

# “It Seems That All Nature Mourns”

## Sally Randall’s Response to the Murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith

*Jordan Watkins and Steven C. Harper*

Sally Carlisle was born in New Hampshire in 1805. She married James Randall, and they settled in Warsaw, New York, where they had two sons, George and Eli, and converted to Mormonism. They moved to Nauvoo in 1843. A collection of Sally’s letters addressed to friends and family has been preserved.<sup>1</sup> The letter she wrote July 1, 1844, less than a week after the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, has a remarkable provenance (see sidebar).

Sally wrote to her “dear friends” in the East, explaining her perceptions regarding the Martyrdom, and thus provided one Latter-day Saint woman’s response to what she described as “one of the most horrible crimes comited that ever history recorded!”

The historical record is rich with such accounts, but Sally’s letter is remarkable for several reasons: in it we hear a believing woman’s voice, and in it we have captured a very early response to the tragedy, a raw and revealing reaction. Because Sally wrote so shortly after the event, historians can distinguish between what Saints in Nauvoo believed at the time of the Martyrdom and later traditions that characterize reminiscences composed years after the event took place. She clarifies that Saints in Nauvoo believed the city council’s decision to destroy the *Expositor* press was a catalyst for the antagonism leading to Joseph’s death.<sup>2</sup> They faulted

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1. Kenneth W. Godfrey, Audrey M. Godfrey, and Jill Mulvay Derr, *Women’s Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 134–46.

2. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 539–41.

the governor of Illinois, Thomas Ford, for not protecting Joseph, and they believed that Joseph and Hyrum voluntarily suffered martyrdom to seal their testimonies with their blood. She even reports that Joseph foreshadowed his death by urging Saints to read chapter 6 of the book of Revelation. Sally's letter has a remarkably detailed description of the Martyrdom itself.<sup>3</sup> She corroborates the many historical accounts that describe the awful feelings experienced by the Saints and the faith and fortitude that characterized their response.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Compare Vilate Kimball's report in Ronald K. Esplin, "Life In Nauvoo, June 1844: Vilate Kimball's Martyrdom Letters," *BYU Studies* 19, no. 2 (1979): 231-40; for other accounts of the Martyrdom see Ronald D. Dennis, trans., "'The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith and His Brother Hyrum' by Dan Jones," *BYU Studies* 24, no. 1 (1984): 78-109; Paul D. Ellsworth, "Mobocracy and the Rule of Law: American Press Reaction to the Murder of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 20, no. 1 (1979): 71-82; Warren A. Jennings, "The Lynching of an American Prophet," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): 205-16; David H. Pratt, "Oh! Brother Joseph," *BYU Studies* 27, no. 1 (1987): 127-31; Jan Shipps, "A Little Known Account of the Murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith," *BYU Studies* 14, no. 3 (1974): 389-92; Richard Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, "The Joseph/Hyrum Smith Funeral Sermon," *BYU Studies* 23, no. 1 (1983): 3-18.

4. Davis Bitton surveyed responses to the Martyrdom written by Mormons in *The Martyrdom Remembered* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1994), 3-21.

## Sally Randall's 1844 Letter<sup>5</sup>

Nauvoo July the 1<sup>st</sup> 1844

Dear friends I take this oportunity to write to you to let you know that we are all as well as usual and hope these lines will find you enjoying the same blessing we have had a verry wet season so far it is hard times especaly for poor people I expect you will have heard of something of our trouble before you get this and will want to know the truth and I will write it as near as posible it has been about three weeks since the fuss begun in the first place thare <were> six or eight apostates cut of from the church and from that time the devil has been rageing with all fury they got up a printing press and went to printing all manner of lies and abominations that could be thought of against the prophet and the heads of the Church and the Citty Council held a council and agreed it was a nuisance and ordered it destroed and it was done we have been expecting the mob upon us ever since the goviner was sent for by Joseph he came to Carthage the County seat about fifteen miles from here and thare he stoped the mob ware then gathered thare and the apostates with them I would like to give you all the procedings of the govinator but my pen would fail me he sent for Joseph and all that ware concerned in destroying the press and said if they would come thare they should be protected and have a trial acording to law thay all gave themselves up and went but instead of haveing a trial thay were put in prison the goviner then sent and took away the states armes and sent in a company of troops he said to protect us the prisoners ware all set at liberty except Joseph and his brother hiram and two of the twelve elder tailor and elder Richards and thursday the 27 of June the govinator came to this town and said he had disperced the mob from Carthage and the same day about 6 in the afternoon was one of the most horrible crimes comited that ever history recorded thare ware about one hundred and fifty of the mob made an attack upon the court house and the guard and went into the Jail and the first one thay shot was hiram he was killed dead on the spot elder tailor was badly wounded Joseph then jumped out of the window thay shot him I know not how many times the mob then fled as quick as posible thay were painted thare ware some crosed the river the

