

“I Was Not Ready to Die Yet”

William Stowell’s Utah War Ordeal

R. Devan Jensen and Kenneth L. Alford

In the fall of 1857, twenty-one-year-old Cynthia Jane Stowell¹ bade farewell to her husband, William R. R. Stowell,² a lieutenant in the Utah militia working to hinder the US Army from entering Utah Territory. Cynthia, who was pregnant, was tending nine children—six of whom were orphans she and William had adopted.³ Sophronia Stowell,⁴ a plural wife of William, also had children to tend. That winter they received

1. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell (FamilySearch.org PID: KWJZ-XNZ) was born April 20, 1836, in Yorkville, Gibson County, Tennessee. Hereafter the FamilySearch personal identification number will be listed in parentheses without “FamilySearch.org PID”).

2. William Rufus Rogers Stowell (KWN2-PHJ) was born September 23, 1822, in Solon, New York.

3. During his life, William wrote three accounts of his Utah War experiences. One handwritten version titled “William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857,” MS 4602, is in the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE4455155. Another handwritten account titled “The Echo Canon War” is housed in Papers, Utah War, MSS 2379, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. The third and most complete version is located at the Weber County Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum, Ogden, Utah, and is published as James Little, *A Biographical Sketch of William Rufus Rogers Stowell* (Colonia Juárez, Mex.: By the author, 1893). The last account was prepared under the supervision of William Stowell and includes expanded journal entries.

4. Sophronia Kelley Stowell (KWN2-PHN) was born July 22, 1826, in Richelieu, Quebec, Canada.

news that William had been captured and was being held as a prisoner of war at Camp Scott, near Fort Bridger, in present-day Wyoming. The two women must have worried that they might never see William again.

The Utah War of 1857–58 grew out of rising tensions between Utah’s leadership and federal authorities. This armed conflict, formally identified by the US government as the Utah Expedition, foreshadowed the struggle between states’ rights and federal authority that played out a few short years later during the American Civil War. Previous publications generally discuss the Utah War from the point of view of the main actors or the war’s effect on the Church or the population of Utah Territory as a whole. On a macro level, the Utah War can be recounted in terms of competing demands between Mormons and the federal government, but this article poignantly recounts how the Utah War also affected individual lives. William Stowell’s family history is uniquely interesting because of William’s participation in the military defense of Utah, his capture and suffering as a prisoner of war, and the struggle of his two wives and many dependents to survive in his absence.

Teenage Marriage and Instant Family

Cynthia’s family joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Tennessee. After the death of her father in June 1845, her widowed mother moved the family to Nauvoo, Illinois, in March 1846, where they lived only a few short months before they and other Mormons felt pressure to leave the state. The family relocated to Council Bluffs in present-day Iowa, where Cynthia’s oldest brother, William A. Park, enlisted in the US Army’s Mormon Battalion for the Mexican-American War. The rest of the family spent several years in frontier surroundings, earning a living and saving money to buy a wagon, steers, and cows.⁵ In 1851, as a fifteen-year-old teenager, Cynthia traveled in Captain John G. Smith’s company across the plains to Salt Lake City.⁶ Settling in Provo, Utah Territory, Cynthia (now sixteen) was living with her widowed

5. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography* (n.p., n.d.), 2, Perry Special Collections.

6. “Cynthia Jane Park,” *Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel, 1847–1868*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://history.lds.org/overland-travel/pioneers/44757>. Utah’s largest city was known as Great Salt Lake City during the Utah War. It was not until 1868 that the city’s name was officially changed to Salt Lake City. For purposes of simplicity, this narrative will refer to Salt Lake City.



William Rufus Rogers Stowell and Cynthia Jane Park Stowell. Cynthia experienced hardship and uncertainty when William was captured by the US Army, held as a prisoner of war, and indicted for high treason. Courtesy Church History Library.

brother, William, when she met William Stowell, a twenty-nine-year-old émigré from Nauvoo. He was caring for his fifteen-month-old nephew, William Henry Packard, whose parents had died.⁷ Cynthia Park and William Stowell were married by Apostle John Taylor on October 19, 1852. In the fall of 1853, Governor Brigham Young asked the Stowells to move to the newly designated territorial capital of Fillmore in Pahvant Valley to guard against “Indian depredations” and to help build a wing of the planned statehouse.⁸

On April 22, 1854, two days after Cynthia’s eighteenth birthday, William brought home his half-brother Dan’s five orphans, aged six to thirteen, whom he wanted to adopt.⁹ Two days later, Cynthia gave birth to her first son, Brigham.¹⁰ The young mother now found herself with seven children to rear.

In June 1855, Cynthia and William moved to Bingham’s Fort, near Ogden.¹¹ In October, William married a plural wife, Sophronia Kelley,



Sophonria Stowell, a plural wife of William Stowell. She assisted Cynthia and the rest of their large family during the Move South in the spring of 1858. Courtesy Abraham Heslington Family Organization.

7. William Henry Packard (KWZ5-G52) was born August 12, 1851, in Springville, Utah County, Utah Territory.

8. “William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857,” 1. Both the small town of Fillmore and Millard County in which it is located were named for US President Millard Fillmore. Indian threats were a legitimate concern, as the October 1853 massacre near Fillmore of US Army Captain John W. Gunnison and his military survey party demonstrated.

9. The orphans were William Augustus (1841–1915, LCXT-ZL8), Harriet Eliza (1843–1897, KWJD-CV1), George Washington (1845–1927, KWJ8-3M5), Mary Louisa (1847–1864, KWVZ-1R7), and Ann Jeanette Abigail Stowell (1848–1912, KWNF-783).

10. Brigham Stowell (KWCD-RTN) was born April 24, 1854, in Fillmore, Millard County, Utah Territory.

11. Begun in the spring of 1851, Bingham’s Fort “was located north of Second Street and west of Wall Avenue in Ogden. The fort enclosed an area 120 by 60 rods and its walls were built of rocks and mud, principally mud. . . . At the close of 1854, Bingham’s Fort had a population of 732.” “Pioneer Forts of

who had a son from a previous marriage.¹² On January 6, 1856, Cynthia gave birth to twins, Amanda and Miranda; Sophronia gave birth to Elvira on September 12.¹³ Their large family eked out a meager living on their farm.

