

## LETTERS BY FORTY-NINERS

WRITTEN FROM GREAT SALT LAKE CITY IN 1849

*Edited by*

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IN this centennial year of the California gold rush, it is interesting to search out some of the letters written a century ago by overland immigrants who traveled the Salt Lake route. Surprisingly little attention has been paid to such letters; yet they provide not only an insight into the experiences of a significant proportion of the California immigration but also the earliest reports by outside observers on the new Mormon colony in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake—a colony which was just beginning to take shape as a community when the tidal inundation by the Forty-niners began.

The first travelers to reach Great Salt Lake City in the summer of 1849 arrived on June 16, a pack mule company said to have been commanded by Captain G. W. Paul, though the earliest allusion to overland arrivals that has so far come to light in a Mormon diary is Eliza R. Snow's notation on June 19, "People with pack animals arrive from the States going to California. They expect wagons in 2 or 3 days." By June 23 they were arriving in great numbers, pack parties and wagon companies alike, and Hosea Stout, who the following morning went around to visit their encampment, found them "trading off their waggons, Harness &c surplus clothings &c cheaper than State prices taking in exchange Horses mules saddles pack saddles &c at very high prices."

Two weeks later, writing to his brother Orson, Parley P. Pratt commented, "The present travel through this place, or near it, will, it is thought, amount to some thirty or forty thousand persons." Almon W. Babbitt, who had gone out to the Valley with the Forty-niners, and who returned east with the mail on July 27, guessed that from 12,000 to 15,000 California immigrants had passed through the Valley. No reliable figures exist, but from 5,000 to 8,000 would approximate the total for the year, the whole immigration over South Pass being estimated by Hubert H. Bancroft at about 25,000.

As the summer waned, the immigration slacked off, but isolated parties arrived throughout the fall. The last company to get in, Critcher's party, which had left the States September 24, reached the haven of the Mormon city by the narrowest margin, having to abandon their wagons in Echo Canyon and their horses below Big Mountain, the snow being six feet deep on the level. When the nineteen exhausted men arrived on December 1, they had been virtually without food for four days. They had taken grave risks in making the journey so late in the season, and their arrival gave a proper dramatic flourish to the final curtain for the overland immigration of 1849.

The letters here printed are only the smallest sampling of those that could be brought to light by a thorough search of the newspaper files of 1849-50. Yet

as a sampling it seems likely that they fairly represent the whole. Of eight letters reproduced, seven express an entirely favorable view of the Saints and their young community, while one is wholly unfavorable. Should one examine the daily journals of immigrants who traveled by way of Great Salt Lake City, one would find about the same proportion of favorable and unfavorable comment, and it would be evident that those who took exception to the Mormons usually were antagonistic to the leaders rather than to the Saints themselves. Although in some respects 1849 saw more cordial relations between the Saints and the overland immigrants than prevailed in any subsequent year, until the end of the frontier era it was always true that the body of the Saints fared better than their ruling authorities in the estimation of the overland travelers.

All but one of these letters were printed originally in contemporary newspapers, and this gives them an interest and value beyond their significance as a picture of social and economic conditions in Great Salt Lake City in 1849; being published, they played their part in the struggle of the Mormons to vindicate themselves before American public opinion, a propaganda struggle in which they had had to engage with the most deadly seriousness for more than fifteen years. There can be no doubt that the favorable reports flooding back into hometown newspapers concerning the Mormons in their new mountain home had a constructive effect upon Congress and the President in the endeavor upon which the Mormons were now embarking to obtain a government of their own. Although their cherished State of Deseret was not sanctioned by Congress, the Territory of Utah being set up in its stead, Utah was favored as few territories have been in the number of its own citizens who were named to be its officers. The letters of Dr. John M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, written from Washington during this critical period, fully emphasize the value to his labors of the cordial letters turning up everywhere in the newspapers.

It has often been said that the Saints were guilty of gouging the needy immigrants who flooded in upon them seeking supplies. But it is evident from these letters that the laws of supply and demand were in usual operation through the summer of 1849. None of the present letters criticizes the Mormons on this score.

