

Joshua Mecham and Permelia (Chapman) Mecham



A Family History

by Shelley Dawson Davies

Photo: Hart Pond in Canaan, Connecticut.

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Chapter 1

New England Strength

A Firm Foundation



Low mountains and thick forests surround the small town of Canaan, New Hampshire.

There were 23,000 acres of wilderness in the Canaan land grant of 1761, and Samuel Meham¹ was determined to claim his portion of it. He joined a dozen other men from Connecticut in clearing trees and carving out farmsteads from the New Hampshire forests, selecting for his own home a plot on Town Hill, several miles up from the main settlement along Hart's Pond.² The land itself was so rocky there was hardly a square rod without "stones enough to build a four-foot wall around it,"³ but it was fertile enough to produce abundant crops, nurture apple orchards and support the fifteen children his wife Phoebe⁴ would give him.

Although Samuel was a stern, unsmiling man, he had a dry sense of humor, according to a story often recounted by his son Joshua.⁵ One day near the end of Revolutionary War, Samuel left his family to gather firewood, promising to return home shortly, but he was soon confronted by a group of anxious men running toward him through the woods. An alarm had been raised he was told, and his services in defense of his country were required immediately. He was pressed into joining Captain Joshua Wells' Company⁶ on the spot and left

without informing Phoebe of his whereabouts. Nine days later, after marching against a force of Indians allied with the British, Samuel returned to Canaan through the same forest. He gathered up a load of firewood and walked home as if he hadn't been gone at all.⁷

The people of Canaan were of old Puritan stock who took their religion seriously, attending Sabbath services in each other's homes and barns until a suitable meeting house was constructed along Broad Street at the edge of Hart's Pond in 1793.⁸ Joshua and his siblings were taught to pray and read the Bible by their devout parents, who accompanied their children to church every Sunday. Even as a youngster, Joshua soon learned to sit quietly during the preacher's long sermons, ever watchful of the tithing man's approach. Brother Samuel Chapman,⁹ charged with keeping the congregation at attention, patrolled the pews on muffled feet, ready to rap nodding heads with the ball end of his long white wand. Drowsy ladies were awakened by gently drawing a fox tail under their noses.¹⁰



The Canaan Meetinghouse, built in 1793, where services for various religious denominations and town meetings were held.

The Chapman family lived on South Road, not far from the Mecham place, where Samuel hosted town meetings at his inn.¹¹ Joshua had known Samuel's daughter, Permelia,¹² ever since he could remember, but he became particularly interested in the pretty young woman during the spring of 1793. Permelia was only sixteen years old when she consented to become Joshua's wife that April, but she was already a skilled housekeeper, and proved to be an excellent wife.

The home Joshua built for Permelia was like almost every other house in town,¹³ a two-story, framed structure with four square rooms and a large central hallway on each floor, secured by heavy shutters and heated against the long New England winters by a pair of fireplaces.¹⁴ Not only was it big enough to accommodate the nine children Permelia bore Joshua, but it was located next to his parents' house on Town Hill.¹⁵

Joshua was a careful and dedicated farmer who taught his sons how to till and fertilize the land, extracting regular crops of grain, corn, potatoes and hay. He kept several horses for plowing and a pair of oxen to work rough ground, but the real work was constantly hoeing the stony soil by hand, a difficult and tedious labor that kept everyone busy in the fields all summer long. Harvesting was done by hand as well, with the boys using scythes and small hand rakes to bring in the hay and sickles for the wheat and rye. Joshua's large and productive apple orchards bore so much fruit Permelia had a hard time knowing what to do with it all. After making a number of preserves, she and her daughters sliced and dried the remainder for winter storage.¹⁶ A great many apples were pressed and fermented for cider, and what fruit was left after the cellar and casks were filled remained on the ground for the cattle, hogs and horses to grow fat on.¹⁷

As the Mecham children grew, so did Canaan, gradually becoming a typical ordered Yankee village, complete with a variety of businesses, including mercantile shops, law offices, a blacksmith and a doctor's office. Receiving mail once a week was possible after Broad Street was designated a post road, and eventually foot traffic gave way to travel by horseback and stagecoach.¹⁸

There was at the same time in the early 1800s an economic boom as better roads and river transportation made it easier to move people and goods across America. Two-way river traffic became possible with the invention of the steamboat in 1807, and a few years later when New York began construction on the Erie Canal, opportunities for a better life opened up all along its route. The Mechams were among the many New England families who uprooted their lives with an eye to the future, relocating to Mercer County, Pennsylvania, where a waterway was being constructed to connect Philadelphia to the Erie Canal.

