

Life of Lyman Curtis, Pioneer of 1847 An Enduring Legacy,

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Lyman Curtis's grandfather, Moses Curtis, was born in Boxford, Massachusetts. He afterward settled in New Salem, Franklin County, Massachusetts, where he married Molly Meacham, by whom he raised a large family. Lyman Curtis's father, Nahum Curtis, third son of Moses Curtis and Molly Meacham, was born July 7, 1784, in New Salem, Franklin County, Massachusetts. In 1809, he married Millicent Waitt, daughter of Phineas Waitt and Methitable Foster, born January 30, 1878, in Athall, Franklin County, Massachusetts. They had a family of ten children, of whom Lyman, born January 21, 1812, in New Salem, Massachusetts, was the second child. About the year 1823 they moved to Pontiac, Oakland County, Michigan. During the years 1832-33, his father's family joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints. Lyman joined on March 14, 1833. In 1834 he and eighteen others were called upon by Hyrum Smith and Lyman Wight to join Zion's Camp and go with that company to the Missouri and help redeem Zion. After traveling about one thousand miles under the guidance of Hyrum Smith and Lyman Wight, they joined the main camp June 8, 1834.

When Zion's Camp was disbanded, each member was given a blessing by Patriarch Joseph Smith, Sr., and some of the promises made to Lyman Curtis will be referred to later in this history. In 1836, his father, with the rest of the family and two of his brothers, Jacob and Jeremiah Curtis and their families, settled in Caldwell County, Missouri. In February of 1836, Lyman was married to Charlotte Alvord, daughter of Thadeus Alvord and Sally Wellington, born in the state of New York in 1815.

His mother, Millicent Curtis, died September 3, 1838, in Caldwell County, Missouri, and about that same time they buried their oldest son, Ammon Curtis. Lyman purchased land from the government, built houses, and began to gather around them the comforts of life, but during the fall of 1838,

they were surrounded by a mob militia, part of whom were painted black. They were subjected to all the horrors of mob violence and at last were compelled to give up their arms and leave their homes to the mob to defray the expenses of mobbing them. This was under the exterminating orders of Lilburn W. Boggs, governor of Missouri, and was carried out by his ever ready tool, General Lucas.

They left the state suffering from the inclemency of the weather added to mob violence. Many of the Saints

were compelled to travel in open wagons, exposed to all the changes of the weather, many of them not having enough clothes to keep them comfortable. They next settled in Nauvoo where they obtained land,

built houses and again began to gather around them the comforts of life. Lyman helped in building both the Kirtland Temple and the Nauvoo Temple. He traveled farther up the Mississippi River where, for

nearly two years he and his brother Moses worked getting timber for the Nauvoo Temple and floating it down the river. When the timber and logs were on the river, they were bound together with wooden pins and hickory withes, then the workmen would pile their belongings on the joined logs and float down to the landing. Once, when they were bringing a raft of timber down the river, it was necessary

to stop at one place for provisions. They drew near the bank and Lyman took the rope, sprang to the land and wrapped the rope around a young tree that grew near the water's edge. The force of the current

on the raft drew the tree down under the water taking Lyman with it, as he did not let it loose. If he had

loosened his hold, he would have been carried under the raft. When he went out of sight, some of the bystanders said, "Well, there's one Mormon gone to — (the hot place they would have consigned all Mormons to), but the supple elasticity of the tree drew the raft back and out of the water, giving Lyman a chance to continue his journey little the worse for the wetting. Lyman's son, Samuel B. Curtis, was born in LaCrosse while they were getting the timber. There is a small town or school district near

LaCrosse that still bears the name Mormon Coulee from their having camped there. Lyman also aided his father and brothers in polishing stones used in building the Nauvoo Temple. It sometimes took days to polish a single stone. Sand was poured on a cut stone then another large flat one was laid on top and ground back and forth until the under stone was polished. Here also they shared in the persecutions of the Saints.

He was present and viewed the dead martyrs, Joseph and Hyrum Smith. At the time of the martyrdom, enemies offered a reward for the head of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Lyman, his father, and brother George, with others, were guards over the bodies. Lyman's father died March 11, 1846, in Nauvoo, Illinois.

