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The Ship *Brooklyn*

*By Amelia D. Everett*

On the bright, breezy afternoon of July 31, 1846, there sailed through the Golden Gate the ship *Brooklyn*, piloted by Capt. Edward Richardson, who was also part-owner. Aboard were over two hundred peace-seeking, sea-weary, and worried Latter Day Saints, commonly called Mormons. Expert craftsmen with stocks of goods were among them; farmers with domestic animals and equipment; and a few professional men; mainly from the eastern United States. Of the total when they left New York on February 4, 1846, 70 were men, 68 women, and 100 children. But during the voyage there had been spiritual backsliding involving four, death had taken ten, and there were two births.¹

The leader or presiding elder of the group was Samuel Brannan, a printer by trade.² Most Californians have heard about Brannan and his accomplishments, but the details of his first and probably his greatest success—the chartering and managing of the cargo-ship *Brooklyn* for this important voyage—are less familiar. Born in Saco, Maine, in 1819, Brannan was a large and handsome man, with a forceful personality; and the *Brooklyn* put him and his fellow-passengers down where they were sure the Lord had sent them. Consequently, many descendants of the *Brooklyn* pioneers now live to glorify the ship and the voyage, though it was a trying experience at times for the voyagers.

The *Brooklyn* was built at Newcastle, Maine, in 1834, and was a full-rigged ship of 445 tons, 125 feet 4 inches long, 27 feet 11 inches beam, and 13 feet 1 ½ inches depth of hold.³ The records show that in November 1839 she was owned at New York by Abel W. Richardson, Stephen C. Burdett, and her captain, Edward Richardson. Elder Brannan chartered her at $1200 per month, the rate of passage to California being fixed at $50 for adults, with an additional charge of $25 for subsistence. Her provisioning and the cabins and bunks he had built cost over $16,000; and though he did not have the money, he was courageous and shrewd enough to raise it with the help of his flock.⁴

Like their forbears, these pilgrims were seeking a place for freedom
of worship, in spite of the fact that their departure was from the port of New York, supposed to be the front door to the land of freedom itself. But mobs had murdered their prophet, Joseph Smith, and his brother Hyrum, and had driven their co-religionists from state to state. In far-away California they hoped at last to find a refuge. En route they stopped at the Hawaiian Islands to deliver 500 barrels of freight, the proceeds helping to defray part of their passage. There they saw war-ships; the United States was at war with Mexico, and the very place for which they were headed was subject to attack. Some of the passengers became panic-stricken. They feared they would be stranded on the Island of Oahu instead of going to California. Others favored going to Oregon or to Victoria Island. But the peril of war was not the paramount problem in the thoughts of their adventure-loving leader.

Instead, Brannan was remembering a contract he had signed with Kendall, Benson and Company of New York, who were said to have influence with the government, which was disposed to prevent the Mormons from leaving. This company agreed to furnish protection if the Mormon leaders would sign an agreement to transfer to "A. G. Benson, Kendall and Company and their heirs and assigns," the odd number of all land units and town lots settled or acquired by the Mormons wherever they might choose to colonize. In other words, Mormons were to divide with politicians their "inheritance" in the new Zion-to-be. Brannan signed the agreement and in vain waited nearly a month for Brigham Young's signature to arrive by mail from Nauvoo, Illinois. By February 4, 1846, he had determined to slip past the guns of Fort Lafayette in New York harbor without waiting any longer. Why hadn't Young signed the pact for their safety, he wondered? He would never rest until he found out.

Now he was faced with the threat of being stopped in Hawaii by Commodore Robert F. Stockton. He must see Stockton. The interview proved pleasing, even exhilarating, to Samuel Brannan. Instead of preventing their progress, Stockton had encouraged the venture. He said that the Navy was to begin an assault against Mexico at Monterey, and he offered the suggestion that the Mormons take and hold Yerba Buena in the name of the United States. To that end, he assisted Brannan in buying some outmoded arms from the Navy. Brannan drilled the seventy male passengers of the Brooklyn, aided by Samuel Ladd, an ex-soldier, and Robert Smith, another passenger who understood military tactics. As for dissenters, Brannan reminded them of their obliga-
tion to prepare a place in California for the 10,000 overland pioneers who were being led westward by Brigham Young. Brannan never took his fellow voyagers into his full confidence; and they, on their part, liked neither his pomposity nor his forceful methods of ruling, but, with Mormon loyalty to leadership, they obeyed.8

