

**Eleanor McLean and the  
Murder of Parley P. Pratt**



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Steven Pratt

Twelve miles northwest of a small Arkansas town called Van Buren, Parley P. Pratt was murdered on 13 May 1857. The events that precipitated the murder have often been speculated about and discussed among students of Mormon history. Most scholars know that Parley's death was connected with his involvement with Eleanor Jane McLean and that her estranged husband Hector committed the murder. Though the narrative of Parley's tragic end is available, the full details are not, and these need telling so that whatever mystery still surrounds it may be resolved.

## **Eleanor Jane McComb McLean: 1817–1854**

Eleanor Jane McComb was born 9 December 1817, in Wheeling, Virginia, to James and Ann McComb.<sup>1</sup> Little is known of her early life, except that her parents were strict Presbyterian and that they moved to Greenville, Louisiana, near New Orleans when she was a small child. It was there that she met and married Hector McLean in 1841.<sup>2</sup> They seemed to be happy at first. But Hector started drinking heavily, causing a separation in 1844. Eleanor, after seeking counsel from her father, two brothers, E. C. and J. J. McComb, and a John McDougal as to whether she should return to or leave Hector sent him an ultimatum:

Dear Hector:

Having used every persuasion in my power to no effect, I see but three alternatives all ending in misery if not in crime. First, to live a victim of the vice to which you have become a prey 2nd to to seek a home among strangers, or shall the smoothe current of the Mississippi be the last page that any may read of my "*Ill Fate?*"

Your Wife.

E.J. McLean

Hector responded with the following note:

Millikins Bend

December 31, 1844

Nea, Ellen neither of these shall ever be your lot. I will cease to grieve your gentle spirit, and we will live together so long as it is the will and good pleasure of a Heavenly Parent we should. We seek an asylum among the people of God (I care not what that may be) and by their good example and precept

I am persuaded your own dear husband, may cure. I must be saved and reformed—it is impossible to be either here. I have tried in vain, to live soberly and righteously before God and men but cannot accomplish it.

Yours sincerely,  
Hector<sup>3</sup>

Eleanor then returned to live with him. Sometime later they decided to leave New Orleans and go to San Francisco to help accomplish Hector's reform. They were accompanied by their three children, Fitzroy, Albert, and Annie, and one of Eleanor's brothers.<sup>4</sup>

It was in San Francisco that they came in contact with the Mormon church. After attending a Mormon meeting with Hector, and her brother, J. J. McComb, Eleanor wanted to join the Church but was forbidden to do so by her husband, who purchased a sword cane and threatened to kill her and the minister who baptized her if she became a Mormon.<sup>5</sup> In spite of this threat, Eleanor attended Church meetings as often as she could. One Sunday night, while Eleanor was singing from a Mormon hymn book she had purchased, Hector tore the book from her hands, threw it into the fire, beat her, cast her out into the street, and locked the door. She sought the help of a Dr. Bush, the family doctor, who took her to a hotel, boarded her there for the night, and charged the bill to Hector. The next day she filed a charge of assault and battery against Hector, planning to go to San Bernardino to live with the Saints and never return. She dropped the charges, however, and returned to Hector, following the advice of Dr. Bush and the members of the San Francisco branch.<sup>6</sup> She describes the incident as follows:

That Mr. McLean put me by violence into the street at night, and locked the door against me, Captain Grey and Dr. Bush are witnesses; and I presume McLean himself would not deny that I then declared that I *would no more be his wife* however many years I might be compelled to appear as such *for the sake of my children*.<sup>7</sup>

Even though she embraced Mormonism in November of 1851, she was not baptized until 24 May 1854, by William McBride.<sup>8</sup> Although he had given his written permission for her to be baptized and she continued to live with Hector, he forbade her to sing Mormon hymns or to read Mormon literature in his home. Eleanor did not comply fully with his rules, however, for she made it a practice to hold morning devotionals with her children while Hector was away, and sought all available means to stay in contact with the Church.

### Parley Meets Eleanor

Parley Pratt, having been called by the First Presidency to preside over the Pacific Mission and to set up a gathering place for the Saints in San Jose, arrived in San Francisco on 2 July 1854.<sup>9</sup> Upon his arrival, he immediately

went to San Jose, picked up his wife Elizabeth, who had come to California earlier, and returned to San Francisco, where they first rented a small house for \$25 a month. When it proved to be inadequate, they moved to a larger home on Broadway Street which cost them \$35 a month.<sup>10</sup> They had few funds and little to eat but were cared for by members of the branch, including Eleanor McLean. She brought the Pratts food, bedding, and clothing and became a frequent visitor at their home, often arriving at dawn with gifts of meat, bread, fruit and other articles which sustained the Pratts until the next day.<sup>11</sup> This was a great help to Parley, because Elizabeth was sick most of the time and could do very little for herself or her husband. During her visits, Eleanor told Parley and Elizabeth of her home situation and asked Parley to help her solve her problems. Parley did visit the McLean home a few times to try to reconcile Hector and Eleanor's differences, but succeeded only in making Hector more bitter.<sup>12</sup> Eleanor appears to have decided that there was no chance that her husband would join the Church, but she decided that her children should belong. So on 27 August 1854, she took her two oldest children, Fitzroy and Albert, to Union City, where Parley was holding a meeting, and had him baptize them into the Church.<sup>13</sup> Shortly after the two boys were baptized, Hector decided that the only way to save his family from the Mormons was to have his wife committed to an asylum; consequently he filed a charge of insanity against Eleanor. When Parley was informed of Hector's plan, he assigned a young missionary to try to stop Hector.

### **Hector and the Mormon Cook**

John R. Young was one of a group of missionaries working in and around San Francisco to obtain funds for their fares to the Sandwich Islands. While they were there, Parley, who was the mission president, had them tracting, distributing pamphlets, and doing other missionary work. John had been assigned to tract the city of San Francisco, but Parley released him from that assignment and assigned him the delicate task of helping Eleanor McLean keep her membership in the Church and keep out of an asylum. When he asked how he was to accomplish his assignment, he was instructed to "listen for the whisperings of the Spirit and do as it directs and you shall be successful." Then President Pratt and William McBride gave him a blessing. Among other things, Parley told John that McLean would not harm a hair of his head.<sup>14</sup> John went immediately to the McLean home and walked past it singing, "O My Father." When no one responded, he went back to his room and spent the remainder of the day reading of Christ's trial and persecutions in Jerusalem. The next morning he returned to the McLean home and finding a card in the window advertising for a cook, applied; Hector agreed to hire him on a trial basis for a

month. For nearly a month John stayed in the McLean home cooking, making beds, and performing other household chores. His job was not without some danger, however. Daily he would take the pistol that Hector threatened to use on the first Mormon that set foot in his house from under the pillow, lay it on the window sill until he had made the bed, then replace it under the pillow. That Young fulfilled his assignment is recorded in his journal:

A week later the directors of the insane asylum, a physician, and Mrs. McLain's brother, who was a banker, called as an examining committee. They had a long talk with Mr. and Mrs. McLain, then called in the children, who had been kept home for that purpose. After a long talk with them, Mrs. McLain suggested that the cook be called. Oh, how I prayed that I might be directed to say the right thing and not say too much. In answer to the questions, I said: Mrs. McLain comes in every day to the kitchen to tell me what she wants and instructs me how to do it. She is always calm and sensible in her talk. I see no evidence of insanity in her conduct. As to McLain, I can say but little. He stays in his room until breakfast is ready and immediately afterwards, goes to his office. When he returns at night, his step does not seem as firm and steady as it does in the morning. He appears nervous and walks about and talks a good deal to himself." Mrs. McLain's brother seemed pleased with my statement. The committee decided that Mr. McLain had no grounds for his complaint, and the shadow of the insane asylum was dispelled. I felt very happy about this, but a few days later something else happened. A man called at the bank where Mr. McLain was a cashier. After a few minutes of business conversation, he said: "I want to ask you a question. You seemed so pronounced against the Mormons. Why do you employ a missionary as cook in your home?" McLain seemed surprised and the man continued: "Do you not know that he is the same young man who was tracting the city and selling Mormon Literature? McLain hurried home and coming to me, demanded: "Are you a Mormon?" "Yes sir," I answered. Shaking his fist in my face, he exclaimed, "If you were not a child, I would kill you." "What have I done that you should want to kill me?" "You are teaching the false doctrines of Joseph Smith."