Escalating Tensions

The Utah War arose from a complex web of causes and motivations. Stated briefly, federal and Utah territorial authorities often clashed regarding Mormon authority and influence in the territorial court system, the mail service, policies regarding American-Indian relations, polygamy, and the moral character of territorial appointees.¹⁴ On January 6, 1857, Utah's legislators approved provocative memorials to President James Buchanan, arguing for rejection of federal officials who did not reflect local values.¹⁵ Shortly thereafter, Buchanan received reports of rebellion and murder in Utah. William W. Drummond, associate justice of the Utah Territory Supreme Court and a married man who flaunted his mistress in public, had tried to diminish Mormon influence by reducing the power of Utah's county probate courts. After disagreeing with local officials, he wrote a formal complaint to Buchanan, then fled first to California and later to New Orleans, where he resigned with

the West," in *Our Pioneer Heritage*, comp. Kate B. Carter, 20 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958-77), 9:123-24.

12. George Washington Eldredge (KWJX-59G) was born June 25, 1846, in Mormon Grove, Pottawattamie County, Iowa Territory.

13. Amanda (KWC6-RVG), Miranda (KWZS-7S6), and Elvira (KWJD-PFJ) were born at Bingham's Fort (present-day Ogden), Weber County, Utah Territory.

14. President James Buchanan justified the Utah Expedition based on complaints from numerous individuals, including William W. Drummond, associate justice of the Utah Territory Supreme Court; W. M. F. Magraw, a mail contractor who lost a lucrative bid to the Brigham Young Express and Carrying Company; and Thomas S. Twiss, Indian agent on the Platte River. Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), 171. For additional context, see Brent M. Rogers, *Unpopular Sovereignty: Mormons and the Federal Management of Early Utah Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 5, 9-15.

15. Several of the men nominated for federal appointments were later indicted for treason, though all were finally pardoned. William P. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 1: A Documentary History of the Utah War, to 1858* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark, 2008), 62-63, 67-73.

a letter that became a scathing newspaper account of Mormon harassment, alleging that Church leaders had destroyed territorial Supreme Court papers and murdered government officials.¹⁶ Drummond called for a non-Mormon replacement as governor “with a *sufficient* military aid” to see the job through.¹⁷ John M. Bernhisel, Utah’s territorial delegate in the US House of Representatives, wrote to Governor Young that “the clouds are dark and lowering . . . that the Government intended to put [polygamy] down,” and that federal troops might be sent to overturn the perceived rebellion.¹⁸

The Utah Expedition and Utah’s Response

In May 1857, while Congress was adjourned, President Buchanan ordered US soldiers to escort and install Alfred Cumming as incoming territorial governor, replacing Brigham Young.¹⁹ They also escorted Delana R. Eckels, the newly appointed chief justice of Utah’s territorial Supreme Court.²⁰ The army left Fort Leavenworth (Kansas Territory) on July 18. While Governor Young had received earlier reports of the federal government’s actions, on July 24, 1857 (ten years after a vanguard company of Mormon pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley), Porter Rockwell, Abraham O. Smoot, and Judson Stoddard shared alarming news with people gathered for a pioneer celebration in Big Cottonwood Canyon that the US Army was marching on Utah Territory and that it was presumably commanded by William S. Harney, a general with a reputation for violence.²¹ The inability of direct communication between Young and Buchanan made war seem likely.

16. “Utah and Its Troubles,” dated March 19, 1857, *New York Herald*, March 20, 1857, 4–5, as cited in MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point, Part 1*, 102–3.

17. “Judge Drummond’s Letter of Resignation,” in *The Utah Expedition, 1857–1858: A Documentary Account of the United States Military Movement under Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston, and the Resistance by Brigham Young and the Mormon Nauvoo Legion*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1982), 363–66, italics in original.

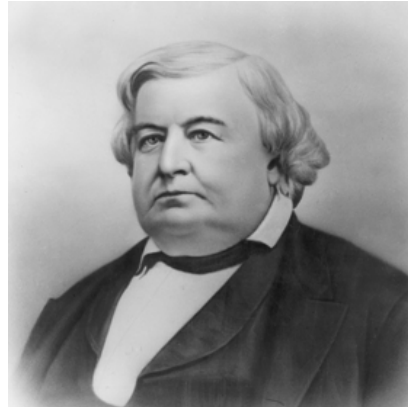
18. John M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, April 2, 1857, Church History Library, quoted in MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point, Part 1*, 106–7.

19. A former mayor of Augusta, Georgia, Cumming served as Utah’s territorial governor from 1858 to 1861.

20. Eckels served from 1857 to 1860 and was both preceded and succeeded by John F. Kinney.

21. Richard Whitehead Young, “The Nauvoo Legion,” *Contributor* 9 (August 1888): 362. See also MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point, Part 1*, 354. General Harney

Recalling mob action that required the forced exoduses of Church members from both Missouri and Illinois,²² on August 1, Governor Young mustered the Nauvoo Legion, Utah's territorial militia—"arguably America's largest, most experienced militia."²³ Captain Stewart Van Vliet, a US Army quartermaster sent to procure food and supplies, met with Young in early September and disclosed the army's mission to replace him as governor. Young declared martial law on September 15 and restricted admittance to the territory.²⁴ Colonel Edmund B. Alexander's federal forces, though, had already entered Utah Territory in today's southwestern Wyoming. In late September, Alexander set up temporary Camp Winfield on Hams Fork of the Green River and reconnoitered two possible routes of march to Salt Lake City—northwest through Soda Springs or southwest through Echo Canyon.



Incoming territorial governor Alfred Cumming. He was convinced by Colonel Thomas L. Kane to enter Salt Lake City unescorted. He met with Cynthia Stowell, gave her money, and promised to assist her husband, who was being held captive near Fort Bridger. Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society.

did not actually lead the Utah Expedition to Utah. He was replaced by Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston.

22. Expulsion from Missouri and Illinois and assassination of their prophet and patriarch clearly influenced the decisions of both Young and the Mormon leadership. For more about the expulsion, see Clark V. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992); and Richard E. Bennett, *We'll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846–1868* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

23. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 1*, 35.

24. Within this charged political climate and apparently without Governor Young's order or consent, some territorial militia members and their Paiute Indian allies massacred the Baker-Fancher party at Mountain Meadows in southern Utah on September 11, 1857. See Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford, 2008).