A Note on Names

The original Meacham ancestors who emigrated from England in the mid-1600s wrote their family name with an extra "a," a letter which was dropped by three sons of Samuel and Phoebe (Main) Meacham around the time they joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1830s. Joshua, Elam and Joseph Mecham also changed the pronunciation from "Mea-chum" (rhyming with "peach") to "Me-come." The new name was used on a patriarchal blessing given to Joshua by John Smith on 23 September, 1845. See: Leon Mecham, Family Book of Remembrance and Genealogy with Allied Lines (Salt Lake City, Utah: self-published, 1952), page 81.

ENDNOTES

¹ Samuel Mecham (1739-1811), #LZ2T-L7P, www.familysearch.org, where verification of all vital dates can be found. Also see family group sheets at www.DaviesDawsonHistory.weebly.com

² Broad Street is now known as Canaan Street. William Allen Wallace, *The History of Canaan, New Hampshire* (Concord, New Hampshire: Rumford Press, 1910), page 3, 231, 387, <https://archive.org/details/historyofcanaann00wall>

³ Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer of Grafton County, New Hampshire, 1709-1886* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Journal Company, 1885), page 217, <https://archive.org/stream/gazetteerofgraft00chil#page/n7/mode/2up>

⁴ Phoebe (Main) Mecham (1747-1778), #MTBV-3F1, www.familysearch.org

⁵ Joshua Mecham (1773-1846), #L6SW-4WR, www.familysearch.org

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- ⁶ William Allen Wallace, *The History of Canaan, New Hampshire*, page 345, <https://archive.org/details/historyofcanaann00wall>
- ⁷ Leon Mecham, *Family Book of Remembrance and Genealogy with Allied Lines* (Salt Lake City, Utah: self-published, 1952), page 27, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE206227
- ⁸ Wallace, *The History of Canaan, New Hampshire*, page 50.
- ⁹ Samuel Chapman (1741-1817), #9H3C-H5D, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁰ Wallace, *The History of Canaan, New Hampshire*, page 50, 459-460.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, page 26, 28.
- ¹² Permelia (Chapman) Mecham (1777-1866), #KNC9-D8Q, www.newfamilysearch.org
- ¹³ Ironically, for an area abundant with stones, only one home was built with it.
- ¹⁴ Wallace, *The History of Canaan, New Hampshire*, page 443.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, page 231.
- ¹⁶ Amos Noyes Currier, "A New England Hill Town, 1800-1850: Canaan, New Hampshire," 1895, <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nhchs/History/NEHillTown.html>
- ¹⁷ Wallace, *The History of Canaan, New Hampshire*, page 430-431.
- ¹⁸ Child, *Gazetteer of Grafton County, New Hampshire, 1709-1886*.

Chapter 2

True Faith

Trials and Tribulations



A packet boat making its way down the Pennsylvania Canal.

The Mechams may have been willing to leave New England, but they were not about to leave without each other. Joshua's brother Elam, Senior,¹⁹ sold his Canaan property in February, 1817, following the Mecham sisters and their husbands, who had taken up land in Conneaut, Erie County, Pennsylvania, around 1810.²⁰ Joshua and his younger brother Joseph²¹ also settled nearby in the early 1820s,²² keeping their extended families connected. Permelia was delighted when her married children settled in neighboring towns across Erie and Mercer counties, from Springfield, at Lake Erie's shore, to Delaware and Mercer, fifty miles south along the canal route.

The Mechams remained close to God as well as to one another, living devout, quiet lives and following the admonition "to abstain from strong drink, avoid bad language, and to keep good company."²³ Their pious Methodist upbringing prepared them for the momentous events that would soon change their lives completely.

While the Mechams were unified in the Methodist faith, the Smith family in upstate New York was divided by the claims of competing churches. Unable “to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong,”²⁴ fourteen-year old Joseph Smith sought clarity by asking God which church he should join. In answer to his prayer, God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared, declaring Joseph must not join any church, for “they were all wrong.”²⁵ Joseph had been chosen to restore long-lost gospel truths once again to the earth. The year was 1820.

During the next ten years, Joseph Smith was further instructed by heavenly messengers, eventually receiving and translating a set of ancient scripture written on golden plates. Printed as *The Book of Mormon*, the first copies were made available in March, 1830, one month before The Church of Jesus Christ was officially organized in Fayette, New York, with Joseph president and prophet. Early members immediately began to share their testimonies of *The Book of Mormon* among family, friends and neighbors.