I asked what was false in the doctrines. He replied that we claimed to confer the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, while the scriptures declare that it has been done away and is not needed in this day. I asked him for a reference. He took his bible and tried to find it, but his hands shook so that he could not find the passage he sought. I took the Bible from his hands, turned to 2nd Chapter of Acts, 38 and 39 verses and read to him "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you and to your children and all that are far off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." He sprang up, went into the other room and returned with two twenty dollar gold coins in his hands. Giving me the money he said: "Here are your month's wages. You are dismissed."<sup>15</sup>

John Young left and used the forty dollars to pay his fare to Honolulu.

### Hector's Retaliation

Shortly after Young left, Hector took the children, put them on the ship *Sierra Nevada*, and sent them to their grandparents in New Orleans. When he returned home that evening, he told Eleanor what he had done, saying, "Now they are where you and the cursed Mormons can never see them again!" Then he locked Eleanor in her room. About two in the morning Hector released her since she had cried so much that it disturbed him. The next morning she attempted unsuccessfully to find the children. Her brother, E. C. McComb, suggested that she take the next steamer and follow the children, but McLean would not let her.<sup>16</sup> She then obtained \$20 and some goods from a local merchant which she gave to Amasa Lyman for safe-keeping, planning to use them to finance her trip to New Orleans. When Hector heard of her plans, he boasted that she was in his power and that if she attempted to go he would have her in the insane asylum in twenty-four hours. This, however, proved an empty threat, as two weeks after the departure of the children, in February 1855, he even helped pay her fare on the steamer *Daniel Webster* bound for New Orleans.<sup>17</sup> She was also assisted in paying her fare by Parley,<sup>18</sup> whom she wrote on 5 February 1855:

Brother Pratt,

I have some goods and 20\$, in gold in Amasa Lyman's hands. Will you be so kind as to see what can be done, in order that whatever they are worth may be available to me, at as early a date as may be convenient. I am called suddenly to depart for a distant shore, and would feel obliged to you to attend to this matter, for I expect to need all the funds I can raise to defend myself in the midst of my enemies.

Feb 5th 1855

Your Sister in hope  
Eleanor J. McLean<sup>19</sup>

Parley wrote to Amasa Lyman on 2 March informing him that Eleanor had been "called suddenly away to New Orleans—& never expects to see this country again, But to make her way to Zion with her children, if she can get the means,"<sup>20</sup> and asking him to send her things to her by the first trustworthy messenger. This Amasa did, and they enabled her eventually to make her way to Utah.

The children had been sent to New Orleans accompanied by neither friend nor relatives. They traveled by ship to San Juan, Nicaragua, and then by steamer to New Orleans, arriving 13 February.<sup>21</sup> They were taken to their maternal grandparents.

Eleanor arrived in New Orleans on 2 March and went immediately to find her children.<sup>22</sup> She remained in her father's house three months, being closely guarded at all times lest she should try to take the children. She did attempt to remove them, however, and kept them hidden four days, but was unsuccessful in getting out of the city. Her father then pledged to

change his treatment of her and let her have a room and free access to the children if she pledged she would not take them out of the city. She agreed and returned to her father's house. Under these circumstances her health declined, and finally she asked her father to help her arrange passage to Salt Lake. She was given the means to take the *May Flower* to St. Louis and then the *Alma* to Atchison, Kansas, where she found a Mormon emigration party that hired her as a cook to pay her way to Salt Lake. She arrived in Salt Lake on 11 September 1855.<sup>23</sup>

### **Parley and Eleanor: 1854–1855**

We do not know what the relationship between Eleanor and Parley was during the 1854–55 San Francisco period other than that he tried to help her solve her domestic difficulties and she assisted the Pratts with gifts of food and clothes. After she had left for New Orleans in 1855, Parley wrote his wife Belinda that he had met a worthy soul who then was in deep tribulation, who, he hoped, could make her way to Zion.<sup>24</sup> After Parley's death in 1857, Eleanor wrote that she had "often sought his society" at the home "he kept with his wife, Elizabeth, in San Francisco. . . ."<sup>25</sup> Whatever their feelings, Eleanor remained with her husband until she went to New Orleans to get her children back, however estranged they had become. When she left San Francisco she left Hector, and later she was to state in a court of law that she had left him as a wife the night he drove her from their home. Whatever the legal situation, she thought of herself as an unmarried woman.<sup>26</sup>

### **For Time and Eternity**

After Parley arrived home in Salt Lake from California on 18 August 1855,<sup>27</sup> he worked in the Endowment House and went on a couple of local missions, speaking, and attending to local Church business. Eleanor arrived in September and went to the Pratt home to apply for a position as a school-teacher.<sup>28</sup> She was accepted, and one month after her arrival in Salt Lake, Eleanor and Parley were married. The ceremony took place in the Endowment House on 14 November 1855, and was performed by Brigham Young. Parley's journal records the marriage ceremony in these words: "Ministered in the Endowments and had Sister Eleanor Jane McComb of N. Orleans sealed to me at the alter by President Brigham Young."<sup>29</sup> The Pratt Family Record also notes the marriage, adding that they were married for time and eternity.<sup>30</sup> Eleanor was looked upon as one of Parley's plural wives from that time on, and was referred to by family and friends as Eleanor Pratt.<sup>31</sup>

Eleanor remained in Salt Lake for one year, serving as schoolteacher for Parley's children for seven months and then boarding in Brigham Young's



house for four months and teaching the governor's family school.<sup>32</sup> But with Parley's call to a mission in the Eastern States on 24 August 1856, Eleanor, thinking to regain her children, bring them to Utah, and raise them there, asked Parley to let her accompany him on his mission.

### **Eleanor Returns to New Orleans**

Traveling by way of Fort Kearney, through Iowa and Illinois, they arrived in St. Louis on 18 November,<sup>33</sup> where Eleanor borrowed \$100 of Church funds and proceeded to New Orleans. She went to her father's home and, by telling him that she had reconsidered her stand on Mormonism and did not believe it anymore, gained liberty with the children. She stayed at her father's house for a week, then she and her two youngest children (Albert and Annie) took a steam car from her father's home to New Orleans, a distance of several miles, from where she wrote a letter to her father telling him that she was now Mrs. Pratt and that she and the children were going to Utah.<sup>34</sup> She had hoped to leave on a steamer for Galveston, Texas, but when no steamer was to leave for almost a week, she took a room in the United States Hotel kept by a Mrs. Smith. The next morning, deeming it unsafe to stay in a public house, she took an omnibus, leaving the children at the hotel, and rode far down in the third municipality. There she found a furnished room across the street from a Dutch grocery store and, together with the children, stayed for four days. Thursday morning, 18 December 1856, they boarded the *Atlantic* bound for Texas; and at Galveston they took the steamer *Captain Pierce* to Harrisburg, where they stayed all night at a hotel kept by a Captain Andrews. The next morning they went to Houston. Two miles from Houston they found a place to stay at the residence of William Gambell, where they were treated very well. While there, Eleanor worked as a seamstress in a Mrs. Stansbury's dressmaking shop. On 4 March, Eleanor and the children left Houston with Captain Andrews, Mr. Stanfield, and James Gambell to journey to Ellis County, where a Mormon emigration group was fitting out for a trip across the plains. Learning in Houston by letter that Hector was in pursuit of her, Eleanor decided to take a passage with a man by the name of Clark, who was not a Mormon. He had a wife, three children, a poor wagon and three yoke of good oxen. It was while they were traveling with these people that McLean met them a little west of Arkansas.<sup>35</sup>

### **Parley's Tour of the East**

Parley visited various eastern states from December 1856 to March 1857.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout his eastern mission, Parley kept in touch with his wives by mail. In January (1857) he wrote:

I have heard from E, once since she sailed from St. Louis. She had arrived in safety in her father's house, & found her two children alive and in tolerable health. She is living there in quiet with them. She may make it back soon.<sup>37</sup>

And in February he added:

I arrived in the states all well, in Novr. E soon went south, found her c . . . ren well, staid at her father's one week, and escaped with the c . . . ren to Texas. She may return to St. Louis, and may not. She may go by land a thousand miles northward through Texas, Indian Territory, and Kansas to get to the Platte River. A Texas company of saints talk of coming that way.<sup>38</sup>

During his visits to Cincinnati, it is claimed that Mormon apostates informed McLean of Pratt's eastern itinerary, setting him on Parley's trail.<sup>39</sup> However he found out where Pratt was to be, McLean followed him throughout the eastern states and almost caught him in St. Louis in March of 1857. Erastus Snow relates:

Early in March Mrs. Rushton who some years ago belonged to the Saints and still professed friendship for us came to George A. Smith and told him that she had learned through a police officer that H. McLean was in St. Louis and seeking Elder Pratt's Life: That the city police had orders for his lowing night. She further said that many apostates in the city were leagued with McLean for the accomplishment of his purpose. From a variety of circumstances we became satisfied that this information was in substance correct and Elder Pratt had for some days previously felt the approaching danger and kept himself retired.

