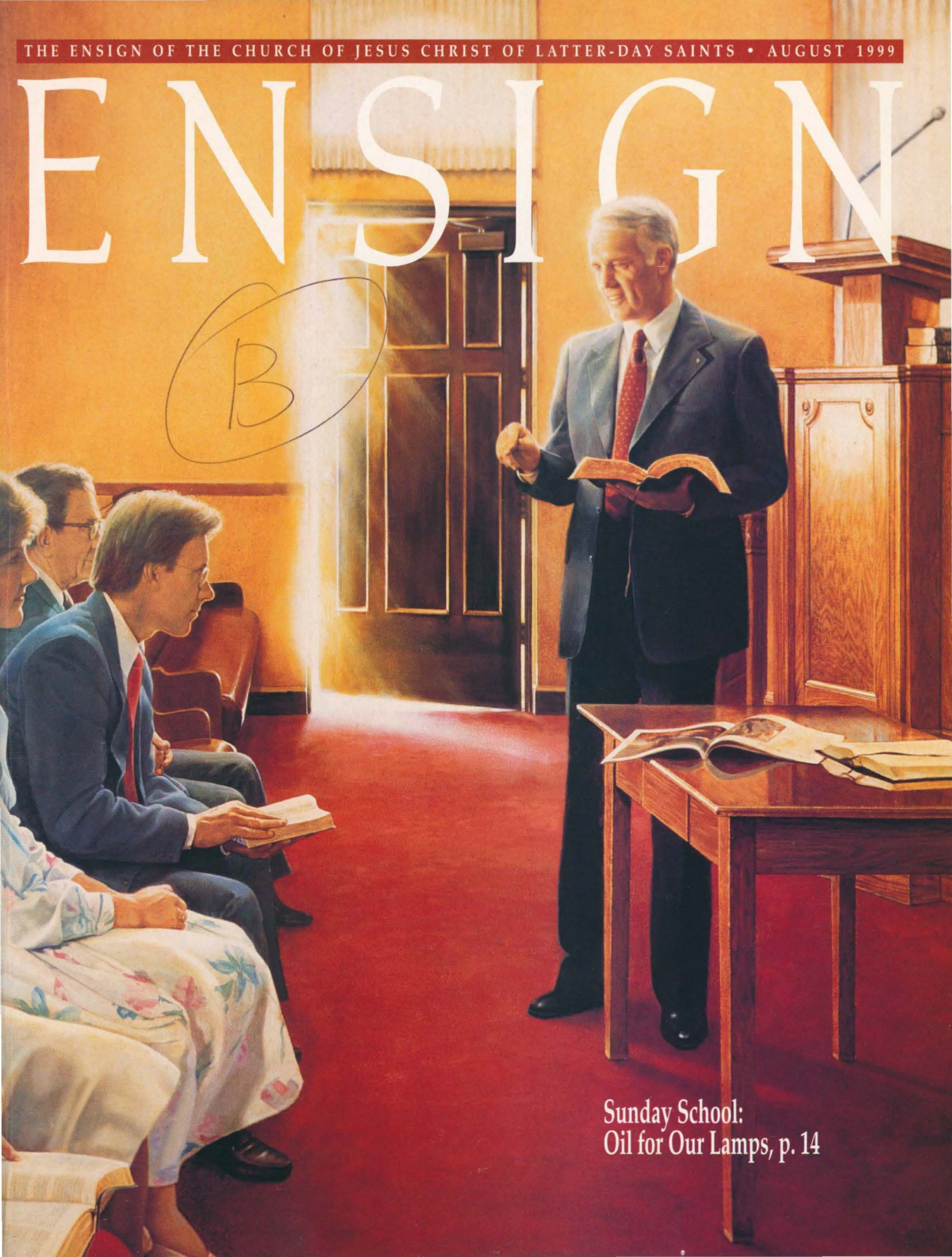


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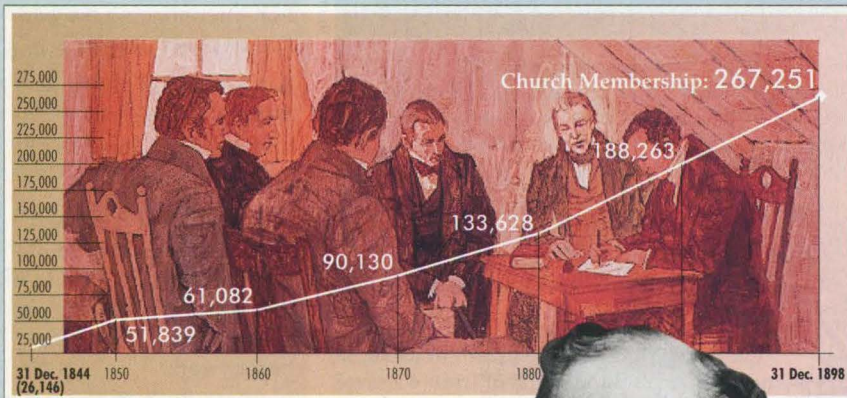
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Sunday School:
Oil for Our Lamps, p. 14

A LOOK AT THE CHURCH: 1844-1898