I

[Great Salt Lake City]

8th July [1849]<sup>2</sup>

We are now encamped in the Mormon City, fourteen hundred miles from the States.<sup>2</sup> The city is laid off in very handsome style, and is about five miles

1. Reprinted from the Palmyra *Missouri Whig*, October 4, 1849. The *Whig* prefaces the letter as follows: "A friend has permitted us to make some extracts from a letter written at the Mormon city, by Mr. JOHN B. HAZLIP, a citizen of our town, who left for California last spring. The writer had been sick with the mountain fever, but had recovered. Mr. THOS. HARD and Mr. JOSEPH WINLOCK, of the same company, were slightly unwell when the letter was written. The letter is dated 8th July . . ."
2. As measured by the Mormon roadometer in 1847, it was 1,031 miles from Great Salt Lake City to Winter Quarters, on the Missouri River. It may have been about 200 miles farther by the usual trail south of the Platte to Independence.



square.—The inhabitants number five thousand at this time, and are increasing in number every day. They have erected a fort, and are about commencing some five [fine?] buildings. The city is watered by two or three fine streams. They have to water their wheat and corn, and vegetables. They have now fifty thousand acres in wheat. Flour is scarce here; I do not know a single family in the city that has a supply. Every family was desirous to purchase from us, and offer from ten to fifteen cents per pound.—They do not want money here; they want sugar, coffee, tea and flour. I had my mules shod in the city, and they charged me four dollars per mule. Coffee is selling at 50 cents per pound, and rice at 25 cents. If you can accomplish the plan of a Rail Road from the States to the Salt Lake City, this will be one of the greatest places of trade in the known world. They have one of the finest warm springs for bathing, and the most healthy that is known. There is a boiling spring and a tar spring, and a cold spring also; and salt water in abundance.<sup>3</sup> They have the finest salt here you ever saw, and any amount of saleratus; they gather it up in a pure state, and it makes splendid bread. The city of the Lake has appropriated \$5,000 for the purpose of making a good road from the city to the North Fork of the Platte river, which will be the means of turning a great number of the emigrants in this direction.<sup>4</sup> I find the Mormons very accommodating, and willing to extend to the emigrants all the hospitality they possibly can. We leave Sunday Morning for the gold diggings, with a fine prospect before us. One man can raise from fifty to a hundred dollars per day. They are packing dirt from fifteen to twenty miles on mules, from what they call dry diggings, to water. Tell the boys to come on—this is the only chance they will ever have to get rich. The gold dust is inexhaustable, if the representations here are correct. If we keep our health, we shall be home in eighteen months. I would advise all persons who intend to emigrate to California this summer or next, to start with a light carriage and eight stout mules, from six to ten years old, and enough provisions to last four men through. Work four mules one day, and four the next, so as to rest them; and by travelling in that way, they can make forty miles per day, and not injure their mules. Start with a very light load; you can make the trip in 55 days.

After coming through the South Pass, the ridge that divides the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific, we had to ferry two streams, South Fork of Platte River,<sup>5</sup>

3. The warm spring is the present municipally operated Wasatch Springs, and the boiling spring the present Beck's Hot Springs a short distance northwest. The tar spring was located not in the vicinity of Great Salt Lake City but in present Wyoming, a little southeast of the crossing of Bear River.

4. This appears to be a mistaken reference to the toll road Parley P. Pratt was building, referred to in Letter VIII, and which was finally opened about July 1, 1850. It separated from the old road at the mouth of Echo Canyon, ascended the Weber River to present Rockport, crossed the divide, and then by the route of present State Highway 530 and U. S. 40 climbed to the head of Parleys Canyon and descended this canyon to Great Salt Lake City.

5. Normally the South Fork of the Platte was forded without any difficulty. The North Fork generally had to be ferried; in fact, the Mormons maintained a ferry there for some years after 1847; and the writer may have had the North Fork in mind.

and Green River. A company built a boat on the Platte, and about the time they crossed, Mr. Armstrong, of Monroe, and another company, offered Capt. Finley, the owner of the boat, \$250 for the boat. Capt. Finley told them that himself and company had crossed, and all others might go to hell; and then cut the boat in pieces before their eyes. This Captain Finley is from Illinois, and the wretch should be published in every newspaper in the U. States. A company from Pennsylvania, the Monroe company, and our company, built a boat and after our companies crossed we handed it over to the next train that arrived. This Capt. Finley is well known on the road from the Platte to California, and will be pointed out to every company and hissed at.

[JOHN B. HAZLIP.]