In the spring of 1846, Lyman shared with his family the lot of the Saints in their wholesale expulsion from their homes. When they were leaving, he sold enough corn at fifteen cents a bushel to buy a home. The remainder of the crop was left in the bin. They again took up the line of march for a new home, this time traveling westward to Council Bluffs, where they spent the winter in making preparations for the onward journey the next season. When the call was made for the Battalion, Lyman's brother, Foster Curtis, joined that company and shared the privation and fatigue of that long and tedious journey. He was one of the men who was working on the millrace when the first gold in California was discovered. He soon returned and joined the main body of the Saints in Salt Lake City.

In the spring of 1847, Lyman left his family at Council Bluffs and, in company with Elder Levi Jackman, joined President Brigham Young's Company as pioneers to travel to the Rocky Mountains. He and Levi Jackman traveled in the same wagon. At the time the mob made the Saints put their guns in the public square, under promise that they would be protected, Lyman's gun, which was at that time an extra good gun, was placed with the others. He felt he simply could not let it go, so, watching his chance when no one was near, he retrieved it. President Young appointed Lyman one

of the two hunters for the pioneers and he carried this gun on his shoulders to Utah and back across the Plains, often using it to great advantage. At one time he broke the back of a deer eight hundred steps away.

He had the weapon with him on his five-year Indian Mission in the Santa Clara, Washington County area in 1854-59. The gun is now in the possession of his youngest son, Dr. A. L. Curtis of Payson, Utah. Great care had to be used in killing game. The hunters dared not kill buffalo on the run, as the smell of blood would cause the males to fight and make trouble. So, when they were away, Lyman and the other hunters would kill the females, bringing in the meat. At camp, ropes were stretched to dry or smoke the meat. When they arrived in the Valley, they still had two sacks of jerky. With fish caught in the streams and the lake, it made a fine living. After enduring all the incidents consequent to traveling through a new country without roads or bridges, they arrived in Salt Lake Valley on July 22, in Apostle Orson Pratt's company, President Young and a portion of the company having been detained some miles back on account of sickness. Lyman built the first fire, which he said was the only honor attributed to him. During the few weeks following his arrival he assisted in plowing, planting, getting water for irrigation, making adobes, etc. When President Young got ready to return to the Saints at Council Bluffs, Lyman and Levi Jackman divided their small stock of provisions. Lyman took one part and the team and returned in President Young's company to his family. During the summer of 1848, his brothers Hyrum, George, and Joseph came to the valley. Lyman remained at Winter Quarters until 1850, where he and his brother Moses and others were busy building and repairing wagons in order that the Saints could leave for the Valley as fast as possible. In 1850 Lyman brought his family to Utah, his brother Moses accompanying with his family. After arriving here the second time, Lyman's days were occupied in building, improving, making water ditches, etc., until 1853 when he went on a mission to Southern Utah

in accordance with a call from the Church leaders to help the Indians in beginning their farming operation.

While there, he assisted in raising and picking the first cotton grown in Utah.

He remained there about two years and then returned to Salt Lake City. While on this mission, his wife, Charlotte, obtained a divorce from him. Shortly after this he settled in Pond Town, since called Salem, in Utah County. When Zion's Camp was disbanded, each member was given a blessing by Patriarch Joseph Smith, Sr. Lyman was promised that he would be an instrument in the hands of the Lord for doing good; was told that even as Moses, he should smite the rock and bring forth water upon dry land. This was given almost as a mission for his early life. President Young sent him on a mission to teach the Indians the art of farming and irrigation, his first work in this line being surveying and engineering the canal from the Little Muddy River, now Moapa, in Southern Nevada.

While on his mission to the Santa Clara, President Young sent him to take charge of the construction of the canal from the Santa Clara to take water out of the vicinity below St. George. When this mission was completed and he returned to the Salt Lake Valley, President Young asked him to go south and establish a home. He was attracted by an old sawmill located at Pond Town, later renamed Salem after his birthplace, so he bought the sawmill and with William G. McClellan, built it anew. A company was formed and for many years this sawmill was operated by Lyman Curtis. Lyman was proficient as a carpenter and built furniture for his home, many articles of which are still in use, showing the excellent quality of his workmanship. He made a door for his home, which was at that time part of the fort. This door is well preserved and is now used as the front door of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers'

log cabin in Salem. After locating in Salem, the people found that by building a canal, water could be taken out of Spanish Fork River and much valuable land could be brought under cultivation.