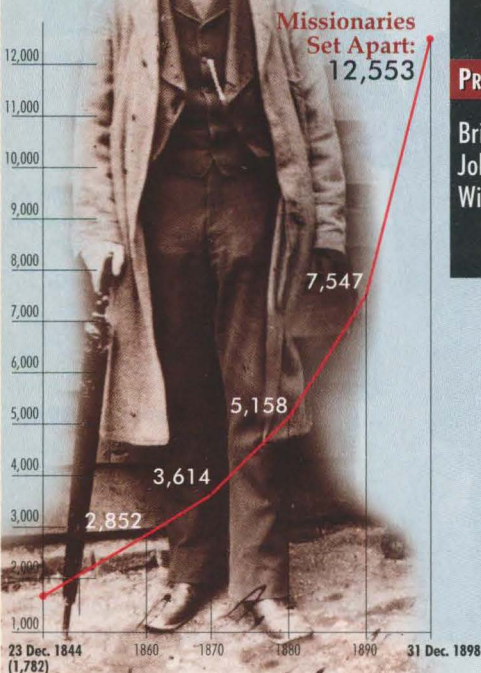
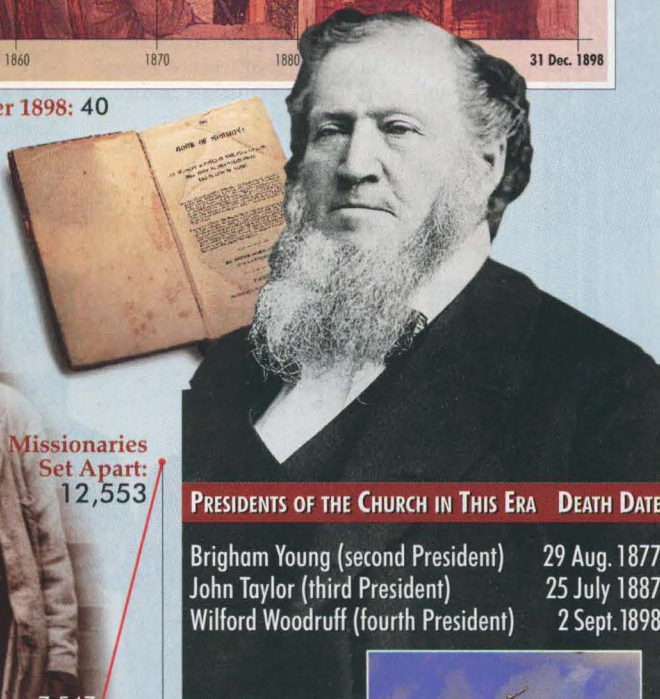
BEGINS with President Brigham Young's leadership in 1844 and ends in 1898, the year of President Wilford Woodruff's death. Figures are based on year-end calculations.