## II

City of the Great Salt Lake,  
July 8th, 1849.<sup>6</sup>

I arrived here several days since, very sick with the mountain fever. I am now convalescent<sup>7</sup> and will leave to-morrow for the Sacramento valley. My mules are in fine condition, and I think will go through in thirty days from this place. Mr. [Heber C.] Kimbal[1], one of the leading members of the Mormon church, to whom I had a letter of introduction, received and treated me with great kindness.

There is a great deal of sickness among the emigrants—some deaths—and for the last five hundred miles the road has been literally strewn with dead animals. The rush has been so great, that many have hurried on without the proper regard for their stock, and the consequence is they will have to stop and resuscitate them. I have passed more than three hundred teams. I left Vancourt's train at the upper crossing of the [North] Platte, all well. Davis's train at Green river crossing, some of whom had been sick, but were well when I saw them. G. W. Coon's train at Green river crossing. These trains hail from St. Louis. Coons had so severe an attack of bilious fever at Pacific creek, that I remained with him three days, but when I left him at Green river he had entirely recovered, and is coming on by the Salt Lake route. John Christy took Sublett[e]'s Cut-off.<sup>8</sup> Capt. Lafferty left here ten days since. The Telegraph company passed here on Monday [July 2] last, all well. I have not heard of our friends Radford, Bay, Kennerly, &c., since I left them at [the crossing of the] Kansas.

6. Reprinted from the St. Louis *Missouri Republican*, September 27, 1849, which prefaces the letter by saying, "To the kindness of a friend we are indebted for the following extract from a private letter, written by a well known young emigrant of this city."

7. He may have been doctored by the Thomsonian practitioner, Priddy Meeks, who gives an engaging account of his ministrations to immigrants this year in his journal, published in *Utah Historical Quarterly*, (1942), X, 183-185.

8. Sublette's Cutoff was so named this year by Joseph E. Ware, in an *Emigrants' Guide* very popular among the Forty-niners, the name evidently given in honor of Solomon Sublette, who read Ware's book before publication. The cutoff previously had been named for Caleb Greenwood, who guided the California-bound Stevens-Townsend-Murphy party across it in 1844. It separated from what became known as the Salt Lake road west of South Pass, near the crossing of the Little Sandy, and struck across country to reach the Bear River Valley near present Cokeville, Wyoming.



osity. It is a gorge where the Sweet Water passes through. It is 60 to 80 rods through, 60 to 100 feet wide, and from 400 to 600 feet high. The water runs through pretty rapidly and makes a great noise. Above this a few miles is what is called the Ice Swamp. It is a kind of ravine, extending from the river in a south-westerly direction to the mountains; the bottom is soft, and upon digging through the turf, which is a kind of peat, about a foot and a half, you come to as pure and perfect ice as you ever saw, varying from two inches to six in thickness. The soil is a thick, soft mud beneath. It was a warm day when we were there, and I saw a great many sick emigrants on the road afterwards, from the effects of eating the ice. I did not eat much, as I thought it had a sort of saline or alkaline taste, and inasmuch as I had suffered two days of pretty severe sickness some way back from the effects of alkaline water.<sup>20</sup> The Sweet Water runs from the South Pass in nearly an easterly course. We followed up the valley to within 10 or 12 miles of the Pass. After we left the Sweet Water, we ascended some pretty high hills, and from the rarity and coldness of the atmosphere, we realized that we were at a great elevation [7,550 feet]. The country from here to the Pass is sandy and gravelly, covered with good grass, and has nothing the appearance of a mountainous country. The hills on either side are gently sloping, and not high. We did not realize that we had passed the ridge which separates the waters of the Atlantic from those of the Pacific, until we came to what is called Pacific Spring, and a stream, about three miles beyond, where the waters run west.

From the Pass to Fort Binjet [Bridger] 170 miles, our course lay about southwest, and our route seemed to be through a great basin formed by the Rocky Mountains on the east, Wind River Mountains on the north, the Utah [Uinta] Mountains on the south, and the ridge which divides the waters of the Great Salt Lake from those of the Colorado. This basin is traversed by the Colorado [Green] and its numerous branches, and is interspersed with hills, which have a round water-washed base, and perfectly level on top, like a truncated cone. These hills are of uniform height, but there [are] three or four classes of them in height. Ft. Busser [Bridger] is situated upon Harney's [Hams?] or Black's fork, a branch of the Colorado, upon a little island in that creek. The valley around this Fort is quite low and wet. There is some cotton wood timber around the Fort, and an abundance of Pine 20 or 30 miles south, toward the Utah Mountains. From here to that place is about 170 miles, and is over the most mountainous country of our whole journey. We ascended the ridge which separates the waters of the Salt Lake from Ft. Busser [Bridger], and from here we passed through mountain gorges or Canons as they are here called, until we came to the valley of this Lake, with the exception of passing over two or three mountain ridges which were higher over than the South Pass. There was generally a stream