We now thought it advisable for him to leave the City privately and after concealing him one day we found means to disguise him and send him to Bro. Browns in Belfountain Cemetery, where on the following morning by day break I sent him Bro. Sprowl with a satchel of clothes and some \$100 expense money and he accompanied by Elder Sprowl left place immediately and traveled a circuitous route westward avoiding the roads, until he deemed himself safe. When he dismissed Bro. Andrew Sprowl some 12 miles from the City and steered his course westward he sent word by Elder S. not to be uneasy if we did not hear of him again in a year.

In the meantime McLean assisted by the police and apostates continued searching the houses of the Saints and all places frequented by us in the City, and adjacent county but without finding the object of their search.<sup>40</sup>

### **George Higginson and the Cherokee Mission**

George Higginson and Riley Perryman were working as missionaries among the Creek and Cherokee Nations in the Indian Territory. In the spring of 1857, they expanded their labors and traveled a great deal to meet and contact as many as they could before their April conference. In the early part of March, George and some Indian members started up the "Verdigree" one Saturday morning to attend the funeral of Prince Perryman. About noon, after coming to Little Spring Creek and stopping for lunch,

they noticed a man riding on horseback full speed toward them. Thinking it was the U.S. Marshal come to remove them from the Indian Nations for preaching the gospel, he and his companions rode off as fast as possible. The rider soon caught up with them, steered straight for George, and asked if his name was Higginson. Receiving an affirmative reply, the rider asked George to ride business with him. George refused to go unless the rider identified himself, at which the rider drew closer and whispered "Parley P. Pratt." Parley being in disguise, George doubted his word until Parley produced a letter Higginson had written to J. H. Hart in St. Louis. As they rode on together, Parley said that he was "flying from death" and sought protection in the Indian Nations.

After the Perryman funeral, George took Parley up the River "Verdigree" to Joseph Burgess, who secluded Parley in his home, which was on the edge of a large prairie. Parley was introduced as Elder Parker from New York, and stayed in the Burgess home until 6 April when he went to conference at Mr. Jack Randall's house. During the conference Parley asked George to go the frontiers of Texas to look for Eleanor and convey some letters to her that informed her of Parley's whereabouts. George went as requested, but after traveling for 200 miles found that the Mormon train was yet 300 miles south of him. He then hastened back to the Arkansas River to report to Parley and receive instructions. Arriving at Fort Gibson on 6 May, George found a letter informing him of Parley's whereabouts.<sup>41</sup> He returned to the Texas road, and having ridden about five miles spotted a man about a mile ahead of him, overtook him, and found it to be Parley. Parley told him that he was determined to travel until he met Eleanor. George asked Parley if he felt safe traveling the public road. Parley replied that he thought so for no one had inquired about him. Shortly thereafter George saw a military escort armed with muskets coming toward them. He said, "Brother Parley here comes an escort of soldiers armed." Parley paused and replied, "Yes. They are certainly in pursuit of me. I must have been watched it is all over now." The captain, whose name was Little, rode up to Parley and said, "Parley P. Pratt. I arrest you in the name of the United States of America."<sup>42</sup>

### **Hector's Pursuit**

As soon as Eleanor had left New Orleans with her children, her father sent word to Hector in San Francisco. Hector came immediately to New Orleans, then searched for Parley throughout the East, almost capturing him in St. Louis in March 1857. Failing that, he decided to look for Eleanor, because he heard that she might be in Texas. He found in Houston that she had left earlier to join a Mormon train to Utah, so he went back to New Orleans. From there he went to Fort Gibson with the hope of catching

Eleanor there. On arriving at Fort Gibson, he inquired if anyone had seen Eleanor or anyone fitting her description. None had, but after he related some of his troubles to the postal official and had given descriptions of Parley and Eleanor, the official produced some letters written to a Mrs. Lucy Parker from Mr. P. Pratt Parker.<sup>43</sup> Hector knew immediately whose letters they were. He filed a formal charge with the commissioner in Fort Gibson and went in pursuit of Eleanor, while the soldiers and his friend Shaw looked for Parley.<sup>44</sup> While riding a little west of what is now Arkansas, he came upon a rider by the name of John Peel, who told him where Eleanor could be found.<sup>45</sup> He met Eleanor's wagon on 6 May, and with another man rode up to the wagon, took the children, and rode off. About three hours later, Eleanor was arrested by a man styled the "State Marshal" on a charge of larceny of clothing belonging to Albert and Annie McLean to the amount of ten dollars. Three other names appeared in this same charge: Parley P. Pratt, James Gammell, and Elias J. Gammell.<sup>46</sup>

### **On the Road to Fort Gibson**

The "marshal" took Eleanor to a hotel in the Indian town of North Fork. She saw twelve armed men in the gallery in a state of "great excitement." These twelve men were some of Hector's Mason friends gathered from "all parts of the territory" to aid him, should the "government take no notice" of his grievances.<sup>47</sup>

The next morning a party consisting of the "marshal" (Shivers), Eleanor, and twelve armed men, set out on horseback. When they had ridden about fifteen miles, Shivers asked Eleanor if she would like to see Mr. Pratt. She replied: "Not in tribulation such as I am in. He is a good man, and I know his family and would be sorry to see him as a prisoner. Is he in this part of the country?" "Well he's not forty miles from here," was the answer. This was the first Eleanor had heard that Parley was in the Indian Territory; the last she had heard, he was in St. Louis. They rode until noon and then stopped at an Indian's house for dinner. Eleanor noticed that the mob, which was composed of some of Hector's friends, had increased. When they remounted the horses, she noticed Hector, who had the children in a carriage some distance from the house, give the lines to another, buckle on a sword in addition to his pistol, and ride off. The marshal informed Eleanor that "they had got Pratt; and McLean is determined to kill him, but we are bound to prevent him while he is our prisoner."<sup>48</sup> When they had ridden a half mile from the house, they came upon the military unit that had arrested Parley. As they drew near, Eleanor could see Parley lying near a stream, with his hands under his head. He was wearing a blue checked shirt and dark pants. When they dismounted, Eleanor asked if she could speak to Parley. Given permission, she advanced towards

him. Parley rose and extended his hand. Eleanor said, "How do you do, Brother Pratt." "Very well Madam, how is your health," Parley replied. "I am well in health, but that demon who has been in my pathway these thirteen years has again crossed my way. He has torn my children again from me and he says I shall never see them again." Parley then said, "Well, my sister, never mind, these things are all in one short lifetime and life is but a speck of eternity and will soon be over." Eleanor turned to him and said, "Brother Parley, I rejoice in one thing. Mormonism has taught me how to live and taken from me all fear of death and the grave." Then she raised her hand and voice and turned to the crowd and said, "Now you civil and military officers and soldiers you can only kill the body and after that you have no power over the soul, do what you please I am ready and willing to die as to live but that is my Father's business not mine."<sup>49</sup>

The marshall then read the charges to Parley. Someone in the crowd pointed to George Higginson, who was with Parley, and asked what was going to be done with him. Though both Captain Little and Marshal Shivers said they had no power to arrest him, he was placed under guard until such time as they deemed it safe to release him. They rode on to Fort Gibson, Parley riding with a rope tied around his right ankle, the other end held by an Indian riding alongside him as a guard. Reaching the fort at midnight, after a twenty-five mile forced ride, Parley and George Higginson were placed in jail with a heavy guard, and Eleanor was taken to a boarding house. She was so bruised and mutilated from the ride and violence of the day before that she had to be lifted from her horse and carried into the house.<sup>50</sup>

### An Important Letter from Fort Gibson

After Hector had left Eleanor at the hotel, on the way to Fort Gibson, he went out to meet his friend Captain Little at the spring where Parley and Eleanor were to meet later. Making sure that Parley was securely arrested, he traveled to the Creek Agency, where he stayed with his friend, Mr. Whitfield. They started for Fort Gibson, escorted by Perkins and the rest of the "Masonic Brethren," and arrived on 7 May.<sup>51</sup>

While in Fort Gibson, Hector wrote a letter to some friends in St. Louis:

Fort Gibson  
Cherokee Nation  
May 7th, 1857

Dear Friends:—I have just arrived from a sore tramp, in which I *succeeded* in coming up with Eleanor and the children, and have taken the children from her by force. I have placed Eleanor in charge of the U. S. Marshal, and have succeeded also in arresting Pratt, who is now in the guard-house of the Fort. The U.S. Marshal will start with his prisoners for Van Buren tomorrow, and

I will by a different route, in company of Capt. Cahil and lady, leave with the children for the same place. I arrested Pratt and R. (E) J. on charge of larceny, in stealing the clothing on the children when kidnapped—in the value \$8 to \$10. It is the only way I could arrest them in these Territories. When I fail before the U. S. Commissioner at Van Buren, I mean to have Pratt arrested for having fled from justice from St. Louis, Mo., and get a requisition from the Governor of Missouri for him. You are fully posted. See Strong, and inform him forthwith of the best manner of proceeding.