Stakes on 31 December 1898: 40

Languages of the Book of Mormon: 11

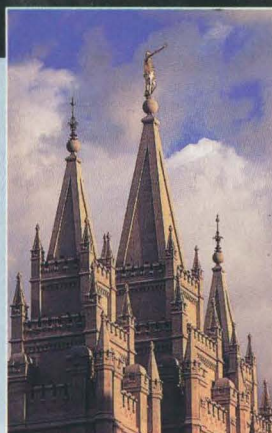
Missions on 31 December 1898: 20



PRESIDENTS OF THE CHURCH IN THIS ERA DEATH DATE

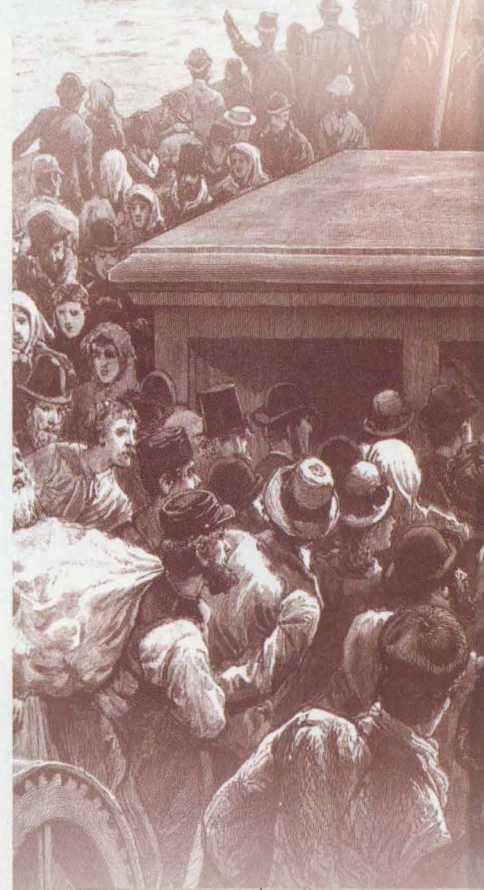
Brigham Young (second President)	29 Aug. 1877
John Taylor (third President)	25 July 1887
Wilford Woodruff (fourth President)	2 Sept. 1898

Temples Dedicated in Era: 5



FROM

BY LARENE PORTER GAUNT
Associate Editor



Thousands of Latter-day Saint converts left Denmark and England to join the Saints in America. Above: The ship James Nesmith. Right: Peter and Martha Isaacson.

DENMARK TO ZION



1844
1898
A GREAT AND
MARVELOUS WORK

Bringing with them the fire of their testimony and their Old World work ethic, Peder and Martha Isaacson were representative of thousands of pioneer emigrants.

Peder Isaacson was a generous, believing man who longed to go to "Zion" after his baptism on 2 July 1854 at age 26. He saved \$800 from his carpenter's wages to buy passage to America for himself and his younger sister, Maria. But when she decided not to be baptized, Peder was heartbroken and simply gave the money he had saved for her passage to pay the way for another LDS immigrant.¹

Born in Thisted County, Denmark, on 30 May 1828, Peder was 13 when his father died, leaving his mother with seven children to support. Soon afterward, she



remarried. Life was hard for the family. With Denmark at war with Germany, poverty hovered over much of the land. Both Peder and his brother served as soldiers. Peder survived his two years of fighting; his brother, who served later, did not. Peder's conversion was born of the hope the gospel offered for a better life.

By November 1854, Peder was ready to go to America. He went home to tell his mother good-bye but was met with disappointment when his stepfather refused to let him in the house because he was "one of those Mormons." Peder never saw his mother or sister again. He left for

ABOVE: BACKGROUND—ON BOARD AN EMIGRANT STEAMSHIP, AROUND 1880. COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON, D.C.; FAR LEFT: PAINTING, COURTESY OF NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, SAN FRANCISCO; CENTER INSET ELECTRONICALLY COMPOSED

Frederikshavn to join hundreds of other Scandinavian Latter-day Saints who were gathering there and in Copenhagen to go to the Great Salt Lake Valley.

Among the Saints gathering in Frederikshavn were Marta Clemensen Dahl; her mother, Maren; her brother, Niels; and her sister, Dorthe. Marta had been born on the small island of Jegindø, Denmark, on 7 May 1822. Her father worked as a fisherman. Everyone on her island was poor, and Marta remembered that one night when her father came home there was nothing for him to eat but potato peelings. Eventually Marta, age 14, and all of her brothers and sisters, except for Dorthe, the youngest, were sent to work on the farms of others, a common practice in poor families. Two years later, in 1839, her father died.