20. These remarks about the Ice Swamp constituted a great novelty for the newspapers of 1849, and were widely reprinted. The "ice swamp" soon disappeared after the livestock of the Forty-niners stripped away the protecting cover of grass.

of water running through these canons, and the bottom of them being only from two to six rods wide, the roads were very crooked and bad. The mountains through here are rocky, composed of agglomerated sand and gravel, pebbles and stones of a red[d]ish color. In many places these rocky cliffs were from three to six thousand feet above us. We descended from one of these canyons directly into the valley of the Salt Lake, about three miles south east of the city. There is a kind of table land or bank about three miles in width, sloping from the base of the mountains to the valley. The city is situated immediately under this bank, and extends three miles west towards the Utah outlet [Jordan River], and is three miles north and south. The city is entirely fenced around, and is laid out in ten acre blocks, which are subdivided into lots of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  [ $1\frac{1}{4}$ ] acres each. These lots are not all built upon, but the land is entirely cultivated. There are probably 500 houses, one story high, and small, and either built of logs or *adobes*. In looking over it from the mountains, it resembles a settlement of Irishmen around some public works—however, every one is neat, comfortable, and in perfect order. The citizens are orderly, well disposed, civil and intelligent. The streets are good, wide, and have generally a stream of water running down each side, coming from their irrigating works.

The whole of the improved land is irrigated by the water coming from these caverns [canyons] in the mountains. There is, I presume, 20 miles of ditch around and in the city for this purpose. The water is very pure, and conducted to every acre of ground in the city. They are just cutting wheat; it is a tolerable crop, pretty short straw but well filled. There are farms some distance from here that are said to raise from 30 to 36 bushels to the acre. Vegetation of all kinds is very thrifty and luxuriant, but still they cannot raise anything here without irrigation.

They have had no rain here since spring, and it is intolerably hot. All vegetation that is not irrigated is parched and dried up, except upon the low and valley land, which produces very good and abundant grass. The valley from the south end of the lake is from 20 to 30 miles in width, and extends south from 60 to 80 miles, at which distance the range of vision is bounded by mountains. The whole valley and lake is bounded by lofty mountains, which are now covered with snow. We have been in sight of snow for more than 500 miles. The Salt Lake is 22 miles from here, in a north westerly direction, and the water is scarcely discernable, although we can see a high rocky island [Antelope Island] in it. There is a remarkable spring about one mile north of the city, which is sulphurous, and at least 110 degrees of temperature, and is the most luxurious bathing in a cold time I ever saw. I cannot indulge more in description; I would like to give you a full narration of our journey thus far, as it is full of interest; but time will not allow. With the exception of the alkaline sickness and about two days of mountain fever, my health has been perfect. This mountain fever has been very prevalent among the emigrants since we struck the green or Colorado river.

There are probably 500 teams on this route, and not less than 20,000 persons. We are quite in advance of the main part of the emigrants—not over 1,500 [a] head



of us. We hear that there is great distress behind on account of lack of food, and sickness among the emigrants. The emigrants and cattle are dying by thousands; the cholera is in the rear of the train. It followed us about 300 miles, since which time we have not seen a case. Game has been abundant, principally elk, buffalo and antelope. I can tell you some long and interesting yarns about buffalo and antelope hunting, and will some time when we are in the back room of a saloon in Rochester—some time when I have more leisure than at present. We hear very favorable and flattering accounts from the gold regions by the Mormons.

Yours &c., J[AMES]. E. S[QUIRE].

