Mississippi Mormons

By Leonard J. Arrington

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Leonard J. Arrington, "Mississippi Mormons," *Ensign*, Jun 1977, 46

These little-known Saints from Monroe County chalked up an impressive record of "firsts" as the Church moved west.

The company that came with Brigham Young through Emigration Canyon was an exciting blend of races and nationalities; but among the Danes and the New Englanders and the Canadians was a small group of converts whose soft drawls and black servants marked them as Southerners.

I was amazed to discover two facts about these Southern converts: (1) They went West a full year before Brigham Young and his party; wintered at Pueblo, Colorado, while waiting for the rest of the Saints; joined them at Fort Laramie in June 1847; and entered the Valley with the first company; and (2) these Southern converts established the first Latter-day Saint settlement in the West after Salt Lake City—Cottonwood—and then, in response to a Church call, made up most of the mission that settled San Bernardino, California, in 1851.

These are historic firsts, both of them, but the group seems to have slipped into obscurity, probably because Southerners, according to Andrew Jenson, our assistant Church historian in the early twentieth century, only comprised 3 percent of the pioneers who came West. The first Mormon missionaries gazed on Southern soil in 1839. Like other outsiders, they soon learned that the warmth of Southern hospitality was matched only by the heat of Southern anger, and the Southern Mission soon acquired a reputation for tarrings and featherings, beatings, and even a few shootings. For the most part the doors of Southern homes opened to the missionaries in friendship—but also closed behind them, still in friendship, without yielding many baptisms.

Monroe County, Mississippi, however, was a little different. Monroe County had been settled, for the most part, by couples with young children who had emigrated to that good cotton country from Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, and Alabama in the late 1830s. As those children grew they intermarried, and practically the whole county was kin. When the missionaries arrived in 1843, the converts spread the gospel among their families, and within a year, a congregation of perhaps 150–200 Latter-day Saints was thriving, including black members as well as whites. It was called the Tombigbee Branch after the river where most of them settled. They were reasonably well-off, with livestock, homes, slaves, and good land.

After the martyrdom, Brigham Young began gathering the Saints as persecution thickened, and the man he sent south to Mississippi was John Brown, an extraordinarily gifted leader who had opened the mission in Monroe County. A Southerner himself from Tennessee, he had taught school in Illinois, hoping to earn enough money to continue his own education. A Mormon elder had obtained permission to preach in a field by the school to farm workers during noon hour. This went on for three days. Brown listened and was converted. The news shocked the community, and one night a mob burned his schoolhouse. 1

So Brown headed for Nauvoo, arriving in October 1841, where he became acquainted with the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. His mission call came during April conference in 1843, and he traveled "without purse or scrip" in parts of Kentucky, Alabama, and Mississippi, coming eventually to

Monroe County, where, in addition to his harvest of baptisms, he converted Elizabeth Crosby, daughter of a well-to-do Mississippi farmer, whom he married in May 1844.

After the martyrdom, in 1845, he and five others were recalled to Nauvoo. There he was one of "The Whittling and Whistling Club" that took the place of city police after the Illinois legislature had repealed the Nauvoo Charter and its constituted police force. He wrote, "We worked on the temple during the day and whittled and whistled through the streets at night, keeping everything in order, and guarding the city against mobs. There was no need of a curfew bell in those times; none were seen upon the streets, except those on duty." 2 In two months, he returned for his wife and brought her to Nauvoo, and had barely built a house when, amid thickening persecutions, he suffered from the enforced exodus of 1846.

John's assignment was to return a third time to Mississippi and gather the Saints and join the main pioneer camp near the Platte River. In the snow and storms of January 1846, John left for Mississippi; he directed the hasty preparations and led forty-three persons in nineteen wagons out on 8 April 1846. He planned to return in the fall of 1846 for the rest.

These fourteen families chose William Crosby, John's father-in-law, as their leader, and hurried their oxen the 640 miles to Independence, arriving less than two months later on May 26th. Independence was buzzing with the unfounded rumor that Mormons had murdered Governor Lilburn Boggs, author of the famous "extermination order." Well-wishers warned the Crosby company to wait till the vengeful Mormons had passed. Under these circumstances, the little band thought it wise not to mention their own religious affiliation. When a six-wagon party of emigrants to Oregon accompanying them discovered that they were surrounded by Mormons, they hit on the excuse that the Mormons weren't traveling fast enough and left one morning at a trot. The separation was short-lived. Keeping their same even pace, the Southerners passed them next day. By then, the emigrants had decided that they would rather take their chances with the Mormons than with the Indians, and timidly pulled their wagons in behind the Crosby group.

Arriving on the Platte River, the Mississippians were disappointed not to see the curling smoke of Brigham Young's campfires. No word awaited them. The non-Mormons left with another group going to Oregon; and after a lonely night and day on the riverbank, the men hunkered in a circle to discuss their situation. Although some objected strongly, the majority concluded that the Saints must surely be traveling ahead of them up the north side of the river. They packed up their pans and unburned buffalo chips and pressed the oxen for speed. The exhausting days that followed were punctuated by frightening events—the threat of a Pawnee raid, stampeding horses and cattle, the first buffalo hunt, a midnight gale that uprooted tents and overturned small wagons, and a nighttime visit by Indians that left the travelers missing a mare and two colts before the Mississippians discovered the shadowy thieves.

Worst of all was the news from returning California travelers that there were no Mormons on the trail ahead of them. Distressed, they decided to winter at the first suitable place. Past Chimney Rock they met up with a leathery-skinned old French trapper dressed in Indian leggings and fringe, with hair down to his shoulders. John Richards (pronounced Reshaw) traded a few furs with the company and then invited them to winter in Pueblo with him. They accepted his kind offer and left for Pueblo, Colorado, on July 10th. 3

Mr. Richards introduced them to friendly Indians in the next few days, one of whom fancied a young married woman in the company. He offered her husband five horses and was quite insulted when the offer was refused. He insisted. He would treat her well; he was not poor. Other Indians began to gather around and nod in agreement, and Richards sensed an imminent fight. So he explained to them that the Americans, like Indians, did not like to sell their squaws to strangers. He himself had been among other Indians for five years before they suggested selling him a wife. With a few grumbles, the Indians conceded and walked away.