By February, 1831, the “Saints” were instructed by the Lord to gather in Ohio, where they could strengthen each other while expanding missionary work eastward. Enthusiastic converts were sent from the new church center at Kirtland, Ohio, along the Ridge Road, which passed straight through Springfield, Pennsylvania. Here, and in towns and villages all through Erie County, they preached the gospel from house to house, meeting with enough success over the next few years that a spot along the east branch of Conneaut Creek became known as “Mormon Run” after the many people baptized there.²⁶

Joshua’s nephew, Elam Mecham Junior,²⁷ was one of those convinced by *The Book of Mormon*, and he set about spreading the good news to his family, converting his three sisters and half-brother Samuel. Elam visited his uncles, Joshua and Joseph Mecham in Delaware Township, eventually teaching and baptizing many members of their households.²⁸ Permelia was the first to be baptized, on New Year’s Day, 1837, followed that summer by her son Ephraim²⁹ and his wife Polly,³⁰ and finally Joshua Sr., in December. The next year Joshua Jr.,³¹ Edward,³² Lewis³³ and their wives also joined the church. Their son Moses,³⁴ who had settled his wife and children in Iowa several years before, was not religious, rejecting “any creed or religion . . . as there was to my knowledge, none that held to the principles contained in the scripture,” he later wrote.³⁵



The temple was the centerpiece of Kirtland, Ohio, in the 1830s.

Towards Zion

Much had happened in the eight years since Joseph Smith officially organized the church. The very same year, after the Lord revealed New Jerusalem would be built in Missouri, Saints began gathering in and around the town of Independence, but wherever they settled, they suffered persecutions of anti-Mormon mobs bent on their destruction. Only two years after establishing communities in Jackson County, Missouri, the Saints were forced to flee their homes. They found refuge in nearby Caldwell and Daviess counties, where they set about reestablishing their Zion. Joseph Smith designated Far West as the new church headquarters, laying a temple cornerstone there in July, 1838, and issuing an invitation for the faithful to join him there.

The Mechams, anxious to join their fellow Saints in Missouri, sold their farms soon afterwards. It was a painful parting when they left Pennsylvania, as not everyone in the family had accepted the gospel. Both of Joshua and Permelia's daughters remained in the east with their husbands, as did their sons Samuel³⁶ and Caleb.³⁷ The final goodbye was particularly difficult for Caleb's wife, Mary,³⁸ and Edward's wife Irene,³⁹ Currier sisters who had married Mecham brothers.

The Mecham clan banded together in a line of wagons headed for Far West, joining up in Ohio with Kirtland Camp, the first company established by the church to assist members in their migration west. The group of over five hundred people was organized into four divisions which left Kirtland in early July, following well-travelled

roads until they reached Indiana, where they headed out directly west across Illinois on rough trails. Travel with so many people was difficult and slow, with breakdowns and illness contributing to the delays. The Mechams' fourth division, under the leadership of Joseph Young, was significantly behind the other three and by the time they reached Springfield, Illinois, a number of people were too ill to continue, including Joshua, Permelia, and Joshua, Junior.⁴⁰

It just so happened that Moses was living some two hundred miles north of Springfield, in the small town of Liberty, Iowa,⁴¹ and of course, the Mechams made it a point to visit their son and his family, remaining there for several weeks while recovering their health. The yearning to be once again united with his parents and brothers was too great, and Moses agreed to move west with the Kirtland Camp, even though he "had heard about the deluded Mormons, but nothing good."⁴²

By the time the fourth division pulled out of Springfield, the Missouri Saints were under attack from anti-Mormon mobs determined to act on Governor Boggs' extermination order. "The Mormons must be treated as enemies and *must be exterminated* or driven from the state," the directive read.⁴³ There was no shortage of violent men willing to follow those orders, and when Young's division straggled into Haun's Mill along Shoal Creek on 28 October, an attack on the settlement was already planned.⁴⁴

Haun's Mill

Two days later, in the late afternoon of 30 October, 1838, "the banks of Shoal creek on either side teemed with children sporting and playing, while their mothers were engaged in domestic employments, and their fathers employed in guarding the mills and other property, while others were engaged in gathering in their crops for their winter consumption," according to Joseph Young. "The weather was very pleasant, the sun shone clear, all was tranquil, and no one expressed any apprehension of the awful crisis that was near us—even at our doors."⁴⁵

When several hundred armed men rode into Haun's Mill, most of the women and children fled into the woods while many of the men took refuge in the blacksmith shop, a rustic building that became a deathtrap as the mob fired through the widely spaced logs. Those who surrendered or who had been wounded were shot dead after the initial attack, including ten-year-old Sardius Smith, eight-year old Alma