V

[Great Salt Lake City  
July, 1849]<sup>21</sup>

The settlement at the point from which I am now writing was commenced in the month of July, 1847, the second anniversary of which will be celebrated by them on the 24th of the present month. The valley in which the city is located is on the east side of the Lake, and is about twenty-five miles wide, and completely shut in by high mountains, the Utah and Bear River ranges being the principal.<sup>22</sup> From the spot where I am now writing I can see the tops of them reaching almost to the clouds, covered with perpetual snow. The city contains about 9,000 inhabitants, and is laid out in squares, the streets running at right angles with each other. These squares are fenced in by one fence running around the whole; the squares are divided into wards, and the wards into blocks, and the blocks into lots—each lot contains one acre and one-fourth of land.

The possession of these was given by drawing lots, in this way: tickets were got up with numbers on them, and put into a hat together, and then drawn out, each man taking the lot bearing the number of his ticket. The houses are built of *adobes*, or sun-burnt brick; they are small, but present a neat and cleanly appearance. The entrance to the valley is over a very rough and mountainous gorge in the mountains, through which the road runs, and at the foot of which the city is situated. The Lake, which is a great curiosity, is 21 miles from the city; the water is a great deal saltier than sea-water, and is so buoyant that a man can float on it without any difficulty whatever. Salt is so plentiful about the shore that it is shoveled up by wagon loads like sand, and drawn to the city. It is coarse and clear, and is very clean. Fine salt is obtained by boiling the water, which yields

21. Reprinted from the Kanessville, Iowa, *Frontier Guardian*, February 20, 1850. This letter had evidently been going the rounds of the press; the prefatory remarks run as follows: "In the *Auburn* [N. Y.?] *Daily Advertiser* of Wednesday we find a letter from an adventurer who had reached the Mormon City of the Salt Lake on his way to California, and writes as follows of that newly-found community."

22. The term "Bear River Mountains" was used in 1849 as applying to the whole mountain mass between the upper and the lower Bear River valleys, the southern reaches of which are now designated as the Wasatch Mountains. "Utah Mountains," although applied also to the Uintas, seems to have been used by Forty-niners to designate the range called by the Mormons the West Mountains, but known today by their Indian name, the Oquirrh Mountains.

one third [one-fourth] fine salt. There are boiling springs a few miles from here; also, sulphur and alkali springs, from which good saleratus is obtained.

The country is settled by farmers for forty miles north and south.<sup>23</sup> They are now engaged in harvesting their wheat, which is yielding an abundant crop. They are very strict in enforcing their penalties—punishing each crime according to its enormity, making the thief return four-fold, and pay so much into the public treasury by working on the roads. The Government is composed of a High Council, the President taking the head; they enact laws, try offences, and make suggestions for the good of the community, and all such laws and suggestions are declared from the pulpit every Sunday. Their money consists of treasury notes, which are issued for coin and gold-dust placed on deposit. Arrangements are being made for coining this dust, and establishing a currency of their own.<sup>24</sup> Large quantities of gold dust has been brought into the Settlement by discharged soldiers [members of the Mormon Battalion], and those who have gone from there for the purpose of digging, so that all the reports we heard there are confirmed here by those who have been and returned loaded with gold.

The public improvements are carried on by a fund which is raised by everyone giving one-tenth of his yearly earnings for that purpose. They are building a council house of stone—a large, substantial edifice. In that way they also intend to build a temple soon. They are expending large sums on the roads over the mountain, and are projecting a new road across the desert to the south of the lake to California.<sup>25</sup> They are an industrious, hospitable people, and have the means within themselves to become rich and powerful.

VI

Great Salt Lake City  
Aug. 7, 1849<sup>26</sup>

Dear Brother.—Since writing to you last from fort Bridger at which place I separated from Doct. Brown, who took the rout to Fort Hall, I with two other waggons came in to this Salt Lake City. We had good roads for a few days after we left Fort Bridger, plenty of grass & water. On the fourth day we traveled through the Snake & Eutaws Indians, their numerous wigwams in the vallie and their countless horses and poneys alongside of the mountains was an interesting sight. Yet not one could be bought or traded of them. The two last days travel before we got here, we had the worst roads we passed over on the whole trip. We traveled up a narrow kenyon crossing a rough dry [?] creek every half hour

23. During the spring of 1849 the first colonizing mission had gone south 45 miles to Fort Utah, the future Provo. Brownsville, as Ogden for the moment was being called, some 35 miles north, was occupied by Mormon colonists in January, 1848.

24. The Saints were about to coin their own gold pieces; and they had had a gold-backed currency since the preceding January.

25. This letter is the only indication that has so far come to light that the Mormons ever projected a road south of Great Salt Lake as an improvement on the Hastings Cutoff.

