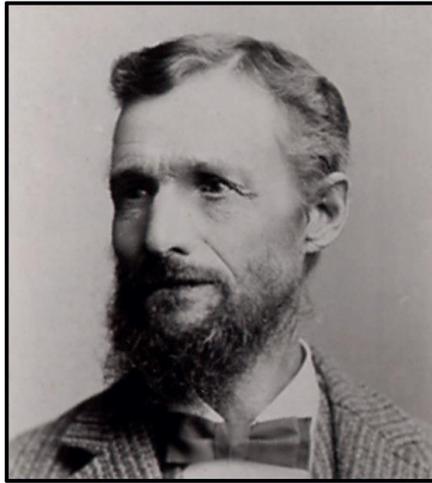


# Nathan Tanner Porter and Rebecca (Cherry) Tanner



## A Family History

by Shelley Dawson Davies

Copyright 2015 Shelley Dawson Davies

All rights reserved. No part this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means  
without written permission from the publisher, Shelley Dawson Davies,  
[shelleydd@verizon.net](mailto:shelleydd@verizon.net)

[www.DaviesDawsonHistory.weebly.com](http://www.DaviesDawsonHistory.weebly.com)

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1

<b>GIVE AND TAKE</b> .....	5
Nathan's Early Years .....	5
The Truth is Restored.....	7
Troubles in Missouri .....	9
Near Nauvoo .....	11
Called to Serve .....	12
Return to Nauvoo .....	13

## CHAPTER 2

<b>ON THE TRAIL</b> .....	16
Walking Westward.....	16
Rebecca's Adventures .....	17

## CHAPTER 3

<b>A GOOD BEGINNING</b> .....	21
Zion at Last .....	21
Centerville.....	23

## CHAPTER 4

<b>DECLARING THE GOSPEL</b> .....	26
Going Forth Boldly .....	26
Gibraltar Bound.....	27
Waylaid in New York City .....	28

## CHAPTER 5

<b>STRANDED ON THE PLAINS</b> .....	30
Tragedy and Triumph.....	30
Winter Comes Early .....	31
Martin's Cove.....	33
Rescue .....	34

## **CHAPTER 6**

<b>HOME AGAIN .....</b>	<b>37</b>
Earnest Embrace.....	37
Sisters in Zion .....	39
Laboring with Love.....	40
Building the Kingdom.....	41
Progress and Prosperity.....	42

## **CHAPTER 7**

<b>FIRM IN THE FAITH .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Enduring to the End .....	45
Temple Blessings .....	46
The Challenge of Death .....	47

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>52</b>
---------------------------	-----------

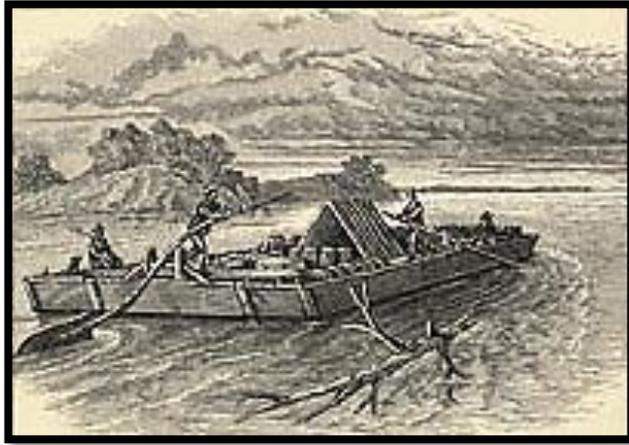
<b>INDEX.....</b>	<b>55</b>
-------------------	-----------

## Chapter 1

# Give and Take

## Nathan's Early Years

---



*Travelling by flatboat in the early 1800s.*

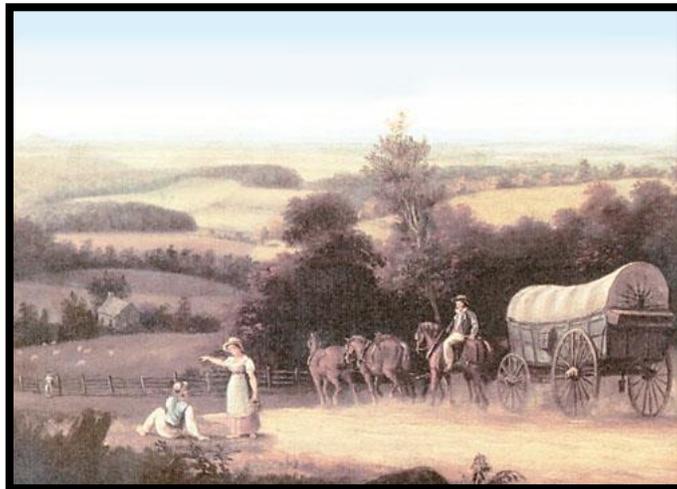
America's rivers teemed with flat boats in the early 1800s,<sup>1</sup> simple one-way vessels any pair of adventurous men could construct quickly from planks of timber and dismantle at their downstream destination for building materials or sell for cash. Even though flat boats were considered a "poor man's transfer," building one was a serious investment at seventy-five dollars,<sup>2</sup> but profits from goods shipped down river to cities such as Cincinnati, Louisville and New Orleans made the initial outlay worthwhile. Farmers floated corn, wheat, potatoes, flour, hay, tobacco, cotton, and whiskey, while traders carried cloth, ammunition, tools, furs, salt and lead. The flat-bottomed boats were often used by families in search of new land in the west, earning them the nickname of "arks," thanks to the assortment of cattle, horses, sheep, dogs and poultry piled on board.

An ark was the fastest and least expensive way for Sanford Porter<sup>3</sup> to move his family five hundred miles from Liberty, Ohio, to the new frontier of Illinois, where he could resettle on a bigger, more productive farm. He teamed up with neighbor John Morgan in the spring of 1827, building a boat large enough to transport both families and their goods. The men launched out on the nearby Mahoning

River, which took them to the Beaver River and onward to the great Ohio, which ran southwest along the edge of Indiana. If all went well, they could make over fifty miles a day.

The men took turns watching the river for sunken trees, snags and eddies which could endanger even a carefully handled boat. There were many hazards along the way, beginning with the waterfalls along the Beaver River. Seven-year old Nathan Porter<sup>4</sup> remembered disembarking with his mother, brothers and sisters just above the falls, walking along the shore while the men guided the boat over the roaring water. “They launched out while we proceeded down along the shore, watching the boat with intense interest as it drew into the suck, which soon plunged it over the falls,” said Nathan. “For a few moments we thought all was lost as it disappeared beneath the foaming waters, but it soon hove in sight right side up, no material damage being done in the adventure.”<sup>5</sup>

The Porters pulled out of the river when they reached Evansville, Indiana, where they spent the next year preparing for their push into the Illinois frontier. All was ready by March, 1828. It took three months to make the journey to Tazewell County in a Conestoga wagon. Travel was difficult along the primitive roads, but the former New Englanders were fascinated by what they saw. “As we moved on the broad fields of the prairie began to present themselves to our view. With wonder and adoration did we gaze upon these extensive fields of nature stretching themselves forth far beyond our natural vision,” said Nathan.<sup>6</sup>



*The heavy, covered Conestoga wagon was used by early Americans as they migrated across the country.*

Sanford settled his family in “a vast country with but few inhabitants” along Farm Creek, six miles east of Peoria, where he established a farm and profitable saw mill. “Here the difficulties of an unsettled country had to be met, but through diligent toil we were soon surrounded with many of the comforts of life,” Nathan recalled.<sup>7</sup> The family had grown to include eight children by this time. Sixteen-year old Chauncey<sup>8</sup> was particularly helpful in running the mill, and fourteen-year old Malinda<sup>9</sup> and twelve-year old Sarah<sup>10</sup> lent a hand in the kitchen. Nathan and John<sup>11</sup> did odd jobs around the house and mill while their mother<sup>12</sup> tended to toddlers Sanford, Junior,<sup>13</sup> Nancy<sup>14</sup> and baby Justin,<sup>15</sup> who was born in May, 1829.



*An early edition of The Book of Mormon.*

## The Truth is Restored

The Porter family was well-settled in by the summer of 1830, and Sanford’s saw mill was doing a such booming business he sold his farm in order to spend more working hours at the mill. One summer morning as he left the house, Sanford was met by a pair of missionaries sent to him by an old friend, Morris Phelps. Sanford, a self-described “infidel,” had an expert knowledge of the Bible and was known for his ability to debate clergymen using the scriptures against them. These men carried a letter from Phelps asking Sanford to “search them to the bottom and find out if possible what their belief was.”<sup>16</sup> They also brought with them a book translated from an ancient text by latter-day prophet Joseph Smith, a man who had seen God in visions and had been chosen to restore the fullness of Christ’s gospel to the earth.

Sanford not only read *The Book of Mormon*, but spent three days in intense discussion with the Elders Lyman Wight and John Corrill. Just before the missionaries were scheduled to leave, Sanford received a spiritual confirmation of their message in the form a voice, which said, "This is right. Arise and be baptized."<sup>17</sup> Sanford, his wife Nancy, and older children Chauncey, Malinda and Sarah became members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on 10 August, 1831. Sanford was ordained an Elder and soon left on a mission of his own, preaching and baptizing among his neighbors.

