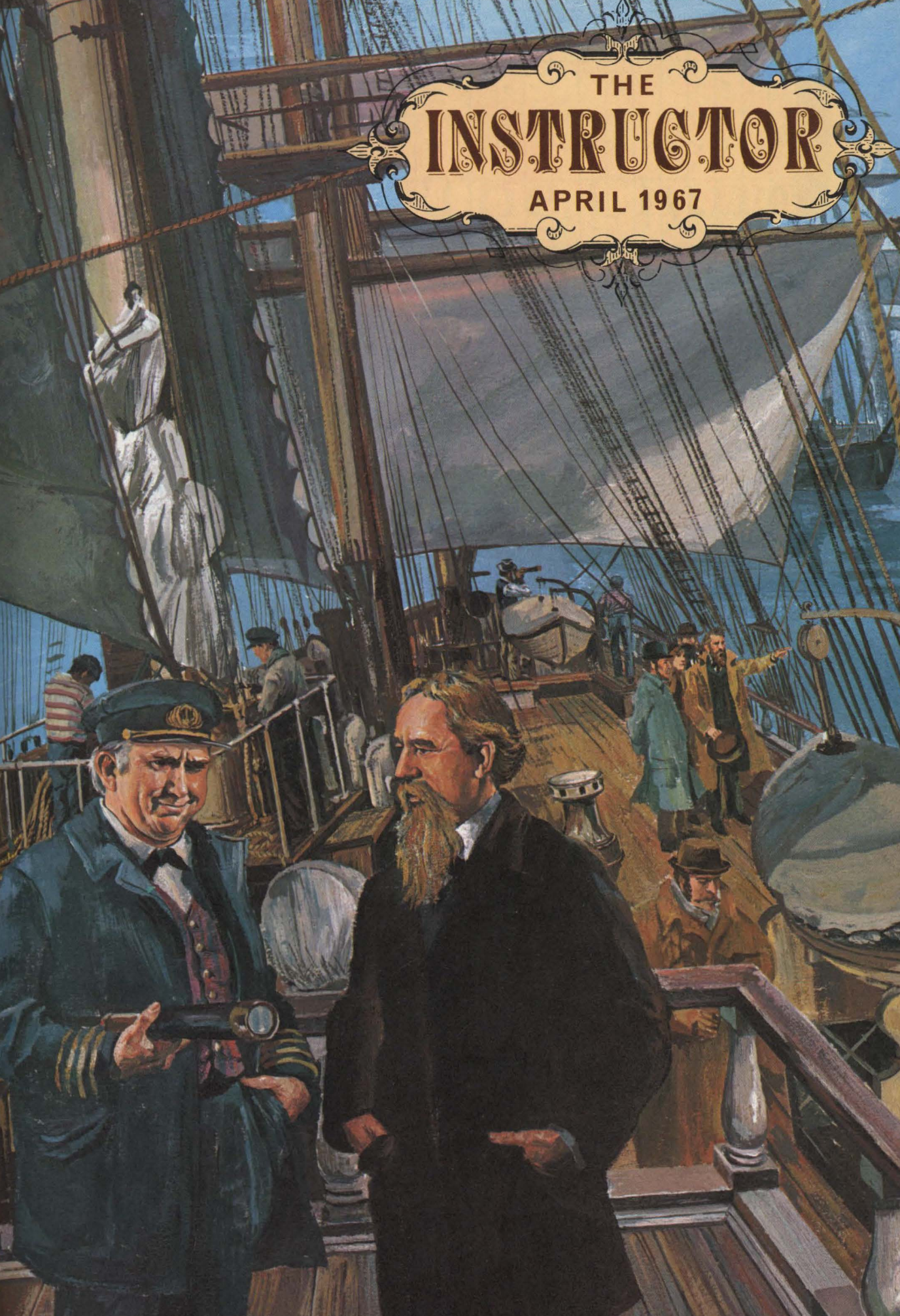


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# "GATHER YE TOGETHER.."

by Leonard J. Arrington\*

In the early days of the Restored Church the Lord counseled His people to gather out of "Babylon" and to build the kingdom of God in "the tops of the mountains." (See Doctrine and Covenants 133.) At the general conference held in the nearly completed Nauvoo Temple in October, 1845, the Saints voted unanimously to remove to the Far West. President Brigham Young proposed ". . . that we take all the Saints with us, to the extent of our ability, that is, our influence and property."

When this motion was enthusiastically passed, President Young prophesied: "If you will be faithful to your covenant . . . the great God will shower down means upon this people to accomplish it to the very letter."<sup>1</sup> Frequently, after the vanguard of Saints arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, President Young reminded them of this sacred covenant to assist their brethren in gathering to Zion.

On September 9, 1849, a conference of Saints approved the establishment of a "Perpetual Emigration Fund" to gather the poor. The territorial legislature incorporated a company, and a committee was appointed to collect contributions. During the next 38 years the Perpetual Emigration Fund Company<sup>2</sup> gave assistance to approximately

(For Course 7, lessons of May 7 and 14, "President Young Guides the Pioneers Westward" and "Water Pioneers"; for Course 11, lessons of April 20 and May 21, "The Railroad" and "Perpetual Emigration Fund Company"; for Course 13, lessons of April 16 and May 28, "Service" and "How the Gospel Spreads"; for Course 27, lesson of April 30, "Conditions of Membership"; and of general interest.)