26. Previously unpublished, this letter from Beeson Townsend to his brother, Benjamin Franklin Townsend, St. Louis, Missouri, is printed by courtesy of the California State Library and the permission of Mrs. Eugene Howard, Howardstown, Kentucky, grand-niece of the writer.



[East Canyon] until we got to the summit [Big Mountain], much higher than the pass in the rocky mountains. This was about noon on the first instant. We then had to descend a high and steep mountain; this we done by taking off all the oxen but the yoke at the tounge and locking all the wheels. We got down safe into a valley very narrow, hemmed in on both sides by high and almost perpendicular mountains [Mountain Dell Canyon]. The bottom below is covered with a thicket of young willow bushes, through which the road as narrow [as] a waggon runs, a pure cold stream of water running down which in a distance of five miles we crossed twelve times, and all bad crossing places. On the morning of the 2d we crossed over another hard hill [Little Mountain] and down into another narrow kenyon [Emigration Canyon], down which we crossed another little stream 13 times in the distance of 5 miles. Here these crossing places were still worse. At last within 6 miles of the city I broke the hind axeltree of my large waggon. This happened about noon. I left it with the oxen behind and followed the other waggons with my carriage, in which Mr. Sands was sick, into the city, proceeding through. We campt on the other side about 4 oclock P. M. on the 2d instant. I engaged a team to go out next morning to bring in a load, and returned myself the same evening to the breakdown, remaining till next morning when we brought in all the loading and waggon which I traded off for a lighter one and gave some to boot. I have here sold off some articles at a loss. The pump & hose I sold for fifteen dollars. Copper kettle for three dollars. All such articules, especial those of hardward & cuttelry do not sell for one half St. Louis price here, there being so much brought in here by Emigrants and disposed of to lighten up. Sugar & Coffee is more in demand and Commands 25 cents per pound, also womens dress goods such as Calicoes, shoes &c but of these I had non to sell. I have traded considerable on the road, and what I have lost on the articules sold here I have fully made up in other trades. At fort Bridger I traded for a horse. My Alkihaul of which I had not used eny was taken at \$4.00 pr gallon. The price I paid for the horse was \$70.00. I could now sell him here for \$125.00. Horses & mules are in great demand by the emigrants here, who are selling their waggons for a trifel and packing through. White's company sold off their waggons and packed and left here day before yesterday. The Mormon people here are much benefited by the emigrants supplying them with many articules at a cheap rate; on the other hand the Emigrants can here supply themselves with vegetables of the Mormons. This Mormon City is situated on the east side of the Salt Lake Valley, and is four miles long from north to south, and two miles from east to west. The sight [site] is level. The streets are wide and strait, running East, West, North & South. The squares are large, two miles in curcumference and half a mile from one street to another. All the squares are surro[unded] by a rail fence and an acre and a fourth apportioned to each Mormon, which he cultivates for his own benefit and upon which his house stands. There is no dividing fence between their lots. All their land is watered by splendid springs [creeks] coming out of the mountain east of the city, and carried through gutters [canals] to everyone's lot

and past every man's door, running out across and along the street. Their wheat crops are good, which is worth \$5.00 pr bushel. Corn is backwards; looks tolerable well. This being the first year of their labours it cannot be expected that they could have done more than what we see. I am now ready to start. I have lightened up so that I have but 1600 lbs. in the waggon to five yoke of oxen. The little carriage with one yoke and a good horse I expect to get through safe and in good time. I am sorry to leave behind Mr. Sands, who is perfectly helpless and incapable of being taken any further. His sistem has been deranged through the whole trip, and since leaving fort Bridger has been quite sick, so much so that he has not been out of the carriage at all, his leg being swelled up very much, full of black spots, and string bound, loosing all use of it entirely, besides being very weak, so much so that he has to be carried from one place to another. I got a place with a Mormon family here for him, where he intends remaining until next Spring or such time when he shall have recovered his health. Then he will proceed to the mines. Give my compliments to all inquiring friends, while myself, Mr. Roush & Jack remain all well.

I remain Your Affectionate Brother  
BEESON TOWNSEND.