In December of the same year another pair of Elders passed through Tazewell County on their return from Missouri, where they had been building a gathering place for the Saints in Jackson County. The Prophet Joseph Smith was asking all the faithful to join him there, and so Sanford sold his mill and in company with his converted neighbors set out right away for Missouri. "I was now eleven years of age, and although thus young, was quite conscious of the unfavorable prospects of anything but a cold and tedious journey for ourselves and animals, having some five hundred miles before us," said Nathan of the mid-winter excursion. "It required no small fortitude, coupled with an assurance that it was the mind and will of God, to induce those who had charge of wives and children, to undertake such a journey at this season of the year. It was under these considerations with the full assurance that it was the mind and will of God, that my father set out, with this little band, not only to meet the storms of snow, hail and sleet, but the denunciations of neighbors and the strangers whom they should meet on the way."<sup>18</sup>

The Porter party crossed the frozen Illinois River by throwing grass in front of their teams to provide traction, but by the time they reached the Mississippi River, the ice had softened, making even crossing on foot unsafe. After praying for guidance on how to proceed, Sanford received assurance the company would safely cross the next morning, which they did despite the ice being so unstable "it was plainly seen to raise like a wave behind the wagon as it passed along, to the surprise of a dense crowd of people who thronged the bank," according to Nathan. "We were all safe across and thus went on our way rejoicing in him who had strengthened the ice for our sakes."<sup>19</sup>



*The lot dedicated for a future temple at Independence, Missouri.*

## Troubles in Missouri

The Porters finally arrived at Independence, Missouri, in early March, 1832. “The Saints greeted us with a hearty welcome as brethren and weary pilgrims, as we were the first company who had come pitching their tents by the way, like Israel of old,” said Nathan. “We were now on the consecrated land, with high anticipation of soon receiving an inheritance that would be everlasting, with all the blessings pertaining there to, which was the object of our toil. We felt that our pilgrimage was over and that our abiding place was sure, until the coming of the Son of Man, and throughout his reign of a thousand years.”<sup>20</sup> The Porters received their “inheritance,” an assigned plot of twenty acres in the Prairie Branch section fifteen miles west of Independence, which they immediately began to improve by clearing trees and planting crops.

However, by spring of 1833, the old settlers in the area were feeling outnumbered and threatened by the arrival of so many Saints. A number of locals joined forces to eliminate the “Mormon scourge,” demanding church members leave Jackson County, and launching attacks against them when they refused to do so. The persecutions eventually became so violent the Saints were compelled to leave the county against their will. In late 1833 “men, women and children were seen fleeing in all directions, hiding in corn shocks, in thickets, in cellars, using every stratagem within their reach to elude the grasp of these relentless demons in human shape,” said Nathan. “Our fields were thrown open, our grain trampled underfoot by man and beast, and thus we fled before the blackened faces of our enemies.”<sup>21</sup>

The Porters were among a large number of Saints camped along the banks of the Grand River on the night of 12 November, anticipating another mob attack, when a rain of meteors lit up the sky. “The starry heavens were in such commotion,” said Nathan, “that at times it seemed as though the heavens would be no more. The whole camp was aroused from their slumbers and standing around their fires, gazed with wonder and admiration. It was like the shaking of a fig or fruit tree, when fully ripe, they would shower down on all sides of sky for a few minutes then peace for ten or fifteen minutes when the scene would be repeated, which continued until morning light extinguished them from our sight.”<sup>22</sup> This great phenomenon left a deep consternation upon the inhabitants throughout the county for a short time, during which the saints passed over into Clay and Ray counties where they found favor in the eyes of the inhabitants.”<sup>23</sup>



*People who were amazed by the 1833 Leonid meteor shower called it “The Night the Stars Fell.”*

Instead of crossing with the main body of the Saints, Sanford led a small group of ten to fifteen families to a “wilderness” part of southern Jackson County.<sup>24</sup> The company made their own road through the territory, “frequently miring down, having to unload the wagon, pull through and reload it,” according to one of the men,<sup>25</sup> eventually settling in for the winter at the head of the Osage River. The following spring Sanford’s group moved father up the Grand River in an area the natives called Pleasant Valley.<sup>26</sup> “Here we found ourselves in an unsettled county, far from any supplier of food or raiment and thus must rely almost if not entirely upon our own resources, which were very limited. Indeed there was not a grist mill within forty miles, or other manufactories or merchandise, and neighbors were five miles away,” said Nathan.<sup>27</sup>

It was this very isolation which allowed the Porters to live in peace while rising hostilities in northern Missouri reached such a critical level the Mormons were driven out under the infamous extermination order from Governor Lilburn Boggs in the late autumn of 1838. The Porters threw their lot in with their fellow Saints. “My father prefer[ed] to leave his possessions without signing away his title to them for nothing but a mere pittance as a recompense,” said Nathan. “Therefore, we gathered our effects and departed, leaving our house and land in the care of a poor, but well-disposed neighbor.”<sup>28</sup>

## Near Nauvoo

Nathan’s family joined the stream of disposed Saints making their way across Missouri that winter. The Porters were fortunate to find temporary shelter in a series of abandoned military barracks on the Mississippi’s banks at Montrose, Iowa. They remained at Montrose until the spring of 1839, when Joseph Smith arranged to purchase lands for the church on both sides of the river. The small town of Commerce, Illinois, was selected as the new headquarters and renamed Nauvoo, inspiring people to immediately gather in both Nauvoo and its surrounding communities. The Porters located land suitable for farming five miles west of Nauvoo and settled in once more with hope they had finally found a permanent home.

With Chauncey now married and living across the river in Illinois, Sanford depended on Nathan and John to help clear and cultivate the land. Nineteen-year old Nathan worked so hard at making fence rails that spring he overtaxed himself and was laid up for the rest of the season. “[I was] confined to the house and a great portion of the time to my bed, with the palpitation of the heart, oft times despairing of life,” he said. “Thus I was brought to realize that time was not mine to use, only as given by Him who said, ‘Let there be light and there was

light,' and to Him did I pour out my desires for length of days on the earth, not to use according to the council of my own will, but as should be meet and pleasing in His sight."<sup>29</sup> Nathan made a covenant that if his life were spared he would spend it in the Lord's service.

Nathan asked for and received a priesthood blessing of healing, but two other members of the Porter family were not as fortunate. Sarah, who was married and living in Illinois, died suddenly in 1841, followed by eleven-year old Justin, who was killed in an accident while working with the horses. "We were now called to mourn the absence of sister and brother, and our parents to mourn the absence of daughter and son during this life. Nevertheless, we did not mourn as those who have no hope of a glorious resurrection," said Nathan, who renewed his commitment to serve the Lord in the face of his siblings' deaths.<sup>30</sup>



*Montrose, Iowa, along the banks of the Mississippi River.*

## Called to Serve

Nathan was ordained to the office of elder and set apart for missionary work in October 1841. He left soon afterwards for Pennsylvania, preaching the gospel along the way with his companion. Nathan and Elder Mowery were guided by the spirit to several receptive communities. They baptized sixty new members in Clinton County, Indiana, remaining there with the church. In March, 1842, Nathan and his companion travelled on to Ohio, where the pair worked until fall, returning to Nauvoo in November, 1842.<sup>31</sup>

Two years later Nathan was again called to the Eastern States mission. He and a company of Elders were assigned to preach the gospel and circulate a document written by presidential candidate

Joseph Smith on the policy and powers of the Federal Government, “a masterpiece of sound logic, and was so expressed by politicians and men of prominence with whom we conversed,” recalled Nathan. “They said it was the greatest masterpiece of statesmanship and mental ability they ever saw,”<sup>32</sup> but Nathan’s mission was cut short when news reached the Elders of the Prophet’s assassination on 27 June, 1844.

## Return to Nauvoo

“We immediately turned our faces homeward and was soon in the midst of our afflicted and sorrowful friends to mingle our grief with theirs,” said Nathan. “The Apostles, who were also absent on missions, had returned. It was now a matter of much comment as to who was to take the lead of Presidency of the Church, and thus many conjectures arose in the minds of the people. Sidney Rigdon had pressed the Twelve in his return from the east and claimed that it was his right, and endeavored to get the people together in order to satisfy his claim by their votes before the Twelve should arrive, but the Twelve arrived before this was accomplished. Brigham Young, being the President of the Quorum, appointed a special conference of the whole people of the church, at which it was visibly made manifest to the most, if not all present, Brigham was the chosen of God to lead his people in Joseph’s stead in moving the cause of Zion. For as he arose and began to speak to the large assembly his countenance was transformed into that of Joseph, while his voice and gestures were almost identically the same,” said Nathan, who witnessed the transformation himself. “This manifestation settled forever that question in the minds and feelings of the Saints, and thus he was nominated and sustained by the unanimous voice of the people.”<sup>33</sup>

The year of 1845 was a prosperous one for the Saints. Converts from England and Canada streamed into the area, making Nauvoo the second most important city in Illinois. Farm villages bordering the city were flourishing and the temple was nearing completion. Such success among the Mormons inflamed their enemies, who plotted continually to drive them out. “The mob soon began to make their attacks, so much so, that it became necessary for those who were at work on the temple often to hold their fire arms in one hand and handle their tools with the other while prosecuting the work,” said Nathan, who hoping marry soon, had recently purchased a farm of his own next to his father’s property.<sup>34</sup> However, the continued persecutions finally reached such dangerous levels that Brigham Young knew the Saints would once again be forced to find refuge somewhere else. He led the first company of refugees from Nauvoo in February, 1846, headed for the temporary camp of Winter Quarters, Nebraska.