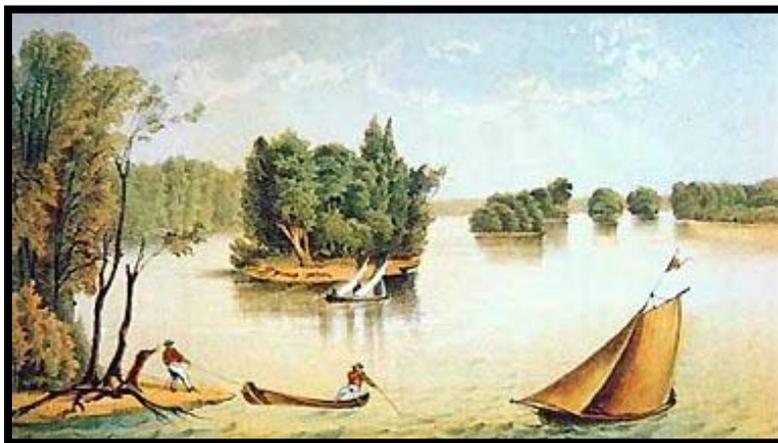
Smith from Kirtland Camp, and nine-year-old Charles Merrick, who was found hiding under the bellows. Seventy-eight-year-old Thomas McBride surrendered his gun to a militiaman, who then shot McBride and mutilated his body with a corn knife. After killing seventeen people and wounding thirteen, the mob made off with food, clothing, horses, livestock, wagons and anything else of value, leaving the survivors destitute.

Word of the massacre spread through the settlement. Fearing another attack, survivors took shelter in the forest. Edward Mechem's eight-year old daughter Roxena⁴⁶ recalled sitting with her father "in the rain all night in a wheat field when he was guarding our house. Mother was too sick to leave the house."⁴⁷ The dead were buried the following morning in a dry well under the direction of Joseph Young.

Emboldened by their success at Haun's Mill, the ant-Mormon militia headed toward Far West intending to lay siege to the city, but Joseph Smith soon realized resistance against was useless and surrendered to the militia as part of a peace settlement. Shortly afterwards the Prophet and other church leaders were imprisoned. Those Saints who did not voluntarily evacuate Missouri were driven from the state toward Illinois.



The scene at Haun's Mill on 30 October, 1838.



On the Mississippi River between Warsaw and Quincy, Illinois.

Starting Over in Illinois

Somehow the Mechams managed to make their way to Quincy, Illinois, where local citizens took pity on the displaced Saints, opening up their homes to provide shelter, clothing and food. Their help was sorely needed. “When we arrived there the people that had been expelled by the mobs were sitting on the banks of the river and many were sick with fever and ague. It was the last of November!” said Roxena.⁴⁸

By December, Edward was able to rent a house in Columbus, eighteen miles east of Quincy; the rest of the Mechams found similar arrangements nearby, taking care not to let anyone know they were Mormons, just in case.⁴⁹ Over the winter, Elam Jr., who happened to be travelling through, stopped by Moses and Elvira’s⁵⁰ home in a continuing effort to convert him to the gospel. “My cousin Elam Mecham was going to hold a Mormon meeting and asked me to come, but I would not, as I would be ashamed to let people know he was a relative of mine,” said Moses. “He left a *Book of Mormon* with me and asked me to read it. I told him if I got time I would. Soon after I was too sick to work, so I thought I would see what was in the book, but before I started I knelt down and prayed that I might know if there was any good in it. I read all day; at bed time my wife went to bed, and I read on until 1 a.m.”

When Moses woke up the next morning he was not only burning with a testimony of *The Book of Mormon*, but was also speaking in tongues. Elvira, frightened and confused, sent for Ephraim and Polly, who lived on the neighboring farm. “They were very pleased, and

said I was speaking in tongues,” said Moses. “I was convinced of the truth of Mormonism. I thought I would never speak in my own tongue until I was baptized. I applied to Brother Snider for baptism, but he refused on account of so much excitement caused by the mob, but about the tenth of March 1839 my wife and I were baptized...I was perfectly convinced of the cause of this remarkable occurrence.”⁵¹

Only a month after Moses and Elvira’s remarkable conversion, Joseph Smith and other imprisoned church leaders were allowed to escape from Missouri, arriving in Quincy that April, where the Prophet was successful in purchasing large parcels of land on both sides of the Mississippi River. Joseph moved his own family to a small town located along a bend in the river. Thousands of Saints flocked to the new church center of Nauvoo, and the city began to grow rapidly.