Finally, on the seventh of August, the wagon train entered Pueblo, a fort occupied only by six or eight mountain men and their Spanish or Indian wives. A few meager corn patches and small vegetable gardens promised potential food supply, but equally important was the reassurance that the main body of Saints was wintering along the Missouri River, delayed by the formation of the five hundred-man

Mormon Battalion. John Brown wrote of the company, "They were much disappointed at this turn of affairs, as we had expected to unite with the main body of the Church in the Rocky Mountains." 4

He set them to work preparing for the winter. Francis Parkman, famous western traveler and writer, recorded in his *The Oregon Trail:* "After half an hour's riding we saw the white wagons of the Mormons drawn up among the trees [in the wide and well-timbered bottom of the Arkansas]. Axes were sounding, trees were falling, and log huts going up along the edge of the woods and upon the adjoining meadow." He adds a familiar note: "As we came up the Mormons left their work and seated themselves on the timber around us, when they began earnestly to discuss points of theology." 5 George Ruxton, whose *Life in the Far West* is a basic source on the West in the early 1840s, said that the Mississippians were "a far better class than the generality of Mormons, and comprised many wealthy and respectable farmers." 6 In addition to their hunting, they planted a turnip patch and also some pumpkins, beans, and melons, and worked for the trappers, who paid them in corn. The near-year they spent in Pueblo made them the first group to establish a religious colony in the West since Father Junipero Serra and his associates founded Catholic missions in 1769. They also thus founded the first of more than five hundred Latter-day Saint communities in the Far West in the years that followed. The first white births in Colorado were to these Mississippi women at Pueblo. 7

They also built a log church house for meetings, preaching, and socials. Ruxton notes that the mountain men joined these festivities, attracted by the "many really beautiful [Mississippi] girls who sported their tall, graceful figures at the frequent fandangoes." He notes, slyly, that "a party of mountaineers," arriving "at the temple" for a dance, were rather taken aback by finding themselves in for a sermon, which one of the elders delivered preparatory to the "physical exercises." 8

Meanwhile John Brown led a small party back South for the rest of their families, traveling part way with some government teamsters headed back from Santa Fe. They reached the main body of the Mormons at Winter Quarters in October.

October was the month for reunions. Some 154 sick Mormon Battalion members were detached from the main body about fifty miles below Pueblo and went to winter at Pueblo, boosting the Mormon population there to 275 persons. Their captain, James Brown of North Carolina, who had also been in Mississippi as a missionary, supervised the construction of eighteen additional log cabins for the soldiers. 9

Meanwhile John Brown's party arrived in Mississippi in January 1847 to prepare for the thousand-mile trip to Winter Quarters. But Brigham Young sent word to leave the main party in Mississippi for another year and handpick a few able-bodied men to join the advance company. Faithfully, John Brown arrived at Winter Quarters with four white men and two black servants, two other servants having died on the arduous journey. Chosen to lead the hunting parties en route, John set out with two wagons, three mules, four oxen, two cows, and two black men named Oscar and Mark. Since another Southerner, James Flake, sent a black member, Green, with the same company, these three blacks were with the advance company that arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in July of 1847. That company consisted of 143 men, three women, and two children. 10

The advance company left Winter Quarters on April 8 and reached Laramie on June 3, where they were welcomed by seventeen of the Pueblo Saints, Mississippians and Battalionists who had been awaiting their arrival for two weeks. Brigham Young sent Amasa Lyman of the Council of the Twelve down to lead the rest of the Pueblo group to Salt Lake Valley.

Thus, some Mississippi Mormons were in the advance party that arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on July 22, and had planted potatoes, beans, and buckwheat by the time Brigham Young entered the valley on July 24th. True to Southern tradition, the Mississippians had also mowed the grass and planted a turnip patch.

The Mississippians helped the settlement put down roots; then a party left for Mississippi On 26 August 1847. John Brown was among them, traveling with Brigham Young to Winter Quarters and arriving in Mississippi in December. Ready to cross the plains for the fifth time, he led the remainder of the

26 went to San Bernardino

Mississippi Mormons toward St. Louis on 10 March 1848. The thirteen families—fifty-six white persons and thirty-four black—arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in October 1848; there were now about two hundred white Southerners in the valley and thirty-seven blacks.

Under the unofficial direction of Amasa Lyman, the majority of the Southerners built a row of cabins nine miles southeast of the original Salt Lake fort, the first town in Utah outside Salt Lake City. 11 Then called Cottonwood or Mississippi Ward, it is now called Holladay, after John D. Holladay, a corpulent Mississippian who was one of the early bishops of the ward. By 1849, this community consisted of about seventy families, most of whom migrated to Southern California in March 1851 with Charles C. Rich and Amasa M. Lyman of the Quorum of the Twelve. Here, with others, they founded San Bernardino. They built a road to the nearby mountains to bring down timber, with which they built sawmills, gristmills, and then raised fields of grain. John Holladay later harvested 110 bushels from the single bushel of Taos (New Mexico) hard red wheat he had planted. 12

They remained in San Bernardino until 1858, when the majority of them obeyed Brigham Young's call to return to Utah during the so-called "Utah War." Most of these returnees settled in southern Utah, then, in the 1870s, packed up again to colonize Arizona, where they established Mormon settlements along the Little Colorado and Gila rivers. Many of their descendants are among the leading families in Arizona today. 13

These Southerners, particularly those who went to Utah in 1847 and 1848 and settled in San Bernardino in 1851, brought to Southern California their courtly manners, their independent ways, and their spirit of enterprise. Marvelous frontiersmen, resourceful colonizers, and shrewd traders, most of them were ultimately called to lead Mormon colonies to other areas of the West. Nearly all of them were sent out to newly established communities to set up sawmills, gristmills, tanneries, textile mills, and other community enterprises. They and their wives also introduced a certain chivalry and elegance into the social life of their communities, and added dignity to the political and business life of Utah, California, and Arizona.

Possessed of a sparkling sense of fun, they preserved a delightful incident in their records of an early school in San Bernardino that pinpoints one of the differences between the Southern pupils and their Yankee schoolteacher. A first-grader asked the teacher how to spell "rat." Somewhat impatiently the teacher spelled it for him, "R-A-T." Fixing her with a look of scorn he replied: "I don't mean mousey rat. Anybody knows how to spell dat. What I mean is like in 'Do it rat now.' " 14

Intelligent and resourceful, those Southern women accomplished miracles in establishing homes and rearing their families. One San Bernardino sister helped build her house, doing all the work on the fireplace and chimney. She took in washing, cut wild hay along the river bottoms, and stacked it for the cows for the winter; she grubbed the brush, hauled manure on the land, sheared the sheep, plowed, planted, helped make the irrigating ditches, and spun and wove cloth. Another sister reports that she arose one morning and found the wood box empty. Not wanting to coddle her children, she says she peeled the potatoes, sliced the ham, made biscuits, and broke the eggs, then called the boys. One glance at the raw food was a strong enough hint to them. One of the negligent boys said, "Well, I'll be darned," and ran to the woodpile. 15

Another sister heard that a young man who was leaving in a week to go on a mission had no suit to wear. The San Bernardino sisters promptly went to work, "with the result that one Sunday the wool was on the sheep's back, but by the next Sunday, it had been clipped, washed, corded, spun, woven, and made into a splendid suit and was on the back of the missionary as he delivered his farewell address in the little church house the next Sunday." 16

The women were also the midwives, doctors, and druggists of the community. One woman noted in her diary that a young girl had accidentally ignited a gunpowder can. The explosion burned her face "until her skin hung in blisters and rages." Paulina Phelps Lyman, the wife of Amasa Lyman, applied first linseed oil, then a mask, then a coat of varnish! The girl's face, according to a later report, healed without a scar. 17

One black woman, Alice Rowan, the daughter of two of the servants who came to California with their families, became a schoolteacher and taught white children at Riverside. She may very well have been the first black to teach at a white school in the United States.