The Brooklyn's stop-over at Honolulu prompted the town's leading newspaper, The Friend, published and edited by Samuel C. Damon, to give, in its July 1, 1846, issue, an extended account of the visitors' religious beliefs and their ecclesiastical organization. The passengers on the Brooklyn were said to "have come from the Baptists, others from the Methodists, a few from the Presbyterians, while almost every denomination has its representative among them... The difficulties in which these people found themselves at Nauvoo, and other parts of the States have led to the resolution to 'break up' and 'be off' for California." Mormon emigrants had already left Liverpool and others would soon follow, all bound for the west. The Brooklyn's captain had referred "in the most favorable manner" to his passengers' "general behavior and character" during the long voyage. "That we differ," the article continued, "upon many essential points of doctrine and practice is clearly manifest, yet our best wishes and prayers go with them... They are to lay the foundations of... institutions, social, civil and religious. O, may they be such that coming generations shall rise up and call them blessed."

When they were again on the way to California, Brannan dug up a suitable bolt of cloth from the cargo, and the women fashioned it into uniforms for their new-fledged warriors. Each man had a military cap, and there were 50 Allen's revolvers available.9 Thus outfitted, they drilled while they sailed. On July 31, 1846, as they neared their destination Samuel Brannan strutted to the front of the deck. Why shouldn't he and his men plant the American flag on San Francisco Bay? That would be an act worthy of notice. Shortly thereafter, they were passing through the rocky portals of the Golden Gate. Sam was eagerly peering through the telescope. He saw a war ship anchored in the cove; but what was more to his consternation was the sight of the American flag, hoisted and waving. "Damn that flag!" he said, not in disrespect for the flag but in disappointment that he had not arrived in time to be the first to fly it.10

Cannon from the Yerba Buena battery boomed a salute, and a gun from the Brooklyn responded. A sturdy rowboat glided out to meet
them. Soon uniformed men trod the Brooklyn’s deck. The Mormons were happy to see that they were friendly Americans from the U.S.S. Portsmouth, not Mexicans. One of the passengers reported: “In our native tongue the officer in command, with head uncovered, courteously said, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor to inform you that you are in the United States of America.’ Three hearty cheers were given in reply.”11

The long sandy beach at Yerba Buena was strewn with hides and the skeletons of slaughtered cattle. There were a few scrubby oaks and, beyond, low sandhills rose as a background to the adobe customshouse and some old shanties that leaned away from the wind. Dejected-looking donkeys plodded along beneath bundles of wood. Here and there, loungers stretched themselves in lazy fashion on the beach. That “odd, uncouth town” was Yerba Buena—soon to be San Francisco—the landing place for the children of the hoped-for new Zion.12

So far as is known, the Brooklyn’s passengers constituted the first Anglo-Saxon colony to sail around Cape Horn with their women and children, and to land in California. The ship herself was the second to come through the Golden Gate after the American flag was raised. War had scarcely begun. A Mexican counter-attack was expected, and the seventy impromptu Mormon soldiers were welcome. A month before, the Bear Flag revolt had precipitated hostilities in California. Commodore Sloat had now captured Monterey, and Colonel Frémont’s “California Battalion” was marching south to engage the enemy. Yerba Buena’s flank stood exposed.

The sea-weary travelers were glad to land after six months in crowded cabins. They found a community consisting of half a dozen Americans (other than the sailors and Marines from the Portsmouth), several members of Spanish families, and about 100 Indians. Everyone wanted to see the Brooklyn, and the natives were amazed at the amount and variety of the things taken off her. There was Brannan’s printing press with two years’ supply of paper and type, and all the material pertaining to the Prophet, one of the two church papers Brannan had published in New York. There were three flour mills, a saw mill, numerous implements for farmers and mechanics—enough for 800 men, in the expectation that there would be later additions to the colony.13

There were two milch cows, forty pigs, and a crate of fowls; saddles; sewing machines; a blacksmith’s forge, iron pipes, brass, copper, tin; crockery; dry goods; hammocks, tents; medical supplies; smooth-bore
muskets; food enough to last them another month; and books—more, one writer states, than could be found in all the rest of the territory put together. Among them were many copies of the Bible and of the Book of Mormon; also copies of the Doctrine and Covenants, and of the "Pearl of Great Price" (then in manuscript)—the four books that are considered the standard works of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. In addition, there were many schoolbooks, dictionaries, and encyclopedias, as well as slates. Harper's Family Library of 179 volumes had been given to them by I. M. VanCott, at a farewell party on the night before they left New York.  