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<sup>1</sup>B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Volume 2, Deseret News Press, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1930; page 538.

<sup>2</sup>B. H. Roberts, *History of the Church*, Volume 3, pages 407-410.

100,000 persons migrating from Europe and the eastern United States to the valleys "in the tops of the mountains."

The Perpetual Emigration Fund was planned in such a way that Church members in the Far West and elsewhere could contribute cash or livestock, produce, and labor, which were then converted into cash to assist converts in gathering to the Rocky Mountain Zion. After their arrival, those assisted were expected to labor part time on public projects to help keep the Fund active. More than ten million dollars in labor, produce, and property was donated to the Fund during its existence.

The Perpetual Emigration Fund Company had a twofold purpose: 1. To supervise the migration of approximately 15,000 "American" Saints from the Missouri River to the valley of the Great Salt Lake. This task was completed in 1852.

2. To organize and supervise the emigration of British, Scandinavian, and other European Saints. For this purpose a headquarters was established in Liverpool. Missionaries shepherded converts from British cities and farms to the English seaport. There, families of migrating Saints were organized into temporary wards and branches, with an experienced member as branch president or bishop, and placed aboard ships chartered for the ocean crossing. Each family was expected to pay whatever it could afford into the common fund.

The British exodus gained attention from prominent, influential men. Charles Dickens, who devoted one of the chapters of *The Uncommercial Traveller* to Mormon emigration from Liverpool, wrote of the strict order and beneficial discipline. "The Mormon ship," reported a House of Commons Committee, "is a family under strong and accepted discipline, with every provision for comfort, decorum, and internal peace."<sup>3</sup> (See our cover article, page 155.)

<sup>3</sup>Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons; Report from the Select Committee on Emigration Ships, 1854; XIII, 163, 349.



# UPON THE LAND OF ZION"

After an ocean voyage of several weeks, the Saints landed at New Orleans and went by river boat up the Mississippi and the Missouri rivers to the frontier outfitting post. Or, later, groups landed at New York, Philadelphia, or Boston, and traveled overland in specially chartered trains to the Missouri River rendezvous. Incoming groups were reorganized at the frontier outfitting point into companies of 200 or more, with a seasoned frontiersman as captain. Oxen, wagons, and provisions were acquired, and they began the long trek to the Great Basin. Once again, Mormon companies were noted for their splendid discipline and good order. The noted western historian, Ray Allen Billington, wrote that Mormon overlanders were "the best prepared pioneers in the West."<sup>4</sup>

As each wagon train arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, Presiding Bishop Edward Hunter convened the local bishops in order to place the immigrants for the winter. A Church Department of Public Works provided gainful employment in the construction of the Salt Lake Theatre, the "Mormon Tabernacle," the Salt Lake Temple, and such other works as irrigation canals, fences, gristmills, and tanneries. Early in the spring those desiring land were organized into companies to colonize new settlements. Almost 500 separate settlements were colonized by Mormon converts during the nineteenth century.

Approximately 3,000 Saints were thus assisted to the Far West each year by means of this inspired program. A noted western historian called it "the most successful example of regulated immigration in United States history."<sup>5</sup>

Beginning in 1856, several immigrant companies made the long trek across the plains pulling hand-

carts. During the 1860's, from 10,000 to 15,000 Saints were taken to the Salt Lake Valley in wagon trains which had been made up in Utah and driven by volunteers to the Missouri River for the express purpose of transporting the poor back to Utah. At the time of the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad in the late 1860's, thousands of Utah Saints labored on the road construction with very little or no pay, in order that their brethren could be brought to the West in relative comfort and ease.

The Perpetual Emigration Fund Company was formally disincorporated by an Act of Congress in 1887, but not before it had completed its task of assisting "the poor" to locate in the Great Basin. A few years after the disincorporation, The First Presidency asked the Saints to recognize that the purposes of the gathering had been accomplished and that new members should then, subject to individual agency, consider remaining in their own states and countries to build up congregations where the spirit of the Gospel would be manifest. Ultimately, of course, this led to the formation of wards and stakes, the erection of chapels and temples, and the location of many "little Zions" in different parts of the world.

#### Suggested Readings:

Gustive O. Larson, *Prelude to the Kingdom: Mormon Desert Conquest—A Chapter in American Cooperative Experience*; Marshall Jones Company, Frankestown, New Hampshire, 1947.

William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia*; University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1957.

Philip A. M. Taylor, *Expectations Westward: The Mormons and the Emigration of their British Converts in the Nineteenth Century*; Clarke Irwin and Company, Ltd., Canada, and Oliver and Boyd, Ltd., England, 1966.

Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900*; Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1958.

Library File Reference: PIONEERS.



Art by Ron Wilkinson.