In early October, Lieutenant William Stowell was serving as an adjutant in Major Joseph Taylor's Nauvoo Legion infantry battalion.²⁵ To hinder the army's advance, Mormons burned Fort Bridger and nearby Fort Supply on October 3–4, and the Nauvoo Legion took watchful note of the Utah Expedition's approach.²⁶ Many of the territory's militiamen suffered from a lack of adequate food and clothing, living on baked flour and water while dealing with occasional snowfalls.²⁷

During the night of October 3, Stowell dreamed he had been captured by the army and made a prisoner of war but that he would subsequently escape "without any material injury." He dreamed that he was riding through Echo Canyon and returning safely to his family.²⁸ That week, Taylor, Stowell, Wells Chase, George Rose, and Joseph Orton were dispatched to watch the movement of the approaching US troops in the Green River area.²⁹

As Major Taylor's adjutant, Stowell carried the following orders from the Nauvoo Legion's commander (and Brigham Young's second counselor in the LDS Church's First Presidency), Lieutenant General Daniel H. Wells:³⁰

25. Stowell was appointed adjutant on May 15, 1857. See "Roll of Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and Privates of the 5th Regiment Commanded by Colonel C. W. West, Ogden City," in Papers, Utah War.

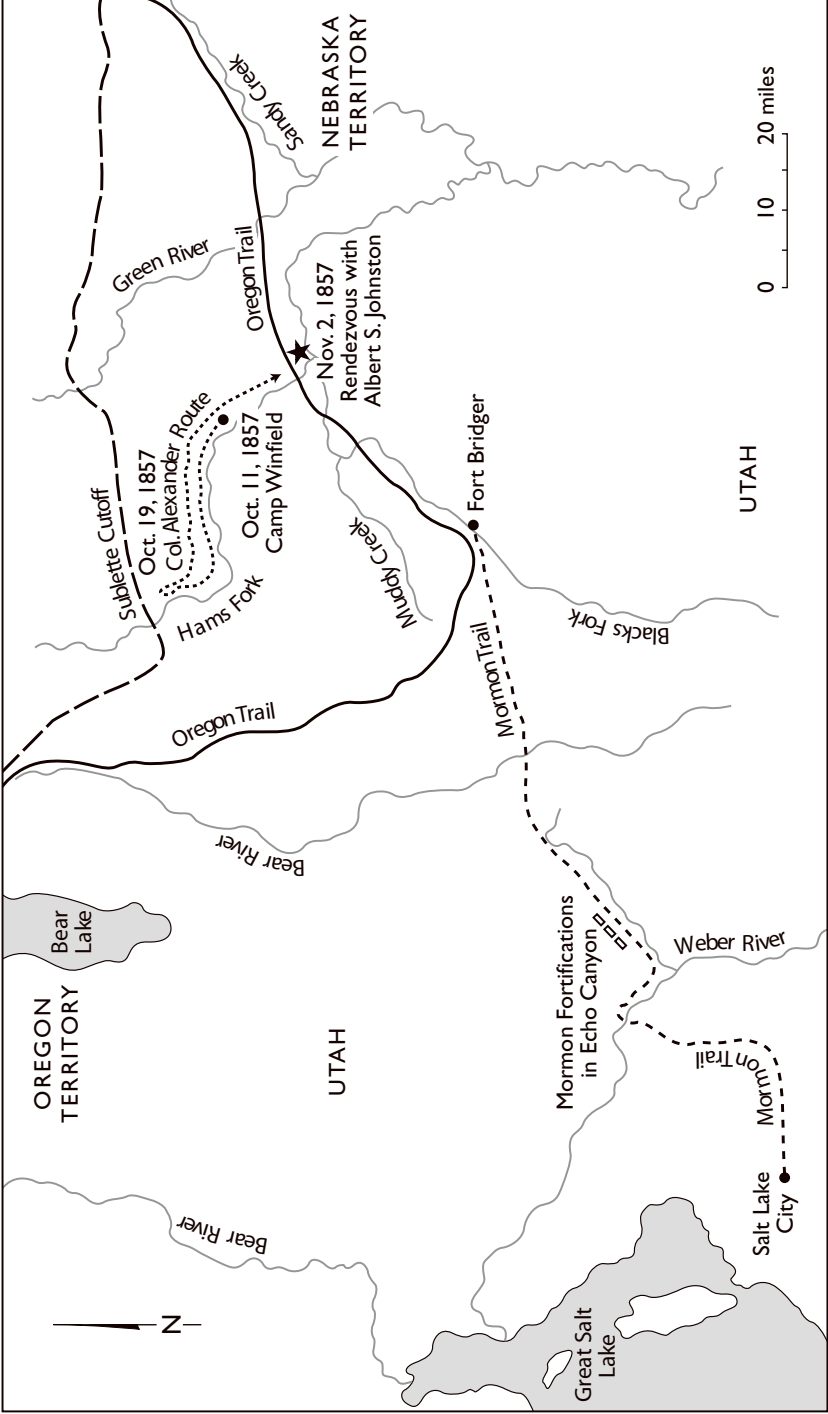
26. Fort Bridger was built in 1842 on Blacks Fork of the Green River by James Bridger—a mountain man, trapper, and scout. Mormons purchased the fort in 1855. Fort Supply, twelve miles south of Fort Bridger, was built by Mormon pioneers "between Willow Creek and Smith's Fork of Green River" in present-day Uinta County, Wyoming. Established as a successful "experiment of raising wheat in that high altitude," Fort Supply was burned by the Legion, together with Fort Bridger, in the fall of 1857 at the beginning of the Utah War. "Pioneer Forts of the West," 9:166–68.

27. Donna G. Ramos, "Utah War: U.S. Government versus Mormon Settlers," June 12, 2006, HistoryNet, World History Group, <http://www.historynet.com/utah-war-us-government-versus-mormon-settlers.htm>.

28. "William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857," 1. See also Stowell, "Echo Canon War," 1; and Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 23.

29. "William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857," 2; Stowell, "Echo Canon War," 3; Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 23; for the names of the men, see "Nauvoo Legion," *Contributor* 9 (August 1888): 370.

30. For more about Wells's defensive campaign, see Quentin Thomas Wells, *Defender: The Life of Daniel H. Wells* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2016), ch. 11.



Routes Followed by the U.S. Army Expedition in 1857-58. Map drawn by Bill Nelson for William P. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 1: A Documentary History of the Utah War, to 1858* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark, 2008), 396. Adapted from Fred R. Gowans and Eugene E. Campbell, *Fort Bridger: Island in the Wilderness*. Used by permission.

