



BROOKLYN

'WATER SAINTS' ENDURE
SUFFERING AND HARDSHIP TO FORM
LIVING BOND OF FREINDSHIP

THE VOYAGE OF THE BROOKLYN

by
David R. Crockett

On July 31, 1846, a weary company of about 220 Latter-day Saints passed through the rocky portals of the Golden Gate, anticipating the end of a difficult six-month voyage that took them around the southern tip of South America, Cape Horn. While thousands of dedicated Mormon pioneers struggled to make their way across Iowa to Council Bluffs,

this bold company of "Water Saints" also experienced the hardships of pioneer life. Their voyage from New York Harbor to what was later called the San Francisco Bay, is a tale full of severe suffering, trials of faith, deaths of loved ones, and an evidence of deep commitment to their faith.

Preparations for their historic voyage began almost nine months earlier when, on Nov. 8, 1845, Elder Orson Pratt of the Council of the Twelve Apostles issued his farewell message to the Saints in the Eastern states before he traveled back to Nauvoo. He encouraged those who could not afford to obtain horses and wagons for a trek across land to "raise means to pay their passage by sea around Cape Horn to the western coast of North America." He announced that Elder Samuel Brannan, a leader of the church in New York, would sail by sea and it was thought the entire journey could be accomplished in only four or five months.¹



New York & Brooklyn, 1851

NEW YORK HARBOR



SAN FRANCISCO BAY

San Francisco, 1851

SANDWICH ISLANDS

JUAN FERNANDEZ

CAPE HORN



Samuel Brannan went right to work. At a church conference held a few days later, Brannan asked all those interested in going with him by water to come forward at the close of the meeting to put their names on a list.² In December, Brannan chartered the *Brooklyn*, a 445-ton ship, 125 feet long, for \$1,200 per month. The decks below were fitted with a large cabin and a row of state rooms on each side that would be used by the passengers. There were sky lights in the deck to provide some light. The original date for sailing was set for January 24th. Each passenger was to raise \$50 to secure a reservation on the ship. An additional \$25 was charged for provisions. The captain would be Edward Richardson who had the "reputation of being one of the most skillful seamen that has ever sailed from this [New York] port, and bears an excellent moral character."³

Samuel Brannan worked hard to recruit the passengers for the *Brooklyn*. He even tried to persuade Oliver Cowdery to sail with him. Oliver later wrote to Phineas Young: "Were I to go, for many reasons, I would prefer going this way, and avoid a long journey by land."⁴

As the day for the voyage approached, the *Brooklyn* was loaded with important cargo that would be needed by the Saints in the west. Among the items was the printing press that had been used to print LDS periodicals such as *The Prophet* and the *New York Messenger*. This press would later serve another historic role to print the first real newspaper in California called, *California Star*.⁵ Also loaded on the ship were agricultural and mechanical tools and equipment "for eight hundred men," such as plows, hoes, shovels, sickles and many other tools.⁶

~~~~~ BON VOYAGE ~~~~~

The date to set sail changed several times, but on Feb. 1, 1846, Brannan wrote "the ship is now loaded, full to the hatchings, about five hundred barrels of which we leave at the Sandwich Islands, and the remainder is ours. There are now in the city, and some on board the vessel, about two hundred and thirty souls that will sail next Wednesday at two o'clock; all happy and cheerful at the prospect of deliverance."⁷

The day finally arrived. The wharf was crowded with friends and relatives bidding their good-byes. "The *Brooklyn* deck was of course the scene of lively excitement and affectionate leavetaking. The crowd on shore kept up their spirits by giving them repeated parting cheers, which those on board duly acknowledged in kind."⁸

The *Brooklyn* raised anchor on Feb. 4, 1846, the exact same day that the first wagons left Nauvoo and crossed over the Mississippi. The ship left New York harbor with 238 passengers, including 70 men, 68 women and 100 children.⁹ There were 12 non-mem-

bers who went with the company.¹⁰ They hired an experienced cook and steward who could cook for such a large group and purchased a good cooking stove. The ship was provisioned for a voyage of seven months.

Brannan established rules and regulations for the passengers, to attempt to keep discipline and order on the ship. Reveille was sounded at 6 a.m. when everyone was to arise from their bed, dress, and wash. All state rooms were inspected each day to see that they were neat and clean, and that all dirty clothes were removed and put in bags. Breakfast was served in the main hall to the children first and then to the adults. From 10 a.m.-2 p.m., time was devoted to various occupations and at 2:30 dinner was prepared. From 5-8 p.m., the time was spent in reading, singing or other amusements. At 8 p.m., a cold lunch was placed on the table. By 9 p.m., the table was cleared and all were ready to retire for the night.¹¹ This routine was soon found impractical, but order and discipline was still established on the ship.¹²