The Mechams chose to settle in the farmlands of Iowa, across the river and five miles south of Nauvoo. “It was a fine place with plenty of deer and wild game,” said Roxena. “Father would go out every few days and shoot wild turkeys. Deer were as numerous as cattle. They came in herds around our place to eat hazel brush and other browse. I gathered hazelnuts there.”⁵² The Mecham Settlement, as the area became known, eventually grew to include over one hundred individuals,⁵³ most of them children and grandchildren of Joshua and Permelia, who also made their home there.⁵⁴

Grandfather Currier

The most remarkable resident of the Mecham Settlement may well have been Irene’s father, John Currier,⁵⁵ who travelled seven hundred miles on foot with the aid of a cane to rescue his daughter from the Mormons. “One day I climbed a tree to get a piece of limb to make a whistle,” recalled Roxena. “I saw my Grandfather Currier coming. Running to the house I announced his approach to Mother. She merely kept on with her washing saying, ‘Do not be so simple, for he could not have walked from where we left him in Pennsylvania.’ She was almost angry when I repeated, ‘Here he comes!’ And much to her astonishment, in he walked. Grandfather had a few things tied up in a large red handkerchief, including a roll of paper lies clipped from various newspapers about Mormons. Then he spoke to mother, ‘Rena, I have come all this distance to take you back home away from these terrible Mormons.’”

“She tried to get him to read *The Book of Mormon*. He at first refused, but Father would leave the book where he could see it, but did not ask him further to read it, thinking if he said nothing more about it he would be apt to read it, which he did. When he had an opportunity to slyly read it, along with *The Doctrine and Covenants*, he would do so.”

Four months into the visit, everyone became so ill with fever they found it difficult to care for each other, and it was feared Grandfather Currier would die. There was no better time to commit to the Lord, John decided, and he approached his ailing son-in-law with a request. “He said to Father, ‘Edward, if I could get to the river, I would be baptized into the Mormon Church,’” Roxena said. “Father replied, ‘Not the church?’ He said, ‘Yes, the Mormon Church is the right church.’ Father replied, ‘If you want to be baptized you shall have your chance, because my cousin, Joseph Mecham, is coming to administer to us.’”⁵⁶

John, accompanied to the Mississippi River by Joshua and Permelia, was baptized on an October Sunday in 1841, by Joseph Mecham. Believing he had been physically as well as spiritually healed, John made plans for the future, but he died a week later. He was buried in the Montrose graveyard across the river from Nauvoo.⁵⁷

Nauvoo

Nauvoo was to be “the cornerstone of Zion,”⁵⁸ complete with a holy temple where the Saints could receive sacred ordinances. The announcement of the temple in 1841 was greeted with joy and construction began immediately. The cornerstone was laid on 6 April of that year, and by November, a temporary wooden baptismal font housed in the completed basement was dedicated for proxy work. Joshua and Permelia were among the many Saints who performed baptisms for relatives who had passed away. Joshua was baptized for his grandfather, uncles and brothers-in-law, while Permelia was proxy for both of her parents, several of her brothers and an uncle.⁵⁹

The very same year, Joshua purchased twenty-six acres of farmland five miles east of Nauvoo in Sonora Township.⁶⁰ Gradually, other members of his family moved to the Illinois side of the river, and it wasn’t long before the Mechams were contributing citizens in Nauvoo itself. Joshua and his sons had become acquainted with Dimick B. Huntington, a close friend of Joseph Smith, when he and his fellow men-at-arms arrived at Haun’s Mill just after the massacre

in 1838.⁶¹ A skilled gunman and enforcer, Huntington was a good choice for Nauvoo's city marshal and bodyguard to the Prophet. Through his influence Joshua Sr., Moses and Moses' son Clinton⁶² often served as members of Nauvoo's police and Joseph Smith's bodyguards.⁶³ Moses eventually established a home on Water Street, one block east of the Prophet's Mansion House, where the extended family often visited, becoming well-acquainted with the Smith family.⁶⁴

Patrolling and keeping order in Nauvoo became an increasingly important task as the city's population exploded to almost twelve thousand by 1844, and protecting the Prophet from dangers both inside and outside the church was critical. A group of dissenters seeking Joseph's removal led a conspiracy against him, claiming he was a blasphemous, fallen prophet who practiced "spiritual wifery" and grasped for political power. On 7 June, 1844, the dissenters published their scathing views in *The Nauvoo Expositor*, a newspaper so negative the city council determined it should be destroyed. As members of the Nauvoo police force, the Mechams may have been among the two hundred men led by the city marshal to break up the press, scatter the type and burn any remaining newspapers. It was this action which began a series of events leading to the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum several weeks later.