Headquarters Eastern Expedition,
Camp near Cache Cave,³¹ Oct 4, 1857.

Major Joseph Taylor:

You will proceed with all possible dispatch, without injuring your animals, to the Oregon road, near the bend of Bear River, north by east of this place. Take close and correct observations of the country on your route. When you approach the road send scouts ahead to ascertain if the invading troops have passed that way. Should they have passed, take a concealed route and get ahead of them. Express to Col. [Robert T.] Burton, who is now on that road and in the vicinity of the troops, and effect a junction with him, so as to operate in concert. On ascertaining the locality or route of the troops proceed at once to annoy them in every possible way. Use every exertion to stampede their animals, and set fire to their trains. Burn the whole country before them and on their flanks. Keep them from sleeping by night surprises. Blockade the road by felling trees or destroying river fords where you can. Watch for opportunities to set fire to the grass, so as, if possible, to envelop their trains. Leave no grass before them that can be burned. Keep your men concentrated as much as possible, and guard against surprise. Keep scouts out at all times, and communication open with Col. Burton, Major [John D. T.] McAllister³² and O. P. [Orrin Porter] Rockwell, who are operating in the same way. Keep me advised daily of your movements, and every step the troops take, and in which direction. God bless you and give you success.

Your bro. in Christ,
Daniel H. Wells.

PS.—If the troops have not passed, or have turned in this direction, follow in their rear and continue to annoy them, burning any trains they may leave. Take no life, but destroy their trains and stampede or drive away their animals at every opportunity.

D. H. Wells.³³

31. Cache Cave played a significant role in the Utah War as Legion headquarters in Echo Canyon. See Hank R. Smith, "Cache Cave: Utah's First Register," in *Far Away in the West: Reflections on the Mormon Pioneer Trail*, ed. Scott C. Esplin and others (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 197.

32. John D. T. McAllister is best known for composing "The Handcart Song."

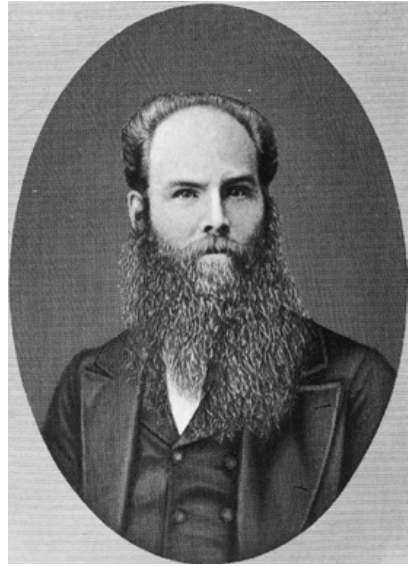
33. Orders of Daniel H. Wells, quoted in Third District Court (Territorial), Case Files, *People v. Young*, series 9802, Utah State Archives, Salt Lake City, quoted also in Stowell, "Echo Canon War," 1–2; and "Indictment of the Mormon Leaders," *New-York Tribune*, March 1, 1858, 6. There are small transcription discrepancies between these sources. The text above conforms to the version that appeared in the *New-York Tribune*.

Prisoners of War

Meanwhile, Major Lot Smith's Mormon scouts patrolled with similar orders "to stampede the animals, burn the grass, stage nightly surprises to keep the soldiers from sleeping, block the road with fallen trees and destroy the fords."³⁴ In early October, Smith burned three supply trains that were hauling tons of food and supplies for the army.³⁵ The following week, he ran off seven hundred head of federally owned cattle.³⁶

Captain Randolph B. Marcy's Utah Expedition soldiers fired dozens of shots at Smith's militiamen on October 16, but none were injured or captured. That afternoon Major Taylor's small party observed smoke and thought they had located Smith's camp, but instead Marcy's soldiers captured Taylor, Stowell, and their pack mules.³⁷ The three men traveling with them escaped.

Stowell carried the orders from General Wells inside a small pocket journal in his shirt. His first thought was to get rid of the papers, but he quickly reconsidered. As he later wrote, "After dark, I took the



Lot Smith, a major in Utah's Nauvoo Legion. He was ordered to delay federal troops until a hoped-for diplomatic breakthrough could be reached. He led a group of rangers east across present-day Wyoming near where the California, Oregon, and Mormon Trails merge. He and his men burned prairie grass, stampeded army mules, drove off cattle, and burned more than seventy wagons filled with food and supplies. Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society.

34. Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 255.

35. "Narrative of Lot Smith," in *Mormon Resistance: A Documentary Account of the Utah Expedition, 1857-1858*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), 220-28.

36. Richard E. Turley Jr. and John Eldredge, "Utah War," in *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. Brandon S. Plewe, 2d ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2014), 111. The army and Lot Smith's scouts continued to skirmish throughout the month of October.

37. Young, "Nauvoo Legion," 370.

book containing the orders out of my bosom, intending to drop it by the side of my horse. Just as I was about to drop the book, a quiet, distinct [otherworldly] voice said, ‘Keep them, for they will do more good than harm.’”³⁸ He was surprised, for he couldn’t see any reason to keep them. He tried to throw them away twice more, and each time he felt the same impulse to retain them—which he did.³⁹

Stowell and Taylor were placed under guard at Camp Winfield and questioned separately by Colonel Alexander, who was at that time the senior officer in the field. When asked why he was there, Stowell replied, “To repel a mob[,] sir.” When asked why he thought the army was a mob, he replied, “I have known the Latter-day Saints to be harassed by mobs from my first acquaintance with them. . . . It had been reported to us that there was an army coming from the states under the name of Government troops without any legal cause hence we regarded it as vile mobocracy.”⁴⁰ He warned the colonel about the strong fortifications in Echo Canyon, exaggerating the number of the Legion’s troops as twenty-five thousand to thirty thousand.⁴¹ The army, he said, would suffer severe casualties if they attempted to enter the Salt Lake Valley by force. Stowell’s orders were soon discovered, and he was interrogated again. Stowell warned the colonel against entering Salt Lake City through Marsh Valley in present-day Idaho because General Chauncey W. West was guarding that entrance.⁴²

Stowell was jeeringly told in mid-October that the army would winter in Salt Lake City and that “Jesus Christ cannot keep us out!”⁴³ Colonel Alexander and his senior advisers sensed the danger of traveling via Echo Canyon and decided the following day to enter the Salt Lake Valley

38. Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 25.