~~~~~ A TERRIBLE STORM ~~~~~

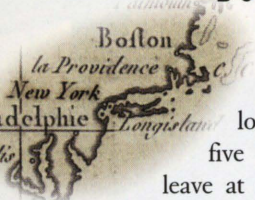
On the fourth day of sailing, the *Brooklyn* encountered a terrible storm. The passengers had to stay below as the crew worked feverishly to save the ship. John Eager recalled, "Women and children were lashed to their berths at night for in no other way could they keep in. Furniture rolled back and forth endangering life and limb. The waves swept the deck and even reached the staterooms. The only light was from two lamps hung outside in the hall and these were dim and wavering from the movements of the vessel."¹³ Another frightened passenger wrote, "The ship rocked, creaked and seemed about to be torn apart. The hatches had to be kept closed, the light put out; the foul air was almost unbearable. Almost everyone was seasick and panic was near."¹⁴

During the storm, the passengers gathered around Captain Richardson to hear his words. He said: "My friends, there is a time in every man's life when it is fitting that he should prepare to die. The time has come to us, and unless God interposes, we shall all go to the bottom; I have done all in my power, but his is the worst gale I have known since I was master of a ship." One woman, told him: "Captain Richardson, we left for California and we shall get there." Another said: "Captain, I have no more fear than though we were on the solid land." The captain was surprised and went upstairs he said, "These people have a faith that I have not," and added to a gentlemen, "They are either fools and fear nothing, or they know more than I do."¹⁵

The Saints recalled how in ancient days, Christ had stilled the storm. They prayed and sang songs such as "The Spirit of God" and "We are Going to California." After four days and nights the storm ceased. They were protected and only lost the two cows that they had brought with them. But Laura Goodwin was severely injured, falling down some stairs. She had been with

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I would prefer
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Oliver Cowdery



RULES AND REGULATIONS

FOR THE EMIGRANTS ON BOARD THE SHIP. *Brooklyn*

DAILY DUTY, &c.

- RULE 1. Revillie to beat at six o'clock in the morning.
- RULE 2. Each person will be required at the beating of the Revillie (that is able) to arise from their beds, put on their apparel, wash their face and hands, and comb their heads.
- RULE 3. No man, woman, or child, will be permitted to leave their respective State Rooms, to appear in the Hall (or Cabin) without being completely dressed (ie) without their Coats, &c.
- RULE 4. Immediately after the beating of the Revillie, the Corporal will visit every State Room, and receive the names of all the sick, and of those who are not able to do duty, and report the same to the officer of the day, who will be chosen every morning.
- RULE 5. Every State Room to be swept, cleansed, and the Beds made by seven o'clock.
- RULE 6. No State Room Doors allowed to remain open at any time, from the spreading of the Table until cleared off.
- RULE 7. The Hall must be dusted and cleansed complete by half past seven, every morning.
- RULE 8. Table spread at eight o'clock, at half past eight, the children to breakfast first, when done to return on deck, or to their respective State Rooms, and no child will be allowed to be in the Hall while the Table is spreading, and meals getting ready.
- RULE 9. At quarter past 9 o'clock the Ladies and Gentlemen will breakfast, and immediately after, retire either on Deck or to their respective State Rooms, to make room to clear the Table and adjust things in the Hall.
- RULE 10. By Ten o'clock the Table must be cleared off, the Hall completely swept clean, and then every State Room door thrown open to receive fresh air.
- RULE 11. From 10 o'clock until 2 P. M. (4 hours) the time will be devoted to labour in various occupations.
- RULE 12. At half past 2 o'clock, all to retire from the Hall, either to their respective State Rooms, or upon Deck, the doors of the State Rooms closed, and the Table spread for dinner.
- RULE 13. At 3 o'clock the children will dine, then retire either upon Deck or to their State Rooms, and there tarry until the table is cleared off.
- RULE 14. At 4 o'clock, the Ladies and Gentlemen will dine, and afterward retire on Deck, or to their State Rooms.
- RULE 15. By 5 o'clock the Table to be cleared off, the Hall swept clean, and the doors of the State Rooms thrown open, and the remainder of the time, until eight o'clock, to be occupied in reading, singing, or other innocent amusements.
- RULE 16. At 8 o'clock a cold lunch will be placed upon the Table, for each one to partake of that feels disposed.
- RULE 17. By 9 o'clock the Table to be cleared, and all ready to retire to rest.
- RULE 18. One Cook, and a cook Police, consisting of three men, will be detailed from the company once every week.
- RULE 19. A Committee of two will be detailed every morning from the company, to wait upon the sick, see that their wants are attended and administered to, &c.
- RULE 20. A Health Officer will be detailed from the company every morning to inspect the State Rooms every day, and see that all are neat and clean, the Beds made, and all dirty clothes removed, put into bags, or rolled up and placed in the hold of the ship.
- RULE 21. Every Sabbath Morning there will be Divine Service held on board, commencing at 11 o'clock, when all that are able must attend, shaved, and washed clean, so as to appear in a manner becoming the solemn, and holy occasion.