A fine record of these Southerners' activities in San Bernardino was kept by Richard Hopkins, the clerk. With a touch of humor, he describes a duststorm soon after they arrived:

"The storm of yesterday [26 November 1851] amounted to a tornado during last night and has continued all day with violence. Many of the houses of our settlement were unroofed during the night. Wagons were overturned and every hole and corner that it was possible for dust to penetrate was filled. In many of the houses the dust was an inch thick in everything that presented a surface for it to rest upon, and the faces and forms of everyone that is visible today look as if a requisition upon the waters of San Bernardino was indispensably necessary." 18

The next year, 1852, saw them celebrating their bountiful harvest in September:

"After our first crop this year we had a kind of Thanksgiving Feast in our Tabernacle. Every person upon the place, white, black and red, was invited and fed. Numerous specimens of the vegetable kingdom were exhibited. 1 stalk of corn measuring 16 feet; a beet weighing 25 pounds; a cabbage weighing 40 pounds; melons weighing as much as 38 pounds; mammoth pumpkins; 4 onions weighing 9 pounds. After dinner, the dance was kept up until 9 oclock." 19 By then they had 2,000 acres under cultivation. Another 2,000 were added in 1853. By 1853, more than 50,000 grape vines had been planted.

Another sister took trees when the call came to return to Utah: twelve walnut trees, twelve almond trees, two figs, twelve quinces, and a large number of grape vines. These were the first of those trees planted in Utah, and family tradition identifies five of the same walnut trees still standing on the family homestead in Centerville. 20

Mostly small landowners, stockmen, and frontiersmen, these Southerners had already demonstrated in Mississippi their courage, love of freedom, independence, and frontier resourcefulness. Because of their prior frontier experience and because of their hardiness, they became Brigham Young's trusted associates in managing men and resources for the development of Mormon settlements. Although they became Westerners, they retained their mellow Southern drawl and exhibited the hospitality for which Southerners have always been famed. And they showed the same fondness for rhetoric which Southerners have always displayed. By their ingenuity, faithfulness, determination, and physical toughness, they became stalwarts in helping make the Western desert blossom like the rose. 21

[illustrations] Illustrated by Craig Poppleton

Notes

1. This is based on the journal of John Brown, MS, Church Archives. See also John Zimmerman Brown, ed., *Autobiography of Pioneer John Brown, 1820–1896* (Salt Lake City, 1941); John Zimmerman Brown, ed; "Pioneer Journeys: From Nauvoo, Illinois, to Pueblo, Colorado, in 1846, and Over the Plains in 1847," *Improvement Era* 13 (1910): 802–10; Kate B. Carter, ed., "Mississippi Saints," in *Our Pioneer Heritage* (19 vols., Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1958–76), 2:421–76; and LaMar C. Berrett, "History of the Southern States Mission, 1831–1861" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960), pp. 46–171.

2. Journal of John Brown. See also Leonard J. Arrington, *Charles C. Rich: Mormon General and Western Frontiersman* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1974), p. 84.

3. Brown, *Autobiography,* pp. 68–69.

4. Journal of John Brown. See also *Autobiography,* p. 70.

5. Francis Parkman, *Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life; or, the California and Oregon Trail* (Columbus,

1856), p. 360. Most editions have been published under the title, *The Oregon Trail.*

6. George Frederic Ruxton, *Life in the Far West* (New York, 1849), p. 214.

7. LeRoy R. Hafen and Frank M. Young, "The Mormon Settlement at Pueblo, Colorado, During the Mexican War," *Colorado Magazine,* 9 (1932): 121–36.

8. Ruxton, p. 214.

9. See Daniel Tyler, *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion in the Mexican War, 1846–1847* (n.p., 1881); B. H. Roberts, *The Mormon Battalion: Its History and Achievements* (Salt Lake City, 1919); Frank A. Golder, *The March of the Mormon Battalion from Council Bluffs to California* (New York, 1928).

10. See B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (6 vols., Salt Lake City, 1930), 3:193–94, 225–26, 284–85.

11. The designation *Mississippi Ward* is in Minutes of the Council of the Twelve, MS, Church Archives, entries for February 12, 14, 16, 1849.

12. "John Holladay," in Carter, "Mississippi Saints," pp. 447–48. See also Arrington, *Charles C. Rich,* pp. 153–214.

13. See Charles S. Peterson, *Take Up Your Mission: Mormon Colonizing Along the Little Colorado River, 1870–1900* (Tucson, 1973).

14. From the folklore of descendants of the Mississippi Saints, as recorded by the writer.

15. Journal of Lucy Hannah White Flake, Church Archives.

16. From "Miscellaneous Pioneer Interviews and Sketches: Mary Julia Johnson Wilson," Box 10, p. 31, Mormon Diaries, Journals, and Life Sketches, Library of Congress.

17. Paulina Phelps Lyman Diary, MS, Church Archives.

18. San Bernardino Historical Record, 27 November 1851, MS, Church Archives.

19. Ibid., 4 September 1852. See also Carter, "Mississippi Saints," p. 445.

20. Carter, "Mississippi Saints," pp. 450–51.

21. The pleasant nature of Southerners is described in W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941); and Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1949).

Notes

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E-mail to a Friend

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Lizzy Flake

In 1854, the first stage line was developed with service between San Bernardino and Los Angeles. On April 13, San Bernardino City was incorporated as the county seat and Amasa Lyman was elected the first mayor.
The more significant, but less tangible aspect of the economic success of early San Bernardino, was the colonists' belief in the brotherhood of man, erasing ethnic barriers, which allowed the spirit of true community to thrive.
The new community from the beginning was ethnically diverse. In addition to the Mormon pioneers of European descent, there were about two dozen African-American pioneers including colony midwives Biddy Mason and Hannah Smith. Hannah was noted for her daring rides on horseback in the middle of the night to "catch babies."
Local Cahuilla and Serrano Indians also frequented the settlement. Some sold their wares including leather belts and some were hired to work in the fields. Pioneer Caroline Crosby recorded in her journal that the Native Americans she had hired were some of the best workers she had ever seen. Today, descendants of the early Indians recount family stories of good will between their forefathers and the Mormon pioneers that have been handed down for generations. The enduring strength of such family traditions is a testament to the community spirit of the San Bernardino colony.

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Pio Pico

Former Mexican governor Pio Pico and other rancho families attended colony celebrations. Pico and other former Mexican government dignitaries were treated as honored guests. Pico recorded in his memoirs that he considered Elders Lyman and Rich his personal friends.

