

The Historians Corner

Edited by James B. Allen

The first item in this issue of "The Historians Corner" provides some fascinating insight not only into the relationship between Utah and the nation in 1850 but also into the tensions involved in certain national debates, as viewed by a Mormon in Congress. In this interesting letter, John M. Bernhisel gave some of his observations on the debates leading to the famous Compromise of 1850. The outcome of these debates was all-important to the Mormons, for it would determine their political relationship to the United States. Utah was part of the territory acquired in the war with Mexico, and one of the issues in the debates of 1850 was what to do, politically, with that territory. The Mormons were attempting to achieve statehood as the State of Deseret, and John M. Bernhisel was their representative in Congress working toward this goal. In the end, Congress admitted California as a free state, while the rest of the Mexican cession was organized as New Mexico and Utah territories. The Mormons thus lost their bid for self-government and did not achieve statehood for Utah until 1896. Bernhisel's 1850 letter has been edited by James F. Cartwright, assistant archivist, Weber State College.

The second document provides an interesting and important sequel to the story of this early quest for statehood. Among other things, it took Wilford Woodruff's "Manifesto" of 1890, announcing the Church's abandonment of the practice of polygamy, to pave the way for the admission of Utah to the Union in 1896. In a personal reminiscence, Brigham H. Roberts expresses his immediate reaction to that momentous announcement, as well as the reaction of a few other General Authorities. The way his initial disappointment is finally turned to full acceptance and support of the "Manifesto" is a very significant commentary on the problems and feelings of his day.

The B. H. Roberts letter has been edited by Ronald W. Walker, senior research historian with the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute of Church History. It is particularly appropriate that Dr. Walker's piece be included in this issue of *BYU Studies* for, beginning with the next issue, Dr. Walker will become the editor of "The Historians Corner."

After a decade of working with "The Historians Corner," I wish to express great appreciation to the editors of *BYU Studies* and the officers of the Mormon History Association for the fine support they have given me. I am also most grateful to the many people who have submitted items for "The Historians Corner" and wish to express my deep appreciation for the efforts of everyone who has been so helpful. I am confident that under the fine direction of Ronald Walker "The Historians Corner" will become even better.

—James B. Allen

JOHN M. BERNHISEL LETTER TO BRIGHAM YOUNG

James F. Cartwright

As a student of Dr. Everett L. Cooley in archives and manuscripts at the University of Utah, I received the assignment of working with a letter from John M. Bernhisel¹ to Brigham Young. Dr. Bernhisel wrote this letter, now a part of the Phillip Blair Collection in the Special Collections of the Marriott Library at the University of Utah, on 23 April 1850 while serving as an appointed delegate to the U.S. Congress. The letter contains an informative account of the tensions dividing the nation over the admission of California, the organization of the remainder of the Mexican Cession territory, and, of course, the conflict concerning the extension of slavery into the western territories. John Bernhisel records a dramatic outburst of these tensions

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I appreciate Dr. Cooley's encouragement and permission to publish this letter and likewise appreciate the assistance Mrs. Della Dye, the manuscripts librarian at the Marriott Library, has given me.

¹John M. Bernhisel was born 23 June 1799 near Loysville, Cumberland Co., Pennsylvania. Probably in 1818, he left the family farm and traveled to Philadelphia to study at the University of Pennsylvania medical school. He completed the course for a certificate in 1820 and then traveled extensively, practicing for several months in various towns of the American West of that time: Trenton, Ohio; Herculaneum, Missouri; Nashville, Tennessee; Lexington, Kentucky; and Sparta, Alabama. In 1825, he reentered the University of Pennsylvania medical school, defending his thesis in March 1827. He then moved to New York City where he heard about Mormonism and joined the LDS church. After serving as the presiding authority in New York City for a few years, he moved to Nauvoo in 1843. Following the death of the Prophet Joseph, Emma Smith allowed him to make a copy of Joseph's manuscript corrections of the Bible. Early in 1849, John Bernhisel was selected by a convention meeting in Salt Lake City to carry a petition to the U.S. Congress for either statehood or territorial status. On his way to Washington, D.C., Dr. Bernhisel met Thomas L. Kane in Philadelphia, and throughout his career in Washington sought advice from Colonel Kane in representing the Mormons in Washington. Following the organization of Utah Territory, Dr. Bernhisel represented Utah in Washington, D.C., until 1863 after which he returned to Utah to practice medicine. (James Keith Melville, *Conflict and Compromise: The Mormons in Mid-Nineteenth Century American Politics* [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974], pp. 57-60, 65-70, 88; and Gwyn William Barrett, "John M. Bernhisel, Mormon Elder in Congress" [Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1968], pp. 1-15.)