N. B. It is expected that the above rules will be strictly complied with by every emigrant (without having to enforce them,) until they are altered or others substituted in their place.



**"Rats abounded
in the vessel;
cockroaches and
smaller vermin
infested the
provisions, until
eternal vigilance
was the price
imposed upon
every mouthful."**

child, and soon lost it by miscarriage. Her sickness would linger on until her death a month later.¹⁶

~~~~~LIFE ON BOARD THE SHIP~~~~~

As the ship traveled into calmer waters, the novelty of the voyage quickly wore off and the pioneers had to look for interesting ways to cure their boredom. The men were fascinated by the maneuvering of the ship by the crew and would watch them for hours. The little children were on deck every day, attending to their school work, jumping rope, and other amusements to pass off the time. The single girls served as waitresses for the cook and the steward. The men took turns to serve as guards night and day.¹⁷

Each Sunday there was a church service on ship, starting at 11 a.m. At these meetings, many testimonies would be borne, a choir was organized and all joined in singing the songs of Zion.¹⁸

The Saints tried to endure many discomforts that accompanied life below the deck, including the lack of headroom. "So low were the ceilings that only a dwarf could stand erect, and a person of normal stature must move about by crouching monkey-fashion."¹⁹ Another pioneer recorded: "It was always in semi-darkness and

could only be dimly lit by the whale oil lamps. After meals and prayers the families went to the tiny bunks with canvas curtains. It was all poorly ventilated, unsanitary, with ceilings too low for standing erect."²⁰

At the beginning of the voyage Brannan took meals with the passengers in the main hall. But because of the noise of plates, the crying of sick babies, and the bad smell, he dined at the captain's table for most of the voyage, which didn't go over well with some of the less fortunate.²¹

In late February, sickness became a severe problem. Eliza Ensign died. A few days later, Phebe Robbins watched the sad faces of men as they lowered a tiny bundle containing the dead body of a baby over the side of the ship. On the very next day, she lost her son, George Edward Robbins. Before the voyage was finished there would be at least twelve deaths, including six children. But in the midst of this death and sadness there was also the joy of birth. On Feb. 24 a baby was born to Charles and Sarah Burr. Brannan later performed a ceremony on deck and named the little boy appropriately, John Atlantic Burr.²²

On March 4, the *Brooklyn* crossed the equator, heading south for Cape Horn. Brannan organized the

ship into a form of "The United Order." The company would become one body and share the debts of the voyage. They were asked to give three years labor into a common fund. If they left the covenant, the common property would remain with the elders. It was an imperfect agreement, and there was some grumbling, but they all signed their names to the agreement.²³