Thank God for his goodness,  
Yours truly,  
H. H. McLean<sup>52</sup>

There are several things that can be learned from this letter: (1) Hector realized that the charge of larceny would not hold up before the U. S. Commissioner in Van Buren; (2) he was planning to have Parley charged in St. Louis with higher crimes and was asking his lawyer to take care of the necessary arrangements; and (3) larceny was the only charge he could come up with in Indian Territory to have Eleanor and Parley arrested. Hector was using the arrest in Indian Territory as a pretext to give him time to get a requisition from the governor of Missouri and thus enable him to put Parley in prison. His plan failed, however.

### **Eleanor's Defense**

After spending Friday at the fort, Eleanor, Parley, George and company started for Van Buren on Saturday, 9 May. They traveled the two days following, Eleanor in a carriage driven by two soldiers and Parley and George chained to each other on horseback. The group arrived in Van Buren, Arkansas, the place of the trial, about noon on 11 May. Hector, traveling by a different route, had gone to Fort Smith and left the children there. He, Captain Cahil, and Major Rector also arrived in Van Buren on 11 May.<sup>53</sup> Parley was sent to jail, Higginson released, and Eleanor taken before the judge and lawyers. At first Judge Ogden was severe in tone, but after Eleanor had answered a few questions his attitude changed. She described her experience as follows:

He first said, "I suppose you understand madam that you have been arrested upon a charge of larceny?" "Yes, Sir, I know the charge but it is false." "Well madam, I suppose you will not deny that you were happy with Mr. McLean until this man Pratt and Mormonism crossed your pathways." "Yes Sir, I must declare that many years before I heard Mormonism McLean drove happiness from our home by inbibing that spirit that comes in bottles! And because I was a mother I would fain have escaped the impending fate foreshadowed in the breath of a man who had learned to love wine more that he loves the happiness of the wife of his bosom. And down through thirteen long years I suffered this blight, and at length he put me by violence into the street in a dark winter's night in a wicked city, and I was compelled to seek

shelter and protection in a public house. And do you suppose Sir, a woman conscious of having done her duty as a virtuous wife and faithful mother could be induced to come again to the arms of that man? No Sir, it was not Mormonism that desolated McLean's home—but that spirit that comes in bottles, prepared his heart and him for deeds of desperation and at last he found a pretext in my religion, that was unpopular, and upon this ground he might treat his family with personal violence,—thrust his wife into the street and lock the doors—send his children, while yet infants upon the high seas to go many thousands of miles without one friend they had ever seen. And now it is no marvel that he is prepared to tell a lie and swear to it—imprison innocent persons, and drag them before an excited populace in a land where mob law bid defiance to the Constitutional government and the Civil Courts. I have no hope of justice in this land Sir. If I had a chance I could bring truthful testimony from the days of my childhood until the present moment, that I have lived a life of strict virtue, industry and faithfulness in the duties belonging to my station. But I see no motive. For after all the adopted course of this government, would sanction my imprisonment and perhaps the shedding of my blood. Because I will *not deny what I know to be the Truth of Heaven!*

“Well Madam, do you acknowledge your father to be a truthful man?” Yes Sir. Here then is a letter from him, which confirms Mr. McLean's statements. I read, “She was honored and beloved by her family and highly esteemed in the society in which she moved. Mr. McLean went to Cal. and by industry procured a home, sent for his family, and they were happy in San Fran. until/Mormonism, and its wiley Elder, began to throw their seductive influence about my unfortunate daughter!”

Well Sir. I will still say my father is a truthful man but honest men are often deceived. And I claim this mother to be the best judge. In all the years to which he alludes, I was in McLean's kitchen, parlor and *bed room*, while my father was at peace in the midst of his own household thousands of miles distant. And if my husband came enraged and intoxicated to either neglect or abuse his family how could my father know it? Who but a wife knows *bed-room* scenes? It is true if I had gone for my neighbors and brought them to see him lying with his head hanging nearly off the bed, one coat sleeve off, and the other on, one boot off and the other on, and the vomit over his boots and all richly perfumed with old bourbon, (or some other well known beverage that adorns the shelves of the fashionable saloon). Then I might have hundreds of witnesses to what I now state. But the opposite of this was my course. I studiously concealed year after year the viper that clung to the secret fibers of my soul. He was not a man that drank and mingled much with his fellowmen, nor did he often drink enough before leaving his place of business to betray to anyone, that he drank at all. But a copious draft just as he left, and then another out of his secret bottle, before a 5 o'clock dinner, and then after dinner *another*; laid the strong man low. Yet who but a wife could know of this state of things. If he could not eat dinner he was sick. If he vomited It is because he was *sick*, and the children pitied “pa” because he was sick! And if a neighbor called he was excused on the same ground. The wife might shed a million tears of untold bitterness between the setting and rising of the sun; and who could know it? Could the husband who lay on the dead sleep of the inebriated all these lonesome hours realize that she had known no rest? And

when she stood beside him at break of day with toast and tea to stay his stomach and clear his brain, so that no betrayal of his vice, might reach his business place or even the nearest neighbours? Was there any witness? When he enjoyed a refreshing mornings' nap, a good breakfast and sallied forth at 9 o'clock in a clean suit, would any neighbors or friends suspect him? And if he delivered a strong temperance speech the following night as a grand worthy Patriarch of the Order Sons of Temperance, was there any to betray him? Nea gentlemen, but I tell you God and the holy angels witness these things and before *them* I am clear as the morning's dew.

The Judge then said, "I think madam it is the mind of the District Attorney to release you as a prisoner and call you as a witness in this case." "Well sir, I am in your power and you can do as you please. But I hope to be protected from insult or personal injury."

"Oh yes Madam, you will be taken to the best hotel and all your wants attended to, and no one shall molest you."

"Thank you Sir."<sup>54</sup>

The lawyers then asked her several questions about Utah and the condition of the women there. After they had finished their questions, the "marshal" (Shivers) took her to a hotel.

The next morning (12 May) when court convened, a crowd rushed into courtroom, anxious to see the proceedings. Eleanor was there, having come twenty minutes before court was to begin. They then brought in Parley as soon as Judge Ogden had taken his place. Parley looked weary and weak, having spent the whole night in jail with no food and little sleep. He seated himself near Eleanor with his counsel, Henry Wilcox. The first thing Judge Ogden did was to dismiss the charges against Eleanor. He said, "Mrs. McLean, the court finds nothing against you. You can retire." Eleanor hesitated, then said to Judge Ogden, "Judge, I have been assured by the officers both Civil and Military that here I would once again see my children, and if this is the only place I may ever see them I wish to stay." The Judge said, "Well madam you are at liberty; but not compelled to leave, you are no longer a prisoner." Eleanor then went back to the hotel following the advice of a lawyer, John T. Humphreys.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Trial of Parley Pratt**

After Eleanor had left, the charges were read to Parley by McLean, who was allowed to state the history of his grievances, and read evidences to the court that "implicated" Parley. He succeeded in stirring up feelings against Parley among the five hundred spectators.<sup>56</sup> When Parley arose to respond to the charges, Hector drew his pistol and pointed it at him but was prevented from firing by the officers of the court.<sup>57</sup> Because of the excitement of the crowd and McLean's display, Judge Ogden postponed the trial until four o'clock that evening. The crowd reluctantly allowed the officers to lock



Parley in jail, and crowded the courtroom and courtyard long before it was time for the trial to start. Judge Ogden postponed the trial further until the next morning at eight o'clock.<sup>58</sup> This was a trick, however, to deceive McLean, for later that evening the real marshal, Mr. Hays, called on Eleanor with George Higginson and told them that Parley had been acquitted by the court and was only kept in jail for his own personal safety and would be released as soon as it was deemed prudent to do so.<sup>59</sup>