Several Jewish merchants were also part of the colony. As early as 1852, Marcus Katz had a mercantile inside the fort. Louis Jacobs also started a mercantile and eventually established the

Biddy Mason

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Bridget "Biddy" Mason (August 15, 1818, in Hancock County, Georgia– January 15, 1891, in Los Angeles, California) was an African American nurse and a Californian real estate entrepreneur and philanthropist.

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Early life

Mason was born a slave in Georgia on August 15, 1818, and given the name of "Bridget" with no surname. She was given to Robert Smith and his bride as a wedding present. After the marriage, Smith took his new wife and slaves to Mississippi.

Missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) proselytized in Mississippi. They taught Smith and his family and they converted. Slaves were not baptized in the church as a matter of policy. Members were encouraged to free their slaves, but Smith chose not to do so.

Moving west

The Smith household joined a group of other church members from Mississippi to meet the Mormon exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois in 1847. The group traveled to Pueblo, Colorado and joined up with the sick detachment from the Mormon Battalion.[1] They later joined the main body of Mormons crossing the plains and settled in the Salt Lake Valley, Utah Territory.

Church leader Brigham Young sent a group of Mormons to Southern California in 1851. Robert Smith, family and slaves joined them in San Bernardino, California sometime later. Young counseled Smith again to free Bridget and his other slaves before going to California. Bridget was among a small group of blacks, free and slave, in the San Bernardino settlement.

Freedom

In 1856, Robert Smith, Mason's owner, planned to move to the slave state of Texas. As part of the Compromise of 1850, California was a free state and any slave brought into the state was free. However, Smith had refused Church leaders' counsel to set his slaves free and maintained that Bridget and her children were his property. He planned to take them with him overland to Texas.

Bridget, helped by friends, attempted to escape from Smith. She and a group of Smith's other slaves traveled towards Los Angeles before Smith caught up with them. A local posse caught up with Smith before he could leave the state.

Bridget petitioned a Los Angeles court for her freedom. A California judge, Benjamin Ignatius Hayes, granted her freedom as a resident of a free state[2], as well as the freedom of the other slaves held captive by Smith (Bridget's three daughters, and ten other African-American women and children). In 1860, Mason received a certified copy of the document that guaranteed her freedom.[3]

Bridget had no legal last name as a slave. After emancipation, she chose to be known as Bridget Mason. Mason was the middle name of Amasa Lyman, Mormon Apostle and mayor of San Bernardino. She had spent many years in the company of the Amasa Lyman household.

Los Angeles

Mason worked in Los Angeles as a nurse and midwife. Saving carefully, she was one of the first African Americans to purchase land in the city. As a businesswoman she amassed a small fortune of nearly $300,000, which she shared generously with charities. Biddy also fed and sheltered the poor, and visited prisoners. She was instrumental in founding a traveler's aid center, and an elementary school for black children. Because of her kind and giving spirit, many called her "Auntie Mason" or "Grandma Mason"

In 1872 Mason was a founding member of First African Methodist Episcopal Church, the city's first black church. The organizing meetings were held in her home on Spring Street. She donated the land on which the church was built.

She spoke fluent Spanish and was a well-known figure downtown, especially at the old plaza, where she conducted business. She dined on occasion at the home of Pio Pico, the last governor of Alta California and a wealthy Los Angeles land owner.[4]

Mason is an honoree in the California Social Work Hall of Distinction. She is also celebrated on Biddy Mason Day on November 16.

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aldana,francisco famous million air music star who went bank rupted and died in central ave california

External links

- Biddy Mason Park website
- A History of Black Americans in California: Biddy Mason
- Biddy Mason on The California Museum's California Legacy Trails
- bio in California Social Work Hall of Distinction
- The City Project Heritage Parkscape website
- Biography at Socialhistory.org
- Biography at DistinguishedWomen.com

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2. ^ Mason v. Smith. "The Bridget 'Biddy' Mason Case" (1856) http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primarywest/mason-v-smith-bridget-biddy-mason-case-1856
3. ^ Reiter, Joan S. (1978). The Old West: The Women, p. 213. Time-Life Books.
4. ^ http://www.ci.la.ca.us/elp/elphis6.htm

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City of San Bernardino California

Former Slave Played Major Role In San Bernardino's Early History

Lizzy Flake Rowan

By

Nicholas R. Cataldo (1998)

(Photographs Courtesy of San Bernardino Historical and Pioneer Society)

In 1851, when 437 Mormons set out from Utah to form a new colony in southern California...eventually to become the city of San Bernardino there were 26 blacks with them.

Unfortunately, chances are that you wouldn't know it from reading most of the history books written about that era.

The involvement of blacks in the early settlement of the San Bernardino Valley gets little mention compared to such prominent white pioneers like Amasa Lyman, Charles Rich, and Jefferson Hunt, men who have been justly honored for their roles in developing the Mormon colony.

A Slave at the Age of Four

However, there were countless unsung heroes...many of who were of those 26 blacks that contributed heavily to the community's success. One such person was taken from her parents at the age of four and given to a wealthy white couple, James and Agnes Flake, as a wedding present. Her name was Elizabeth (Lizzy) Flake Rowan.

A Three Year Journey to Utah

After the Flakes conversion to Mormonism, followed by the persecution of Mormons by Easterners, they set out from their Carolina plantation for the Great Salt Lake with their three sons and young Lizzy in 1845. Along the way, Lizzy and the boys were responsible for herding the Flake's oxen and cattle from the plantation all the way to Utah.

The rugged journey, which included a grueling harsh winter encampment in Illinois, took 3 long years. Finally, the Flakes arrived in Salt Lake in 1848.

Unfortunately, because of the hardships incurred by the long journey, James Flake died in 1850. His widow then joined a company of Mormon pioneers who eventually would buy the San Bernardino Rancho from the Lugo family a year later.

On to California

Once again Lizzy set out on a long journey across mountains and deserts, driving a covered wagon pulled by two yoke of oxen.

After the purchase of Lugo's ranch, Lizzy and the Flake boys helped make the first adobe brick for the first homes in the new community. Hearing news of an "Indian Uprising" from the Mojave Desert, she helped build the fort, which encompassed land where the San Bernardino County Court House stands today.

On January 15, 1855, Agnes Flake, who Lizzy fondly recalled "like a member of my own family" died from a lengthy illness, leaving her children to the care of Lizzy.

Lizzy Becomes Free at Last

While it is possible that Lizzy was kept ignorant of the law which, clearly stated that all slaves would become free upon entering California, William Flake, one of the boys, returned to Utah and sent back the proper papers to Lizzy giving her the freedom she already technically had. Lizzy, nevertheless, continued taking care of the younger Flake children until other arrangements were made later that year.

According to contemporary accounts, in 1854, a "Mrs. Rowan" reportedly rode out to Los Angeles to inform the sheriff that a white man named Robert Smith, afraid that word would leak out to that California was a "free state", was planning to head for Texas with his 14 slaves. One of them was Biddy Mason, a woman of enormous physical strength. Mason, who eventually would become the wealthiest woman in California, donated property for the first African Methodist Episcopal Church on the West Coast.