A company was formed and Lyman Curtis, with a simple water level, surveyed the Salem Canal. In the crudest way, men worked with picks, shovels, hoes and even buckets, or whatever they could get, yet under these great hardships and with short rations, the canal was completed. The surveyors and civil engineers of today acclaim this canal a very fine piece of engineering work. When there was a break in the canal, Lyman, being the president, would repair it with the meager implements they had on hand

and with the help of others interested in the project. If the repairs took longer than they at first anticipated,

he would count his biscuits and eat in accordance with his provisions. The first canal at Price, Utah, was also his work. Lyman Curtis became an accurate surveyor, laying out roads and canals with an

improvised transit and a water level. Surely he lived and accomplished the mission predicted for him by Patriarch Joseph Smith, Sr. As a colonizer, his judgment and leadership were highly esteemed.

He would be regarded today as a practical civil engineer. Work he did in that line still stands and is a striking monument to his memory.

In the year 1862, August 28, he married Sarah Hartley Soper, a widow with two children. She was born August 10, 1836, in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England, a daughter of Samuel and Eliza Gill Hartley.

She bore Lyman six children. She was a member of the ill-fated handcart company led by Edward Martin,

which arrived in Great Salt Lake City November 30, 1856. —Emma Curtis Hanks, daughter

[In addition to the above sketch, Mary B. R. Campbell writes:] My mother, Julia Curtis Raleigh, told me that one time when the Saints were driven from their homes in Illinois, her father and mother, Lyman and Charlotte Alvord Curtis, were especially reluctant to leave the comforts they had worked so hard to gather around them. Along with the rest, they mentioned the new painted chairs, their first real ones, that they ought to enjoy so much. At last there was no choice. They had no idea what they might meet up with, but if they were to be with the Saints they must leave everything except what could be put into one small spring wagon. Near them lived a family of five who had no way of going

except through the kindness of their neighbors. So, Grandfather put what flour they had into the wagon, along with a small box of wearing apparel and other absolute necessities, then, along with their four children and their neighbors, they began the long trek. It was indeed a hard move.

When they reached the Illinois River, the water had risen and the wagon was swept down until it missed the

place where they should have pulled up the bank. Without good footing the horses were unable to pull it out and several times the outfit went back into the water. At last, others came and helped them, but everything in the wagon was wet. About an hour after the wagons and horses were on the bank, one of the horses, Claybank, named because of his color, laid down and died. One can fancy their feelings,

especially those of Grandfather with such a responsibility resting upon him. Many people gathered around the dead horse, some with real sympathy, when a tall man reached through the crowd and said, "Mr. Curtis, here is thirty-five dollars; go and buy another horse." Grandfather was so surprised for a minute

that he could only look at the money in his hand. When he turned to thank the man, he was nowhere to be seen; though the crowd looked for him, no one had seen him come or go. Others have told of the incident. Lyman Curtis was a participant in the Walker War and the Black Hawk War. He loved to hunt and trap. Putting his meager necessities on a horse, he would set out alone to trap and hunt, returning laden with his catch. In early days he made many burial caskets, as such necessities could not be bought.

He was active in church and community work. Among other things, he helped shingle the Salem Ward meetinghouse when he was eighty years old. He was a man of faith and humility and a staunch believer in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its mission upon the earth.

