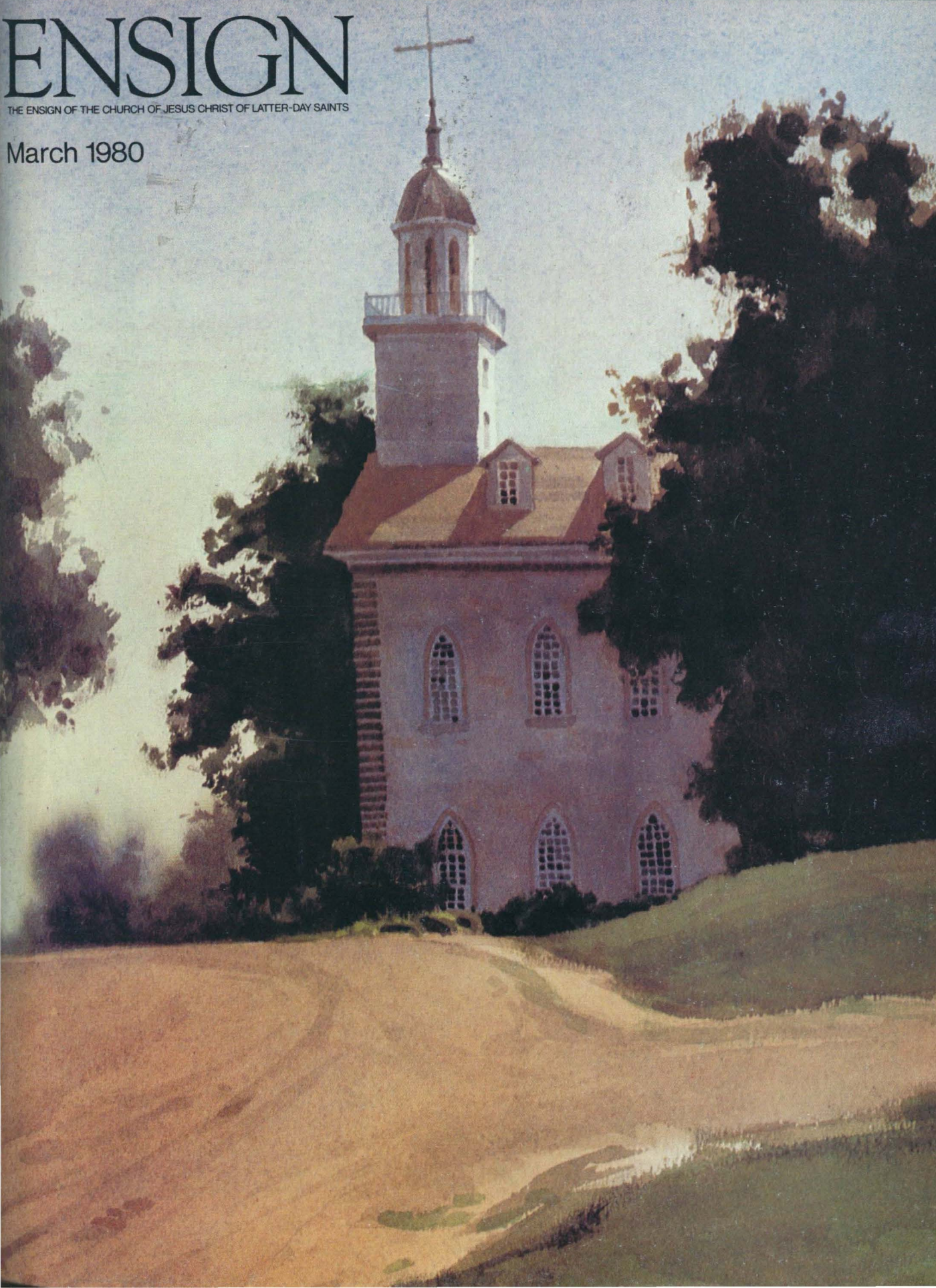


ENSIGN

THE ENSIGN OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

March 1980



THE VOYAGE OF THE AMAZON

A CLOSE VIEW OF ONE IMMIGRANT COMPANY

By Richard L. Jensen and Gordon Irving

In June of 1863 the *Amazon*, a passenger ship with 891 Latter-day Saints aboard, set sail from London. Just before the voyage, many Londoners—government officials and clergymen included—came for a firsthand look at the Mormons and their traveling arrangements. Among the visitors was author Charles Dickens, who spent several hours on board the ship questioning British Mission President George Q. Cannon and quietly observing the Saints.