Lizzy Flake Marries Charles Rowan

Although, evidence is not conclusive at this time, "Mrs. Rowan" may have been Lizzy, as she eventually married a man named Charles Rowan. Author/historian Byron Skinner indicated in his *Black Origins of the Inland Empire*, that although the recorded date of their marriage was 1860, the possibility still exists that their nuptials actually occurred several years earlier.

Elizabeth "Lizzy" Flake Rowan, ca 1885

In any event, the couple built a home for their three children and acquired some land on "D" Street near San Bernardino's downtown area where Lizzy worked as a laundress. Meanwhile, Charles ran a barbershop for almost 40 years inside the Southern Hotel, approximately where The San Bernardino County Sun now stands [Now American Sports University].

A son, Byron, worked for a while as a teaming contractor on the desert, operated a feed store on "I" Street, and eventually followed in his fathers' footsteps by opening up a barbershop on 3rd Street.

Their daughter, Alice Rowan Johnson, was one of the first Blacks to graduate from college in California. She became a teacher in Riverside--probably the first black teacher of white children in the state of California.

As for Lizzy, she lived out her remaining years loved and respected by the whole community. When she died in 1908, fellow pioneers of all races and creeds attended her funeral and acted as pall bearers.

Elizabeth (Lizzy) Flake Rowan is buried at San Bernardino's Pioneer Cemetery.

October 20, 1903
Is when the earth buried me.

In Union Cemetery, with Martha dear,
Is a Green and Black suit of a pioneer.
I am Green Flake, Green Flake I am.
I am now full blessed by Abraham.

On to heaven''s great expansion,
Father''s house has many mansions.
I am Green Flake, Green Flake I am.
Full blessed I am by Abraham.

Miriam B. Murphy
Beehive History 22

The names Green Flake, Hark Lay, and Oscar Crosby are inscribed on monuments and remembered by Utah school children as the three African American slaves who came to Utah with the first company of Mormon pioneers. Beyond that, most children and adults know little about the three men and even less about the free blacks, members of the James family, who also immigrated to Utah in 1847.

Green Flake, pioneer

Green Flake was born in Anson County, North Carolina, ca. 1828. In 1841 he traveled with his owners, James Madison and Agnes Love Flake, to Kemper County, Mississippi, where the family cleared land for a farm. During the winter of 1843-44 Madison, as he was called, and

Agnes were baptized as members of the Mormon church and so was their servant Green. When the Flakes decided to join the main body of the church in Nauvoo, Green accompanied them. For a time he served as a bodyguard for Joseph Smith.

According to historian Leonard J. Arrington:
When Brigham Young organized the pioneer company in the spring of 1847, Madison Flake volunteered to send Green and his fine white 'mountain' carriage to carry the leader. Green was instructed to build a nice log house for the Flakes during the winter and have it ready for occupancy by 1848 when the family would begin the trek from the Missouri.

The log cabin on the left was reportedly built by Green Flake on his farm in Union. The other structures were built by a later owner. From Steven K. Madsen's A Union, Utah History (1981).

When Brigham Young became ill near the present Utah-Wyoming border on July 12, Green Flake--as well as Hark Lay and Oscar Crosby--joined a group of men under Orson Pratt's leadership to find the best route through the mountains to their destination in the valley. They formed what is known as the advance company. Behind them were the main body of pioneers and a smaller group with the ailing Brigham Young.

The advance company proceeded down Echo Canyon, around Little Mountain, and through Emigration Canyon. The men used shovels, axes, and other tools to create a passable road for the main body of wagons to follow. Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow rode into the valley on July 21, and the following day, July 22, all of the immigrants, except Brigham Young's small group, entered the valley. Plowing, planting, and digging irrigation ditches occupied almost every man, including the African Americans. Green Flake, as instructed, also built a home for Madison and Agnes Flake. Some sources suggest that Green accompanied Brigham Young east in the fall of

1847, taking the Flakes' wagon and then returning to Utah with the family in 1848.

In 1850 Madison Flake went to California where he was killed in an accident. When his widow Agnes decided to go to California with the Charles C. Rich company, she left Green Flake in Salt Lake City to "work for the Church, as a way of paying the family's back tithing."

Arrington stated:
Green worked for Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball in a variety of capacities for a year or two, and then was given his freedom and a plot of ground at Union Fort, in the Salt Lake Valley....He thereupon married Martha Crosby and at Union, on the east side of 9th East, they grew garden crops, maintained an orchard, and bread fine livestock. They had two children.

Green probably developed at least a small herd of cattle, for he had his own registered livestock brand--his initials, GF, with a bar above them.

Another account says that Green, Martha, and their son Abraham purchased some 20 acres of land in Union for $1,880 from James Godfrey ca. 1881. Although the Flakes raised much of their own food, Green also "worked for others who needed a good man. He was a big man, weighing nearly 200 pounds."

The energetic Green may also have tried his hand at prospecting. Historian Ronald G. Coleman states that Green and his brother-in-law Miles Litzford (or Litchford), after limited success in the Bingham Canyon area, located several claims in the Big Cottonwood Mining District: Evergreen, Abraham Lincoln. Lake Cross, Union Blue, and Rainbow. Lack of capital to develop the claims led the men to sell out in 1871 to the Elevator Prospecting Company, one of two mining companies organized by blacks that year.

Green and Martha Flake were active members of the LDS ward in Union. In addition to tithing, he made donations to building funds for the Union Ward and the Salt Lake Temple. He was a good neighbor by all accounts, extending a helping hand without being asked. He was also noted for his fine singing voice. Some accounts claim that Green maintained the friendly relationship with Brigham Young that began on the overland trek and that when the pioneer leader died in 1877 Green helped to dig his grave.

Although children of African American descent could and did attend school alongside whites in Utah, territorial law prohibited blacks from voting and from serving on juries and in the legislature until the "free, white" qualification was deleted on February 5, 1868. The 1870 census shows four black children attending school in Union. Some half-dozen black families lived in the area, and Green Flake seems to have been the leading figure among them.

Sometime after his wife's death in 1885, Green moved to Idaho to live with his son Abraham, until his own death on October 20, 1903. Both Martha and Green Flake are buried in the Union Cemetery. Arrington wrote:

An exciting event in Green's later life was an invitation to attend the Jubilee Pioneer Celebration of the settlement of the Salt Lake Valley in 1897. One of the small handful of persons who were in the Pioneer Company who were still alive, Green was given a special certificate which he proudly hung in his home.

Much less is known about Oscar Crosby and Hark Lay. Both men traveled to Utah with a group of Mississippi Mormons that made a difficult journey from the South to Winter Quarters and then west with the first pioneer company in 1847. Like Green Flake, Crosby and Lay helped forge a road through Emigration Canyon and worked to establish the initial settlement in the Salt Lake Valley.