Early on Wednesday, 13 May 1857, Judge Ogden brought Parley's horse to him at the jail. He released Parley, put him on his horse and offered him his knife and pistol, but Parley refused by saying, "Gentlemen, I do not rely on weapons of that kind, my trust is in my God. Good-bye Gentlemen." He rode off in a southerly direction.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Murder**

Hector, who had stayed up all night, came into Van Buren the morning of the thirteenth and was talking to a group of men outside the hotel, when a boy ran up and told him that Parley had escaped.<sup>61</sup> Hector and several others mounted their horses and started in pursuit. Parley had taken a circuitous route to avoid detection, but a light rain that morning made his tracks easily traceable. Some of the pursuers turned back, but Hector and two others (James Cornell and Amasa Howell) followed Parley's tracks. They caught up with him in front of the Winn farm about twelve miles north of Van Buren. McLean fired six shots from his pistol, but they all missed, some going through Parley's coat and some into his saddle. McLean then rode up close to Parley's and stabbed him twice in the chest. Parley fell off his horse to the ground and lay there motionless; McLean and his friends rode away. But in about ten minutes Hector came back, got down from his horse, placed a gun next to Parley's neck, fired, and then rode off. Mr. Winn, who witnessed the murder, thought that Parley was dead, so he rode to his neighbors' homes for help, which took about an hour. When he and a few neighbors returned, Parley turned over and said, "Sir, will you please give me a drink of water? I am thirsty and raise my head if you please." Mr. Winn asked him his name, who had attacked him, and if he had any family. Parley responded:

Yes, I have a family at Salt Lake City, Utah Territory and that is my home. My gold is in this pocket (pointing to his pants) and my gold watch is in this, and I want them with all my effects sent to my family in Salt Lake, write to a Mr. Couch Flint Post Office Cherokee Nation and let him have all my things to send to my family.<sup>62</sup>

Parley asked the men to communicate with a Mormon train and have some of them take his body back to Utah.<sup>63</sup> He then desired to leave his dying testimony with these men saying,

I die a firm believer in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith, and I wish you to carry this my dying testimony. I know that the Gospel is true and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of the living God, I am dying a martyr to the faith.<sup>64</sup>

Parley's voice weakened and finally ceased.

At about half past noon a lady came to the hotel in Van Buren where Eleanor was staying and told her that Parley had been shot. A later report said he was wounded but not dead. Then McLean appeared on the scene. He and few friends were drinking at the bar of the hotel when Mr. Smith, the landlord, approached them and asked McLean what he had done. Hector raved, "Well, I have done a good work." Then the crowd began talking of lynching Eleanor, one saying, "Come now let us lynch her, twile not do to let her escape." Mr. Smith broke in:

How dare you speak in that manner in my house. If any man attempts to molest that lady while she is in my house he must do it over my dead body, for I will protect her while she is under my roof. The man that would so disgrace his kind as to suggest such a thing had better not be seen again on my premises.

A few minutes later McLean crossed the Arkansas River and boarded a boat. Just before he stepped on deck he spoke to a man on the street and said, "Sir if you will go out eight or ten miles on a certain road you might do a deed of humanity," and then he sailed off.<sup>65</sup>

### **Eleanor and George Visit the Murder Scene**

After Eleanor received definite word that Parley was dead, she asked Marshal Hays if she and George Higginson might go prepare the body for burial. The marshal said he would furnish a wagon and take them out to the site the next morning. Upon entering the Winn farm house they saw Parley's body lying on a board. Mr. Winn told them about the murder and took them to the scene. They saw where Parley had fallen near a stump and had crawled to and used it to try to stop the bleeding. They also found several papers that he tried to use as a compress. Although Parley had lived about two hours after being attacked, he had bled to death. Examination of his body and clothing showed six bullet holes around the skirt of his coat and two knife marks in the front. One was in a V form over the left breast, but this did not penetrate to the body. The second, the fatal wound, was to the left of the first and about two inches long; this went directly to the heart. They also found evidence that a bullet had struck his collarbone and bounced off. Mr. Winn informed them that when asked if they should send for a doctor, Parley had said, "I want no doctors for I will be dead in a few minutes."<sup>66</sup>

When Eleanor and George arrived, the body had been washed, the face shaved, and all necessary materials made available for their use. George

and the marshal put clean clothing on the body and Eleanor wrapped it from head to foot in white linen, which she had obtained from Mr. Smith at the hotel. She returned to the hotel in Van Buren, being advised to do so by the marshal because of the animosity that prevailed in the area. Parley's body was placed in a white pine box made by William Steward at the request of James Orme, Justice of the Peace, and driven by John Steward to Serman's Graveyard (now known as Fine Springs) about twelve miles northeast of Van Buren.<sup>67</sup> There Parley was buried by George Higginson about ten o'clock the night of 14 May 1857.<sup>68</sup>

### **Eleanor Returns to Salt Lake**

Eleanor, without means to leave Van Buren, was compelled to stay until a way could be provided. The lawyers continued to call daily to question her on when she planned to leave, but she replied that she "knew nothing on the subject" and could not leave then because she lacked money and clothing.

This situation continued for several days, until the district attorney persuaded her that if she would go to see her parents in New Orleans just once more, "the means would flow freely." Eleanor promised to go if the way were provided for her escape if she would run into trouble in New Orleans. The lawyers still insisted that she go because her father had attempted to see her while she was on trial but couldn't because of sickness and forced to return home. Eleanor promised to go. On Monday morning, 18 May, Marshal Hays, Judge Ogden, and an unnamed lawyer gave Eleanor \$54.50 to pay her expenses to New Orleans. The Judge had collected this money from various people in Van Buren,<sup>69</sup> and he told her that he sympathized with Parley and had never seen a man quite like him, so "uncomplaining and free from every feeling of revenge." He told Eleanor that he had instructed Hector to leave Parley alone because he had failed to prove one thing against him:

I pleaded with him until two o'clock in the morning, I kept him in my office and talked with him, and told him I did not wish violence done to the prisoner, and I hope he would not incite men to take his life. And he [McLean] said he did not wish any man to touch him, that *that* was a privilege he wished to reserve to himself.

Judge Ogden continued, "I am doubly grieved when I reflect that he [Pratt] was a grand Master Mason." Eleanor replied:

And not only so, he was a mighty man of God and this day tens of thousands of men, women, and children (not to mention his numerous family) would fain bring their tribute of unsophisticated affection & gratitude. And I know not of a nation where the news of his cruel death will not produce a sensation of grief and irreparable loss.

The judge also spoke of the men who had assisted McLean and said that they could not escape punishment. The lawyer then spoke up and asked if the Mormons would not avenge Parley's death. Eleanor told them that they need have no fear on that score, for Hector and his friends would be judged by God and get their just reward. Eleanor then told them that she had composed a song on the death of Parley and wished to sing it to them, which she did.<sup>70</sup> After the song, she read them an article she had written for the *Arkansas Intelligencer* and asked them to see that it was printed. The judge said that he would see that every word of it was published.<sup>71</sup> He then handed her a five-dollar gold piece and went on board the boat to arrange passage for her down the Arkansas River to the Mississippi. Mr. Smith, the landlord of the hotel, took Eleanor to the boat (the *H.L. Tucker*), introduced her to its captain and made sure that she would be cared for.