“All was now to be abandoned, and instead of making further efforts to secure a peaceable home for myself, it became necessary for me to assist my father and brothers to escape with their families,” said Nathan. “My father succeeded in disposing of his farm for ready pay at a low figure, while I could only get part down, and in this we were fortunate above many others. I let my father and eldest brother [Chauncey] take the ready pay I had received to aid them on their way, while I tarried to collect the remainder, and so follow after them with my elder brother [John], who was also tarrying to assist his father-in-law to dispose of his possessions. We were delayed until it was too late in the season to overtake them before the inclement season would set in. We therefore remained until the following spring.”<sup>35</sup> Nathan and John finally joined their family at Winter Quarters the first part of June, 1847.<sup>36</sup>

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> An average of three-thousand flatboats floated down the Ohio River each year between 1810 and 1820.

<sup>2</sup> Equivalent to \$1,042.00 in 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Sanford Porter (1790-1873), #KWJT-VMZ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) where verification of all vital dates can be found. Also see family group sheets at [www.DaviesDawsonHistory.weebly.com](http://www.DaviesDawsonHistory.weebly.com)

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Tanner Porter (1820-1897), #KWCV-XNL, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>5</sup> “Sanford Porter Begins His Own Family,” Nathan Tanner Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter* (Porter Family Organization, 2000), <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/NTPorter.html>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Chauncey Warriner Porter (1812-1868), #KWJZ-67F, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>9</sup> Malinda (Porter) Chipman (1814-1870), KWVH-7Z5, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>10</sup> Sarah (Porter) Willard (1816-1841), KWVH-7ZT, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>11</sup> John President Porter (1818-1895), #KWJV-9J6, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>12</sup> Nancy (Warriner) Porter (1790-1864), #KWJT-VMH, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>13</sup> Sanford Porter (1823-1913), #KWJ8-KD6, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Areta (Porter) Stevenson Clark (1825-1888), #KWJZ-8FT, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>15</sup> Justin Porter (1828-1841), #L4MJ-KDK, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1* (self-published, 1957), page 71.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, page 78.

<sup>18</sup> “Sanford Porter Leads a Group to Zion in Jackson County, Missouri,” Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter*.

<sup>19</sup> “A Dangerous Crossing of the Mississippi River,” *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> “Sanford Porter and His Company Arrive in Independence, Missouri,” *Ibid.*

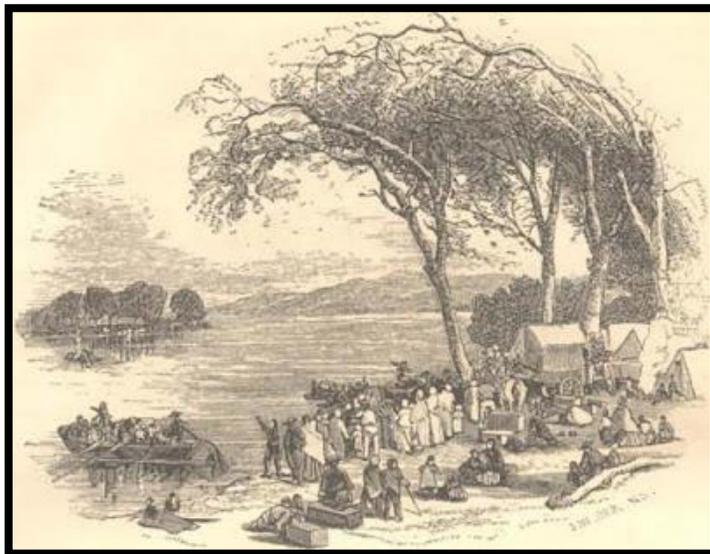
- 
- <sup>21</sup> “The Persecution of the Saints in the Independence, Missouri Area,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> “Sanford’s Family Watched the Meteor Shower,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> “The Saints are Forced to Leave Independence, Missouri, and the ‘Shaking of the Heavens,’” *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> This portion of Jackson County became Van Buren County in 1835 and Cass County in 1849.
- <sup>25</sup> Larry C. Porter and Ronald E. Romig, “The Prairie Branch, Jackson County, Missouri: Emergence, Flourishing and Demise, 1831-1834” (*Mormon Historical Studies*, Volume 8, No. 1 and 2, Spring/Fall 2007), page 7 [http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2-MHS\\_2007\\_Prairie-Branch-Jackson-County.pdf](http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2-MHS_2007_Prairie-Branch-Jackson-County.pdf)
- <sup>26</sup> “Thousands who traveled this old trail wore deep ruts in the soil that are still visible to day. The old trail ran next to the cabins that Sanford Porter built. This old homestead is now owned by John H. Davis and is called the ‘Spring Stream Farm.’ The stream that boarded the Porter’s homestead was known as Owens Creek. Presently there are several springs within Owens Creek that feed it before it empties into the South Grand River.” Wayne J. Lewis, *Mormon Land Ownership as a Factor in Evaluating the Extent of Mormon Settlements and Influence in Missouri, 1831-1841* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1918), page 16-17.
- <sup>27</sup> “Sanford Returns to His Farm in Independence, Missouri, for Supplies,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> “Sanford Prepares to Move his Family to Join the Main Body of the Church in the Nauvoo Area,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> “Nathan Prepares to Earn His Own Way,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> “Nathan’s Sister Marries David Willard,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> “Nathan, Twenty-one Years of Age, Called on His First Mission, October, 1841,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> “Nathan Called on Second Mission, June, 1844,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> “Brigham Young Chosen as President of the Church,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> “The Mobs Persecute the Saints in Nauvoo and Drive Them From Nauvoo,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> “Sanford Porter and His Family are Forced to Leave Their Home,” *Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> “Nathan Remains in the Nauvoo Area to Prepare for the Trip West,” *Ibid.*

## Chapter 2

# On the Trail

## Walking Westward

---



*Mormons crossing the Missouri River on their way to Zion.*

The Porters were anxious to depart Winter Quarters as soon as possible, desiring to follow Brigham Young's advance team to the Salt Lake Valley during the summer of 1847. By combining their resources, the entire family was able to put together an ox team, wagon and enough supplies for the trip in time to join the Charles C. Rich Company, scheduled to leave Council Bluffs on 20 June.<sup>37</sup> "We were again on the move with our faces set for the Rocky Mountain region," recalled Nathan.<sup>38</sup>

In this same company were Aaron<sup>39</sup> and Margaret Cherry,<sup>40</sup> well-to-do farmers from Camp Point, Illinois, who had joined the church the previous spring. The sale of Aaron's farm allowed the Cherrys to purchase a band of horses, several yoke of oxen and three nicely stocked wagons for the journey,<sup>41</sup> one of which was driven by their seventeen-year old daughter Rebecca.<sup>42</sup> Due to the scarcity of men in the company, Rebecca wasn't the only woman driving a team,<sup>43</sup> but she was one of the most skilled. She prided herself on being able to

yoke and unyoke her team of oxen as rapidly as any man in the company,<sup>44</sup> directing the animals with a six-foot long whip she snapped over their heads as she walked alongside the wagon.

