord's promise "that they should be provided for," but that was a special situation. "God does not require the same thing of the elders now," Young declared, "neither does he promise to provide for their families when they leave them contrary to counsel."⁵⁵

After these instructions were given, there were still times when men spent prolonged periods of time away from their families on preaching assignments. On these occasions, wives and children still suffered, because of both a lack of necessities and sheer loneliness. Louisa Barnes Pratt, for example, referred to herself as a widow after her husband, Addison, was called on a multiyear mission to the Hawaiian islands. "I felt a loneliness indescribable!" she later remembered. "I was subject to severe fits of melancholy."⁵⁶ Yet because of Mary Ann's experiences, Brigham Young's feelings on providing for the families of missionaries had changed. It was no longer the Church's responsibility to take care of families, he believed; instead, that duty fell to the elders themselves.

Conclusion

In the early years of the Church, men's assignment to preach for long periods of time in areas away from their homes disrupted the lives of families in several ways, including economically, as the pay order from Joseph Smith on behalf of Mary Ann Angell Young highlights. Revelations and instructions from Joseph Smith had placed the burden of providing for the families of missionaries on the Church itself, which, at times, seemed to work well. However, in Nauvoo in 1839 and 1840, when the Church and its members were building a new community in a disease-ridden environment after having lost everything in Missouri, the lack of resources prevented the Church from meeting the needs of the Apostles' families. Thus, Mary Ann Angell Young and the wives of other Apostles suffered greatly while their husbands preached in England. Their sacrifices—and their willingness to assume the burden of caring for their families—enabled the Apostles to gather a multitude of converts to Nauvoo, but it came at a significant price. Largely because of the condition of these families, Brigham Young

55. "Elder's Conference," *Times and Seasons* 4 (April 1, 1843): 157–58.

56. S. George Ellsworth, ed., *The History of Louisa Barnes Pratt: Mormon Missionary Widow and Pioneer* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998), 67; see also Perrin, "Louisa Barnes Pratt," 265–66; and Hendrix-Komoto, "Imperial Zions," 141–42.

provided a different direction in 1843 to those going out to preach. Now elders were not to leave before ensuring that their families were provided for. This counsel solidified what the families of the Apostles already knew: sometimes, despite best efforts, the Church could not meet the needs of the families left behind.

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