Ordered to stand trial on a charge of causing a civil disturbance, Joseph, Hyrum and several other church leaders were imprisoned in the county jail at Carthage, twenty miles from Nauvoo. In the late afternoon of 27 June, an armed mob stormed the jail, killing Joseph and Hyrum.

The Saints were stunned by the loss of their beloved prophet. Joseph and Hyrum's bodies were returned to Nauvoo the next day under the direction of Dimick Huntington, who was by then the city's coroner.⁶⁵ Among the crowds of mourners gathered to pay their respects at the Mansion House Joshua and Permelia, along with the rest of the Mechams. Edward was one of twelve men chosen by Brother Huntington to secretly bury the bodies under the Nauvoo House to thwart desecration by enemies of the church.⁶⁶

ENDNOTES

- ¹⁹ Elam Mecham (1776-1855), #KNZJ-2C6, www.familysearch.org
- ²⁰ Judah and Temperance (Mecham) Wells and Noah and Zuba (Mecham) Kidder. See: Steve Mecham, "Elam Mecham, Jr." #KQVH-4CG, and "Miss Meacham Kidder, 1772-1848" #LCFL-2NL, www.familysearch.org
- ²¹ Joseph Mecham (1780-1845), #LCZH-17M, www.familysearch.org
- ²² Robert Bernard Mecham, *Mecham Family History* (Provo, Utah: self-published, 1985), page 27. Joshua and Permelia Mecham may have been in Mercer County as early as April, 1822, where their oldest daughter, Permelia (Mecham) Eldridge, gave birth to a son in Salem.
- ²³ Karen Bray Keeley and Sandra S. Bray, "History of Ephraim Mecham," <http://www.rootcellar.us/mecheph.htm>
- ²⁴ *Joseph Smith History*, 1:8.
- ²⁵ *Joseph Smith History*, 1:19.
- ²⁶ Cheryl Harmon Bean and Pamela Call Johnson, "Rediscovering History: Mormons in Erie County, Pennsylvania, 1832-1833," self-published, 1995, page 9, file:///C:/Users/Shelley_2/Downloads/Rediscovering%20History_%20%20Mormon.pdf
- ²⁷ Elam Mecham (1799-1874), #KQVH-4CG, www.familysearch.org
- ²⁸ Steve Mecham, "Elam Mecham, Jr.," 3 September, 2014, Elam Mecham, #KQVH-4CG, www.familysearch.org
- ²⁹ Ephraim Mecham (1808-1891), #KQJ6-17T, www.familysearch.org
- ³⁰ Polly (Derby) Mecham (1813-1898), #KQJ6-17R, www.familysearch.org
- ³¹ Joshua Mecham (1802-1840), #LZ67-7G1, www.familysearch.org
- ³² Edward Mecham (1802-1895), #LHVW-YT8, www.familysearch.org
- ³³ Lewis Mecham (1814-1875), #LZXP-31R, www.familysearch.org
- ³⁴ Leonidas Moses Worthen Mecham (1802-1878), #LZ24-KDB, www.familysearch.org
- ³⁵ Diane Rawlins Mayo, "History of Leonidas Moses Worthen Mecham," 1987. www.rawlins.org/histories/html/mecham_moses_wortham.html
- ³⁶ Samuel Mecham (1798-1882), #LZJW-89S, www.familysearch.org
- ³⁷ Caleb Mecham (1810-1852), #LZ6Q-BJD, www.familysearch.org
- ³⁸ Mary (Currier) Mecham (1813-1892), #L4BF-M8J, www.familysearch.org
- ³⁹ Irena (Currier) Mecham (1807-1864), #K246-868, www.familysearch.org
- ⁴⁰ Joshua Mecham (1795-1841), #MNP9-HQ4, www.familysearch.org Mayo, "History of Leonidas Moses Worthen Mecham," 1987. Also see: Roxena Mecham Carter, "History of Roxena Mecham," Roxena Mecham, #KN6V-8QM, www.familysearch.org
- ⁴¹ Moses' daughter America (Mecham) Orser was born in Liberty, Buchanan, Iowa, in October, 1837.
- ⁴² Mayo, "History of Leonidas Moses Worthen Mecham," 1987. Also see: Carter, "History of Roxena Mecham."
- ⁴³ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Church History in the Fullness of Times* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Church Educational System, 1989), page 201.
- ⁴⁴ Alexander L. Baugh, "Kirtland Camp, 1838: Brining the Poor to Missouri," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Reference Scripture* (2013), Volume 22, Number 1, page 58-61, <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/22/6Baugh.pdf>
- ⁴⁵ Joseph Young, "Account of the Haun's Mill Massacre," http://scottwoodward.org/churchhistory_missouri_haunsmill_accountofmassacre.html
- ⁴⁶ Roxena (Mecham) Carter (1830-1919), #KN6V-8QM, www.familysearch.org
- ⁴⁷ Carter, "History of Roxena Mecham." Moses and his family were also present. See: "History of Leonidas Clinton Mecham," Leonidas Americas Likurkus DeWitt Clinton Mecham, #KWJ8-XYP, www.familysearch.org
- ⁴⁸ Carter, "History of Roxena Mecham."