As skilled a driver as Rebecca was, she met with an alarming situation as she took the oxen for water one evening along the Platte River. “The oxen were of course thirsty and tired so they went out into the stream, half way across,” according to Rebecca’s friend and fellow driver Emeline Rich. “They drank and then stayed there as though they were in no hurry to come back. [Rebecca] called to them, [but] they seemed to look happy and content to stay where they were. I looked around and espied a young man coming with his team to water them, just as she was about to wade into the water. ‘See, there is a young man coming. Perhaps he will have pity for you.’ He came up to us and of course could see what was our trouble. He said, ‘Shall I fetch your cattle out ladies?’ She said, ‘If it’s not asking too much of you.’ After he had started in after them, she said to me, ‘Who is that young man?’ I told her I had never met him before. She replied, ‘I am going to set my cap for him,’ and sure enough they were very good friends all the way on our journey.”<sup>45</sup>

Rebecca had “set her cap” for young Nathan Porter, who found Rebecca interesting and intelligent as well as pretty. He often visited the Cherry wagons after dinner, chatting with Rebecca as she knitted by the campfire. Rebecca had set herself set a goal to knit fifty yards of fine lace for pillow cases and the flounces of a four poster bed for her trousseau. Stored handily by in her wagon were many spools of white thread, and when a rest time or delay came she pulled out her needles and went to work on the lace.<sup>46</sup>

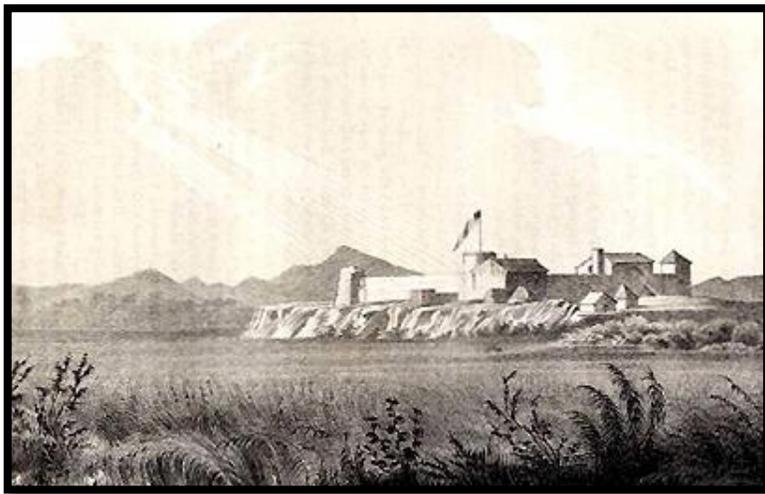
## Rebecca’s Adventures

Aside from the hard work of driving cattle, Rebecca found the three-month journey across the plains to be quite an adventure. The company passed by strange natural features like Chimney Rock in Nebraska, and came across great herds of buffalo “whose bellowing resembled the distant thunder”<sup>47</sup> and hundreds of Indians. “They were very cunning and we had to watch them very closely to see that they did not steal everything we had in our wagons,” said Mary Ann Rich.<sup>48</sup> Fear of attack led the company to demonstrate the company cannon to natives from time to time, “which had the desired effect,” according to Nathan. “We were met on one occasion by a band who presented a hostile appearance as they approached us, having left their women and children in the background, while the warriors advanced carrying a red flag. Our company was soon formed into a hollow square. Seeing our position, they came to a halt upon an elevated spot

of ground. They sent one of their number forward, who was met by one of our men. The token of friendship was extended by shaking hands and extending the pipe. The women and children then came forward and with the men were permitted to come into our enclosure, distributing themselves around among the company asking for bread and offering trinkets or such articles as they had for trinkets.

“The wagon bearing the field piece was drawn out and placed in position outside our lines to which their attention was called. They gathered around to see the curious wanton and on motioning to them they stepped back. The torch was applied and off she went, resulting in a general stampede on the part of the Indians. Men, women and children were struck with consternation for a minute or two, but smiles on our faces dispelled all fear. We learned that the impression went out among them that all our wagons would shoot. No one wished to dispel the impression as it answered well to deter them from molesting us.”<sup>49</sup>

The company reached Fort Laramie, Wyoming, on 5 August, where the pioneers resupplied the best they could, trading with local Indians and resting their horses and cattle as well as themselves. Rebecca’s mother needed rest more than anyone. Ten days past Laramie, on 15 August, Margaret gave birth to a son<sup>50</sup> along the open trail. From this time forward, Rebecca not only drove one of the family wagons, but took over her mother’s camp duties until the company reached their destination.



*Fort Laramie, Wyoming, was an important supply stop along the trail.*

Before leaving the Sweetwater River area the Rich Company was met by Brigham Young and a group of men returning to Winter Quarters. President Young had good news for those heading on to the Salt Lake Valley. “He informed us that they had penetrated the Great Basin of the Salt Lake in which they had selected a location for settlement, and had left a few of their number to await the arrival of the emigrating companies, and to put in a few seeds to test the soil, and were now returning to bring their families on next season,” said Nathan. “This was cheering news to us all, and it put an end to our anxieties as to where we should find a country where we could subsist and dwell, undisturbed by ruthless mobs, under the edicts of mob governors. We continued on with light hearts and buoyant spirits without an expression of doubt as to the result of our locating in that hither to unknown region.”<sup>51</sup>

The C.C. Rich Company arrived in Salt Lake on October 1, 1847, with a sense of destiny and relief. “When for the first time our anxious eyes rested on the silvery lake and slopes below, the dusty hats and faded sunbonnets were seen waving above the heads of the wearers, while shouts of joy and admiration ascended up as each in his gaiety made the summit. The contrast between the long dreary plains and this valley, like an oasis in a desert, coupled with the thought of safety from oppression, was truly soul stirring,” recalled Nathan.<sup>52</sup>



*The first pioneers as they entered the Salt Lake Valley in 1847.*

## ENDNOTES

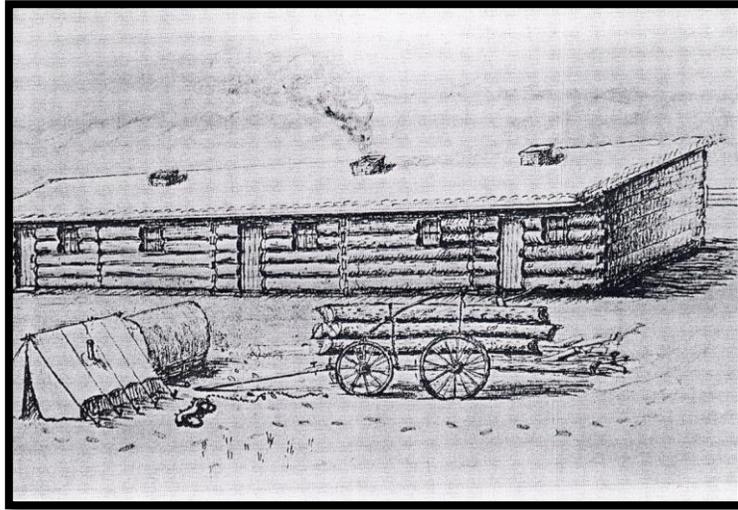
---

- <sup>37</sup> Passenger list, Charles C. Rich Company, Winter Quarters, Nebraska, to Salt Lake City, Utah, 21 June-2 October, 1847,  
<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/companyPioneers?lang=eng&companyId=250>
- <sup>38</sup> Nathan Tanner Porter, "Nathan and His Brother John Arrive at Winter Quarters, Nebraska," *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter* (Porter Family Organization, 2000)  
<http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/NTPorter.html>
- <sup>39</sup> Aaron Benjamin Cherry (1801-1864), #KWJR-FDX, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>40</sup> Margaret (Yelton) Cherry (1811-1898), #KWJR-FD6, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>41</sup> Cleo H. Page, "Aaron Benjamin Porter," undated typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>42</sup> Rebecca Ann (Cherry) Porter (1830-1922), #KWV9-F82, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>43</sup> Emeline Grover Rich, "Autobiography and Diary, 1890-1909," Mormon Overland Travel Index,  
<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&companyId=250&sourceId=18017>
- <sup>44</sup> "Rebecca Ann Cherry," undated typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>45</sup> Rich, "Autobiography and Diary, 1890-1909," Mormon Overland Travel Index.
- <sup>46</sup> "Rebecca Ann Cherry," undated typescript. A piece of Rebecca's knitted lace is on display at the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers cabin in Centerville, Utah.
- <sup>47</sup> "The Trek West," Nathan Tanner Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter* (Porter Family Organization, 2000) <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/NTPorter.html>
- <sup>48</sup> Mary Ann Rich Phelps, "Autobiography of Mary Ann Phelps Rich,"  
<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&companyId=250&sourceId=16596>
- <sup>49</sup> "The Trek West," Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter*.
- <sup>50</sup> Joseph Smith Cherry (1847-1915), #KWVG-HVH, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>51</sup> "The Trek West," Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter*.
- <sup>52</sup> "Sanford Porter's Family Arrives in the Salt Lake Valley," Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter*.

## Chapter 3

# A Good Beginning

## Zion at Last



*Rough log cabins surrounded by a primitive fort were the only protections for the pioneers during the winter of 1847-48.*

The Salt Lake Valley was a vast wilderness of grass and sagebrush ringed by dry, rugged mountains in the autumn of 1847. Until Brigham Young's company arrived several months before, the few white men and women who had entered the valley made haste to leave it again, finding the high desert climate and salty lake to the west unfit for permanent settlement. Yet it was the valley's very remoteness and perceived hostility which made it the perfect place for the Saints to find refuge. Sheltered from their enemies by the location's isolation and lack of obvious resources, the pioneers set about building rough cabins to see them through the coming winter.

The Porter and Cherry families huddled in their cabins as the snow piled up outside, trying to keep warm with branches of sagebrush and cow dung thrown on the fire when the wood supply ran out. "The need of houses for women and children was keenly felt, but the need of foods was much more so," said Nathan. "It became necessary to put ourselves on one fourth of a pound of bread to the head per day, else we would be entirely out before any harvest could be secured. This was the case with the majority of people. There were those who

did not taste of bread for weeks and months, and thus many moved on in their labor without a single complaint, oft times chewing sticks or pits of twigs, to soften if possible, the keen appetite which had been aroused by the taste and smell of the scanty meal set before them.”<sup>53</sup> On many occasions those meals consisted of animals considered “unclean,” including foxes, wolves, hawks and ravens, whatever the men were able to hunt down. Women and children dug up thistles and wild sego lily roots with sticks.