39. Stowell, “Echo Canon War,” 5.

40. Stowell, “Echo Canon War,” 4. Compare “William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857,” 2; and Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 25. President James Buchanan had never informed Brigham Young that he was being replaced as territorial governor and that a Utah Expedition was being sent to escort his successor.

41. “William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857,” 3. The actual number was only a fraction of Stowell’s boast to his captors. See MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point, Part 1*, 428, for a US Army estimate of the Nauvoo Legion forces facing them.

42. Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 25. In *Biographical Sketch*, the general is referred to as “General G. W. West.”

43. Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 26; see also “William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857,” 3.

by way of Soda Springs, traveling northward along Hams Fork.⁴⁴ Stowell recorded that the information he and Major Taylor shared regarding Mormon defensive operations caused division within the army's leadership. As a result, the army retraced its route down Hams Fork and waited for Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston's arrival.⁴⁵ This short delay—along with the more significant impact of "severe weather, deep snow, and a massive loss of animals"⁴⁶—possibly prevented an armed conflict that winter that could have resulted from the army's immediate deployment.

Taylor and Stowell were restrained in irons while they suffered from cold, hunger, and growing uncertainty. Time surely passed slowly for them. Stowell claimed that a sergeant fed them vegetable soup that had been poisoned. They vomited after sampling it and administered priesthood blessings to each other. Both men remained weak for several days.⁴⁷

On Trial for Treason

Colonel Johnston arrived on November 3, escorting Governor Cumming and Chief Justice Eckels. Johnston complained to army headquarters on November 5 that the Mormons had "placed themselves in rebellion against the Union and entertain the insane design of establishing a form of government thoroughly despotic and utterly repugnant to our institutions."⁴⁸

About this time, Major Taylor formulated an escape plan. Stowell was suffering from rheumatism from the cold march. He began spinning a yarn to his guards at the campfire while Major Taylor escaped into an opening in a passing herd of cattle. Taylor's absence went unnoticed for about fifteen minutes.⁴⁹ A party with bloodhounds searched but couldn't

44. Brandon J. Metcalf, "The Nauvoo Legion and the Prevention of the Utah War," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 72 (Fall 2004): 310.

45. Stowell, "Echo Canon War," 6.

46. William P. MacKinnon, ed., *At Sword's Point, Part 2: A Documentary History of the Utah War, 1858–1859* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark, 2016), 618. The name of the sergeant later recorded by the captives does not correspond to anyone carried on the Utah Expedition's muster rolls.

47. Stowell, "Echo Canon War," 5; see also "William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857," 3.

48. Colonel Johnston to Army Headquarters, November 5, 1857, in Hafen and Hafen, *Mormon Resistance*, 159. Within a few years, Johnston would join the Confederacy and die at the Battle of Shiloh. He was the highest-ranking officer killed in the Civil War.

49. "William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857," 3.

find him. Half frozen, he joined up with a Mormon supply train four miles from Fort Bridger, sharing military intelligence and reporting Stowell's capture to Brigham Young.⁵⁰

On November 16, the army established temporary winter quarters at Camp Scott, about two miles southwest from Fort Bridger. They spread a Sibley tent over Stowell and staked it tightly down. Many animals died of the cold that night. Stowell's legs were subsequently shackled, and he complained of "living [in the guard tent] with filthy lousy soldiers and being covered with body lice."⁵¹ Brigham Young wrote to Colonel Johnston on November 26, informing him that "if you imagine that keeping, mistreating or killing Mr. Stowell will redound to your credit or advantage, future experience may add to the stock of your better judgment."⁵²

Near Camp Scott, Governor Cumming, Chief Justice Eckels, and their associates set up a temporary seat of territorial government in quarters called Eckelsville, a "ramshackle warren of dugouts, log cabins, tents, buggies, and wagon boxes."⁵³ Mormon troops continued to watch the army from nearby Bridger Butte. Not intimidated by Governor Young's earlier correspondence, Eckels convened a grand jury on December 30 that indicted twenty Mormons for high treason. The list of those



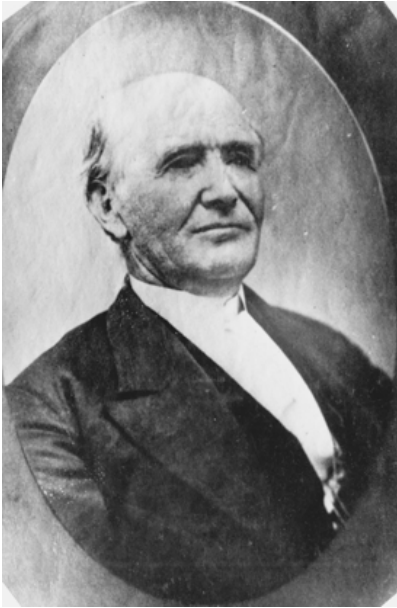
Brigham Young (c. 1857). He declared martial law in Utah Territory and ordered the Nauvoo Legion to hinder the approach of federal troops. He also took a personal interest in the safe return of William Stowell from captivity. Courtesy Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

50. Joseph Taylor, Journal, 1857, Church History Library; Stowell, "Echo Canon War," 7.

51. Stowell, "Echo Canon War," 7-8; Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 27.

52. Brigham Young to Col. A. S. Johnston, November 26, 1857, in *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, January 4, 1857, 3-4, Church History Library. Thanks to Steve Richardson for identifying this resource.

53. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 2*, 284.



Delana R. Eckels, incoming chief justice of the Utah Territory Supreme Court. He arraigned Lieutenant Stowell for high treason and reportedly attempted to poison him. Courtesy Utah State Historical Society.

indicted included the Church's First Presidency (Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Daniel H. Wells⁵⁴), John Taylor, George D. Grant, Lot Smith, Orrin Porter Rockwell, William A. Hickman, Albert Carrington, Joseph Taylor, Robert Burton, James Ferguson, Ephraim Hanks, and the army's prisoner, William Stowell.⁵⁵

On January 5, 1858, with Judge Eckels presiding, Stowell was charged in person (the other nineteen were charged in absentia) with "wicked, malicious, and treasonable conspiracy, combination, confederation, and agreement." Stowell was further charged with possessing "a wicked, malicious and treasonable communication from the said Daniel H. Wells to the said Joseph Taylor."⁵⁶ Journalist Albert G. Browne Jr.,⁵⁷ a reporter for Horace Greeley's *New-York Tribune* who doubled as the

court's clerk, sent the following account to the *Tribune*: "Stowell is a thick, heavy-set man, not more than five feet six inches in height, with a rough

54. After the unexpected death of Jedediah M. Grant on December 1, 1856, Wells was set apart as second counselor in the First Presidency on January 4, 1857.