~~~~~ AROUND CAPE HORN ~~~~~

In mid April, the *Brooklyn* headed into the treacherous waters of Drake's Passage at the tip of South America. Through the skillful seamanship of Captain Richardson, Cape Horn was rounded, and they safely passed by the feared graveyard of ships. The colder weather caused ice to form on the sails and rigging, which made the passage even more difficult.²⁴ One passenger wrote, "We had a quick passage to Cape Horn and found that the terrors of the passage round it were all imaginary." Another wrote, "The days were very short; we could hardly get a glimpse of the sun for several days but we got around first rate."²⁵

The temperatures during the voyage were never very cold. At no time was the temperature below 50 degrees in the cabins below. On one day it was a chilly 36 degrees on deck, but the captain explained that this was caused by a passing iceberg.²⁶

On April 28, with the *Brooklyn* now headed north, drinking water was becoming so scarce that it was rationed in pints. Firewood for the galley was almost gone. It was time to go into port. Everyone on ship was looking forward to the port of Valparaiso, Chile, after being at sea for so long. When they were within reach of the harbor, an offshore gale started to rage. For three days and nights it raged and blew the ship back. At least one child died during the storm and one of the sailors was washed overboard. Captain Richardson decided to make no more attempts to enter to harbor. The ship had been blown so far south that icebergs were sighted. The Captain turned for the island of Juan Fernandez, 400 miles to the west.²⁷

The conditions on the ship were reaching a terrible state. "The drinking water grew thick and ropy with slime, so that it had to be strained between the teeth, and the taste was dreadful... Rats abounded in the vessel; cockroaches and smaller vermin infested the provisions, until eternal vigilance was the price imposed upon every mouthful."²⁸

~~~~~ ISLAND OF JUAN FERNANDEZ ~~~~~

After three months of sailing, the *Brooklyn* dropped anchor in the cove of the Island of Juan Fernandez on May 4. This is the island on which Alexander Selkirk (Robinson Crusoe) lived from 1704 to 1709. Caroline A.

Joyce later wrote, "The memory of the place will never fade from our minds. As we approached, being yet a great distance away, the island looked like a mass of immensely high rocks covered with moss; which

moss, on nearer scrutiny, turned out to be heavy forests covering lofty peaks."²⁹

Here they were permitted to load up with 18,000 gallons of fresh water and all sorts of fruits and vegetables free of charge. The items were graciously given to them by two families who were living there. The island was being used as a penal colony by the Chilean government. Water was obtained only thirty feet from the beach and there was plenty of firewood. They saw goats, hares and pigs. They were told that the last settlement on the island had been abandoned four years earlier when an earthquake caused the island to sink and rise about fifty feet.

Shortly before the ship arrived in this paradise, Laura Goodwin's sickness became worse and she died of scurvy, leaving behind seven children. On May 6, the Saints attended to her burial on Goat Island. Brannan delivered a sermon at the funeral, which was attended by many of the pioneers and the crew of the *Brooklyn*. He spoke about motherhood and its place in the eternal worlds even before the worlds were created. The few families that lived on the little island attended the service, even though they didn't understand English.³⁰

Caroline Joyce wrote, "Although the occasion was so sorrowful, the presence of the seven little children sobbing in their uncontrollable grief and the father in his loneliness trying to comfort them, still, such was our weariness of the voyage that the sight of... terra firma once more was such a relief from the ship life, that we gratefully realized and enjoyed it."

"The passengers bathed and washed their clothing in the fresh water, gathered fruit and potatoes, caught fish, some eels—great spotted creatures that looked so much like snakes that some members of the company could not eat them when cooked. We rambled about the island, visited the caves, one of which was pointed out to us as the veritable Robinson Crusoe cave, and it was my good fortune to take a sound nap there one pleasant afternoon. Many mementoes and souvenirs were gathered, and after strewing our dead sister's grave anew with parting tokens of love, regret and remembrance, we departed from the island, bearing away a serene, though shaded picture of our brief sojourn."³¹

Julius Austin had gone ashore for wood and water. He stayed on the island for several days. His son later wrote, "My father went to hunt goats with a convict for a guide. The convicts were apparently given the liberty of the island as they could not escape from it. This convict escorted my father into the hills hunting goats. He offered to carry my father's gun over some especially difficult country. My father permitted him to take the gun—and that was the last my father ever saw of the convict or the gun."³²

On May 9, the *Brooklyn* set sail again, now fully stocked with provisions including many barrels of fish that had been caught and salted. The captain set a course for the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) on a fairly calm sea at a rate of six or seven knots per hour. At first



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there was a sad waste of food that had been recently taken on board the ship. Food was thrown from the ship and soon sharks were seen following closely behind. One daring young man would lower himself over the deck, down close to the water, where he could almost reach out and touch the sharks. Caroline Joyce wrote, "evidently he did not share the nervous apprehensions of his wife, nor the superstitions entertained by the sailors."³³

In early June, as the *Brooklyn* reached tropical waters, the winds died and the sails drooped for days. One passenger described the scene "as silent as a painted ship upon a painted ocean."³⁴ This was a great trial to the Saints who had suffered so much in cramped quarters. Caroline A. Joyce wrote, "We were so closely crowded that the heat of the Tropics was terrible, but 'mid all our trials the object of our journey was never forgotten. The living faith was there and was often manifested."³⁵ In a few days the breeze soon started to blow and a joyous shout went up.

On June 14, the second baby was born on ship. She was the daughter was John and Phebe Robbins. The captain wanted them to name the baby Helen Brooklyn Pacific. Helen was the name of the captain's wife. He didn't get his wish. They named her Georgianna Pacific Robbins. This little girl brought great joy to the Robbins family. Earlier during the voyage, the Robbins' had lost two of their sons.