The Saints somehow survived their first winter, taking the first opportunity to plant crops as soon as spring arrived. By early summer green fields of grain promised a needful harvest, but just as the crops were maturing clouds of huge crickets descended from the sky, eating everything thing in sight. “The anxiety of us all was now intense,” said Nathan. “Every exertion and stratagem to stop their progress, or turn them away from the grain, that could be thought of was adopted. Ditches were dug around the fields, filled with running water, which served to keep them at bay while they were small, but as they increased in size and age they became more resolute and determined, so that they would not turn to the right or left, but would crowd one upon another at the water’s edge until some of the foremost would leap into the stream, making a desperate effort to gain the opposite bank which they would accomplish at short distances below. This feat would be followed by the gathered host in quick succession. They catch upon every stick or straw they came in contact with as they neared the opposite bank, and thus would make a full landing where they would remain until sufficiently dry to proceed on with renewed appetites for every green herb in the line of their march. Bushels of them were destroyed in divers ways, but seemingly to but little or no avail.”<sup>54</sup>

Just when it seemed the entire harvest would be lost, large flocks of sea gulls flew in from the south west, frightening the settlers who thought the birds would finish off what was left of their crops, but “the sea gulls exhibited a strange phenomenon,” said Nathan. “They would eat to the full, then spew them up, then repeat the gorge. Thus they made sad havoc of the innumerable foe, to the joy and admiration of God’s devoted people, in whose behalf he had sent them. The remaining crops were now preserved from further molestation and so matured to replenish the exhausted store of provisions so as to carry us along for another season, by using it sparingly.”<sup>55</sup>



*Parish Canyon above Centerville, Utah.*

## Centerville

Nathan finally felt he was able to support a wife after a successful harvest that fall. He and Rebecca were married on 12 November, 1848, taking up residence in Aaron Cherry's old cabin after the Cherrys moved north to a new settlement northward along Deuel Creek in Davis County. Reports from Deuel Creek were encouraging enough to convince Nathan and Rebecca to join the Cherrys there the following spring, taking ownership of ten acres next to Aaron and Margaret. With Rebecca expecting her first child in November, Nathan was anxious to not only put in a crop, but provide his little family with adequate shelter. He worked hard over the summer bringing logs down from the canyon and fashioning them into a cabin. Nathan finished just in time. He and Rebecca moved into their new home on 10 November, and only five days later little Sarah Jane<sup>56</sup> was born.

Nathan improved his family's situation by building an adobe home soon afterwards where Rebecca gave birth to her second child, Aaron,<sup>57</sup> in April, 1851. A few days later Rebecca contracted child bed fever, an often fatal infection of the uterus. She was deathly ill for days, and when she finally recovered Rebecca was heartbroken to discover she was unable to bear another child.

Rebecca poured her energies into caring for her children and household, volunteering to help her neighbors whenever there was a need. She did what she could for the Nathan and Eliza Cheney family when Eliza died in October, 1851, leaving five children to be raised by their father. “My father was overpowered with grief and on the evening of the funeral became sick and never after stepped his foot out of doors,” said the Cheney’s oldest daughter, Eliza Jane. “On February 10, 1852, he too passed away. We had no relatives in Utah to care for us, therefore we were scattered one in a place wherever charity would open its doors.”<sup>58</sup> No one was more charitable than Nathan and Rebecca, who included eight-year old Nathan Cheney, Junior, in their home until he reached adulthood.

Centerville was gradually growing with a number of families establishing farms along the brush-covered foothills.<sup>59</sup> Sanford and Nancy Porter bought a place not far from Nathan and Rebecca in 1850, and two years later Sanford was set apart as bishop of the settlement. Nathan donated land for a log meetinghouse, which served as both church and school for a number of years. Nathan continued to work hard, improving his twenty acres of farmland until he was called to serve a mission to Gibraltar in 1852. He would be gone for four years, leaving Rebecca to manage on her own with one-year old Aaron, three-year old Sarah and nine-year old Nathan Cheney.

Nathan leased out his farm and made arrangements with his neighbors to watch over his family. “My labors at home terminated in hanging the little gate in front of the house,” said Nathan. “On the 14th [September], 1852, while my horse was standing with saddle and bridle in readiness to convey me to the city, I put up my tools, embraced my wife and little ones, commending them to God and their kindred. Bidding all adieu, I mounted the steed and soon disappeared in the distance, no more to return until after the elapse of years, with a purpose to devote all the time with its toils, hardships, privations and labors, of both body and mind in behalf of strangers in far off lands, without any earthly reward.

“What a strange spirit to be sure, and how strange those who are exorcised by it, to leave fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, wives, children, houses and lands. The strong ties of affection will not stay them, much less the love of home with all its endearments. Is there any example of such devotion in the annals of history? Yes, strange as it may appear, it is to be found in that sacred history the Bible. It says there were men who left all those endearments, devoting their whole time in ministering to strangers in a strange land, travelling without purse or script. They called themselves the disciples of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He commanded them to do this, telling them that he who would not do this was not worthy of him, and therefore could not be his disciple. They believed that he meant what he said, and that not

one jot nor tittle of his word would fall to the ground unfulfilled. Therefore it sank deep into their hearts, and counting up the cost they made the sacrifice. This was the case with me and my fellow companions. We had chosen this same Jesus to be our Lord and Master, and had taken upon us his name, and were called as they were called and ordained as they were, and sent as they were sent to reprove the world of sin and of a judgment to come.”<sup>60</sup>

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>53</sup> “Sanford Porter’s Family Arrives in the Salt Lake Valley,” Nathan Tanner Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter* (Porter Family Organization, 2000) <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/NTPorter.html>

<sup>54</sup> “The Crickets Swarm into the Valley and Destroy the Crops,” *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Sarah Jane Porter (1849-1861), #K2MH-QZB, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>57</sup> Aaron Benjamin Porter (1851-1904), #KWCT-DNK, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>58</sup> Eliza Jane Cheney, “Autobiography,” Eliza Jane Cheney, #KWJC-7H3, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

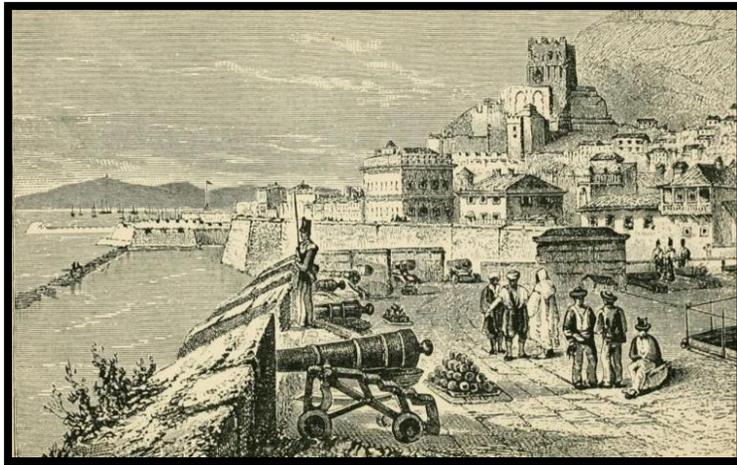
<sup>59</sup> The population of Centerville reached one hundred ninety-four by 1853. Mary Ellen Smoot, *The City In Between* (Bountiful: Carr Printing, 1975), page 84.

<sup>60</sup> “Nathan Called on a Mission to Gibraltar,” Tanner, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter*.

## Chapter 4

# Declaring the Gospel

## Going Forth Boldly



*The King's Bastion at Gibraltar, Spain.*

Nathan and his brother-in-law Edward Stevenson<sup>61</sup> were among many men called to serve missions in Europe in 1852. They retraced the prairie trail they had crossed five years before, making their way to St. Louis, where they boarded a boat to Cincinnati. The Elders then took a train to New York City, a new experience for Nathan. “Instead of riding it seemed to me we were flying through space with the speed of the swiftest bird,” he said.<sup>62</sup> The missionaries booked passage to Liverpool from New York, arriving on 5 January, 1853.

