

**“In Order to Be in Fashion I
Am Called on a Mission”: Wil-
ford Woodruff’s Parting Letter
to Emma as He Joins the
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William Hartley

Rummaging through the contents of a rarely disturbed old trunk in her basement, Maxine G. Daynes of the Salt Lake Monument Park First Ward picked up a framed family photograph. Thinking that the gold frame might serve a better purpose, she emptied its contents. When the cardboard backing was removed from the photograph, out fell a neatly folded piece of old paper. Opening it and quickly scanning the four small pages of scrawled handwriting, Sister Daynes discovered it to be an original letter written by Wilford Woodruff, grandfather of her husband, Byron Woodruff Daynes.

Penned in slightly faded brown ink, the letter is a farewell message to Emma Smith Woodruff, a plural wife. Patiently Sister Daynes and other family members deciphered Elder Woodruff’s sometimes difficult handwriting, then researched in Church history to discover the threatening circumstances which prompted Elder Woodruff to dash off this hurried goodbye.

The letter’s date, 14 January 1885, has particular historical importance. (Although Elder Woodruff wrote 1884, he meant 1885—like many of us it took him a few days into the new year to lose the habit of writing the previous year’s date.) Seventy-seven years old at the time, he was the President of the Council of the Twelve and also Church Historian. During the preceding year he and other Church leaders had experienced increasing harassment from government officials committed to enforcing a tough new anti-polygamy law. As federal marshals, deputies, and Judges energetically—and sometimes illegally—sought to arrest and convict leading Mormons for “unlawful cohabitation,” hundreds of Saints fled into exile on the Mormon “underground” as it was called. On the day this letter was written, the First Presidency and most of the Twelve, including Elder Woodruff, found it necessary to go into hiding—being “called on a mission” as Woodruff jokingly termed it—something he had had to do before.

As this letter shows, it was no easy thing for a husband and father to be suddenly separated from his family and leave them on their own. Here,

Elder Woodruff's character as a family man permeates his message: his concern about solving his family's economic needs while he is away; his humor in announcing his departure and in advising his family how to talk to federal officers; his pride in his children's individual activities; his desire to take family "likenesses" (pictures) with him; and his hope that family letters will be forwarded to him.

Emma Smith Woodruff (1838–1912) married Wilford Woodruff in 1853, becoming his second wife when she was fifteen years old. She bore him eight children, of whom Asahel, "Nellie," and Clara are discussed in this letter. The other people mentioned are also relatives except for John Jaques and James Jack, both clerks at the Church offices.

After writing the letter, Elder Woodruff spent the next three nights lodged at a room in the Salt Lake Seventeenth Ward meetinghouse, then inconspicuously boarded a train for Nephi and within a few days was in St. George, using an assumed name. His days in exile were spent laboring in the temple and visiting stakes and settlements in southern Utah, Nevada, and Arizona. Everywhere he went the local Saints ministered to his needs and protected his identity.

When his wife Phoebe died in November 1885, Elder Woodruff ended an eleven month exile and secretly returned to Salt Lake. But even then his fugitive status remained: he did not dare to attend the funeral, but could only watch the funeral procession tearfully from a hiding place in the Historian's Office.

Three months later he was again forced to flee Salt Lake City to spend another year on the Mormon "underground."

A copy of this valuable letter has been donated by the Daynes, through the efforts of their daughter, Mrs. Michael (Christine) Rhead, to the LDS Historical Department.

Salt Lake City Jan 14/84 [1885]

My Dear Emma

In order to be in fashion I am Called on a Mission. I Cannot say where now But I shall keep you advised. As Circumstances to day Deprive me of *home Office & Clerk* you must try to make out my own scrawl. I should have been much pleased to have had an interview with you before I left but I do not Expect to be Able to. I had rather be a free man any where than to be in the hands of my Enemies. Any Communication you wish to make to me within two days if given to Orion will reach me. I would like Asahels last Letter before I leave you. Keep *Henrys & Nellies* letters. I have told Brother Jaques to send to you all of Asahels Letters to me, & when you have read them return them to Bro Jaques & He will forward them to me. I have made arrangements with Brother *Jack* to give you \$30 order at the beginning of Every other Month. You call at his Office on the 1 March for it. I have ownly received about mony Enough since Christmass to pay the present tuition of *Clara & Lucy* of the present term. Nearly all my rents have stoped payment,

but I will try to make arrangements for you to have some Mony when it comes in.

I now wish to say that if you or any of your family are called before the *Court* don't *Perjure* yourselves. Tell nothing but the truth and as *little of that* as you Can. I do not want any of my family to injure themselves on My Account. Kiss the Children for me, give my love to them. I want the prayers of my family & friends. All the *Elders of Israel* Need the prayers of the Saints these days. God Bless you and the Children. I thank the Lord that we have one Son in the Vinyard preching the Gospel. I hope Clara will do well in school and not get her mind more than she can help on any thing Else. I see Asahel is located in London in his last Letters. I think He will have a pleasanter field to work in. I think in the Spring Azmen had better Stay the best he Can untill Henry comes after him.

Ever yours Affectionately

W Woodruff

I shall take a copy of your family likenesses with me.

William Hartley is an historical associate in the Church Historical Department.