VII

[Great Salt Lake City  
October (?), 1849]<sup>27</sup>

When I first came into the valley there was a large number of emigrants here, that expected to stay till spring, but now all seem determined to go on, which is mainly owing to the uncongeniality of feeling existing between the people here and themselves. I must say, in reference to these people—I have been disappointed in them. I had supposed them an abused people; I had thought them falsely accused of all manner of crime when in the states. However it may have been there, it has proven to be a fact here that there is nothing they will not do. From the highest in authority to the most servile and beggarly, they will steal, rob and *beg* worse than the worst indians we have yet met with. They have resorted to all manner of devices to induce emigrants to stay with them, for no reason but to steal and beg from them. \* \* \* No man can live among them who is not one of them, because I believe they consider all as lawful [omission?] that does not belong to the Saints. So take them as they are, and the earth does not produce so degraded, so damnable a community of people. The morals and order of society are totally disregarded by them. Their Bishops take as many women as they wish, and discard them at pleasure. Some instances have come under my notice where men have a mother and three daughters at the same time as wives. It is

27. Reprinted from the Hannibal *Missouri Courier*, January 10, 1850, by courtesy of the State Historical Society of Missouri. The *Courier* says by way of introduction, "A correspondent of this paper, writing from Salt Lake Valley, gives a very unfavorable picture of the Mormon settlers there. He was a resident for a short time among them, detained there by the illness of his family, and his opportunities for judging were good. We give a few extracts for the present, promising hereafter his detailed account of the country settled by these people, their prospects, plan of government, &c." Asterisks in this letter, indicating a deletion, are those of the *Courier*.



no uncommon thing to find them with a whole family of sisters, and other women too; some four instances have come under my notice where men have a mother and her daughters, more or less.<sup>28</sup>

My opinion is, that if something does not occur to change their course, the world's history will not furnish a parallel of degradation and wretchedness. They are from under all restraints of law. The Priests are supreme, and they indulge in all these vices; and like priest, like people. They deny the authority of the United States, and gasconade around as if they were able to maintain themselves against any force that might be sent against them.

## VIII

Great Salt Lake City,  
Oct. 18, 1849.<sup>29</sup>

Mr. Editor: I am yet here in this great city of the Mormons, where I have been some weeks, but expect to leave for the diggings in a few days, by the south route, which is said to be passable only in the winter season. A large company of emigrants hired a Mormon guide, (Capt. [Jefferson] Hunt, I believe, of the Mormon battalion,) and started on the south route some three weeks since.<sup>30</sup> This was a company who came in too late to go by the north route, where a great many who have gone will find it difficult to get over the [Sierra Nevada] mountain, if we believe the report. A few Mormons came that way from the Diggings, and arrived here about three weeks ago, who said there was a great deal of old snow on the mountains. They met many emigrants this side, and they had had one battle with the Snake Indians. It is said that the company from Missouri killed some Snake squaws, and in revenge, they (the Snakes) now attack every company they come across, though I cannot learn that the Snakes had been quarrelsome or attacked any one for a long time previous to their squaws being killed. The Mormons that have come in are said to have brought some two or three hundred thousand dollars in gold, and if we may judge by the dust and scales afloat since that, it is likely to be true. I accidentally saw one of their bags, said to contain more than sixty pounds of the dust, and I should think it big enough for that, and if the whole fifteen or twenty who came in had as much, no wonder it is plenty here.

Messrs. [James M.] Livingston & [John H.] Kinkead, merchants of your place,

28. Now that the Mormons had removed to the isolated Great Basin, they began to practice plural marriage openly. Many Forty-niners got wind of polygamy, but this must have been one of the earliest reports to appear in print. In the cases this correspondent refers to, in which a man might have married a mother as well as her daughters, the marriage ordinarily would have been a case of her being "sealed" to him to insure her salvation in the life to come, and she would not have entered into marital relations with him.

29. Reprinted from the St. Louis *Missouri Republican*, January 18, 1850.

30. This was the inception of the celebrated Death Valley party, the adventures of which, as with those of the Mormons who stuck to the known trail, make up a considerable literature. For a recent treatment see Margaret Long's *The Shadow of the Arrow*, Caldwell, Idaho, 1941. These immigrants rendezvoused in Utah Valley and began their southward journey October 4.

have had their goods open here about two weeks, and it is currently reported, and believed here, that they carry back with the mail near \$20,000, besides paying their bills. I went into their store two or three times, but could get no more chance to trade than you could in a bee hive, though they had eight or ten clerks. I called at their store after they had opened only one day, and by hook and crook got a chance to ask for a few pounds of sugar, but was told, "we have sold out."