Under the title "the awakening of Yerba Buena" one historian credits much of the town's progress at that time to the supplies the Mormon colonists brought with them on the Brooklyn. Not only were material objects unloaded that day on the Yerba Buena beach, but those who did the unloading had, ingrained in themselves, habits of industry and a talent for establishing and adorning their homes. The first night many found shelter in tents, and for a month or more, guards kept a sharp lookout for possible attack; but the enemy never appeared and was soon forgotten by the newcomers in the stress of finding food, in building adequate shelter, and in work that would help them pay off the indebtedness they had incurred for transportation to California. For example, twenty men were sent to Marin County with axes, whipsaws, and Spanish oxen, to haul out redwood as cargo for the Brooklyn's return trip.  

In an attempt to find an answer to the question often asked, namely, what happened to the Brooklyn after her 1846 voyage, the present writer consulted Mr. John Lyman, the specialist on California shipping, at the Archives in Washington, D. C., who supplied the information on the ship's dimensions, etc., mentioned earlier. According to Mr. Lyman, in November, 1839, the Brooklyn was owned at New York by Abel W. Richardson, Stephen C. Burdett, and her captain, Edward Richardson; but by January 1849 her owners had been changed to Edward Richardson and Francis Burritt, both of New York City, with Joseph M. Richardson as master. She loaded at New York for San Francisco via Panama at the end of 1849, being freighted by A. G. Benson & Co. and E. Richardson. In March 1852, Francis Burritt became the sole owner. The next month he sold her to Marshall O. Roberts, George Law, and Bowes R. McIlwaine, trustees, who represented the United States Mail Line which provided the New York-to-Panama service connecting
with the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. between Panama and San Francisco. To quote Mr. Lyman directly on the *Brooklyn*'s history:

She was registered on 10 April 1852 at New York, and this document is not to be found at the Archives. (Normally, whenever a ship is reregistered, sold foreign, or wrecked, her document is cancelled and sent to Washington.) However, the summary of registers indicates that a report was made to Washington by the Collector at New York early in August 1856; (the date is either 4 or 6 August). This can only mean that the *Brooklyn* was wrecked, scrapped, or sold to foreigners between April 1852 and August 1856; but at this time nothing further can be determined as to her fate.17

**SOME DETAILS OF THE VOYAGE**

To return to the *Brooklyn*'s 1846 voyage: a few days after leaving New York she encountered a great storm. All on board were sea-sick. According to one eye-witness, the more resolute ones “struggled to the deck to behold the sublime grandeur of the scene, to hear the dismal howl of the winds, and to see the ship . . . dipping in the troughs of the sea and then tossed on the highest billow.” On the passenger deck, all manner of household furnishings were crashing into each other. “Sister Laura Goodwin was thrown from a ladder and lay critically injured. Old Brother Ensign and his daughter Eliza were dead. It was only by realizing that the Lord holds the waters in His hand that we could have faith to be delivered from our perilous condition.”18

As they neared the treacherous coast of the Cape Verde Islands, Samuel Brannan adjured them to “Sing! Sing all!” And, with “The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning,” and “We Are Going to California,” the Saints sang down the howl of the winds and the roar of the waves. Captain Richardson, having given up hope, went below to prepare his passengers for the worst. He was astonished to find them singing, singing all, in the face of a watery grave. Suddenly the wind died to a sailing breeze; the sun came out, and, in thanks for their deliverance, the voyagers knelt in prayer.19

During the storm, Silas Aldrich had died, as well as a child of John Fowler, two children of John R. Robbins, and George K. Winner's child. These tragedies heightened all the more the Saints' apprehension of the dangers still awaiting them in the rounding of Cape Horn.

In crossing the equator, they experienced calm for two or three days. The children thronged the deck, attending school, jumping rope, and engaging in other amusements. One day the thermometer on deck fell as low as 36 degrees, which Captain Richardson attributed to their
The Ship Brooklyn

passing near an iceberg. Cape Horn was at last rounded; beyond, every-
thing seemed propitious—in fact, the two oceans came in for special
recognition. While the Brooklyn was traversing the Atlantic, a baby,
born to Sarah Sloat Burr, was given the name of John Atlantic Burr;
during the rounding of Cape Horn, the wife of John Robbins gave
birth to a baby girl, who was thereupon christened Georgianna Pacific
Robbins. Two more children died and were buried at sea.  