Nathan and his companions were met in Liverpool by several families on their way to Utah, who were anxious for news about the Salt Lake Valley. “We sat up till quite a late hour conversing with them on various subjects,” said Nathan, who reflected on his experiences that evening after retiring. “I thought of the protecting hand of the Lord that had been over me and my brethren, how the winds had been turned or modified at our request. I also thought of my family and the promise in my blessing that I should have knowledge of their situation by visions or dreams or ministering of angels. After these reflections had passed through my mind I sought for sleep, but it had

gone from me, leaving me under the influence of the Holy Spirit which filled my heart with thanksgiving and praise to God for his abundant goodness unto me, from the earliest period of my life.<sup>63</sup>

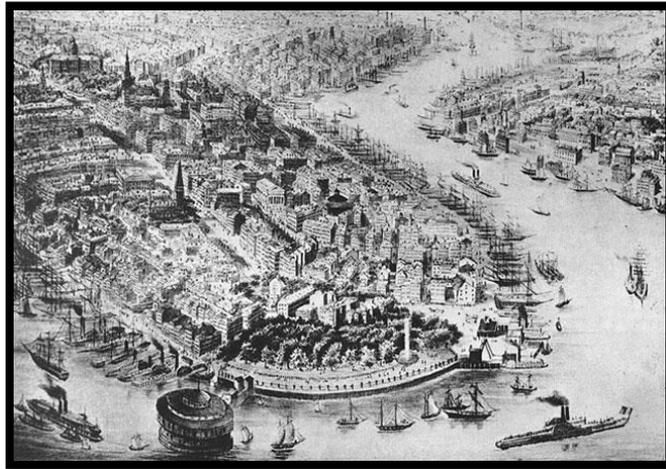
“Finally the clock struck two, after which I fell asleep and was caught away in the visions of my mind, as it were, on a swift beast, across the mighty deep with the speed of light. I saw the sea but for a moment, ere the dry land was passing beneath us but for another moment, and I was at my home. I went into the house, saw Father and Mother, shook hands with them. Then looked and saw my wife standing at my left, shook hands with her, she looked well. I then saw the children lying in the cradle asleep. I went to them, as I drew near Sarah awoke... I took her and embraced her, then took up little Aaron and embraced him. They were quite well. I talked with Father and Mother inquiring as to the welfare of the family. They said the boys [Nathan’s brothers] with their families were well, also my sister Nancy. I told them that I must soon go back, but they seemed to take no notice of the remark. I thought to myself, is it so? I then looked at myself and saw that I had my body, yet I thought it was in Liverpool.

“In an instant, as it were, I awoke from the transient visit with the most singular sensation I had ever experienced. A prickly sensation went through my system from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, as though my body had become benumbed, and as Paul said of himself at a certain time, whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell, so it was with me.”<sup>64</sup> Nathan left England for his mission assignment reassured of his family’s welfare.

## Gibraltar Bound

Once again, Elders Porter and Stevenson booked an ocean passage, arriving at Gibraltar on the morning of 8 March, 1853. Although Gibraltar was a small peninsula on the southern coast of Spain, it was one of Britain’s most important Mediterranean possessions, its fortified colony having been under English control since the early 1700s. Nathan and his companion immediately met with strong resistance from the local government. “We learned that ministers of the gospel were required to obtain a license, otherwise they were not permitted to hold meetings in the garrison,” he said. Nathan and Elder Stevenson applied to the chief magistrate for a license, but received “a positive denial; we would not be permitted to hold meetings indoors or outdoors. Being a foreigner, I could not even remain in the garrison without a permit for the reason that I had been distributing tracts, thereby causing a disturbance in the churches.”<sup>65</sup>

Nathan, forced to make his way back to England as soon as possible, booked passage to Southampton on a steam-packet just arrived from Constantinople. “The agent . . . granted me a steerage rate of four pounds. This enabled me to leave a few pounds with Elder Stevenson,” he said. “I soon found myself steaming up the Straits of Gibraltar, with perhaps a final adieu to Gibraltar and the Great Mediterranean Sea.” Nathan left Gibraltar on the first day of April, 1853.<sup>66</sup> He spent the remaining three years of his mission in the Reading, Essex and Kent conferences before becoming president of the Worcestershire conference. He was released to return home on 1 January, 1856,



*New York harbor in 1856.*

## Waylaid in New York City

Nathan joined a group of three hundred Saints bound for Utah on the *Enoch Train*, arriving in New York after a slow passage of thirty days. “Sea sickness was prevalent at the commencement of the voyage,” said Nathan. “I having taken a very active part in waiting on and administering to the sick became exhausted, so much so that I became prostrated as we arrived in New York, and thus was left in care of Brother Beason at his residence in Williamsburg of that city, and under the cognizance of Apostle John Taylor who was there editing a paper called *The Mormon*. I remained here for six weeks, during which I was visited by Elder Taylor and several of the elders and Saints who administered to me the ordinance of the gospel as I desired, bestowing their kind attention to my welfare. I however became so low that all seemed to despair of my recovery. I besought the Lord that he would spare my life to return home, for the sake of having my body laid with those of the saints in Zion, instead of the wicked in that corrupt city [New York]. . . .

“I saw in a dream a messenger from the spirit world who had come for me. I was within the company of the Saints who had just landed with me and were now leaving the shore to take the [train]. I began shaking hands with them and bidding them farewell, while the messenger was standing by my side in waiting. The last to bid adieu was one of the elders with a valise in his hand. As he went up from the shore I turned to see the messenger who was some six feet in height, in so doing I saw a man coming in full speed on a white horse. As he came up I recognized him to be Daniel Spencer, who gave me a returning blessing after my release to return home, in which I had the promise that I should return and again enjoy the society of my family and friends in Zion. He stopped suddenly at my side, and leaning towards me placed his hand on my shoulder saying, ‘Brother Porter, you will not go to the spirit world now. There are many of the Saints who have become cold and lukewarm. We want you to go and stir them up and prepare them for Zion.’ I replied that I was willing to do anything the Lord wanted me to do...

“I awoke with an assurance that the time of my departure to the spirit land was changed, so far as the present call was concerned, and thus the way remained open for the promised blessing to be realized in mortality, coupled with a mission in the midst of the Saints, having for its object the renewal of the diligence of those who have become careless in discharge of their duties in the observance of the laws of the gospel. For without this no one is prepared for Zion, after her redemption. Having had the above manifestations and ministrations, I began to recover very fast so that I was able to join the last company of Saints who arrived from Liverpool, about the 15th of April.”<sup>67</sup>

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>61</sup> Edward Stevenson (1820-1897), #KWNJ-FXM, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) Edward was married to Nathan’s sister Nancy Areta Porter.

<sup>62</sup> “The Missionary Wagon Train was Organized,” Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter* (Porter Family Organization, 2000) <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/NTPorter.html>

<sup>63</sup> “The Missionaries Set Sail for England,” *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> “Elder Nathan Tanner Porter Has a Vision of His Family in Utah,” *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> “Elder Porter and Elder Stevenson Arrive in Gibraltar,” *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> “Nathan Porter is Visited by a Messenger from the Spirit World,” *Ibid.*

## Chapter 5

# Tragedy and Triumph

## Stranded on the Plains



*The handcart companies of 1856 make their way west.*

Nathan's delayed arrival at the outfitting post of Iowa City meant he would be joining the season's last immigrants, poor Saints assigned to handcart companies who had not only been delayed crossing the Atlantic, but met with further problems when their carts were not ready as planned. The James G. Willie and Edward Martin companies lost so much time building and repairing carts in Iowa City that it was late August when they reached the edge of the plains at Council Bluffs, Nebraska. By this time it was so late in the season there were some who questioned the wisdom of making the trip at all that year. There was simply not enough time to cross the trail before snowfall in the high elevations of Wyoming's plains.

"A decision was rendered in favor of continuing on without further delay," said Nathan, who had been appointed a sub-captain in the Benjamin Hodgett Company,<sup>68</sup> one of two wagon trains accompanying and supporting the handcart Saints. "My own feelings according to my judgment, were not in harmony with the decision of the council," said Nathan. "Nevertheless, I felt it my duty to comply with the request of those who were placed to direct the work in which I was engaged, and thus I endeavored to use my best energies to make a successful trip across the extended plains before us, notwithstanding the lateness of the season."<sup>69</sup>

Spirits were high at first while the weather was mild and the carts rolled along easily, but as the companies travelled across the dry plains, their carts shrunk and broke down, causing more delays for repairs. By mid-September food supplies were already low enough in the Willie Company to require a cut in rations. A small party of church leaders returning to Salt Lake City in light carriages passed the companies, encouraging them to move forward as quickly as they could, even though they knew what hardships were ahead.



*The Willie and Martin Handcart Companies were among those Saints caught on the Wyoming plains in raging snow storms.*

## Winter Comes Early

The first hint of those hardships came on the morning of 18 September, three hundred and eighty miles west of Council Bluffs, when the companies awoke to a “sharp freeze.” They hurried on to Fort Laramie, Wyoming, where they hoped to resupply, but there was little food available and with five hundred miles still ahead, rations were cut once more. “During the afternoon meeting, Captain Hodgett [said] he hoped the God of Israel would see his children more protected from the inclement weather, sickness, hunger and death,” said company member John Bond. “Captain Porter then arose and from the looks on his countenance, he showed a look of distress, but in spite of the lateness of the season, held out hopes of arriving safely. As good was at the helm, he was of the opinion that the Saints would be protected in time, as they journey on. He gave encouragement as to the road all were about to travel, and was of the opinion that all would

prove for the best good of the faithful at heart. At the close of the meeting, a seriousness came over the countenances of the Saints, for they knew it was fatherly advice and must be carried out as far as possible.”<sup>70</sup>

By 5 October, the returning church leaders reached Salt Lake City and informed Brigham Young of the emigrants’ situation. Young immediately called for rescue teams to go in search of the vulnerable emigrants. Two days later the first train of rescue wagons headed for the plains, not knowing how far they would have to travel or if they would find the stranded Saints in time.