"What was your price?"

"Forty cents a pound, when we had the article."

Poor consolation for a traveler to drink his coffee without sugar till he gets to California. Mr. Kinkead goes home with this mail.<sup>31</sup>

Another store was opened here four days ago by a merchant from New York, as I understand, by the name of Reese.<sup>32</sup> He is about to return with \$5,000, the product of four days' sale, besides paying his expenses. These seem like big stories, I know, but from the testimony before me, I have no doubt of its general truth. If they are not true, Messrs. Kinkead and Reese will be there, and can contradict it. I write from the best information I can get; and what do I care for either side of the question. I should like to get a few pounds of sugar even at forty cents, and a piece of sole leather, (just to replace my taps, worn out on the plains), at sixty cents, what it has been selling for here, while there was any—but it's no go now, for there is none to be had at any price. I have seen a few calfskins that were bought at the stores here for \$6 50—a very common article, which you could get in the States for \$1 50, and an ordinary kip of second quality, so marked, at \$7 50. Glass is selling at \$15 & \$16 by the half box; calicoes from 35 to 50 cents a yard.

These are a specimen of a few articles of which I have learned the prices since these stores have been open; but the Mormons buy as though they had seen better times, and were used to it, but had been pinched of late, which I have no doubt has been the case. Where this people are to get goods from after a few days more sale, if they keep on as they are now going it, I hope somebody knows; I don't, for all the goods that are here cannot keep up the trade a month longer, at the rate they have been going; and there is a settlement some thirty or forty miles north [Ogden], as I understand, and another in the Utah Valley, who cannot have supplied themselves as yet. What would the folks in the States think of one or two little shops of goods among 15,000 people, which is about the number supposed to be in this valley, and their emigration for this year has not come in yet, except a few wagons. I heard last night that an express had come in from the Mormon camp, near the South Pass, and that the snow around their wagons

31. Livingston & Kinkead were among the earliest merchants to establish themselves at Great Salt Lake City, having gone out this summer from Kaneshville. Although they were non-Mormons, they won a recognized place for themselves in the city's commercial life until the period of the Utah Expedition.

32. John Reese figured prominently in Utah business affairs for many years. He is best remembered as the proprietor of the "Mormon Station" in the Carson Valley, in present Nevada. His reminiscences, as dictated to H. H. Bancroft, are published in *Nevada Historical Society Papers*, I, 186-190.



was four feet deep. I fear some of the poor creatures will have cold toes before they get through.

Snow fell on the mountains all round the valley about two weeks ago; it is still on the ground, and will be all winter, though I never saw pleasanter weather in my life than is in this valley. The grain crops have been pretty good; some I have seen are very heavy, and the folks here will have a poor chance of starving this year.

It is said that but a part of the Mormon battalion has returned here yet, and many others have gone to the diggings, and if they all come in next year, loaded as they did this, business will be lively, if there should be any thing with which to carry it on. These Mormons are pretty good at hatching up things. They are making a road through the mountains from the Webber [Weber] to this place, making bridges, building houses, &c., and are very industrious, and a good people to live amongst, only for one thing. I broke my demijohn and spilt my brandy on the mountains, and I can not get a new supply without giving eight or ten dollars a gallon. The Mormons have made it a law that any one that sells grog shall pay 50 per cent. duty, and it brings it a little too high for those on their way to the diggings. After all, I don't know but it is a good plan, for I have not seen a drunken man since we arrived here.

One thing more I will mention for the benefit of travelers. I cannot get a plug of tobacco for less than \$1 50 a pound, and not the best at that. These things seem high, but they are nothing when you get used to it. The Indian traders think nothing of getting a good horse for a blanket worth three or four dollars, that is, at Fort Laramie and on the road. I don't know that there is much trading with the Indians here, any way. All the symptoms I have seen, is a good many buckskin breeches, but this I suppose is for want of cloth; and the Mormons kill their own deer, for aught I know.

But I must come to a close. I am not used to writing for the press, but have done this for my own amusement and the gratification of many acquaintances. What I have stated, as the saying is, is true according to the best of my knowledge and belief, and you are at liberty to use it as you please. If I were known as a writer, or were I capable, or could it be of any use, I would give my name; but as it is I will simply sign myself a traveler to the

GOLD MINES.