On the farm, Marta worked hard binding newly threshed grain into bundles and gleaning grain. At night, she snuggled down in her featherbed and knitted sweaters and stockings. In 1842, Marta joined her sisters Ane Margrethe and Mette on another farm. In 1843, Mette bled to death as the result of a threshing accident. Her death was one of Marta's greatest sorrows, for which the gospel eventually brought understanding and peace.

In 1853 the missionaries taught Marta's mother, Maren, the gospel, and before long she became the first person on her little island to be baptized. Filled with joy, she gathered her children in from where they were working to hear the missionaries. Within a few months, Marta, Niels, and Dorthe were baptized. Two sisters—Karen and Ane Margrethe—chose not to be baptized and remained in Denmark.

Peder Isaacson and Marta Clemensen Dahl were typical of the thousands of Scandinavian Latter-day Saints for whom the gospel of Jesus Christ brought hope and peace amid their suffering and poverty. Motivated by their testimonies, these Saints willingly made great sacrifices, leaving family and traveling thousands of miles to gather to Zion. They brought with them a strong work ethic. Out of their sacrifices came strength of character. Fortified by their unwavering testimonies, they raised up a righteous posterity that became the backbone of the pioneer Church.

FROM COPENHAGEN TO SALT LAKE CITY

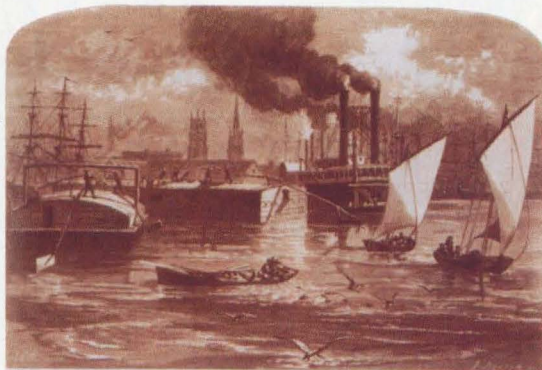
In Copenhagen, the Saints were divided into groups to board three steamships to Liverpool,

England. Three hundred boarded the *Cimbria* on 24 November 1854, which made only a single stop—three days later at Frederikshavn. Peder and Marta were among the 149 who came on board there. While the other two steamships arrived in England in only a matter of days, the *Cimbria* ran into stormy weather three times. Each storm forced the captain to return to land. It was a full month before the *Cimbria* anchored in England, and the Saints then took the train from Hull to Liverpool.

United again, the Scandinavian members secured the sailing ship *James Nesmith*.² With anticipation and joy in their hearts, the 441 Latter-day Saints were in good spirits when they set sail from Liverpool on 7 January 1855. Thirteen died en route before the *James Nesmith* unloaded its passengers in New Orleans on 23 February. The next day the group boarded the *Oceana*, a large steamboat, and traveled up the Mississippi River. Seven more died before the steamboat arrived in St. Louis, Missouri, on 7 March.³

In St. Louis, the group divided again. Peder joined with those who left on 10 March for Weston, Missouri, about 300 miles north of St. Louis.⁴ Also in this group was Ann Poulsen. Little is known of her except that she married Peder on 1 April 1855 or 1856 in Weston, Missouri. Their joy was short-lived; Ann died from cholera two months later. Heartbroken, Peder left on 10 August 1856 with the Abraham O. Smoot company, made up primarily of teamsters hauling wagons and carriages to Salt Lake, arriving on 9 November.⁵

Marta and her family joined



Above: *The Mississippi River at New Orleans, where the James Nesmith landed in 1855. Right: In 1856, Peter worked as a teamster on a wagon train such as this one in order to come west.*



the group which left St. Louis on 12 March on the steamboat *Clara*. Headed for Atchison, Kansas, they had to put in at Fort Leavenworth, where 20 died. They moved to a new campsite, but cholera broke out, and nine more died. By the end of May, the group had settled in Mormon Grove, an area five miles west of Atchison that served as an outfitting place for emigrants who planned on crossing the plains in 1855. At its apex in June 1855, the population reached nearly



With Mount Nebo to the left, this painting of a farm in Ephraim, Sanpete County, Utah, shows the area in about 1904. The Isaacsons' farm was similar.