A month later Dickens published an account of his visit to the Mormon emigrant ship. He pointed out that these were primarily working-class people, including craftsmen in many trades. Though he remained skeptical about what the Mormons would find when they reached Utah, Dickens was impressed by their thoroughgoing organization, their calmness, and their quiet self-respect:

“I went on board their ship,” he said, “to bear testimony against them if they deserved it, as I fully believed they would; to my great astonishment they did not deserve it; and my predispositions and tendencies must not affect me as an honest witness. I went over the *Amazon's* side feeling it impossible to deny that, so far, some remarkable influence had produced a remarkable result, which better known influences have often missed.” Of the people themselves Dickens wrote that had he not known they were Mormons, he would have described them as, “in their degree, the pick and flower of England.”¹

Dickens was right: a remarkable influence had indeed produced a remarkable result. The influence enabled this group of Saints to become, in effect, a large family that worked successfully together toward a difficult goal. Other observers marvelled at the success of the Mormons' emigration and often pointed to their thoroughgoing organization as the key. But Dickens, a shrewd observer, raised the central question: What was behind the organization and its smooth operation? Only

through the Spirit of the Lord could the full answer be found.

Fortunately, records kept by the British Mission and by the *Amazon* passengers and their descendants make it possible to look closely at the ship's family before, during, and after the voyage.²

PRELUDE TO EMIGRATION

Missionary work had begun in the British Isles in 1837. During the next fifty years converts were urged to emigrate and strengthen the Latter-day Saint base of operations in America. With such strong encouragement to emigrate, one might expect Latter-day Saints to have left their homelands soon after conversion to the gospel. The experience of the *Amazon* emigrants suggests, however, that preparation for emigration was usually a long, slow process.

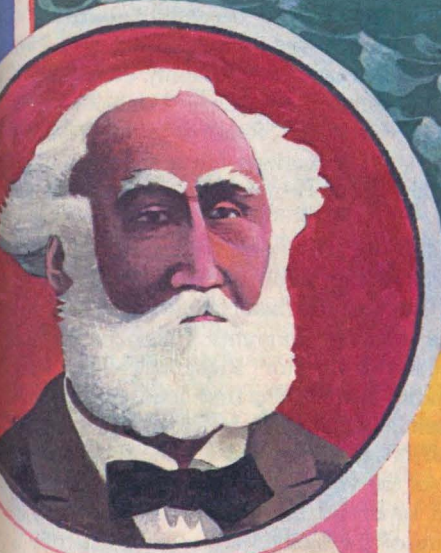
For instance, Ishmael and Mary Phillips were converted to the gospel in Herefordshire, part of the great wave of conversions that followed Elder Wilford Woodruff's missionary labors in 1840. But calls to Church service delayed their emigration. Ishmael served as a branch president and a diligent local missionary for thirteen years. Later the Phillipses moved to Birmingham, where Ishmael did missionary work for another ten years. Finally, twenty-three years after their conversion, they emigrated on the *Amazon* with their two daughters, the two young children of the eldest daughter, who was a widow, and two other children who were under their care.³

Many others of the *Amazon* Saints, like Brother Phillips, had also given years of Church service before their emigration. William Fowler, an 1849 convert, had served for several years as a local missionary. He authored the hymn, “We Thank Thee, Oh God, for a Prophet,” which was published for the first time in Liverpool two weeks before the *Amazon* sailed.⁴