55. Third District Court (Territorial), Case Files, *People v. Young*. See "Indictment of the Mormon Leaders," *New-York Daily Tribune*, March 1, 1858, 6. The article was published in March 1858, but the news report from which the article quoted was dated December 30, 1857. The other individuals indicted were Lewis Robison, Joshua Terry, John Harvey, Daniel Jones, Phineas Young, and William Young (spelling corrected). In the original handwritten indictment, blank space was left for the later addition of more people.

56. Third District Court (Territorial), Case Files, *People v. Young*.

57. The overqualified but inexperienced reporter had a bachelor's and law degree from Harvard, a law license, and a PhD from the University of Heidelberg. See MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 1*, 186; and MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 2*, 96.

and obstinate, but not malignant countenance, short and shaggy black hair, and an illiterate expression. He was clothed warmly, and with tolerable neatness, Judge Eckels having personally inspected and provided for his physical cleanliness before the arrival of the Marshal at camp. He listened to the reading of the indictment with composure, and was evidently gratified, surprised to find his name in such noble company.”⁵⁸ Stowell hired the gray-bearded Virginia attorney Charles Maurice Smith, who was traveling with the army as a civilian camp-follower, for two hundred dollars, pled not guilty, and asked for an adjournment to secure witnesses.⁵⁹ Eckels agreed to a delay for both sides to call witnesses, noting that there were still numerous other “persons who had not yet been arrested.”⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Lieutenant Stowell remained a prisoner.

Sister Wives with Shoeless Orphans

On the home front, unaware of their husband’s capture, Cynthia and Sophronia worked hard to harvest crops and prepare for winter. Cynthia wrote, “We were living on our town lot in Ogden in a house with two rooms for our families. The oldest boy of the orphans, about fifteen, was the best help we had for our out-door work. Before the severe cold of winter set in he, with a yoke of steers and a wagon, hauled a large quantity of sage brush from the sand ridge for fuel as he was too young to battle with the difficulties of hauling wood from the canyons.” Her son, she said, “was, as well, poorly clad and wore a pair of tattered men’s shoes until a kind neighbor furnished him a better pair. The other wife and myself worked together and spun yarn which we . . . wove into cloth to supply the pressing wants of the family.”⁶¹

During those early years, Utah lacked sufficient means to manufacture clothing and bedding. Despite their best efforts, Cynthia and Sophronia were unable to provide shoes for their children during the winter. Cynthia wrote, “Sophronia and myself took turns on alternate days to go with ox team and gather the squashes, potatoes, etc. and

58. “A Mormon Prisoner—His Trial,” *New-York Semi-Weekly Tribune*, March 2, 1858, transcript in Perry Special Collections.

59. Stowell, “Echo Canon War,” 8. MacKinnon notes, “One of the war’s mysteries is how Smith, later a prominent Washington lawyer, happened to accompany the Utah Expedition.” MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point, Part 2*, 293 n. 44, 576.

60. “Mormon Prisoner—His Trial,” March 2, 1858.

61. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 3.

bring them home for the winter. The second orphan boy of eleven years usually accompanied us with his thin clothing and shoeless feet in the cold raw winds of autumn. Sophronia's father kindly let us have a winter cow, but our supply of milk was very limited for want of food and shelter for the cow."⁶²

Many kind neighbors provided food for their family, and Cynthia recorded that "as a family we enjoyed excellent health. Plain food, fresh air, and a healthy climate all worked in our favor." Unfortunately, they did have one serious accident when William Henry Packard, "the first orphan adopted into the family, and now about [8?] yrs. old, accidentally ran a pitchfork into his leg. He caught cold in it and had a serious time for three weeks during which he required good care and nursing."⁶³

Adding to her anxiety, Cynthia learned, likely during November, of William's imprisonment. "Circumstances did not admit," she observed, "to our keeping up a correspondence with him."⁶⁴ For his part, William was able to write his family only one short note during his imprisonment. His family was able to write only one or two times after being informed by Church leaders that there would be an opportunity of corresponding with him. Cynthia and Sophronia were both pregnant, and they dreamed of being reunited with William. "We had some dreams of his being home with us again and that gave us some hope and a little comfort. At one time I dreamed that he was at home and played with the baby on my lap, that was just getting old enough to take a little notice of its surroundings."⁶⁵

Midwinter, Apostle Orson Hyde visited Cynthia and Sophronia to assure them that "all things would work around right for Mr. Stowell's deliverance and restoration to his family." She wrote that the winter passed "the faster and with less borrowed anxiety from the constant care and exertion required to meet the urgent demands of the family." Cynthia recorded that she deeply appreciated her friendship with her sister wife, Sophronia, who "worked faithfully along with me in these difficult times, and our faith and confidence in each other has remained steadfast ever since."⁶⁶

62. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 3.

63. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 4.

64. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 4.

65. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 4.

66. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 4.

Continued Captivity

In February or March, Lieutenant Stowell and a fellow prisoner, a US corporal named Nicholson who was “imprisoned for some light offence,”⁶⁷ stockpiled food and bribed a guard so they could escape. After four days of wandering near Fort Supply, they concluded that they would almost certainly die of exposure, so they returned to camp. William later wrote that it required great endurance to reach the camp. Their feet, hands, and face were “frozen and our strength almost exhausted.” Stowell recorded that upon seeing them back in custody, Eckels commented that “he would rather have frozen to death on the mountains than come back.” Stowell told him, “I was not ready to die yet.”⁶⁸ Manacled with a heavy ball and chain, Stowell later recorded that Corporal Nicholson was court-martialed and received fifty lashes for his desertion. “I was compelled to see the fifty lashes severely administered,” he wrote. “When I was released, [Nicholson] was still a prisoner with ball and chain. The punishment seem to me barbarous in the extreme.”⁶⁹

Soon after, Eckels surprised Stowell with a pie baked by an apostate Mormon in camp, Elizabeth Wadsworth.⁷⁰ More than a year earlier, James and Elizabeth Wadsworth had brought their adopted nephew, also named James, from England to Utah Territory as part of the ill-fated Hunt wagon company that accompanied the Willie and Martin handcart companies. While living in Payson, they resisted pressure to practice plural marriage. Their niece, Elizabeth Cotton, joined the Wadsworth household with the intent to “escape from Utah and return to Iowa”⁷¹ and had traveled with them to Eckelsville. The Wadsworths

67. Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 30. This may have been Edwin or Edward E. Nicholson, Co. K, Tenth US Infantry. In 1861, he returned east with the Tenth Infantry to fight in the Union Army in Virginia, was discharged in July 1862, and was commissioned an officer in the 4th Maryland Infantry, a volunteer regiment. He is identified as a private in Utah Expedition rolls, but William Stowell refers to him as a corporal.