When the stock of fresh food was gone, scurvy began to take its toll.
Supplies of water and of fuel (needed for the cook stoves) were becom-
ing exhausted. Laura Goodwin, the accident victim, had died after
requesting that she be buried on land. Owing to a heavy gale from the
south, Captain Richardson was unable to land at Valparaiso, but by the
time they came abreast of the Island of Juan Fernandez (Defoe’s Robin-
son Crusoe Isle) a landing was possible. Here they found an abundance
of food—goats, pigs, hares, fresh peaches and figs—the fruit being
invaluable in combatting the scurvy; and there was plenty of wood and
water. Except for two families, the island had been deserted because
of an earthquake. The Brooklyn’s passengers found them eager to help
in loading the ship with whatever native products were desired and at
exceedingly low prices. The stop at Juan Fernandez Island also made
it possible to fulfill Laura Goodwin’s wish to be buried on land. The
merciful hand of God was now seen in the wind that had prevented
their landing at Valparaiso, where only a meager supply of food would
have taken all the funds they had.  

On May 9th, the company left Juan Fernandez and had clear sailing
all the way to the Sandwich Islands. But trouble had been brewing
aboard, and Brannan’s method of stopping it had only made it worse.
Lucy Eagar, an attractive widow with grown children, was the center
of some talk about polygamy—a subject forbidden by Brannan. Two
men were interested in Lucy. One was already married, but he spoke
of making her his second wife. Whereupon Brannan excommunicated
several men and also Lucy Eagar. He had to report it to the presidency
at the Saints’ headquarters; so he gave as his excuse that their conduct
had been “wicked and licentious.” This stirred up a sharp reaction
among the interested parties and others, and they determined to take
Brannan to court upon their arrival at their destination. When the case
came to trial, the jury found for Brannan.  

Elder Brannan is said to have officiated at the town’s first American
wedding—Lizzie Winner to Basil Hall. He continued to urge his flock
to hold strictly to the regulation for meetings, and not let themselves be led astray by the ways of the Gentiles. For a time he was the only preacher in the community; he published the first San Francisco newspaper, the California Star (Jan. 9, 1847); he was, in fact, a "first-doer" of many things, such as becoming the town’s first millionaire. But there were others arriving on the Brooklyn who were likewise originators and makers of fortunes.

**NOTES ON SOME OF THE PASSENGERS**

John Horner, a “Seventy” in the Mormon Church, a wheelwright, blacksmith, farmer, and town-planner, made history in the southern part of Alameda County by erecting the first American home in the county.²⁴ His son is reported to have been the first Anglo-Saxon child born in California. John Horner built the county’s first schoolhouse, which was also used as a church for twenty-three years, and he was the first non-Catholic to hold church services in the county. In improving methods of communication—on San Francisco Bay and along roads (including the building of bridges)—and in the establishment of laundries, he was a pioneer. He also donated ground for a grave yard. Horner spent his money freely to advance his religion, though he did not go to Utah.

With the colony on the Brooklyn were also Isaac Robbins and his brothers John Roger (father of Georgianna Pacific Robbins) and Charles.²⁵ A ship coming into San Francisco Bay from Sydney had on board a horse which the Robbinses purchased; with it and a cart they started the first express business in San Francisco. Like Brannan, John R. Robbins thought that Brigham Young might be persuaded to build his Zion-metropolis at the gateway to the Pacific. John therefore took up land where the Sheraton-Palace Hotel now stands. He later became the father of two girls. Their Brooklyn-born sister, Georgianna Pacific, attained prominence in the musical life of early Salt Lake City. John R. made several trips from his farm in New Jersey, back and forth across the continent, and settled in Utah in 1853. Under date of July 6, 1854, the Deseret News says: “John Roger Robbins, C. Kinkead, J. Needham and L. Stewart have arrived in our city in advance of their trains of goods to the value of one million dollars which are now on the road to this Market and will soon begin to arrive.”