They were five days reaching the Mississippi, landing at Napoleon to let off some passengers. Eleanor was afraid to leave the boat because most of the men on board that had gone ashore were gamblers. Feeling unsafe on the boat also, she asked the protection of the captain, who said he would protect her but made it clear that he did not approve of her. She stayed on board until the first boat going to New Orleans was available; she boarded the *Queen of the West*, and traveled directly to the Baton Rouge area. While on board, she became acquainted with a couple named Walker, who were spiritualists. She told them of her peculiar situation and requested that Mr. Walker take a letter to her father, and then write back to her at Bayou Sara when it was safe for her to proceed to New Orleans. Mr. Walker promised he would deliver the letter. She waited at Bayou Sara, a hundred miles from the city, for three days, hoping to hear from either Mr. Walker or her father. Finally she decided she had better go to New Orleans. She took a packet, stayed at a friend's house until the next morning, and then, taking a steam car to her father's neighborhood, stopped at a hotel. From there she sent her father a note informing him that she had been advised by the district attorney and Judge Ogden of the state of Arkansas to see him, and that he could reach her until 11:00 A.M. at the Carolton Hotel, and at 11 Graciar Street from 4:00 to 5:00 P.M. Her father replied by note that he would meet her that afternoon. When she inquired at 11 Graciar Street for J. S. McComb, she was told that he had been there, but had left word that he did not wish to see her. As she was leaving, she met her brother-in-law, Dr. Cambell, who was living with his family in her father's house. He assured her that he was her friend and had decided to see her when her father had refused. They talked freely, and when Dr. Cambell left, Eleanor felt assured that she had at least one friend in New Orleans. Dr. Cambell visited her a number of times, passing notes between her and her parents. The substance of these notes was that they wished her to give up her religion

and come back to them. She responded by testifying of the truths of Mormonism. She remained in New Orleans four days, affording her parents ample opportunity to see her; but they did not come, and she didn't go to them for fear of meeting McLean.<sup>72</sup> The day before she left, she learned that her oldest brother, David, had come from Memphis, empowered by McLean to act as his agent and have her arrested upon a charge of insanity, that he had sworn an oath before the court that she was a maniac, and that the papers were in the hands of the sheriff for her arrest.<sup>73</sup> She went to the private residence of Randall Hunt, a lawyer, and related her case to him, asking his counsel. He listened to her story and told her that McLean had no case against her, but that she had better leave, for McLean might put her in an asylum for a time to see if he could make her insane. She left New Orleans and went back to Bayou Sara, where she found several notes from her parents in one envelope. These stated that they never wanted to see her again, that when she had taken upon herself the name of Mrs. Pratt, she had cut off all their sympathy for her. With that disappointment, she left the New Orleans area, never to return.

She took the *James E. Woodruff* to St. Louis, arriving on 11 June. As she stepped off the boat, she noticed H. J. Bartlete, another brother-in-law, talking to a couple on board the ship. Eleanor walked by, paying no attention to them. She had anticipated that she would be followed, so she asked the clerk of the boat to take her to the corner. When the clerk left her at the street corner, she noticed that a man was following her. He followed her until she went into a boarding house, and then left. The next morning there were several policemen in front of the building, but none of them entered. When she left, however, they followed her from house to house until they lost sight of her. The police continued their search for several days, but could not find her. Eleanor said that she knew of their movements at all times, had looked in their faces several times, and had overheard several conversations about her and their plans to arrest her. But she was never detected. On 16 June she left St. Louis on the first steamboat to Florence, Nebraska, and then joined a wagon train going to Salt Lake.<sup>74</sup>

Arriving in Salt Lake, she stayed with the Pratt family and taught school. Brigham Young had called her to build a schoolhouse in which to teach the Pratt family. During the construction of the school, she wrote several letters to Brigham Young, and these are the principal source of the knowledge we have of her activities until her death in 1874.<sup>75</sup> The building was begun in the latter part of 1857 and completed in 1858. The other Pratt wives were slow enough in helping her financially that she had to borrow twenty dollars from Brigham Young to complete the structure.<sup>76</sup> Most of the letters to Brigham Young reflect her dismay at the lack of support she was receiving from the Pratt family both before and after the school was completed. She wrote on 23 October 1858:

Bro Young,

Must I teach the Pratt children without any compensation? Or should I share like any other members of the P. P. Pratt family?

Certainly they have not contributed a mite to the building of the house neither have they rendered a mite of gratitude for my services, during the past years in instructing their children.

I have waded through toil and perplexity unknown to any second person to obtain a living and building the house agreeable to your instructions—and now I much desire your counsel as to the terms upon which I am to occupy the house. The women are not agreed and Parley [Jr.] declines deciding the matter. I believe your word would make an end of all strife in the case.

Your Sister in the Everlasting Covenant,  
Eleanor Pratt<sup>77</sup>

Brigham wrote back on 26 October:

Dear Sister:

Your note in regard to teaching Brother Pratt's children is received. As regards the school house I suppose that it was principally built, by a freewill gift of the people, out of respect for Brother Parley and with a view of benefiting his Family.

So far as you identify your interest and means with the family and for their support, you should share equally with them according to your necessities.

Trusting that unity may pervade your councils and that the Lord will give you wisdom to see and do right

I Remain as Ever  
Your Brother in the  
Gospel of Christ.  
Brigham Young<sup>78</sup>

She did begin to share her means equally as Brigham directed, and the family allowed her to stay in the school, which became her home. Not only did she teach the Pratt children but also Brigham Young's children and several other children of members of the Church.<sup>79</sup> She was able to support herself on the tuition paid by her pupils, even though she received very little in tuition payments from the Pratt family, which created a hardship for her because even though she had enough to live on, that was about all she had, and repairs on the schoolhouse drew heavily on her funds. It appears that the Pratt family blamed her for Parley's death and withheld their complete support from her.

On 30 April 1860 she met with George A. Smith and turned her handwritten account of the murder of Parley P. Pratt over to the Church.<sup>80</sup> On 16 November 1860, Wilford Woodruff and Robert Campbell addressed the concluding session of a series of teachers' meetings held in Eleanor's schoolhouse. The major topic of the week-long meetings was education in Utah,

and how to best teach the various subjects in the schools. The teachers presented papers on several topics and discussions were held on all aspects of teaching. Eleanor was a dedicated teacher and participated fully in the meetings in an attempt to improve her teaching ability.<sup>81</sup> One example of her dedication may be cited. One of Parley's sons, Teancum, had lost part of his foot to frostbite and required special care to insure his education. Eleanor wrote to Brigham Young:

... I am now anxious to help in the education of Teancum. If my school is not decided the best place for him at present, I am ready to contribute the tuition of one pupil and also assist to clothe him, when I shall be free from debt contracted to improve the house last fall.<sup>82</sup>

In 1862 Eleanor added two rooms to the schoolhouse to rent and proposed to clear a way for a playground for the school. That way she could accommodate some "brother or sister with a small place of business, in a convenient location, at a reasonable rent," and at the same time create a small income for her to live on.<sup>83</sup> The next thing that we learn about her comes from a 13 October 1866 letter to Brigham Young. Writing very graphically, she relates what had happened to her since coming to Salt Lake after Parley's death:

When I came from your Office in 1857 and told the family what you had given me to do one said, "I'm glad its not me." Another "I wouldn't like to do it." And a third said "Eleanor are you going to do it?" Yes. "When do you intend to commence?" Tomorrow.

She then recounted to him how the construction of the school was accomplished by freewill offering and her expenditure and then said that the family had held a meeting and by unanimous vote refused her either the portion of a wife or  $\frac{3}{5}$  tuition pay for their children, when the schoolhouse was \$200 in debt. She then continued:

Nevertheless the Lord blessed me and I have toiled through the years and the sons and daughters of Parley have been faithfully taught in the house built for that purpose and now a number of them are qualified to maintain themselves by teaching.

She then told Brigham that an old rumor was abounding in the vicinity that she had refused to teach the Pratt children until they paid tuition and this had been used to prejudice the minds of several against her. She affirmed that she had not refused them but had sought all manner of means to improve the building for their best good. She asked President Young to put aside this controversy by a word from him to the guilty parties. She informed him that she planned to leave town that winter with Abinadi, one of Parley and Belinda's sons, to teach in the country. She said that plan met with Belinda's approval and wished to know if Brigham would

approve.<sup>84</sup> We can only suppose that she did go through with her plan for we can find nothing further on what she did do in the winter of 1866.

In 1870 she was still teaching school at the Pratt schoolhouse and had Keziah, one of Parley's wives, living with her.<sup>85</sup> It seems from the 1870 Census Record of Utah that her youngest son, Albert, came to live with her, for he taught school for a time with her in the house.<sup>86</sup> What happened to her other children is still a mystery. Annie died on 9 September 1872.<sup>87</sup> We know nothing of Fitzroy, and we know little about Eleanor's activities until her death at 8:00 P.M. on 24 October 1874.<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusion

These, then, are the details available concerning Eleanor Jane McComb McLean Pratt and Parley P. Pratt. Hector McLean apparently was a violent man, especially when he was under the influence of alcohol, which plagued him most of his life. When he had driven his wife from him and, in his mind at least, lost her to Mormonism, and was on the verge of losing his two youngest children he struck out at the man who stood for the Church and seemed to be the cause of his personal problems, convinced that by doing so he would rid the world of a social menace and a despicable man. He was totally unable to feel anything for his estranged wife's or Parley's religious beliefs.