3,000. Wagon train after wagon train left from there. Sadly, during that same summer a cholera outbreak claimed the lives of about 50 Saints. By the end of August, the population was down to 30.⁶

Marta's mother, Maren, died of cholera sometime after her arrival in New Orleans and before arriving in Salt Lake. Marta and her family joined the Jacob F. Secrist company⁷ and left from Mormon Grove on 13 June 1855.

STRENGTH IN UNITY

Marta, Niels, and Dortha arrived in Salt Lake on 7 September, after having traveled nearly 8,000 miles over a period of 10 months. They shared sorrow over the loss of their mother and over leaving Denmark; nevertheless, they were filled with hope in their future. Their common experiences had forged a closeness among them that would last a lifetime.

So it was with most LDS pioneers, but early members from Denmark and Europe also left behind their native culture as they embraced the American West and struggled to master a new language. To ease the transition, Sanpete County in central Utah became a gathering place for many of the Scandinavian people. Marta, now known as Martha, worked for about one year in Salt Lake City before moving to Ephraim in Sanpete County with her brother and sister. Peder, now known as Peter, also moved to Ephraim after his arrival in Salt Lake in 1856. Here 29-year-old Peter and 35-year-old Martha, who had met on the *James Nesmith*, renewed

their acquaintance and married in the spring of 1857.

The Isaacsons loved Ephraim and enjoyed the sound of Danish, as well as other familiar reminders of Denmark. They built a four-room adobe house, a good rock barn, and a granary, in which they stored thousands of bushels of wheat—evidence of their Old World work ethic. One grandson remembered Peter as a man of neatness, one who always wanted his hair combed and his bed and clothes straightened. Peter kept his wood stack tidy and wore a pair of wooden shoes when he worked around the cows. He always took off his shoes before he came into the house.

Martha, with her black hair and brown eyes, was an exception among the fair, blue-eyed Danes. "Mother's dark eyes could really snap and pop when she got mad," remembered her daughter, Anna Maria. Martha had one child with her dark coloring: her first, Peter Jr., born on 1 June 1858, died when he was 16 months old. Only a few weeks after little Peter's death, the Isaacsons' second child was born: Isaac, known as "Ike," on 9 December 1859. Anna Maria, their only girl, was born on 26 June 1863. The last child, Martin, was born on 24 January 1866.

Industrious and with an eye on the future, Peter and a friend bought a reaper and binder. During the harvest, they cut and bound grain day and night for others. Martha, who had worked for so many years binding sheaves of grain by hand, could never get over this marvelous machine. She was amazed that the only thing left to do was glean the leftover grain, which she always did.

The Isaacsons established a relatively prosperous farm as a result of their hard work. Martha's chickens helped scare away the grasshoppers and provided eggs for Martha to sell. "She knew and loved each hen and chick," wrote her daughter. "She never wasted one feather. Even when a chicken died she would save the feathers for bedding and pillows.

"Father raised many potatoes and kept them in a huge pit. We also raised peas, so many that we threshed them with a thresher. We were very lucky to have such good gardens. The only chance we had to get anything ahead was on what we could raise."

Peter was able to acquire a team of prized Texan oxen, which he generously loaned to an out-and-back wagon train for its trip to Missouri to pick up Latter-day Saints and bring them to Utah.

THE BLACK HAWK WAR

In the spring of 1865, amid the challenges of establishing families, farms, and the Church in Sanpete County, Church members had to prepare for war against Indians in the Black Hawk War. Peter served as a captain over 50 men. During the three years of the war, each man in Ephraim took his turn standing guard every fourth day.

For safety, when the men traveled to the mountains outside of town for the winter's wood, they went in groups. On 17 October 1865, as Peter hitched up his prized oxen, six-year-old Ike begged his father to let him go for wood with him. Peter decided against it. As the 16 men worked out on the mountain cutting wood, 20 Indians armed with bows, arrows, and guns surrounded them. A bullet whizzed by Peter's head. Grabbing his ax and figuring the Indians would block the road, he ran the opposite way from the wagons. He was right. In all, seven were killed before they reached town.⁸ All alone, Peter walked the five miles in the cold to get home, knowing he had lost his wagon and prize oxen but grateful that he was alive and had not taken Ike with him. This whole experience upset Martha so much that she lost the baby she was carrying.