Charles Burtis Robbins remained in San Francisco to work as a printer’s apprentice to Samuel Brannan, and assisted in getting out the first number of the California Star. He also mined for gold on Mormon
Island. By 1853 he had become a resident of Utah, after returning to New Jersey via the Isthmus of Panama.\textsuperscript{26}

The family of William Evans learned to speak Spanish fluently while living among the Spanish residents of San Francisco. William purchased a piece of land on the corner of Market Street and Van Ness Avenue, and established what has been called the first tailor shop on the west coast of America. The Evans home became a mecca for the missionaries of their church. William died in 1851, leaving his widow Hannah and five children. Hannah carried on her husband’s business until, in 1856, she moved her family to Utah.\textsuperscript{27}

Among the other \textit{Brooklyn} passengers were John Joyce, a carpenter, his wife Caroline A., and two daughters. In Boston, Mrs. Joyce was called “the Mormon Nightingale.” Strangers, indifferent to the Gospel, would say, “Let us go to Boylston Hall and hear her sing.”\textsuperscript{28} Many thought that she sang the newly-restored hymns as one inspired. After coming to San Francisco, she was able to buy a melodeon, the first in San Francisco, brought to the coast in 1848 by Washington Holbrook, supercargo on the American brig \textit{Sabine}.\textsuperscript{29} According to Joyce’s daughter, her father prospered in the growing community, but his wealth coming between him and his religious principles, he abandoned the latter. Combined with his heavy drinking, this caused a separation between him and Mrs. Joyce. Subsequently she was married to Col. Alden A. M. Jackson.

While preparing this account, the writer interviewed John Eagar’s descendants, who are highly thought-of citizens and loyal workers in the Mormon Church. They state that they have searched all available records to learn why his mother, Lucy Eagar, was excommunicated and have found no complaint against her except Samuel Brannan’s. As they see it, Mrs. Eagar’s great mistake was in staying out of the church, even though she lost her case against Brannan. She managed to support herself, however, in addition to securing a town lot, by keeping a small store in San Francisco in 1846. In 1847 she moved to Monterey, where her daughter taught school.\textsuperscript{30} John was one of Brannan’s \textit{California Star} printers, while her other son, Thomas, gold miner, owner of a San Francisco lot, and lumberman of East Oakland, was a member of the California legislature in the 1860’s.\textsuperscript{31}

\textit{Brooklyn} passenger William Glover, whose manuscript reminiscences, “Mormons in California,” dated 1884, Bancroft calls “an important source of information on its topic,” was by craft a mason and
He went to the mines in 1848, did well, and later removed to Farmington, Utah. While living in San Francisco he invested in town lots and took up his responsibilities as a citizen in 1847 by serving, along with W. D. M. Howard, W. A. Leidesdorff, and Elbert P. Jones (a Kentucky lawyer and first editor of Brannan's *Star*), on the town council or ayuntamiento, and also on the school committee.

In efforts to further education in the new community, Glover worked along with Samuel Brannan, whose breadth of view was shown in the prospectus for his newspaper; viz., that it would “eschew with the greatest caution every thing that tends to the propagation of sectarian dogmas.” Brannan gave weight to his views by urging in the *Star’s* columns the necessity of getting the forty children he had counted off the streets and into a schoolhouse; and, as a member of a committee chosen for the purpose, by personally canvassing the community for scholars to act as teachers. Meanwhile, William Glover’s efforts were directed toward the erection of a suitable schoolhouse.

But San Francisco was not destined to be the new Zion for the Mormon Church; nor did Brannan’s attempt to establish it at New Hope in the San Joaquin Valley meet with success. Instead, when Brannan and his party struggled over the Sierra (taking with them copies of the *California Star* as persuasive evidence) in April 1847, to meet Brigham Young midway of the continent, he at last realized that it was fruitless to argue. Young and his council had made up their minds; to them neither the Peninsula of San Francisco nor the Valley of the San Joaquin offered a site for the blossoming of Zion that could compare with the Valley of Salt Lake.

**NOTES**


5. *History of the [Mormon] Church* (Salt Lake City, 1932), VI, 612; VII, 177.


18. Glover, *op. cit.*


20. The Honolulu *Friend*, July 1, 1846, pp. 101-102, gives causes of deaths as diarrhea, scarlet fever, consumption, cankered sore throat, and dropsy of the stomach, with the ages of the victims. *See also* Carter, *op. cit.*, VII, 400.


36. *History of the Church*, *op. cit.*, VII, 591. For Brannan’s excommunication and his subsequent reinstatement, see *ibid.*, pp. 395, 418.
Snow in the Sierra, a painting by William Hahn.
Presented to the Society by Mrs. Eric Gerson in memory of her father, Jacob Goldberg.
The Ship Brooklyn, from a painting by Arnold Friberg. 

Courtesy The Improvement Era.

(See page 229)