Also of prime importance in determining when a

W. C. CLEAR
PRESIDENT

VALLEY



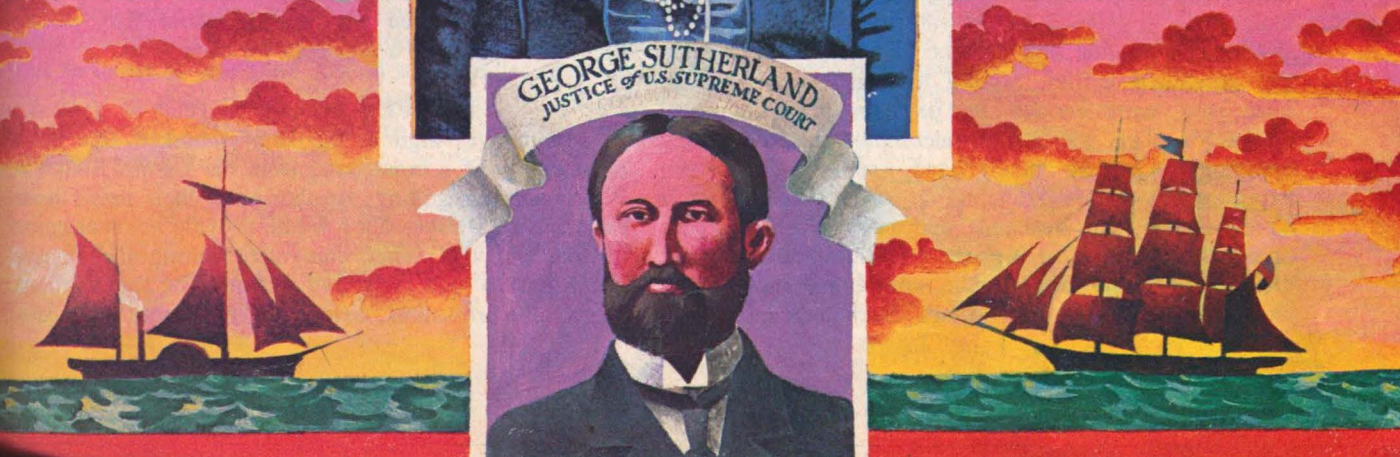
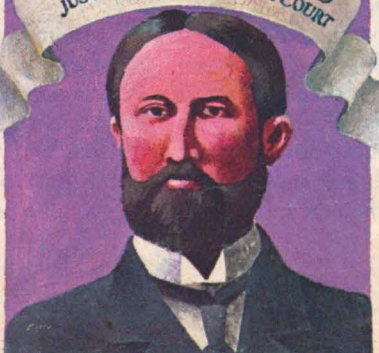
ELIJAH LARKIN
DETECTIVE - AIDE to BRIGHAM YOUNG

LAVINA TRIPLETT CARELESS
UTAH'S LEADING FEMALE VIOCELLIST



EDWARD LENNOX SLOAN
FOUNDER & EDITOR of the SALT LAKE HERALD

GEORGE SUTHERLAND
JUSTICE of U.S. SUPREME COURT





At 5:30 each morning the Saints were to "rise, receive water, clean out berths, scrape the decks and prepare for prayers in the various Wards at 7 o'clock." The care of the many sick, however, caused a relaxation of that rigorous schedule.

family would emigrate was the matter of finances. In spite of great faith, many would-be emigrants found it difficult to save enough money to pay for their passage and other expenses. Charles and Eliza West joined the Church in 1849 and began in 1853 to put money into the individual emigrating accounts kept by local Church leaders. But the expenses of a growing family made saving difficult. "We had children faster than we could get means for our emigration," Charles told a visiting missionary in 1862.⁵ That year the Wests arranged for an emigrating couple from their branch to take two of the West daughters with them. The family then had extra incentive to save so they could join their daughters the next year.

The Wests were apparently typical. Half the married adults aboard the *Amazon* had been Latter-day Saints for thirteen years or more. Even those with a larger income found it difficult to save for emigration. But single adults, without the expense of a family, generally emigrated three to four years sooner after baptism than married adults. Though some of the *Amazon* passengers were recent converts, eighty-five percent of the adults had been members more than five years before they emigrated.