Oscar Crosby, born in Virginia ca. 1815, left Utah in the early 1850s with William Crosby, his owner, who was headed for the Mormon settlement at San Bernardino, California. Since California was a free state, Oscar could have claimed his freedom upon arrival there. He died in Los Angeles in 1870. Hark Lay (Wales is sometimes shown as another surname) was born in Mississippi ca. 1825. According to Coleman:

Hark Lay, the slave of William Lay, was married to a slave owned by either George or John Bankhead. William Lay was planning to move to San Bernardino and did not have the funds to purchase Hark's wife. He attempted to find other solutions to the problem, but the record is unclear as to whether or not the couple were able to avoid separation.

Isaac and Jane Manning James and their sons Sylvester and Silas were the first free blacks to settle in Utah. They immigrated with the Ira Eldredge company, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley on September 19, 1847. Both Isaac and Jane had embraced the Mormon faith before they met in Nauvoo, Illinois. Jane and her brother had worked for Joseph and Emma Smith, and after the Mormon prophet's murder she "resided in Brigham Young's home." She was living there when she met and married Isaac.

In the spring of 1848 the Jameses became the parents of Mary Ann, the first black child born in Utah. Coleman noted:
Like many early pioneers, the James family experienced difficult times and sought assistance from more fortunate neighbors, a consideration they returned by sharing their later good fortune. Slowly the family's financial status improved, and by 1865, they were doing relatively well. In addition to a land claim and a home, they owned household items and a small number of livestock. Isaac listed farming as his occupation, but between 1849 and 1851 he also worked as a coachman for Brigham Young. Sylvester James was listed in 1861 [he was then about age 16] as a member of the Nauvoo Legion and was in possession of his ten pounds of ammunition and musket.

Jane Manning James became the matriarch of Utah's black community. Poised and dignified, she was widely admired. Mormon leader Joseph Fielding Smith spoke at her funeral in 1908.

By the end of 1847, Coleman estimates, there were perhaps a dozen +26 that went to CA African Americans living in Utah. From that small number the black community would grow and change during the next century and a half. Although they shared the pioneering era with Euro-Americans and participated in Utah's later development, African Americans faced difficulties and challenges unknown to most of their white neighbors. That they endured these with remarkable courage is their monument to the human spirit.

Sources: Ronald G. Coleman, "A History of Blacks in Utah, 1825-1910" (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1980); Leonard J. Arrington, "Black

Pioneer Was Union Fort Settler," *The Pioneer* (SUP), September-October 1981

Black side bar 2 - green

Daily Herald

Green Flake

Green Flake is one of the three black pioneers whose names are immortalized on the back of the Brigham Young monument in Salt Lake City.

He was born in North Carolina as a slave and was given as a wedding present to James and Agnes Flake when he was 10 years old. Green and the Flake family later moved to Mississippi where the Flakes joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

"My sense is there was not coercion to make the slaves join," said historian Margaret Young. "I do not know how much they were taught, but they did not have to join."

A few weeks after James and Agnes Flake were baptized, records show Green and one other Flake slave were baptized, too. The Flake family records, which include a biography of William Jordan Flake by Osmer Flake, state that the family decided to travel to Illinois to gather with the Mormons in 1844.

They gave each slave a choice whether or not to stay in Mississippi. Green Flake and another slave named Liz Flake chose to make the journey.

Green and the Flake family arrived in Nauvoo, Ill., in April 1844.

Three years later, Green Flake was pointed out as one of the stronger slaves and chosen to join Brigham Young, then president of the church, and the Vanguard Company as the first pioneers to reach the Salt Lake Valley.

Later in his life, Flake taught himself to write and recorded some of what he saw on the pioneer trail. His exact words, with many spelling corrections, were printed in "The Book of the Pioneers," a publication of the Utah Semi-centennial Commission.

Flake wrote about meeting up with the Pawnee who acted "war like" and demanded pay for crossing the country.

"After President Young counseled with them by paying them something, they give us permission to cross the country," Flake said.

Many folklore records indicate that Green Flake was driving Brigham Young's wagon when he first spotted the valley.

"When Brigham Young said, 'This is the right place. Drive on,' guess who those words were directed to," Margaret Young said. "The driver, Green Flake."

Green built a cabin for the Flake family and returned to Nebraska to lead them to their new home.

On this second journey, he fell in love with Martha Crosby and paid the Crosby family with vegetables for the right to marry her.

After the family settled in the Salt Lake Valley, James Flake left for a church mission to California and was killed when he got kicked in the head by a mule, Margaret Young said.

Agnes Flake left Green to the care of Brigham Young and moved to California. Multiple sources indicate Green worked for Brigham Young for about a year, but it is unclear whether or not he was considered his slave. Other sources indicate Green was used as tithing to the church from the Flake family.

Dale Bills a spokesperson for the LDS Church, said many pioneers offered time and labor as tithing to the church, but there are no records to indicate if they served for themselves or other people.

In 1854, Amasa Lyman, an LDS Church leader in California, wrote Brigham Young a letter on behalf of Agnes Flake. Flake was sick and poor in California and wanted Young to sell Green and send her the money.

The letter recorded as "letter number 185" in the Brigham Young files of letters at LDS Church Archives reads: "Sister Agnes Flake wishes me to inquire of you if there is any chance for her to receive any help by way of the Negro man she left when she came here. She has a family on her hands for which to provide. Her health is also very delicate health and if she could realize something from this quarter it would be a benefit to her. Thomas I. Williams told me if he could, he would purchase the Negro and pay for him."

Margaret Young said Brigham Young's reply skirted around the issue.

"Brigham Young wrote back and said something like, 'Yes, Green Flake worked for me for about a year, but that last I heard he was poor in health,'" she said. "But the truth is they were good friends, and Green and Martha's children have memories of sitting on Brigham Young's lap."

This story appeared in The Daily Herald on page A2.

Article views: 4

Documentary chronicles history of blacks in LDS church

Jennifer Dobner - THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MURRAY -- Elijah Abel, Jane Manning James and Green Flake hold a unique, but rather obscure place in Mormon history. All three were members of their church in the mid-1800s and all three were black.

They also stayed faithful when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day denied blacks full membership in the denomination.

Abel was the first black man ordained to the church priesthood in 1832. James worked in the home of church founder Joseph Smith and followed the faith's next president, Brigham Young, across the frontier to Utah in 1848. Flake came to Utah as well, but as the slave of white members. He was freed by Young in 1854.

Now, filmmakers Darius Gray and Margaret Young have chronicled those stories and the struggles of other black Latter-day Saints in a new documentary, "Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons."

"To me it's parallel with the story of African-Americans, period," said Gray, who is black and has been a member of the church since 1964. "We talk about the black history and contributions being either lost, stolen or strayed generally, and it's the same within the LDS Church."