68. Stowell, “Echo Canon War,” 9.

69. Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 30.

70. Elizabeth Wadsworth “emigrated to Utah in 1856, but soon became disgusted with the practices there and came to Newton, Iowa, where she united with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1866.” “Obituary,” *Newton (Iowa) Journal*, February 3, 1892, 2.

71. “Late from the Utah Expedition,” *New-York Tribune*, January 22, 1858, 2.

were disgruntled with Mormonism, and Stowell claimed it was widely known in camp that Elizabeth Cotton was sleeping with Eckels.⁷²

A week after the initial gift of a pie, Eckels and James Wadsworth privately presented Stowell with a most unusual gift for a Mormon teetotalist: a bottle of liquor and another pie. Eckels told him not to share the liquor with anyone. Wadsworth quietly confided to Stowell that it had been laced with chloroform. Stowell dumped the liquor on the ground but ate some of the pie, which promptly made him sick. A man who found a small portion of the liquor remaining, drank it, became ill, and was taken to the hospital. A prisoner told the man, "They have tried to poison Stowell, and you have got the dose."⁷³

Into this setting rode Colonel Thomas L. Kane on March 12 as an unofficial peace commissioner.⁷⁴ After informing President Buchanan the previous Christmas Day that he intended to travel to Utah to offer his services as an unofficial negotiator, Kane had traveled by steamer from New York to San Pedro and then quietly traveled overland northeast to meet with Brigham Young in Salt Lake City. Young directed Kane to "please learn what you can in regard to Stowel[l], and what their intentions are toward him."⁷⁵ Kane rode through mountain snows to Camp Scott in order to speak with Colonel Johnston. Soldiers suspected Kane was a Mormon, and as Captain Jesse A. Gove reported, his men "want[ed] to hang him."⁷⁶ To avoid conflict, Kane moved a short distance to Eckelsville. He called the men at Camp Scott "monomaniacs" with "no exception"⁷⁷ and assessed Chief Justice Eckels as "an over eager prosecutor and certainly one of the most indiscreet of speakers. . . . He

72. Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 30. In 1858, Cotton left Utah with Eckels and became a member of his household in Greencastle, Indiana. In the early 1860s, she married the judge's son, William, the day after he divorced his first wife.

73. Stowell, "Echo Canon War," 10; "William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857," 6.

74. For Kane's friendship with the Latter-day Saints and motivations behind this unofficial peace mission, see Matthew J. Grow, *Liberty to the Downtrodden: Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and David J. Whittaker, ed., *Colonel Thomas L. Kane and the Mormons, 1846-1883* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2009).

75. Brigham Young to Thomas L. Kane, March 22, 1858, Church History Library.

76. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 2*, 283.

77. MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 2*, 285.

boasts to all the world of what he intends to do when he reaches the little capital [Salt Lake City].”⁷⁸

Kane helped convince Governor Cumming to enter Salt Lake City without a military escort, which defused much of the tension. Kane also proved instrumental in working out a solution to the misunderstandings between the federal government and the Mormons.

Shortly after Cumming left Eckelsville for Salt Lake City, Eckels began empaneling a grand jury to probe plural marriage in Utah. It was a judicial action that was “well beyond his judicial purview. . . . Absent a U.S. or territorial statute banning polygamy, the judge’s gratuitous charge to the jury smacked of religious persecution, a provocation that sent shock waves to Salt Lake City and Washington.”⁷⁹ Kane assessed him as “a bad man” who “desired to embarrass the peace negotiations, to *which he is opposed*.”⁸⁰ Governor Cumming called Eckels’s actions “unwise and unauthorized.”⁸¹

The Move South

Meanwhile, in Salt Lake City, fearing military occupation by federal troops, Young convened a special conference on March 21, 1858, in the Old Tabernacle on Temple Square. Referring to the 1855 Crimean War Siege of Sebastopol, he said it would be better to burn their cities than allow the army to live in them—rendering hollow any military victory. Young instructed residents north of Utah County to move south for safety. Approximately thirty thousand people from southern Idaho to the Salt Lake Valley’s Point of the Mountain moved on snowy, slushy roads to central and southern Utah. Many of the refugees settled temporarily in Utah County between Provo and present-day Salem. Elder Wilford Woodruff noted in his journal: “North to the South the road is lined for 50 to 100 miles from Box Elder to Provo with horse Mule & ox teams and loose cattle sheep & hogs and also men women & Children.

78. Thomas L. Kane to James Buchanan, c. March 15, 1858, Vault MSS 792, Kane Family Papers, Perry Special Collections.

79. MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point, Part 2*, 383–84.

80. Thomas L. Kane to Judge John K. Kane, April 4, 1858, Vault MSS 792, Kane Family Papers; emphasis in original.

81. Alfred Cumming to James L. Orr, May 12, 1858, James Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

All are leaving their homes."⁸² The massive three-month move obliged Latter-day Saints to make do as best they could.

Because both Cynthia and Sophronia were pregnant, they did not leave their home in Ogden until April 21—just one week after the birth of Cynthia's son Rufus.⁸³ In those extreme circumstances, Sophronia gave birth to daughter Mary on May 4.⁸⁴ Cynthia wrote that the difficulties "seemed quite insurmountable" and added:

In this wagon were myself and four children, Sophronia and her two children and the six orphan children; in all fourteen souls with no other male assistance than the orphan boys we were raising.