The Willie Company, several days ahead of the Martin and Hodgett trains, ran out of flour on 19 October, the same day the first major snow storm descended on the plains. Only two days before, blankets and warm clothing had been left by the trail in an effort to lighten the load. Now, with eight inches of snow on the ground and sub-zero temperatures, these items were needed more than ever.

That same day the Martin Company reached the last crossing of the North Platte River. “The river was wide, the current strong, the water exceedingly cold and up to the wagon beds in the deepest parts, and men carried some of the women over on their backs or in their arms, but other of the women tied up their skirts and waded through,” said John Jacques, a member of the Martin Company. “The company was barely over when snow, hail and sleet began to fall, accompanied by a piercing north wind and camp was made on this river.”<sup>71</sup>

The Hodgett train had crossed the Platte the previous evening. “As we arose in the morning we saw there was an approaching storm, and by the time we were in readiness to move on the snow commenced falling,” said Nathan. “I was aware of a place three miles up the river where there was low grassland surrounded by high bluffs, and was well supplied with grass and timber for fuel. I remembered this place from when I came with the missionaries in 1852. We therefore decided to make for that point and wait the result of the storm. At this juncture the handcart company made its appearance on the opposite bank at the crossing. We instructed the company to move on, that we would stop and see the handcarts cross and soon overtake our company. They had just commenced crossing as we rode up. It was not a pleasant scene for us to behold. Women and children wading above their knees in the cold piercing element. We hastened across on our animals and began taking them one by one behind us across the river. The wading soon stopped. They huddled like sheep awaiting our return as we made each trip. We never failed to return without a blessing pronounced upon us, in addition to ones we had already received.”<sup>72</sup> One of the families Nathan helped turned out to be a widowed mother with several daughters he had become acquainted

with during his recovery in New York City. “He felt so sorry to see us having to wade the river and pull the cart through,” remembered one of the girls. “He took Mother on his mule behind him, telling her to hold fast to him and he would take her safely through the water.”<sup>73</sup>



*Many pioneers died from exposure and were buried in shallow graves along the trail.*

## Martin's Cove

Nathan and his companions stayed on until all the handcart Saints had successfully crossed the river, joining up later with the Hodgett group camped at the protected cove. “Here we rounded up our wagons, pitched our tents and gathered some wood for the camp fires ere the day closed in,” Nathan said. “I wonder how it is with the handcart company. They must of remained at the crossing. I wish they were here with us.’ This was frequently expressed during the evening as we sat around our fires.

“We arose in the morning with about six inches of snow on the ground. Elder Hodgett returned to the crossing to learn the condition of the other companies...and invite them up to share with us, there being a supply for all. [Elder Hodgett] found the handcarts still in camp at the crossing. The handcarts were very much exposed to the severity of the storm which we scarcely felt. They listened with gladness to his report and readily accepted the invitation...On the morrow our men turned out and met them, and assisted those with handcarts in pulling them into our quarters and shoveled away the snow, and pitched their tents as, some of the men had become almost

exhausted and benumbed, the cold having increased several degrees as the snow ceased falling, being about a foot on the level. It was a trying time with us, on man and beasts. It proved fatal to two of the handcart company during the night and one the following day. They fell with their faces Zion-ward to await the resurrection day.”<sup>74</sup>

Death stalked the camps. During breakfast on 24 October, Captain Hodgett announced the death of six Saints. “Each of the captains detailed men to dig the graves while others were allotted the task of sewing the departed up in sheets or canvas,” said John Bond. “Brothers Benjamin Hodges, Porter, B.J. Franklin, Moses Cluff and John Toone were detailed to carry the departed one to their last resting place. The bugle sounds for all to gather at the graves as the brethren walk slowly up with the dead and lay them in their graves. A hymn is sung and Brother Porter made the dedicatory prayer amidst much sorrow and shedding of tears.”<sup>75</sup>

Only one day of rations remained by 27 October. “It was decided that we could go no further, the snow so deep and no food. We were doomed to starvation. The next day we had nothing to eat but some back from trees,” said Peter McBride. Fortunately, it was the same day word came that rescue teams were close to camp. “Men women and children knelt down and thanks the Almighty God for our delivery from certain death. It put new life into all the Saints.”<sup>76</sup>

## Rescue

The following afternoon the rescue team was spotted as it heading toward the stranded Saints. “[Sister Scott] was looking to the westward. All at once [she] sprang to her feet in the wagon and screamed out at the top of her voice, ‘I see them coming! I see them coming!’ Surely they are angels of heaven!” said John Bond, who saw “in the far distance at the curve of the hill ... three men on horses driving another slowly in the deep crusted snow and the wolves were howling in all directions... Undaunted faith as the moving objects could be seen distinctly a general cry rent the air, ‘Hurrah! Hurrah!’ Some of the voices choking with laughter and of tears down care worn cheeks. They were so pleased to know that they were to be saved and delivered from the fears of ignominious death.”<sup>77</sup>

After handing out supplies and tending to the company’s needs as best they could, a committee was formed to “consult the best method to take to save life at any sacrifice requisite,” said Nathan, who was appointed to the committee along with Captains Martin and Hodgetts and rescuers Joseph A. Young, Daniel W. Jones and Abraham Garr.

“It was decided that those of the independent companies should cache all their luggage except what was really necessary for the remainder of the journey, and thus turn over to the use of the handcart company a portion of their teams and wagons so as to convey them on as fast as possible.”<sup>78</sup>

The Martin and Hodgett Companies left their sheltered cove on 9 November, the same day the Willie Company, who had been far ahead for some time, arrived in Salt Lake City. The tattered group was “strung out in a long line that made a needle and trailing black line in the snow. No one sang, no one talked. Folks just pushed along at their own pace and tried not to think of how the days and nights stretch into weeks and months before the last of them found a long sleep in a trench of snow,” said John Jacques.<sup>79</sup>

The next day another group of “valley boys” met the beleaguered Saints as they trudged westward through the snow. Among them was Nathan’s younger brother, Lyman. The two men were stunned to see each other. Lyman had no idea his brother was stranded on the plains when he answered the call to render aid to emigrants; he simply volunteered to save his brothers and sisters in Christ, never dreaming his mission of mercy would eventually save his own brother.<sup>80</sup>

The rescue wagons, loaded with as many handcart Saints as they could carry, hurried on toward Salt Lake City. The last of the Martin Company arrived on 30 November, while the Hodgett train struggled through the snow at Big Mountain. Here the emigrants had “the first glimpse of the valley in the opening in the Emigration Canyon below, which brought many tears to the eyes of the Saints to know that their journey was drawing to a close, what all had suffered so long to see,” said John Bond, who described their journey down the final miles of trail. “The sun shines brightly though everything is calm. The wind ceased blowing and drifting the snow, which was a great aid. The teamsters were delighted on ascending the mountain, calling to their horses, ‘Kit and Fanny, go on here go on,’ and pop goes the whip, ‘Get out of here, pull the wagon like good fellows,’ and pop goes the whip again, amidst joking and laughter as the wagon wheels make loud noises in the frozen snow.”<sup>81</sup>

Members of the Hodgett wagon train straggled in until mid-December. Nathan and Lyman were among the last men to enter the valley, on 15 December, 1856. Nathan made his way home to “the embrace of wife and children, also my aged parents and friends after an absence of four years and three months.”<sup>82</sup>

## ENDNOTES

---

- <sup>68</sup> “Camp Journal, 15 December, 1856,” *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, page 16-37,  
<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&companyId=148&sourceId=3147>
- <sup>69</sup> Nathan Tanner Porter, “Wagon Trains and Handcarts Take the Saints to Utah,” *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter* (Porter Family Organization, 2000)  
<http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/NTPorter.html>
- <sup>70</sup> John Bond, “Handcarts West in ’56,”  
<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&pioneerId=20558&sourceId=5317>
- <sup>71</sup> *The Salt Lake Herald*, 15 December, 1878.
- <sup>72</sup> “Wagon Trains and Handcarts Take the Saints to Utah,” Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter*.
- <sup>73</sup> Kenneth W. Godfrey, *Women’s Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints 1830-1900* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), page 224-225.
- <sup>74</sup> “The Suffering of the Handcart Pioneers,” Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter*.
- <sup>75</sup> Bond, “Handcarts West in ’56.”
- <sup>76</sup> Heber McBride; “Autobiography of Heber Robert McBride” (LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah), page 45-56.
- <sup>77</sup> Bond, “Handcarts West in ’56.”
- <sup>78</sup> “The Suffering of the Handcart Pioneers,” Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter*.
- <sup>79</sup> Stella Jacques Bell, *Life History and Writings of John Jacques, including a diary of the Martin Handcart Company*, (Rexburg, Idaho: Ricks College Press, 1978) page 160.
- <sup>80</sup> Jeffrey Lyn Porter, “You Never Know Whom You May Save,” Lyman Wight Porter #KWNV-42J, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>81</sup> Bond, “Handcarts West in ’56.”
- <sup>82</sup> “The Suffering of the Handcart Pioneers,” Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter*.