Nearly six years in the making, the film is an extension of a longtime partnership between Gray, a former broadcaster, and Young, who is white and a writing teacher at the church-owned Brigham Young University. Together, the pair have written three books on black Mormons.

Wrapped in soulful, black spirituals, the 72-minute film takes viewers on a journey from the days of Mormon pioneers to the 1960s civil rights era, when some university athletics teams refused to compete against BYU because of the way blacks were treated by the church. It ends with current black church members sharing their own stories -- good and bad.

"We're not hiding anything, we're not sugarcoating anything," Young said. "We're telling a very difficult history, but the people who are telling it have come through it."

Tamu Smith, of Provo, is one of those storytellers.

"It's liberating," Smith said of sharing her struggle to fit in and find other people of color in her faith. "We don't talk about black Mormon history and it's sad. Every person in the church needs to see this."

Church history shows that founder Smith granted blacks full membership in the faith not long

after founding the church in 1830. Brigham Young reversed the policy after the Latter-day Saints came to Utah.

On June 8, 1978, a revelation announced by then-president Spencer W. Kimball extended the priesthood to every worthy male member "without regard for race or color."

Since 1978, the church membership has grown significantly in Brazil, the Caribbean and Africa, where the church now claims more than 250,000 Saints. Worldwide, the church has 13 million members.

An interview subject in the film in addition to his behind-camera role, Gray said black Mormons needed to tell their own story instead of letting others continue to interpret their history.

"It's important to be validated, and it's important to share it with our white brothers and sisters so [they] can have an appreciation for who we are and from whence we've come," he said. "Part of it is sweet, part of it is bitter, but it's our story."

Young said a goal of the film, which was not produced in conjunction with the church, is to build a bridge between blacks and whites both in and out of the church.

Gray and Young have been shopping their project to film festivals across the U.S. To date it's been shown in Dallas, Detroit and San Diego, where so many turned out that festival organizers had to move the showing to a larger theater. They hope to find a distributor that will allow the film, which was funded largely through a University of Utah grant, to be widely seen.

Earlier this month, the film drew a crowd of more than 100 at the Foursite Film Festival, in Ogden.

"This was very impressive," schoolteacher Tamara Lei Peters said. "There have been so many questions about black people in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It made me weep in a few places."

Peters said she knew nothing about black LDS history before seeing the film.

David Rowe, who teaches at the Salt Lake Theological Seminary, knew the history, but said he was surprised by the film.

"I would say it was bracingly forthright about the black Mormons's struggle," said the self-described evangelical. "I didn't expect them to allow quite as much criticism along with the commendation. I expected a bit more of P.R. gloss, but I didn't find it overly romanticized."

Mormon Jeanette Lambert of Salt Lake City said perhaps the film can begin to heal the divisiveness wrought by the past treatment of black church members. Sadly, some old doctrines that support the idea that blacks are less than full church members are still taught, said Lambert, a hospice nurse.

"I think there needs to be a concerted effort made to acknowledge that some things were wrong. It's a part of the repentance process," said the mother of two teenagers.

Early Latter-day Saints like Abel, James and Flake, "should be some of our heroes," she said.

Crosby, Oscar
He was enslaved to Southern Mormon William Crosby. #57, pp.8, 10

Along with Hark Lay and Green Flake, his name appears on the monument that stands in Salt Lake City at the mouth of Emigration Canyon. #57, p.10

He was listed as having arrived in Utah in July 1847.
He was one of 26 black slaves ◆en route to California◆ according to the 1850 U.S. census.
He was part of the Amasa Lyman and Charles C. Rich Expedition of 1851. #57, p.97

Embers, Grief (c. 1812 ◆October 10, 1873)
He was enslaved to Southern Mormon William Crosby. #57, p.8

He was part of the ◆Mississippi Company◆ of Mormons, who arrived in Utah in October 1848. #57, p.10

He and his brother Toby were enslaved to Bishop Crosby.
The brothers played roles in the building of San Bernardino. #57, p.25

His last name had been acquired from a previous owner.
He was born in 1812 or 1813 and listed his birth place as Indiana.
After the Mormons left him in San Bernardino he used the name Embers. #57, p.26

In early San Bernardino, he acted as a bugler, playing a six-foot long horn for various functions. #57, p.27

He played his horn at the first Independence Day celebration in San Bernardino in 1852. #57, p.29

He was listed in the 1860 census as a property owner in San Bernardino.
By the time of his death in 1873, he owned considerable property near downtown San Bernardino.. #57, p.36

He arrived in Utah in October 1848.
He was one of 26 black slaves ◆en route to California◆ according to the 1850 U.S. census.
He was part of the Amasa Lyman and Charles C. Rich Expedition of 1851.
He was listed as Grief Crosby, owned by William Crosby. #57, p.97

He was listed as 27 years old in the 1852 census for Los Angeles County. #57, p.98

Embers, Toby
He and his brother Grief were enslaved to Bishop Crosby.
They both played roles in the building of San Bernardino. #57, p.25

He was one of 26 black slaves ◆en route to California◆ according to the 1850 U.S. census. #57, p.97

Flake-Rowan, Mrs. Elizabeth (Lizzie)
Elizabeth was a black woman who came to California and became a pioneer of San Bernardino. #15, p.103

She was a former slave who took the name of her owner◆s family.
Along with 25 other blacks, she came to San Bernardino, California in 1851. #57, p.1

A ca. 1885 portrait photograph of Elizabeth Flake Rowan can be found in Heritage Tales. #57, p.2

She was born in the 1830s on a plantation in Mason County, North Carolina.
Taken from her parents at age four, she was given to James and Agnes Flake as a wedding gift.
She was raised as the personal slave of Agnes Flake.
The Flakes moved to Mississippi with their slaves Elizabeth and Green.
After becoming Mormons, the couple and their two slaves moved to Navoo, Illinois, where they spent the winter of 1846-1847 with other Mormons.
Other Southerners also brought their slaves, including Oscar, Grief, Aunt Hanna and Lawrence. #57, p.8

Lizzie and the Flake children herded loose cattle on the overland journey by wagon to Utah.
The ◆Mississippi Company◆ arrived in the valley of the Great Salt Lake in October, 1848. #57, p.10

After the accidental death of James Flake in California in 1850, Agnes became more dependent on Lizzie.
Green Flake was sent to live with another Mormon man. #57, p.13

The widowed Agnes Flake decided to go to San Bernardino with her children and Lizzie. #57, p.16

On March 14, 1851 500 people and 150 wagons left Salt Lake City for San Bernardino, California.
Lizzie and 25 other blacks were included in the three companies on their difficult three month journey.
#57, p.23

On the trip, she and the two Flake sons drove a yoke of oxen behind the wagon driven by Agnes. #57, p.24

She worked hard, helping Agnes and her family to build a new home inside Fort San Bernardino. #57, p.25

The 1852 Los Angeles census showed 20 of the original 26 black settlers of San Bernardino, but it failed to list Lizzie Flake. #57, p.28