OBEDIENT TO THE CALL

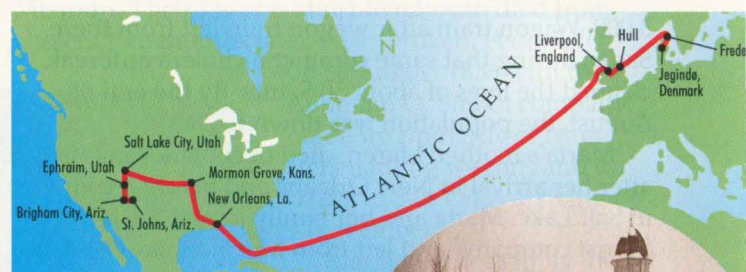
Eventually Peter and Martha and their family outgrew the adobe house, so they began construction on a larger rock home. In February 1876, when it was nearly finished, Church leaders called Peter to help the Saints colonize a United Order settlement in Arizona to be known as Brigham City. It was located more than 200 miles away on the Little Colorado River near modern-day Winslow, and the members were to build a dam there. Peter's testimony provided him with the motivation and courage to obey the call to leave his prosperous farm and start over again.

"Peter Isaacson was a man of obedience," wrote one grandson. "He did what he was told unwaveringly."

The men were told to leave their families until they could build a fort to protect everyone, so Martha and the children remained in Ephraim. At the end of the first year, Peter came back and got a load of wheat from his own bins to feed the group of workers in Arizona. It was another year before Peter returned for his family. Though it was difficult for the family to leave, "we couldn't let that stop us," wrote Anna Maria. "Father had been called to go to Arizona by the Church authorities, so we went. But Mother was always homesick for her brother and sister in Ephraim."

SIXTEEN YEARS IN ARIZONA

The Isaacsons now poured all their energy into the success of Brigham City, Arizona. Peter was superintendent of all the farms and served as first counselor in the bishopric. As he prepared the grain seed for planting, he would open the sack and then, on bended knees, bless the seed that it might grow and mature for his good and the blessings of those in need. Martha was always busy with the children, and she knitted stockings, made quilts and feather comforters, and gleaned wheat.



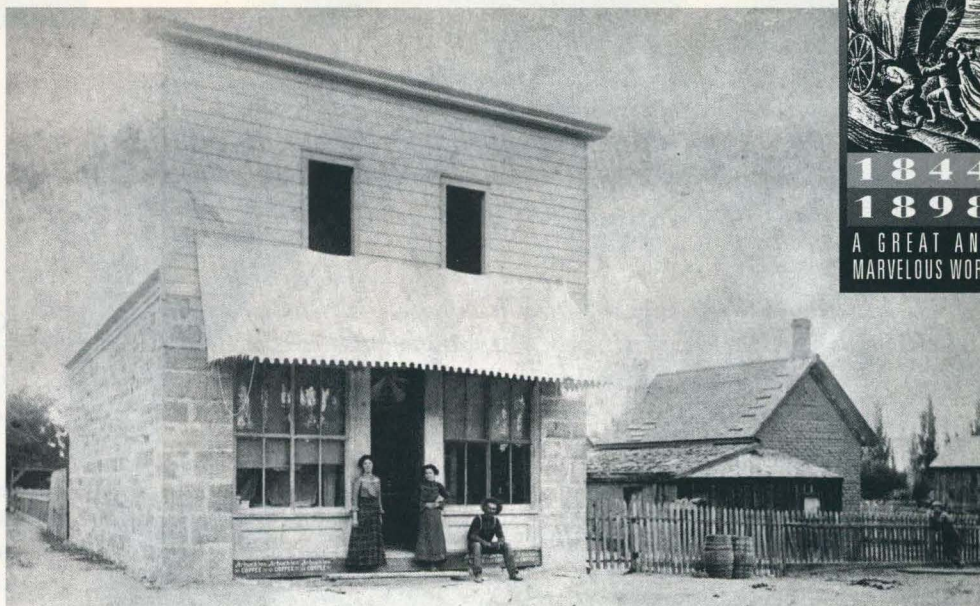
Above: In their nearly 8,000-mile journey, the Isaacsons traveled by ship, steamboat, train, and wagon train, and on foot. Right: Ephraim Tabernacle.