Some husbands and fathers of *Amazon* passengers had emigrated earlier, hoping to establish a home in Utah and earn enough to pay for their families' emigration. This was not an uncommon practice among emigrants. On the other hand, some wives—even expectant mothers—and children aboard the *Amazon* were leaving their husbands and fathers behind; these breadwinners hoped to join their families the next year after earning the rest of the emigration money and closing out their financial affairs. Such men must have

had great confidence in the safety of Mormon emigration and in the treatment their families would receive when they arrived in Salt Lake City.

PRESSURE TO STAY

Many of those on board were sailing despite strong encouragement from relatives, friends, and employers to remain where they were. *Amazon* passenger Elijah Larkin, a Cambridge police detective, was visited by a member of the local police supervisory committee who tried to persuade him to stay with the police force. Brother Larkin took the opportunity to explain the gospel, bear his testimony, and sell the man copies of the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, a pamphlet, and a ticket to the Cambridge Branch's farewell party for the emigrants.⁶

FAMILY ORGANIZATION

Eight of every ten *Amazon* passengers came aboard with a family group. Most of these groups consisted of husbands and wives and their children, but other families were headed by widows, widowers, or individual parents whose spouses had sailed earlier or would sail later. Thirty brothers or sisters were traveling together in groups of two; there were also a few grandchildren and other relatives. This family-based organization spread to individuals traveling alone, who became "attached" to particular families during the voyage. Elijah Larkin wrote in his diary, "I organized my family consisting of 9 persons having added Ruth Coe, Hannah Webb, Martha Larkins, Wm & Chas Read to it to draw our rations together. . . .⁷ The Larkins felt a special responsibility for their new "family members" throughout the journey to Utah.

The ship's family was also well organized to provide for the many needs of the Saints aboard. Mission president George Q. Cannon appointed a president and two counselors for the *Amazon* emigrants. President William Bramall and second counselor Richard Palmer were returning missionaries from Utah; first counselor Edward L. Sloan had been a local Church leader and editorial assistant for the *Millennial Star* and was now emigrating with his family. As the voyage progressed these appointed officers would supervise the provisions, worship services, and the care of the sick. They were assisted by a sergeant of the guard, two cooks, two stewards, a lamplighter, and a man who took charge of the lost-and-found department. The presidency also divided the entire company into fifteen "wards" of about sixty persons each, and appointed a president for each ward.

LIFE ABOARD SHIP

Morale was high as the ship embarked. The entire membership of a brass band from the Cardiff Branch in Wales was emigrating together, and their music made the occasion festive. They would provide accompaniment for dancing and other enjoyment during the voyage. Elijah Larkin soon organized a choir. The ship's officers passed out provisions, helped the emigrants settle com-

fortably between decks, and fastened down loose luggage. A baby girl born three days after departure was christened Amazon Seaborn Harris.

The voyage had its share of challenges and difficulties, which gave the emigrants opportunity to use their religious teachings and their ward organizations. At 5:30 each morning the Saints were to "rise, receive water, clean out berths, scrape the decks and prepare for prayers in the various Wards at 7 o'clock."⁸ However, because many became seasick right away, caring for and administering to the sick caused a relaxation of that rigorous schedule. At times the ship was becalmed; at times the crew fought headwinds. One Sunday the ship was hit by a violent squall while ward meetings were being conducted on the lower deck. One sail was "torn into ribbons like paper," and water poured down the hatches before they could be closed. But the singing of the hymns continued. The second mate was heard to exclaim how astonished he was at "the nonchalance displayed by the sisters in such a season of apparent peril."⁹

English Saints aboard the ship outnumbered the Welsh five to one, but that did not deter some members of each group from squabbling over the relative merits of their homelands. The ship's presidency tried to calm the rivalry by preaching against nationalism. A little irritation which developed over family cooking arrangements also had to be smoothed over. And apparently a few were guilty of "finding" articles that had not been lost. Still, on the whole, the voyage appears to have been a positive and memorable experience.