We could take nothing more with us than necessary clothing, bedding and food, the latter only enough to last us until we hoped to be able to get more by a return of the team. We went as far as Salt Lake City and found shelter in the house of Mr. Seth M. Blair.⁸⁵ There we remained until the oldest boy, Wm. A. Stowell, returned to Ogden and brought down another load. In these two loads were all we took with us in the move; very little for so large a family.⁸⁶

Pleading for Her Husband

The first week of May or so, Cynthia met with Governor Cumming in Salt Lake City to explain personally her husband's situation and plead for his release. Cumming listened to her plight and promised to take a letter to William when he returned to Camp Scott.⁸⁷ Cynthia wrote the following account of her meeting with the incoming governor:

82. Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833-1898 Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kinney, 9 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1983-84), 5:177-8, 186; spelling standardized.

83. Rufus Stowell (KWJD-KJP) was born April 14, 1858, in Ogden and died October 15, 1858, in Ogden.

84. Mary Stowell (KWVS-5CT) was born May 4, 1858, in Ogden and died October 17, 1858, in Ogden.

85. Blair, a Legion major, played a colorful role in the war as Brigham Young's liaison with fellow Texans US Senator Sam Houston and Buchanan peace commissioner Ben McCulloch.

86. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 4-5.

87. Governor Cumming was true to his word and delivered Cynthia's letter to William after he returned to Camp Scott on May 13. See MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 2*, 463.

He received me very kindly. He inquired about the family and as his queries led to it I gave him an account of the family, its numbers, the orphan children, etc. He said it was a bad shape to be in. His sympathetic attitude cheered me. He probably thought my case quite a representative one among our people. He assured me he would do all he could for Mr. Stowell. At the close of our short interview he gave me ten dollars. I had expected he would feel ugly towards us and of course was the more surprised at his kindness and sympathy. At that time there was not much in the way of good to be had in Utah.⁸⁸

With the money she received from the governor, Cynthia bought shoes for Sophronia and some yards of fabric to make clothing for the children.⁸⁹

Back at Camp Scott, Governor Cumming tearfully interviewed William Stowell and assured him of “a fair, and impartial trial and not by a jury of that camp.”⁹⁰ At the end of May, two peace commissioners (Benjamin McCulloch of Texas, who earlier had turned down the president’s invitation to be Utah’s territorial governor, and Kentucky senator-elect Lazarus W. Powell) arrived with a proclamation of general pardon from President Buchanan. Stowell swore allegiance to the United States on June 1 and was freed. Historian William P. MacKinnon notes, “In effect, Lieutenant Stowell was the first beneficiary of this amnesty and the only individual case in the midst of the blanket pardon granted to the territory’s entire population.”⁹¹

Stowell reported his release as follows: “I was escorted to the blacksmith shop to be relieved of my irons. . . . When the smith came out to take off the shackles, I turned the end to him that was sound and at the same time cautioned him not to injure my leg. I stood in an awkward position purposely making it rather difficult to loosen the iron. After a little,” he continued, “I said, ‘let me take the tools, I can take it off sooner than you can.’ I sat down and put the weak joint . . . on the top of my leg, took the cold chisel, applied it to the weak place and with a slight tap of the hammer, parted the iron, remarking that I could have taken that off any time since it was put on, in five minutes. The officers turned away laughing.” Stowell thanked Commissioner Powell for bringing President

88. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 5.

89. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 5.

90. Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 31; see also “William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857,” 6–7.

91. MacKinnon, *At Sword’s Point, Part 2*, 510 n. 10.

Buchanan's proclamation of pardon and asked him to thank the president. Eckels and the soldiers donated forty-seven dollars and fifty cents to help his family.⁹² Stowell then rode down Echo Canyon on June 4 with Governor Cumming's advance party and recalled his dream of the previous fall.⁹³

A Family Reunited

Stowell's first concern was for his family. He traveled to Provo and met with Brigham Young, seeking his family's whereabouts. He found Cynthia in Pionertown (now Salem) and Sophronia in Payson.⁹⁴ Cynthia wrote, "As patiently as possible we awaited the arrival of Mr. Stowell. We understood that the general pardon of the President of the U.S. would release him. He arrived in Payson the 10th of June, 1858. . . . When Mr. Stowell returned my dream before related in which I saw him play with the baby on my lap was fulfilled."⁹⁵

After a joyful reunion, they made the hot, dry journey home to Ogden, but more afflictions lay in store for the Stowells. Cynthia's son Rufus died on October 14, and Sophronia's daughter Mary died three days later. They were buried in the same grave. "Surely it was a time of great destitution and affliction to us," Cynthia wrote. "Many others suffered with us. There was the satisfaction that we had done the best we could as a people under the difficulties that were forced upon us by our enemies."⁹⁶

William's capture, imprisonment, and trial for high treason makes his Utah War experience unique. Cynthia and Sophronia demonstrated resilience, faith, courage, and hard work throughout the war. Eventually, Cynthia would have five more children,⁹⁷ as would Sophronia.⁹⁸ Over the next decade, the Stowells enjoyed a brief respite from their trials

92. Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 31–32.

93. "William R. Stowell Journal, circa 1857," 7; Stowell, "Echo Canon War," 11; MacKinnon, *At Sword's Point, Part 2*, 510 n. 10, 513.

94. Little, *Biographical Sketch*, 33.

95. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 5.

96. Cynthia Jane Park Stowell, *Autobiography*, 5.

97. Heber John (1860–1923, KW8C-CVP), Matilda (1863–1957, KWJZ-XNH), Cynthia (1865–1930, KWNX-S3X), James (1868–1889, KWV7-W81), and Francis Augustus Stowell (1877–1925, KWZV-7H6).

98. Mariah (1859–1945, KWCK-LP9), Martha Matilda (1859–1947, KWJZ-88N), David (1861–1939, KWZH-4MV), Alexander (1864–1941, KWCB-B4Q), and Mary Ann (1866–1943, KWCF-FKX).

until federal antipolygamy legislation drove them into hiding and to move further south—this time to Colonia Juárez in northern Mexico. There, William became a mill owner and a Church patriarch. He passed away on May 30, 1901. After William’s death, Cynthia and Sophronia returned to the United States, free from the political pressures that had motivated their second move south.⁹⁹

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99. Sophronia died at Franklin, Idaho, on January 24, 1907. Cynthia moved to Cornish, Utah, where she died in the home of her daughter Matilda on January 18, 1908.