In 1881, after five years of unsuccessful attempts to build a permanent dam on the Little Colorado River at Brigham City, Church authorities advised everyone to abandon the settlement. They were to move 100 miles upstream and settle eight miles north of St. Johns, Arizona, in a place they called the Meadows. By now, Peter was serving as bishop. The spirit of working together prevailed as the families cleared the land and helped each other build fences around each family's five-acre farm plot. They hauled logs from the mountains and built a house for each family. The first winter at the Meadows was hard. With little food, the people and the cattle nearly starved to death. The sack of

wheat Martha had gleaned from the last harvest in Brigham City served as the main source of seed when it came time to plant the first crops at the Meadows.

The Isaacsons refused to kill their cow for food. This proved to be a great blessing later, as Martha made butter and sold it in St. Johns along with her eggs, milk, Dutch cheese, and fruit. Though she never learned to read or write English, she was intelligent, had a strong business sense, and kept accurate accounts of her earnings. She began to put some of this money in a missionary fund for her grandchildren.



Some Isaacson descendants, shown above, ran this general store in St. Johns, Arizona, and lived next door.

BACK TO EPHRAIM

In 1891, Martha wanted to move the more than 500 miles back to Ephraim, Utah, so she could be with her brother and sister and their families. Peter took her and their son Martin back but had to return to the Meadows to fulfill his calling as bishop. It was two more years before he was released and able to return to Ephraim. There, he finished the stone house he had started years earlier, and he and Martha moved in. Anna Maria and her family moved to Utah in 1888, living there until 1900 when they moved back to St. Johns. Ike and his family had remained in St. Johns. Martin and his family, living in Ephraim, eventually cared for Peter and Martha in their old age. Martha died on 13 December 1913 at the age of 91, and Peter died on 9 June 1920 at the age of 92.

A RIGHTEOUS POSTERITY

Peter and Martha sacrificed family, culture, and language when they came to the United States. The legacy they left their posterity grew out of the refining of the best they had to offer: their testimonies, their obedience to Church leaders, and their willingness to contribute to the common good of their fellow Saints. In the process, they helped establish Church settlements and forged a strong family circle that included three children, 30 living grandchildren, and the families of Martha's brother and sister, Niels and Dortha.

Martha's wise management of her missionary fund and Peter's lifelong example of generosity and consecration provided the money and motivation for the Isaacson grandchildren to serve missions. After

Martha's death, Anna Maria carried on the management of the fund, and through family donations and investments in apartments and property, this fund allowed hundreds of Martha's and Peter's great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren to serve missions.

Many of the Isaacsons' numerous posterity, now in the fifth and sixth generations, still meet yearly at the homestead in St. Johns for family reunions, with nearly 800 attending. Among the thousands of Isaacson descendants are such stalwarts as Thorpe B. Isaacson (1898–1970), counselor in the First Presidency, Rex E. Lee (1935–96), former president of Brigham Young University, and many mission presidents. Even today, these descendants draw strength from the example of their faithful, obedient Danish ancestors, Peter and Martha Isaacson. □

Gospel topics: faith, obedience, pioneers, sacrifice

NOTES

1. Information for this article has been gathered primarily from three sources, unless otherwise noted: (1) family group sheets; (2) Annette Whiting Farr, *The Story of Edwin Marion Whiting & Anna Maria Isaacson*; (3) Diane Rice, *The Whiting Infobase* CD-ROM Introductory Version, 1998. As is often the case with family records, there are conflicting versions of dates, places, and stories. In all cases, the author has attempted to resolve conflicting information through the use of printed records.

2. Conway B. Sonne, *Ships, Saints, and Mariners* [1987], 111.

3. Church Emigration Book, 1855, Eightieth Company—"James Nesmith," Historical Department, Archives Division, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

4. Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 31 Dec. 1855, 9.

5. Crossing the Plains Narratives, 1856, Abraham O. Smoot Company, Church Archives.

6. Dean L. May, "Mormon Grove," *Church News*, 20 Aug. 1977, 16.

7. Crossing the Plains Narratives, 1855, Jacob F. Secrist/Noah T. Guyman Company, Church Archives.

8. John A. Peterson, "Mormons, Indians, and Gentiles, and Utah's Black Hawk War" (Ph.D. dissertation, Arizona State University, 1993).