~~~~~THE SANDWICH ISLANDS~~~~~

On June 20, the *Brooklyn* put into port for the second time of the voyage, landing at Honolulu in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). As they came into the harbor, they noticed a number of American warships in the harbor including the Congress, with Commodore Robert F. Stockton in charge. There were also a number of whale ships in the port. They soon learned from Commodore Stockton that the United States was at war with Mexico and would likely seize California and that he was about to set sail for Monterrey, California.

Stockton expressed the possibility that they might have to help with the fight against Mexico when they arrived. At his suggestion, Brannan purchased 150 outdated military arms for \$3-\$4 a piece. He also brought on board some blue denim to be made into uniforms. Commodore Stockton advised Brannan to sail to Yerba Buena Bay to help secure that area in the name of the United States. This thought brought fear into the hearts of some of the Saints. A few wanted to stay in Honolulu while others suggested that they return to their homes in the East. Samuel Brannan was determined and reminded them that they were to meet Brigham Young in the West.

While at Honolulu, the *Brooklyn* took on fresh vegetables, meat, fruits and casks of fresh water. The Saints welcomed the opportunity to leave the ship and to visit some of the natives. Hundreds of friendly natives waited to see the Saints land. The Americans

on the island were also glad to see the Saints and invited them to come and see them.³⁶ The daring man who enjoyed lowering himself close to the sharks tried to do the same stunt at a nearly extinct volcano. The foolish man narrowly escaped suffocation.³⁷

On Sunday, June 27, several of the pioneers visited a native church and listened to the American (non-Mormon) missionaries preach in the native tongue. One Sister commented, "I don't think the missionaries have done much good here; they degrade the natives. Here the white ladies are drawn around in two-wheeled vehicles by the natives. I saw a great many of them drawn to church by them and men too. I think it would have looked better had they gone on foot. Many of the natives wear scarcely any clothing at all."³⁸

Honolulu's leading newspaper, *The Friend*, gave an account of the pioneers' arrival on the island: "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... That we differ 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, civic and religious. May they be such that coming generations shall rise up and call them blessed."³⁹

On about July 1, the *Brooklyn* raised anchor and again started to sail for California. The Orrin Smith family was left behind because of illness.⁴⁰ As they sailed, it was soon discovered that they had a stow-away—a young lad from the U.S. Army.⁴¹

The Saints recognized

Independence Day on

July 4. Brannan

brought out the cloth

that he obtained at

Honolulu and had the

women make it into uni-

forms for the men. Each man

had a military cap and there were 50 Allen revolvers available. Brannan then drilled the men with the help of Samuel Ladd, an ex-soldier, and Robert Smith, another passenger who understood military tactics.⁴²

ARRIVAL AT YERBA BUENA

The *Brooklyn* sailed on to California. As it passed through the Golden Gate on July 31, 1846, there was great anticipation on the ship, and some concern about the possibility of military confrontation. Brannan had visions of planting the American flag for the first time at Yerba Buena. Captain Richardson ordered all the passengers to go down into the hold for their safety, but they were soon permitted to come on deck and put on their uniforms. Brannan passed out the guns and ammunition. All things were ready for a battle with the Mexicans. He peered into his telescope and to his great disappointment he sighted the American flag already waving.⁴³

Esther Ann Crimson Sirrine and her sons.
Photographed in San Bernardino, 1856.
Esther and her husband George W. Sirrine
went to California aboard the *Brooklyn*.