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Steven Pratt is the Pratt family historian and a great-grandson of Parley P. Pratt.

1. Parley P. Pratt Family Record, a genealogical record kept by Parley Pratt. The original, in Parley's handwriting, is in the possession of Cathryn B. Pratt, Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter cited as Pratt Family Record.

2. New Orleans Probate Court. "In the matter of Eleanor Jane McComb wife of Hector H. McLean," June 1857, Case #12018. A petition to the court for the arrest of Eleanor on the charged of insanity, filed by David McComb acting for Hector McLean.

3. Eleanor Pratt, sixty-two-page handwritten account of the murder of Parley P. Pratt, p. 60. Eleanor Pratt Papers, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Hereafter cited as Eleanor Pratt, "Account."

4. *Millennial Star* 19:418. Her youngest child was born in New Orleans in 1847.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 419. Reva Stanley, in the *California Historical Quarterly* (March 1935), p. 175, suggests that Parley met Eleanor sometime during his visit to San Francisco from 11 July to 4 September 1851, prior to sailing for Valparaiso, Chile, on 5 September 1851. Parley was also in the San Francisco area from 21 May to 30 July 1852 (see *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 6th ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966], pp. 383–87, 404), and it is possible that Parley met her during that period. Both of these suggestions are countered by the following: "In July '54 br. Pratt arrived here [San Francisco] from G. S. L. City, on a mission to the country. Up to this time Mrs. McLean had never seen br. Pratt; and he did not know that such a woman existed, although she had been a member nine months, and had been trying for two years to obtain her



husband's consent to it" (*Western Standard*, 10 July 1857). This quotation is from an article signed by a member of the Church who was in the San Francisco Branch when Parley and Eleanor met, and also prior to their meeting when Eleanor had problems with Hector in her attempt to obtain consent to join the Church. Eleanor substantiates the above with the following: "In the first place, the article alluded to says that 'Mrs. McLean was induced to embrace the Mormon faith by Mr. Pratt' [*Arkansas Intelligencer*, 15 May 1857]. This is false, for Mr. McLean knows that the first 'Mormon' sermon I heard in California, himself and my brother J. J. McComb, were present, and they know that it was at least two years before Mr. Pratt made his appearance in San Francisco; and they know that from the time I heard the first sermon I never spoke except in defence of the 'Mormons' and their faith; and they know that I sought diligently for my husbands consent to be baptized into the Church of the Saints, and finally obtained it in writing, and was baptized before P. P. Pratt made his appearance" (*Millennial Star* 19:428).

6. *Western Standard*, 10 July 1857, and *Millennial Star* 19:419, 432.

7. *Millennial Star* 19:432.

8. Nathan Tanner Journal, 24–26 May 1854, Church Archives. Although Eleanor said that she had "embraced" the Mormon faith in November 1851, Tanner records that the baptism occurred on 24 May 1854: "Sister McClain was baptized & Sisters Evans & King, Sister Evans a little big also & I preached at Sister Evan's house. May 25–56, 1854. . . . Sister Eleanor Jane McClain gave me one shirt and 3 hankchiefs. Her husband dos not belong to the Church & has forbid deen for the last two years [her] beying baptized untill now he gave his concnet in writeing." The Endowment House Record, 1855–56, also lists her baptism as May 1854.

9. Parley P. Pratt Journal, 2 July 1854, Church Archives. Hereafter cited as Pratt Journal.

10. *Ibid.*, August 1854.

11. *Millennial Star* 19:430–31.

12. *Western Standard*, 10 July 1857.

13. Pratt Journal, 26–27 August 1854.

14. John R. Young, "The Last Days of Parley P. Pratt," Church Archives. A letter to William C. Black from John R. Young, March 1930. Also in the "Autobiography of John R. Young," Church Archives, and William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton, *Readings in L. D. S. Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953), pp. 400–1.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Millennial Star* 19:429.

17. New Orleans Passenger List, Genealogical Society Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

18. *Millennial Star* 19:429.

19. Letter from Eleanor Mclean to Parley P. Pratt, 5 February 1855, Parley P. Pratt Papers, Church Archives. Hereafter cited as Pratt Papers.

20. Letter from Parley P. Pratt to Amasa Lyman, 2 March 1855, Pratt Papers.

21. New Orleans Passenger List, 13 February 1855, Genealogical Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

22. *Ibid.*, 2 March 1855.

23. *Millennial Star* 19:429.

24. Letter from Parley P. Pratt to his wife Belinda, 16 May 1855, Pratt Papers.

25. *Millennial Star* 19:430. Eleanor seems to have been deeply fond of Parley for she says: "When he kept house with his wife, Elizabeth, in San Francisco, I often sought his society, and if any censure me, let them censure me for the strongest impulses of

nature, which have ever prompted me to seek light and truth, despite the difficult that might intervene between me and the object of my search.”

26. *Millennial Star* 19:432. There is no doubt that Eleanor was not divorced from Hector at the time she was sealed to Parley on 14 November 1855. On 1 June 1857 when Hector filed a charge of insanity against his wife in New Orleans, he stated that he wanted her “placed under charge of your petitioner [Hector] as her curator.” All through the petition Eleanor was named as his wife. To further substantiate the above, when Eleanor was asked by a reporter of the *New York World* in 1869 whether she had divorced Hector prior to marrying Parley, she answered: “No, the sectarian priests have no power from God to marry; and as a so-called marriage ceremony performed by them is no marriage at all, no divorce was needed. The priesthood with its powers and privileges, can be found no where upon the face of the earth but in Utah. . . . I regard the laws of Celestial Marriage, or, as the “Gentiles” term it, polygamy, as the keystone of our religion. That is wherein we differ from the sects of the world. They hope for salvation in a heaven where husbands and wives shall be utter strangers to each other; we expect to reach a heaven where we shall rear families, the same as we do here. We could not do this unless we had a revelation authorizing Celestial Marriage; and we could not be saved in the Celestial Kingdom without obeying this revelation. It is the great distinctive feature of our religion, and by it our religion stands or falls” (*New York World*, 23 November 1869, p.2).

Eleanor’s explanation of why she joined in a polygamous marriage without going through the formalities of a sectarian divorce from Hector helps the modern reader better understand both the teaching about the authority of the priesthood, and the tenor of the time. For further discussions on the subject, see the following: Wilford Woodruff Journal, 15 August 1847, Church Archives; Orson Pratt, Speech on Marriage, *Journal of Discourses*, 16:175; Parley P. Pratt, *Marriage and Morals in Utah* (Liverpool: Orson Pratt, 1856); and Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855), chapter 17.

27. Pratt Journal, 18 August 1855.

28. *Millennial Star* 19:429.

29. Pratt Journal, 14 November 1855.

30. Pratt Family Record. The Endowment House Record’s date of 10 November 1855 must be in error.

31. Pratt Journal, 24 January 1856: “Jan. 24 The day in slayriding and visiting Bro. Keslar with five of my wives viz: Belinda, Elizabeth, Mary, Hannahette and Eleanor.” Reva Stanley, in *Archer of Paradise* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Press, 1937), pp. 293–94, 296, didn’t rule out the possibility that Parley and Eleanor lived as a married couple, but favored the idea that the marriage was a Platonic gesture to provide Eleanor a husband in eternity. The evidence is not conclusive either way, except it was Parley’s habit to live with his wives.

32. *Millennial Star* 19:429.

33. Taylor to President Heber J. Grant, 14 March 1936, Japan Mission General Files.

34. John A. Peel, “Dying Remarks of Parley P. Pratt,” Church Archives. Peel was in Van Buren at the time of the murder, but his statement was not taken down by Frank Poneroy until 1895. See also *Daily Missouri Democrat*, 25 May 1857.

35. Eleanor Pratt, “Account,” p. 1.

36. Pratt *Autobiography*, pp. 435–42.

37. Letter from Parley P. Pratt to his family, 3 January 1857, Pratt Papers.

38. Letter from Parley P. Pratt to his wife Agatha, 25 February 1857, Steven Pratt Collection, typescript.

39. Samuel E. Allen, notarized statement sworn before Joseph W. Musser, 25 May 1857, Steven Pratt Collection, typescript.

40. Erastus Snow Journal, March 1857, Church Archives.

41. George Higginson, "History of the Cherokee Mission," pp. 8–10, Church Archives.

42. George Higginson, "Account of the Assassination of Parley P. Pratt," handwritten manuscript, Church Archives. All conversations between Pratt and Higginson are taken from this source.