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- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Elvira (Derby) Mecham (1811-1886), KVV9-W5C, www.familysearch.org
- ⁵¹ Mayo, "History of Leonidas Moses Worthen Mecham," 1987.
- ⁵² Carter, "History of Roxena Mecham."
- ⁵³ The Mecham settlement reported one hundred nine members at the Zarahemla stake conference held 8 August, 1841. Lyman D. Platte, "Early Branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1830-1850," page 28, http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NJ3_Platt.pdf
- ⁵⁴ Joshua Jr., too ill to continue to Missouri with Kirtland camp, remained behind in Springfield, Illinois, where he died in 1840. His wife and children later made their way to the Mecham Settlement. "History of Elizabeth Lucina Mecham," Elizabeth Lucina Mecham, #K2QX-845, www.familysearch.org
- ⁵⁵ John Currier (1786-1841), #27S7-VWS, www.familysearch.org
- ⁵⁶ Mayo, "History of Leonidas Moses Worthen Mecham," 1987.
- ⁵⁷ Carter, "History of Roxena Mecham."
- ⁵⁸ *The Doctrine and Covenants*, 124:2.
- ⁵⁹ Susan Easton Black and Harvey Bischoff Black, *Annotated Record of Baptisms for the Dead 1840-1845* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), pages 2433-2435.
- ⁶⁰ Property: T6 R8 Sec 15, NW/4 of the SE/4, 26 acres. Property Transactions, Hancock County, Black Black and Plewe, 2683. Nauvoo Land and Records Office, Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., 8 May, 2014.
- ⁶¹ Carter, "History of Roxena Mecham."
- ⁶² Leonidas Americas Likurkus DeWitt Clinton Mecham (1828-1890).
- ⁶³ Robert Bernard Mecham, *Mecham Family History* (Provo, Utah: self-published, 1985), page 28.
- ⁶⁴ Block 146, Lot 4, where today's Community of Christ's visitor's center is located, <http://www.earlylds.com/getperson.php?personID=111815&tree=Earlylds>
- ⁶⁵ Ron Freeman, "Life and Times of Dimick Baker Huntington, 1808-1879," <https://familysearch.org/patron/v2/TH-301-42118-29-76/dist.pdf?ctx=ArtCtxPublic>
- ⁶⁶ Carter, "History of Roxena Mecham."

Chapter 3

Moving West

Equal to the Task



The Saints' temporary settlement at Kaneshville, Iowa.

Persecution against the church increased after Joseph Smith's death as anti-Mormon forces did everything in their power to force the Saints out of Illinois. It soon became obvious the church would need to move yet again to ensure the safety of its members. As the new prophet and president, Brigham Young made plans to evacuate Nauvoo beginning in the spring of 1846, but under new threats of violence, he led the first departures across the Mississippi on 4 February. Many wagon companies followed over the spring and summer, until by September, only those too poor or too ill to travel were left in the city, along with a few men charged with selling properties such as the temple.

Determined to drive out even the few remaining residents, a force of eight hundred men equipped with cannons opened fire on Nauvoo during the second week of September. Several days of fighting resulted in the unconditional surrender of the Saints, who were forced out their homes at gunpoint. The families of Joshua Sr., Ephraim and Lewis Mechem left behind their homes and farms, travelling together along the forty mile road to Bonaparte, Iowa, where they hoped to find work and shelter for the winter.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the Mechams found illness and death. Joshua died from the effects of exposure soon

within weeks of their arrival, followed by Lewis and Lydia's⁶⁸ eleven-month old daughter, Melissa,⁶⁹ and Ephraim and Polly's two-month old son Ephraim Jr.⁷⁰ From this time onward, Permelia would live a nomadic existence, alternatively spending time in each of her son's households.