But there was no disappointment on the faces of most of the weary passengers when they saw their long-awaited destination in sight. "The day opened not with glorious sunshine to us, for fog hovered over the harbor of Yerba Buena, and a mist like a winter's robe hung all around, hiding from our eager eyes the few objects... of the firm and solid ground, where we expected that soon willing labor would begin, homes be erected, fields cultivated, and peace and safety spread over us their wings of protection."⁴⁴

A cannon from the Yerba Buena battery fired a welcome salute and the *Brooklyn* fired a gun in response. A rowboat soon came out to meet them and men in uniforms came aboard. They were from the *U.S.S. Portsmouth*, which had arrived three weeks earlier. 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.'" To this, they replied with three hearty cheers.⁴⁵ By 3 p.m., the *Brooklyn* was at anchor near the town of Yerba Buena.⁴⁶

"They crowded upon the deck, women and children, questioning husbands and fathers, and studied the picture before them—they would never see it just the same again—as the foggy curtains furled towards the azure ceiling. How it imprinted itself upon their minds! A long, sandy beach strewn with hides and skeletons of slaughtered cattle, a few scrubby oaks, farther back low sand hills rising behind each other as a background to a few old shanties that leaned away from the wind, an old adobe barrack, a few donkeys plodding dejectedly along beneath towering bundles of wood, a few loungers stretched lazily upon the beach as though nothing could astonish them—and that was Yerba Buena, now San Francisco, the landing place for the pilgrims of faith."⁴⁷

On the following day, Aug. 1, the passengers remained on board, preparing to land and unload the ship. On Sunday, Aug. 2, the military men on the *Portsmouth* observed the Sabbath by holding a service. U.S. Captain Montgomery invited the Mormons to attend this service on the main deck of the *Portsmouth*. Many preparations were made, a canvas spread, and seating was made available for the women and children. The sailors were eager to get a glimpse of the Mormon women. One was heard remarking, "I'll be derved, they look like any other woman!"⁴⁸

Early in the morning of Aug. 3, Captain Montgomery detailed men to help the Saints unload the *Brooklyn*. The cargo was a great wonder to the men. One man remarked that it "compared favorably with the ark of Noah." The Saints were greeted at the little town of Yerba Buena by about a half dozen American settlers, several members of Spanish families and about 100 Indians. The town was located on a cove at the base of Telegraph Hill. The Saints set foot on the

rocks at what was later known as Clark's Point.⁴⁹

That night, many of the Saints slept in a tents pitched near what is now Washington and Montgomery Streets in San Francisco.⁵⁰ Sixteen families found shelter in a small adobe house which they partitioned off with quilts, on what is now Grant Avenue (formerly Dupont Street) between Clay and Washington. Others found shelter in the deserted Mission Dolores a few miles over the hills (on today's Dolores Street and 16th Street). The new sleeping quarters were a very welcome relief after spending almost six months on the *Brooklyn*. They were all very happy to stand once again on solid ground.⁵¹

One sister would later comment, "Of all the memories of my life, not one is so bitter as that dreary six month's voyage on an emigrant ship around the Horn."⁵² But another would later write: "After all their trials during the six months' voyage of tropic heat and heavy storms, the faults and defects of human nature discovered and endured, there still exists between the living a bond of remembrance and friendship, unlike that of any other claim, and toward the dead a tender regret, a sense of loss, almost as of kinship."⁵³

The voyage was over and these "Water Saints" were hopeful to have the main body of the church join them in California. This wouldn't happen, but most of these Saints would remain in California as pioneers, missionaries and faithful Church members.

David R. Crockett is a direct descendent of 42 Utah pioneers. He is the author of four books and is co-founder and editor of LDS-Gems on the internet.

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