43. *Daily Missouri Democrat*, 25 May 1857. Following is a copy of one of the letters Hector found that led to his locating Parley and Eleanor. The letter was addressed "Mrs. Lucy R. Parker, by P. Pratt Parker, from near Fort Gibson, Cherokee nation,—dated 11 April 1857, as printed in the 25 May 1857 *Daily Missouri Democrat*:

Dear Eleanor,

McLean is in St. Louis; he has offered a reward for your discovery, or your children or me. The Apostates have betrayed me and you. I had to get away on foot, and leave all to save myself. If you come to Fort Gibson, you can hire a messenger and send him to Riley Perryman's mill on the Arkansas River, twenty-five miles from Fort Gibson, and let him inquire for Washington N. Cook, mormon missionary, and when he has found him he will soon tell where elder-Pratt-Parker is. Do not let your children or any friend know that I am in this region, or anywhere else on the earth; except it is an elder from Texas who is in your confidence, and even him under strictest charge of *keep you it*.

"If you send a messenger to Perryman's mill for Elder Cook in order to find me, send a note addressed to Washington N. Cook. Everybody knows the place. He may live a few miles distant, but the folks at Riley Perryman's mill know where he is. And if they can be made sensible that it requires immediate action, some of them can go and find him. Your messenger can leave the note at Riley Perryman's or with Elder George Burgess there and return, but you must state in the note where you can be found, and Elder Cook will probably call on you before he can have time to see me, as I may be some days journey away, for I don't much expect you at Fort Gibson, as I don't believe you received my last letter mailed at St. Louis, March 4th, and addressed as usual to the usual place. Elder Cook knows all, and you can trust him with all necessary information. When I know that you and the children are safe and your circumstances, I will know what to do.

"Be sure not to let the Texas company know anything, for all the frontiers are watched, and some of them may betray you there. I must hide you or pass you some other way.

"Pray much. Be still and wise. I have made use of some of the late alterations in the alphabet. I am well.

And your own \_\_\_\_\_."

44. *Daily Alta California*, 9 July 1857.

45. Peel, "Dying Remarks."

46. Eleanor Pratt, "Account," p. 2.

47. *Daily Alta California*, 9 July 1857.

48. *Millennial Star* 19:545.

49. Eleanor Pratt, "Account," p. 5.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

51. *Daily Alta California*, 9 July 1857.

52. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 16 May 1857.

53. *Daily Alta California*, 9 July 1857.

54. Eleanor Pratt, "Account," pp. 11–15.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 21.  
 56. *Daily Alta California*, 9 July 1857.  
 57. Eleanor Pratt, "Account," pp. 22.  
 58. *Daily Alta California*, 9 July 1857.  
 59. Eleanor Pratt, "Account," pp. 23–24.  
 60. *Ibid.*  
 61. Peel, "Dying Remarks."  
 62. Eleanor Pratt, "Account", pp. 29–30.

63. Eleanor sent the following letter to Erastus Snow. The original is in the Erastus Snow Papers, Church Archives. This copy comes from the one Eleanor Pratt retained in her files, also in the Church Archives.

Dear Brother Snow,

I do not feel to have power to write you fully the painful news, you will find on the enclosed sheet. I therefore leave it open for your perusal.

Can you send for the body of Brother Parley. What shall I do? In case Mr. McLean either flees to evade arrest, or is taken into custody, my children will be without a protector!

I cannot wait to hear from you before I take some step, and I think I will go to N. O. and there I hope to hear from you. Address to E. J. McComb care of J. S. McComb N. O.

Yours respectfully,  
 Eleanor

P. S.

If Brother Higinson is permitted to live and journey to you he can tell you all things.

E. J.

The claim that the Church had deserted Parley Pratt by not taking his body to Utah for final burial needs to be placed in its proper perspective. There were a number of circumstances that arose to block any attempt to return Parley's body as he had requested. First, the difficulty of transporting a body over the miles of wagon trail led the Saints to bury their dead where they died and move on, which is what they invariably did. Second, the news that Johnston's Army had been sent to Utah precluded taking anything on the trains that did not absolutely have to be taken. Third, during the events of the Utah War there was no real opportunity to recover the body. Fourth, after the Mountain Meadow's Massacre, the people of Van Buren, Arkansas refused to allow Mormons into their region until this century. All these did not deter later attempts as the following shows:

In 1902 Samuel Russell, Parley's grandson, corresponded with John Neal, former mayor of Van Buren, and was informed that a Walter Fine knew the location of Parley's grave. Russell wrote to the First Presidency asking what he should do. They recommended that he contact President J. G. Duffin of the Southwestern States Mission and request him to send some Elders to locate the grave "with the view of bringing his remains to this city [Salt Lake] for interment" (Letter from J. F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund to Samuel Russell, 19 May 1902, Church Archives). J. G. Duffin visited Van Buren on 3 September 1902 and contacted John Neal, former mayor, John Orme, Justice of the Peace at the time of Parley's murder, and John Steward, the man who drove the wagon that transported Parley's body to the gravesite. Brother Duffin did not visit the grave, but got a promise from John Steward and John Neal that they would assist in the removal of the body if the exact location of the burial place could be determined. They informed Duffin that the Fine brothers could point out the exact location. He was not able to visit them. (James G. Duffin to Anthon H. Lund, 19 December 1902, and Journal History of the Church, 13 May 1857)

Further investigation was done in 1912 by Samuel Russell. He visited Van Buren and talked with Thomas Fine, who pointed out what he thought was the location of the grave. After Elder Russell had returned to Salt Lake, he sent a letter to his friend, Calvin Little, of Alma, Arkansas, on 17 November 1912, and asked him to investigate further. Little sent Russell a memorandum giving the location of the graveyard and the approximate location of the grave, which was in the northeast part of the graveyard near a large oak stump—he could not determine the exact location. (Samuel Russell Papers, Church Archives. The Little Memorandum is a letter from A.B. Howell to Calvin Little, dated 11 August 1912. Little must have gotten the memorandum after Russell left, and sent it to him later in the November letter.) See footnote 63B.

64. Peel, “Dying Remarks.”

65. Eleanor Pratt, “Account,” p. 25, for this and preceding quotation.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–31.

67. Journal History of the Church, 13 May 1857.

68. George Higginson, “History of the Cherokee Mission,” pp. 9–10.

69. List of the contributions by the people of Van Buren to Judge Ogden to pay Eleanor’s expenses to New Orleans, Eleanor Pratt Papers, Church Archives.

70. Eleanor Pratt, “Account,” pp. 40–42, for this and two preceding quotations.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43. For a copy of the article, see *Arkansas Intelligencer*, 22 May 1857 and *Millennial Star* 19:428–32.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 44–49.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 49. See also Hector’s petition to the probate court on 1 June 1857. See footnote 2.

74. Eleanor Pratt, letter in “Account,” pp. 49–59.

75. Letters from 1858–1866 from Eleanor Pratt to Brigham Young, Brigham Young Correspondence, Church Archives. Stanley Hirshson in *Lion of the Lord: A Biography of Brigham Young* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 217, quotes a Captain Ginn, who visited Utah, that Eleanor was a concubine of Brigham Young. I could find nothing to substantiate this claim, and in fact, her letters to Brigham suggest that she was not married to him. The Endowment House Record from 1858–1874 shows no sealing taking place between Brigham and Eleanor. Eleanor was a frequent visitor to the Young house, because she taught Brigham’s children.

76. Letters from Eleanor Pratt to Brigham Young, 18 August 1858 and 5 November 1858.

77. Letter from Eleanor Pratt to Brigham Young, 23 October 1858.

78. Letter from Brigham Young to Eleanor Pratt, 26 October 1858, Brigham Young Letter Book, Church Archives.

79. Letters from Eleanor Pratt to Brigham Young, 5 November 1858 and 13 October 1866.

80. Journal History of the Church, 13 April 1860.

81. *Ibid.*, 16 November 1860.

82. Letter from Eleanor Pratt to Brigham Young, 2 June 1866. Young Pratt had lost part of his left foot frostbite in 1865. History of Teancum Pratt. Autobiography,” p. 44. Handwritten original in the possession of Mrs. J. A. Barker, Sandy, Utah.

83. *Ibid.*, 18 August 1862.

84. *Ibid.*, 13 October 1866, for this and two preceding quotations.

85. U. S. Census Record of Utah, 1870.

86. *Ibid.*

87. Pratt Family Record.

88. Wilford Woodruff Journal, 24–25 October 1874, Church Archives.