There were people scattered in temporary settlements all across Iowa during the winter as thousands of displaced people struggled to survive. Somehow the Mechams made their way to the way station of Garden Grove, where Edward found them later that year. Edward had built a cabin for his wife and children in the new church headquarters of Kaneshville, near the Missouri River, and the family agreed their mother would be more comfortable there.⁷¹ By 1849, the rest of the Mecham brothers were managing farms in one of the many cluster settlements surrounding Kaneshville, where Permelia was welcomed into Moses' household⁷²

As usual, the Saints quickly transformed empty Iowan lands into bustling towns and fertile farms, but no matter how prosperous their settlements became, the truly faithful were determined to move on toward the Rocky Mountains. Brigham Young and a vanguard company had established a permanent settlement in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, calling for church members to gather there as quickly as they could.

Journey's End

Even though she was seventy-four year old, Permelia was anxious to make the trek, and she found a place with friends in a wagon train leaving Kaneshville in 1850.⁷³ Permelia joined Edward's household when he and Irena arrived the next year.⁷⁴ By 1853, Ephraim, Lewis and Moses were all living near each other in Lehi, south of Salt Lake City.

Permelia spent her remaining years surrounded by her family. She was loved by her grandchildren, one of whom remembered a "funny little game" she played when churning butter. Working cream in a wooden churn eventually set the butter, making its removal from the plunger difficult. Permelia claimed "a witch had hold of it with her fingers, so she would heat a poker red hot and dash it in the churn quickly to burn the witch's fingers so she would let go and the butter would come. Then if it still wouldn't come, she repeated the process, saying the witch saw her coming and pulled her fingers away." The warmed butter came out of the churn easily after one or two passes with the poker.⁷⁵

Permelia moved with Moses's family to Provo Canyon when he took a job there as toll gate attendant, occupying one of the three rooms in the family cabin. "This was a very lonely place to live," said Moses' daughter Donna,⁷⁶ but the isolation was softened by Permelia's care. The extended Mecham clan broke new ground in Wallsburg around 1865. "There were only a few log cabins there, but it was better than living in the canyon," said Donna. Unfortunately, the settlers were soon forced to abandon their farms under threats of Indian attack. Instead of moving back to Provo, Permelia travelled with granddaughter Lucina⁷⁷ and her husband William Boren⁷⁸ to Heber City during the troubles, where housing was impossible to find. The Borens made do living in a bowery until they found shelter in an empty granary.⁷⁹ Conditions were difficult for the young and healthy, but for eighty-nine year old Permelia, they proved too much to bear. She died in Heber City 19 May, 1866.⁸⁰



The mountains and valley near Heber City, Utah.

ENDNOTES

⁶⁷Mavis Greer Clayton, "History of Ephraim Mecham," typescript 1964. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

⁶⁸Lydia Knight (Wells) Mecham 1817-1890, #KWJY-F7B, www.familysearch.org

⁶⁹Melissa Mecham (1845-1846), #KWVQ-S1L, www.familysearch.org

⁷⁰Ephraim Don Carlos Mecham (1846-1846), #KWVH-218, www.familysearch.org

⁷¹Roxena Mecham Carter, "History of Roxena Mecham," Roxena Mecham, #KN6V-8QM, www.familysearch.org

⁷²Permelia is shown living with Moses in the 1850 census. See:

<http://www.earlylds.com/getperson.php?personID=I30426&tree=Earlylds>

⁷³*Pioneer Women of Faith and Fortitude* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1998).

According to the Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Index, census and church records indicate Permelia travelled to Utah between 1851 and 1852 in an unknown company.

<http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/pioneerDetail?lang=eng&pioneerId=55205>

⁷⁴*Pioneer Women of Faith and Fortitude*, 1998.

⁷⁵"Permelia Chapman Mecham Makes Butter," Permelia Chapman, LZ6Q-BXB, www.familysearch.org

⁷⁶Donna Maria (Mecham) Mecham (1852-1935), #KW68-NFL, www.familysearch.org

⁷⁷Lucina (Mecham) Boren (1841-1925), #KWNV-6N8, www.familysearch.org

⁷⁸William Jasper Boren (1837-1900), #KWZ3-BGN, www.familysearch.org

⁷⁹Lucina (Mecham) Boren, "Autobiography," Lucina Mecham, #KWNV-6N8, www.familysearch.org

⁸⁰A search of period records, the Heber City Cemetery and nearby Center Creek Pioneer Cemetery failed to result in any reference to the death or burial of Permelia Mecham. See:

Commentary on Permelia Chapman Mecham, 2 September, 2011, Rootsweb, <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=ksmartbraden&id=I783>

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