THE OVERLAND JOURNEY

After their arrival in New York on July 18, the *Amazon* Saints were taken by rail and river steamer to Florence, Nebraska. Though the Civil War was raging at the time, they were largely unaffected by it. At Florence, teams and wagons provided by the Church met those who could not afford to provide their own transportation. They then divided into several companies for the final leg of their journey.

From Salt Lake City, Elder George A. Smith of the Council of the Twelve sent Charles Dickens a final report on the progress of the *Amazon's* emigrants:

"The whole company arrived in this city, and encamped on the Union square on Saturday & Sunday Oct. 3rd & 4th, in good health and fine spirits. After attending the General Conference, they distributed themselves among the people of the Territory, like the water of a river as it empties into the sea, and could now only be found by searching 25,000 square miles of country, and by their industrious habits, they are placed where they will soon put themselves in possession of the necessary comforts of life."¹⁰

SETTLING IN THE WEST

The temporary "family" which had worked so closely together aboard the *Amazon* now dispersed. Most became part of another kind of family, the ward organi-

zations of the various Latter-day Saint settlements. A high proportion settled first in Utah. Of the *Amazon* passengers for whom information has been located, ninety-eight percent lived in Utah during 1863-65. By 1891-1900, eighty-four percent still lived in Utah, while thirteen percent were in Idaho and three percent were elsewhere.

Success and tragedy alike met the immigrants in the western United States. One was struck and killed by a railroad train, leaving a large family. Another committed suicide, apparently in despair over the recent death of his wife. William Fowler became a school teacher in Manti, Utah, but died only two years after he immigrated. Some had marital difficulties. A few became disillusioned with their religion and left it entirely or abandoned church involvement. From all indications, however, the vast majority remained faithful to the Church, and most received the sacred ordinances of the Endowment House, which was used before temples were completed in Utah.

The *Amazon* immigrants' achievements as individuals were notable. Lavinia Triplett became Utah's leading female vocalist in her day. Edward L. Sloan was an outstanding writer and newspaper editor. The Castleton family became prominent merchants, the Larkins respected morticians. William McLachlan became the first president of the Pioneer Stake in Salt Lake City. And George Sutherland, an infant when the *Amazon* sailed, became a U.S. Senator and a justice of the United States Supreme Court. Others were bishops, patriarchs, state legislators, and fine parents—people who contributed in many ways to the building of their communities. To use Charles Dicken's phrase, they became the "pick and flower" of western America. □

Richard L. Jensen, a high councilor in the Salt Lake Hunter West Stake, and Gordon Irving, assistant stake clerk in the Bountiful Utah South Stake, are both research historians in the Church Historical Department.

Notes

1. Charles Dickens, "The Uncommercial Traveller," *All the Year Round*, 4 July 1863, pp. 444, 446.
2. Statistical information in this article is based on a computer-assisted study of data compiled from the passenger list of the *Amazon* in the British Mission's Emigration Records on file in the Church Hist. Dept. Archives, family group sheets in the Church Genealogical Dept. Archives, and other basic sources of biographical and genealogical information.
3. Andrew Jensen, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (1901; reprint ed., Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1971), 2:692.
4. J. Spencer Cornwall, *Stories of Our Mormon Hymns*, 2nd ed., (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), pp. 207-211.
5. Charles Henry John West Journal, 1833-1906, photocopy of typescript in the possession of the authors, p. 4.
6. Elijah Larkin Diary, 2 Apr. 1863, photocopy of typescript, Hist. Dept. Archives, p. 431.
7. *Ibid.*, 3 June 1863, p. 454.
8. William Bramall, E. L. Sloan, and Richard Palmer letter to George Q. Cannon, 19 July 1863, *Millennial Star*, 25:542.
9. Edward L. Sloan Diary, 28 June 1863, holograph, Hist. Dept. Archives.
10. George A. Smith letter to "Mr. Uncommercial," 14 Oct., copy in Historian's Office Letterpress Copybook, 1859-69, Hist. Dept. Archives.