

Guest Editor's Prologue

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The assassination of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum in June 1844 marked the beginning of an aggressive attempt by a coterie of Illinois vigilantes to rid the state of the Latter-day Saints. In January 1845 the Illinois legislature repealed the charter which had given self-rule to the Mormon headquarters city of Nauvoo. During the following months, Latter-day Saint leaders were harassed with legal writs. In September, hostile mobs began a systematic campaign of burning the barns and crops of LDS residents. By the end of the month, it was clear to Brigham Young and his followers that they would have to leave Nauvoo.

Before his death, Joseph Smith had proposed the establishment of Latter-day Saint settlements in Wisconsin, Texas, Oregon, and California; and Church leaders now gave these locations active consideration. Leaders carefully studied the published reports of western travelers and interviewed government officials, trappers, and explorers. A consensus was reached that the main body of the Church would move to the Great Basin and that advance parties were to lead the way there in 1846. Saints in the Northeast would charter a ship and go to Yerba Buena (San Francisco). Saints in the Southeast would move from northeast Mississippi to Independence, Missouri, and then overland to the headquarters location in a valley adjacent to the Great Salt Lake or one of its tributaries. Illinois Saints would cross Iowa toward the Missouri River; the precise plan of moving them west would be announced after their arrival there.

The articles in this special issue present in some detail this movement west. "The Iowa Journal of Lorenzo Snow," edited by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and never before published, describes the difficulties encountered by a leading personality among the Saints who crossed Iowa. "Cultural Conflict: Mormons and Indians in Nebraska," by Lawrence G. Coates, analyzes the relationship of the Saints

and their leaders with Native Americans in the Missouri Valley. Richard E. Bennett, who has spent the past few years studying the Mormon experience in Winter Quarters, discusses the formulation of the final plan to move west. Stanley B. Kimball puts in perspective the Mormon Trail network in Nebraska, 1846–48, while Stephen F. Pratt furnishes insights into the larger company which followed the 1847 pioneer company of Brigham Young. A final view of the important role of Nebraska in the outfitting of subsequent companies which migrated west is given in William G. Hartley's article "The Great Florence Fitout of 1861."

Each of the articles in this issue has involved extensive research in primary documents never before examined, or, as in the case of Stanley Kimball, new investigation of the trail. Together, these articles furnish a fresh perspective on the Latter-day Saint journey to, sojourn in, and movement from the Missouri River Valley.