He was ordained a seventy April 8, 1845, and at the time of his death was a high priest. He died at his home in Salem, Utah County, Utah, on August 5, 1898, of general debility. He was the father of fifteen children. The Ninth Horseman The ninth horseman on the "This Is The Place" monument was

not identified when the monument was built and dedicated in 1947, but new evidence has been provided by Dr. Asa L. Curtis, Payson, Utah, that this person may have been his father, Lyman Curtis. This information was submitted to President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., chairman of the monument commission, and to William W. Reeder, vice-chairman of the executive committee. In his leather-bound volume entitled Pioneer Lyman Curtis, One of the Nine Horsemen, Dr. Curtis wrote, "A strange twist of fate is the reason for the omission of the name of the ninth horseman. During the program held in 1897 to honor the original pioneers, the names of eight horsemen were read and the ninth was listed as unknown. Pioneer Lyman Curtis was the only living survivor of the nine horsemen. He was present at the program. He had, earlier in the day, been honored and bedecked with medals and flowers, but through the mistake of some person on the committee his name was deleted from the list.

The eight that were listed were: Orson Pratt, George A. Smith, Erastus Snow, Joseph Matthews, John Brown,

John Pack, Porter Rockwell and Jesse C. Little. This was a deep hurt to the aging pioneer who no longer had the physical energy to tell his story or to establish for himself his title

." Perhaps the most pertinent evidence submitted is the statement of pioneer Curtis as recorded in an issue of the Utah Historical Magazine: "Brother Levi Jackman and myself traveling in the same wagon, arrived in Salt Lake Valley on the 22nd of July, 1847, in Apostle Orson Pratt's Company." Andrew Jenson,

Assistant Church Historian, also recorded July 22, 1847, as the date pioneer Curtis entered the Valley.

Lyman Curtis's name is already officially listed as a member of company thirteen, which was the company

named to proceed ahead of the main camp of pioneers. An impressive bit of evidence is in the obituary of the pioneer as written by Andreas Engberg, an early-day legislator, "Elder Lyman Curtis came west with the pioneers, entering Salt Lake Valley with Orson Pratt's Company, July 22, 1847."

—Dorothy O. Rea



The Two Unidentified Men A few sidelights on the entrance of the pioneers into Salt Lake Valley should be interesting and may afford a clearer view of the event. We are given a graphic description of the entrance of Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow into the valley on July 21, 1847. The two, with one horse between them, proceeded ahead of the main companies. Because the going was bad along the creek, they climbed a steep hill at the mouth of Emigration Canyon. Here the valley burst into full view. They were overwhelmed and overjoyed. They waved their hats in the air and cried, "Hosannah! Hosannah to the Lord!" After gazing at the valley, the sky, the mountains, the blue water of the lake with its islands, and range after range of mountains, they proceeded on their journey, taking a circuitous course. We are told they first went north toward Red Butte. Later they must have turned west and then south or southwest, for after a few miles' travel they came to some "canyons" in the valley.

These were probably the deep ravines in the east bench through which the streams flow. In this region Erastus Snow missed his jacket and returned to find it. Orson Pratt continued on for a short distance and then returned to the mouth of Emigration Canyon, where the two men met and returned to camp.

An exploring party of nine men under the leadership of Orson Pratt and George A. Smith entered the valley

early the next day, Thursday morning, July 22, 1847. The main object was to find a suitable site for a future city.

They took a westward course from Emigration Canyon until they reached the level valley, where they followed a meandering course northward to the forks of City Creek. They were favorably impressed with this region.

Nevertheless, they explored farther north toward the lake and finally came to the warm springs.

The hot springs were a curiosity to them, but since the soil was poor here they returned to City Creek.

Here they did something that in the histories is not usually emphasized. They actually took possession of the region. They established a camp. In 1888, when many of the men of the exploring party were still alive,

the historian Bancroft wrote: "The following morning (July 22, 1847) the advance company, composed of Orson Pratt, George A. Smith, and seven others, entered the valley and encamped on Canon Creek." "Canon Creek" evidently was City Creek. The main point in Bancroft's statement is that the exploring party established a camp. The party divided. Some of the members remained at the site and the others returned to the main groups to report. Orson Pratt, George A. Smith, Erastus Snow, John Pack, and Joseph Matthews returned.