Agnes Flake died on January 5, 1855 with Lizzie still serving her loyally. After her death, her two sons and daughter remained in Lizzie's care for several months.
The 1860 census lists Lizzie as a laundress in San Bernardino. #57, p.33

.When the three Flake children returned to Utah in 1857 they left Lizzie behind. #57, pp.35-36

According to records, Lizzie was enslaved to Agnes L Flake and arrived in Utah in October 1848.
Lizzie's name appears on the list of 26 blacks en route to California according to the 1850 U.S. census.
Her name appears on the list of black slaves taken to San Bernardino along with the Amasa Lyman and Charles C. Rich Expedition of 1851. #57, p

Lay, Hark
Along with Green Flake and Oscar Crosby, his name appears on the monument that stands in Salt Lake City at the mouth of Emigration Canyon. #57, p.10

He sang beautifully and was kind to the children of Brigham Young.
He was enslaved to William Lay, who decided to move from Utah to San Bernardino.
William didn't have enough money to purchase Hark's wife from her owner. #57, p.16

He was listed as having arrived in Utah in July 1847.
He was one of 26 black slaves "en route to California" according to the 1850 U.S. census.
He was part of the Amasa Lyman and Charles C. Rich Expedition of 1851. #57, p.97

He was listed as 27 years old in the 1852 census for Los Angeles County. #57, p.98

Mason, (Bridget) Biddy (?-1891)
She and her family moved to Utah with their owner Robert Smith in 1851.

In 1852 Mason came to San Bernardino as an enslaved black woman.
In 1855 Smith moved to Texas and Mason and her family stayed in California.
Judge Hayes freed them.
Mason moved to Santa Monica, and then later, to Los Angeles.
She took up housework and nursing and she also owned a ranch.
Eventually she became one of the wealthiest blacks in Los Angeles. #3, p.120

She came to California from Mississippi at age 32.
Walking behind the three hundred wagons of her masters group, her job was to keep the cattle together.
In 1856 her owner decided to return home with his slaves. #4, p.129

Mason refused to return to the South and convinced the local sheriff to press her case.
She won freedom for herself and her three daughters.
She acquired large parcels of land through hard work and clever saving.
She donated money for schools, churches, nursing homes and she also aided flood victims.
She brought food to undernourished men in local jails.
She died in 1891. #4, p.130

She was born enslaved in Hancock County, Georgia.
In 1851 she crossed the plains following a wagon of owner Robert Smith.
She herded sheep during the journey to San Bernardino in California.
After obtaining freedom Mason and her children moved to Los Angeles.
She secured a job as a practical nurse, working for $2.50 per day.
She saved her money and bought two parcels of land (about ten acres).
She paid $250 for the land and sold it five years later for $200,000.
The land had become the center of the downtown business district of Los Angeles. #46, p.70

Mormon Settlements in San Bernardino County

Not all Mormons traveled to California to prospect for gold. One group, for example, was sent west in 1851 by Brigham Young to establish a new colony. The colonists, led by Amasa Lyman and Charles Rich, eventually settled in San Bernardino. The group, which numbered several hundred, established a thriving and growing settlement that eventually grew into the city of San Bernardino. The Mormons built the first roads in the area and practiced agriculture and cattle ranching.

The great distance between the California settlement and the church leadership in Utah led to suspicion and difficulties. Brigham Young questioned the loyalty of the settlers, and Lyman was frustrated by the his meddling. The conflict resulted in Lyman's excommunication from the church. Troubles between Mormons and the U.S. government in Utah made the church leadership even more wary of the California settlements.

Ultimately Young demanded that the settlers leave San Bernardino and return to Utah. Most of them agreed, selling their land and abandoning the colony.

After the Mormons left, the nearly deserted town of San Bernardino attracted a variety of schemers, criminals, and pro-slavery Southerners. The city existed as a rural backwater until connected to Los Angeles by rail in the 1880s.

On the Net:

http://www.untoldstoryofblackmormons.com/

Article views: 114

Black Youths Helped Blaze Mormon Trail

Will Bagley

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In most ways, Lizzie Flake was a typical young pioneer of Utah. Born in 1833 in North Carolina, she followed the James M. Flake family to Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1843, to Winter Quarters in 1846 and to Utah in 1848. The Flake family lost a son at Nauvoo and buried an infant daughter at Winter Quarters. At age fifteen, Lizzie walked 1,100 miles from the Missouri River to the Salt Lake Valley, tending babies and driving cattle along the way. There was one striking difference between Lizzie Flake and most Mormons: She was among the twenty black children who crossed the plains to Utah in 1848.

Legally, she was not a member of the Flake family. She was their property. Yet the Flakes considered Lizzie an invaluable member of their family. After Brigham Young in 1850 sent James Flake on a gold-mining mission, during which a recalcitrant mule threw him and fatally broke his neck, Lizzie followed Flake's widow, Agnes, to California. They crossed the Mojave Desert in 1851 and helped found San Bernardino.

Slavery was legal in Utah Territory, but California was a free state. Lizzie was now a free woman. Agnes Flake had grown up in the comfort of a North Carolina plantation. When she arrived in San Bernardino, her family's fortune was wrecked and she had tuberculosis. Lizzie stayed with her former mistress until Agnes died, running the household and caring for the children. "She was the best woman that lived," Lizzie mourned when Agnes died. "I love her better than anyone in the world."

When he returned to Utah, family member William Flake encouraged Lizzie to stay in California and build a family of her own. She married Charles Rowan, a barber and teamster, and together they helped found San Bernardino's still-thriving black community. The Rowans prospered and had three children. Their daughter, Alice, was said to be the first black woman to teach in a white school.

Lizzie Rowan died in 1903 and is buried beneath an impressive granite marker in San Bernardino. The Flake family of Snowflake, Arizona, still cherish the silver set she gave William as a wedding present. Lizzie Rowan's story is only one of dozens told in Violet T. Kimball's just-published *Stories of Young Pioneers in Their Own Words*, aimed at readers ten to fifteen years old. Kimball describes what daily life was like on the trail and how children gathered buffalo chips and hauled water. Chapters describe the dangers, animals, chores, romances and Indians they met on the way West, and how after an exhausting day, pioneers could dance and sing.

The epic of the Sager family tells a lot about America before the coming of malls. Rocky Mountain fever struck down both parents on the way to Oregon in 1844. "In twenty-six days both our parents were laid in the grave, and we were orphans, the oldest fourteen years old and the youngest five months old," recalled Catherine Sager.Theophilos Dagon drove the children's wagon to the Whitman Mission near today's Walla Walla, Washington. But even there they could not escape the danger of the frontier. Cayuse Indians killed Francis and John Sager at the mission in 1847.

In the old days, when every other movie and television show was a Western, kids grew up playing cowboys and Indians and living in the past. In the computer age, our children live in the future. Violet Kimball has done young and old a great favor.