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5. This transcript is based on the photocopy James Nowa made of the original holograph while serving in the Northern States Mission. The transcript he made on his mission provided the basis for the portion of the letter that we no longer have. Randall's spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar have been maintained. Her insertions are in angle brackets <like these>.

### **James Nowa's Account of Obtaining the Sally Randall Letter**

In 1962, I was serving in the Northern States Mission, headquartered in Chicago. While my companion and I were tracting in the western suburbs of Chicago one day, we tracted out a sister member living in the ward boundaries. She said she had just received the Church magazine the *Improvement Era*, and it was not her family's name on the mailing label. She did not recognize the person's name, but the address was on the same street a block or so away. She gave us the magazine and we went to the address.

The person whose name was on the magazine invited us in. Unfortunately, I did not write down his name in my journal. Being nineteen at the time, I guess I didn't think it was important. He told us his father used to live in Utah and was friendly with the Mormons but was not a member. To keep abreast of what was going on in the Church, he [the man's father] had subscribed to the Church magazine. His father was a doctor and used to buy old trunks at estate sales. One of the trunks he purchased had Sally Randall's original letter in it. We talked this man into letting us take the letter and make a photocopy of it. Unfortunately, the equipment at that time was not very good—hence the poor quality of the copy. The letter was also old, and the paper somewhat faded.

I can find only two of the three pages of the letter. I think that when I was being transferred around in the mission field I misplaced the last page, but the bulk of the letter is contained in the first two pages. I typed up a copy of the full three pages while I was in the mission field with the help of a member of the Church who was in the media, so the typed copy is accurate.

next morning and the paint was to be seen on them there was only eight men left to guard the Court house the govonor left this place the same day about sundown and took his troops with him thay got about four miles from here thay met a man comeing to fetch the sad news and took him back would not let him come so we did not get the news till the next morning if you can imagine yourselfs how the apostles and saints felt when the Saveior was Crusified you can give some thing of a guess of how the Saints felt here when thay <heard> that thare prophet and patriarch ware both Dead and murdered to by a lawles mob never has thare been such a horibll crime commited since the day Christ was Crusified it seams that all nature mournes the earth is deprived of the too best men thare was on it thay have seald thare testamony with thare blood Joseph sent word to the church after he went to prison to read the 6 chapter of revelations and give particular notice from the 8 to the 12 verses I have no doubt but that he knew he should be killed when he gave himself up he told his wife when he left here he was going as a lamb to the slaughter and many other things give us reason to believe he knew what would befall him he gave himself up to die for the church that thay might not be destroyed for it seamed all thay wanted was to kill him and thay have done it but I dont know as thay will let us alone now but I hope thay will be easy a little while thay say there is nine more thay are determined to have and when it will end I dont know<sup>6</sup> I expect there are many that will rejoice and think mormonism is down now but thay will be mistaken for the Lord has begun his work and he will carry it on in spite of all mobs and devils now one and all of my friends is honest people I entreat of you if you have any influence to use it now in our behalf among all people and in all places I dont know how long we shall be permitted to stay here or whare I shall be next time I write if I ever have another oportunity I am not sorry I am here at this time I want you should write to me I have not had but one letter from you since I came here I have written you a long one this time give my respects to all inquiring friends I have been braiding some this summer but it is hard getting palm leaf I intend to braid straw I shall write no more at present

Sally Randall

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6. A rumor circulated that the enemies of Joseph and Hyrum would not be satisfied until eleven leading men of the Church were dead. Vilate Kimball feared, therefore, for her husband Heber's life. Sally's language here echoes Vilate's in a June 30 letter to Heber: "Every heart is filled with sorrow, and the very streets of Nauvoo seem to mourn. Where it will end the Lord only knows." Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, June 30, 1844, in Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 108.

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