Lyman Curtis and Levi Jackman, and possibly two others, remained at the permanent campsite. They slept on the present location of Salt Lake City that night and were on the ground to welcome their comrades the next day. One of their charges was to build and maintain a beacon fire to mark the chosen site and to pilot the course of the various advancing groups. No sooner had the returning members left them than Lyman Curtis kindled a fire of sagebrush. When this was burning briskly he piled it high with green sage. From it rose a column of blue-gray smoke that could be seen from many parts of the valley. It was a welcome; a beacon to which all eyes turned and by which all hearts were moved. Levi Jackman had been, at one time, the scribe of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

He kept a daily journal of the pioneer journey. Lyman Curtis and Levi Jackman were companions in the great trek. They traveled in the same wagon. They had been in the militia at Far West, Missouri, and in the Nauvoo Legion. Years afterward, when the Salem Canal had been completed by the united efforts of Lyman Curtis and his associates, thus making possible homes for hundreds, Levi Jackman came and made his home at Salem, Utah, as a neighbor. It seems that during the day of July 22, the advancing groups did not know the exact whereabouts of the exploring party and, in turn, the exploring party did not know the exact location of the various groups.

At the mouth of Emigration Canyon the second division caught up with the first division and the two

emerged from the canyon as one body. Strange to say, they turned left and traveled southwest, probably over the bench land south of Emigration Creek. They were attracted here by a beautiful and extended level area of ground, brushless and covered with grass. From the distance it looked like a green field of waving grain. But it proved to be marshland, unsuitable as the site for a city. They encamped at 4:30 p.m. within two or three miles of their final destination. Had they known, they could easily have completed the last lap of their journey that day. Orson Pratt records that he "found" the wagons, apparently to his happy surprise, encamped in the valley. The explorers' camp, according to Lyman Curtis, was located near the present Temple Block, probably just east between the two forks of City Creek. We are indebted to him for the information that early the next morning, July 23, the main body of pioneers arrived in two divisions. One division came about an hour ahead of the other. Apparently the first, or smaller body, came to the vanguard camp, and the other one camped a half-mile or more south on one branch of City Creek. There seems to have been two camps established from the first.

President Young and party arrived the second day, July 24, shortly after noon. His party seems to have turned to the right at the mouth of Emigration Canyon, and to have taken a course directly toward the chosen site. They appear to have located at the south camp. However, on July 27, President Young and some others moved to the north camp. The first camp, according to Lyman Curtis, had apparently been made near the Temple Block. This seems reasonable. It is unlikely that this exploring party, which had found an acceptable location, would leave it and go elsewhere to establish a camp.

Howard Egan writes (July 24, 1847): "After leaving the canyon about two miles, we came in sight of the other camps a few miles to the west." He uses the plural term "camps." Wilford Woodruff throws some light on this subject. He gives us an idea of the location, which was upon "two small streams" or City Creek, and the time the first camp was made which was "Two days before us." His words follow: After gazing a while upon this scenery, we moved four miles across the table land, into the valley to the encampment of our brethren who had arrived two days before us. They had pitched upon the banks

of two small streams of pure water... It seems that both forks of City Creek were camped upon.

On July 28 Brother Woodruff speaks of the "north camp" and on July 29 he states that the members of the

Mormon Battalion, who arrived that day, made their camp "between our two camps." The streams played

an important role. City Creek divided at the mouth of the canyon into two streams. One flowed west along

North Temple Street. It crossed and re-crossed the street three times and emptied into the Jordan after

uniting with other streams south of the Fair Grounds. The other branch of City Creek flowed south (or west of south) diagonally down through the tier of blocks between State Street and Main Street.

It crossed Main Street near the Post Office Building and ran west and south, joining Emigration and

Parley's creeks after their merger. —Dr. A. L. Curtis The story of Lyman Curtis and Levi Jackman,

who lighted these early fires in the valley, forms only an episode in the moving drama of the pioneers.

But it was fitting that they should have tended that early beacon, for they were themselves examples of warm friendship and loyal devotion, a friendship and devotion typical of all that vanguard of pioneer men.

Certainly Brigham Young recognized it. We are told that never thereafter did they meet this great man

but he held out a warm hand of affection, or encircled them in his strong arms in brotherly love.

Lyman settle on Pond Town, UT. He designed and built roads and canals.

He was a successful lumberman and farmer. To honor, Lyman Curtis, the

town ws remained to Salem, the name of the city where Lyman was born