## Chapter 6

# Home Again

## Earnest Embrace

---



*The brick house Nathan built for his wife Rebecca.*

No one was happier to have Nathan back home than Rebecca, who had managed the family's affairs by herself during her husband's four year absence. Nathan hardly recognized Sarah, now seven years old, and little Aaron, almost six. While thirteen-year old Nathan Cheney had taken on many of the manly duties around the house, it was with relief and love that the entire family welcomed home their husband and father, content to resume their quiet lives on the farm together.

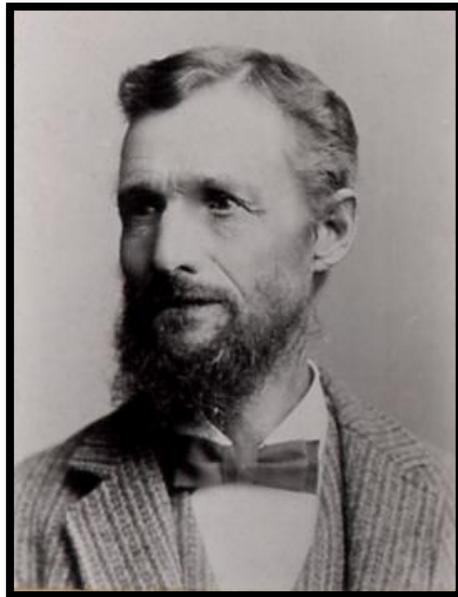
Four months after his return, Nathan added another member to the household with his plural marriage to sixteen-year old Eliza Ford<sup>83</sup> on 13 April, 1857. Rebecca fully accepted the doctrine of celestial marriage, a fact she demonstrated by living in harmony with her much younger sister wife in the same house for over thirty years.

Eliza was only thirteen years old when her parents, John<sup>84</sup> and Rebecca Ford,<sup>85</sup> immigrated to Utah from their native England in 1854.<sup>86</sup> It was a difficult nine-week trip across the ocean, during which Eliza's older brothers, William<sup>87</sup> and Thomas,<sup>88</sup> both came down with smallpox. They fortunately recovered, but their mother contracted cholera while the family was in Kansas City preparing for their journey west. While Rebecca Ford eventually recovered in time

to join her family in the Job Smith Company headed for Salt Lake City,<sup>89</sup> William and Thomas were stricken with the disease on the trail. Thomas died and was buried on the plains not far from Kansas City. Several days later Eliza's father, her younger sister Sally<sup>90</sup> and brothers William and John<sup>91</sup> all came down with mountain fever. William was so ill he was unconscious for weeks, but eight-year old Sally never recovered. She was also left in a lonely grave on the plains.<sup>92</sup>

The Ford's first home in Utah was a crude one-room log house south of Salt Lake City near the Jordan River. John hoped to improve on the family's situation by renting a Centerville farm in the fall of 1855, but a grasshopper plague the following spring left so little to harvest the family almost starved. Aaron Cherry and his family helped the Fords through the winter with a hundred pound sack of flour, earning the Ford family's gratefulness and friendship.<sup>93</sup>

As the oldest daughter, Eliza was her mother's constant support in running the household. She was especially skilled at sewing, weaving and spinning the wool she washed and carded herself. Eliza was more than ready to become a wife and mother when she accepted Nathan Porter's marriage proposal, and worked hard to make her new home a happy one.



*Nathan Tanner Porter*



*Rebecca Ann and Eliza Porter*

## Sisters in Zion

The Porter's plural marriage was a long a successful relationship, thanks to the respect and commitment Nathan, Rebecca and Eliza demonstrated towards each other. "No marriage covenant was ever more sacred than my father's and mother's and no husband was ever more loyal and just than was my father to his two wives," said Eliza's youngest daughter, Amelia,<sup>94</sup> who considered her "Aunt Rebecca" a second mother. "As Mother's children came along, we were all one family. Aunt Rebecca loved us and called us her children and strangers to the family often thought we belonged to her."<sup>95</sup> Rebecca shared Eliza's joy with the birth of Eliza Ann<sup>96</sup> in November, 1860, and both women mourned the untimely deaths of twelve-year old Sarah Jane the next fall and little Eliza Ann in May, 1863. Rebecca may have ached at not being able to bear children, but she mothered all the Porter children just the same.

The two women worked together in the small adobe home Nathan built himself. "Those were busy day in the farm home where the housewives plied a dozen trades," said Amelia. "Mother washed, carded and spun the wool, dyed the yarn, wove the cloth and fashioned and made clothing for every member of the family, gathered, spun and wove the flax for their linen, made hats of braided straw, sewed rags and wove carpets, made great vats of soap, rendered out tallow and made candles, cut and dried great bags of fruit using for their sweetening. They knitted all their stockings and mittens; that was just evening pastime when the babies were tucked in bed and Father read. I believe Mother and Aunt Rebecca could both knit with their eyes shut."<sup>97</sup>

The Porter household became even busier as Eliza gave birth to seven more daughters and two sons, prompting Nathan to move his family into a larger home on the corner.<sup>98</sup> With so many children to educate, Nathan accepted the position of school trustee, hiring Mr. George Bowering from Salt Lake City to conduct classes for twenty dollars a month, including board, lodging and washing. Mr. Bowering boarded with the Porters for some time, then with other families in town. School was held for a three month term in 1859, and later for four and five months.<sup>99</sup> All of the Porter children attended the school, where they were taught the “three Rs, the staples of learning; history and geography [were] mere deserts,” according to Nathan Junior.<sup>100</sup> “Discipline [was] by rule or strap. If learning [was] low, discipline was high by painful application.”<sup>101</sup>



*The stone church where Centerville’s faithful met in 1888.*

## Laboring with Love

Nathan’s leadership talents were also tapped by the local church. When his father, Sanford, was released as bishop of the Centerville Ward in 1855, Nathan was called as a counselor to his successor. He later served as Sunday school superintendent, a position which required him to conduct opening exercises and often administer and pass the sacrament.<sup>102</sup>

Church service required much of Nathan’s time, but he never let it interfere with caring for his family. “He was a prosperous and progressive farmer and took pride in his livestock, his well-filled barns and granaries and his splendid fields of grain and hay,” said Amelia. “He and his neighbor John Woolley owned the first grain

binder in Davis County, a real marvel in that day. His farm and the work it entailed was more than he and his four sons could do and many men were given work and a home while in his employ.”<sup>103</sup>

Nathan extended his support to one young man who later became a renowned writer, historian and general authority in the church. B.H. Roberts was serving an apprenticeship to a Centerville blacksmith when Nathan took an interest in the rough young man, giving him the opportunity to develop his skills in public speaking. Nathan himself was “noted as a local orator,” according to Roberts, who learned to follow his mentor’s style. Of Nathan Roberts said, “In his speeches, which were always extemporaneous, he was fervid, even passionate, and under the spirit he rose to real heights, apparently both in knowledge and in the expression of it, especially in matters involving the interpretations of scripture of which he was a severely logical and impressive interpreter.”<sup>104</sup>

Nathan not only tutored the young Roberts in oratory, but guided him in spiritual matters as well. “Porter put his arm around [Roberts] and told him he was doing wrong. The family can never be grateful enough to him,” said Robert’s daughter Georgia. It was Nathan who counselled B.H. Roberts as he became a man, and later ordained him as a seventy in the priesthood. Even after he was ordained a President of the First Council of the Seventy by President Lorenzo Snow, Roberts preferred to trace his line of priesthood authority through Nathan Porter.<sup>105</sup>

## Building the Kingdom

With his skills as an orator, his knowledge of the gospel and his willingness to serve, there was no finer missionary than Nathan Porter. He was called upon to fill two more missions to the Eastern States, beginning in 1869, when he and his companions travelled to Erie County, New York. Here he visited with his cousin Chauncey Currier,<sup>106</sup> who was living on Sanford Porter’s old homestead, and his aunt Sally Richardson<sup>107</sup> before moving on to Pendleton County, Kentucky, where he met with relatives in the Cherry branch of the family. Two years after his return Nathan was asked to serve another short mission in the same area. He and his companions preached the gospel as they travelled, holding meetings wherever they could, “with an opportunity to proclaim the principles of the Gospel, which was very limited in consequence of prejudice and infidelity prevailing in the hearts of the people,” said Nathan.<sup>108</sup>



*Centerville's cooperative store was an important part of the growing community*

## Progress and Prosperity

Utah became connected to the wider world when the transcontinental railroad was completed in the spring of 1869. Now travel from the east coast could be accomplished in a matter of days instead of months, and with a spur line constructed from Ogden to Salt Lake City the following year, residents suddenly had easy access to an increasing number of goods and products of every kind. This mark of progress made possible the opening of Centerville's coop store on Second South and Main Street. As one of the coop's officers, Nathan helped manage operations, assisting in purchasing goods, monitoring inventory and tracking profits. Items were bought from Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institute in Salt Lake City and shipped north to Centerville, where they were sold alongside local products such as milk, butter, eggs, fresh produce and blocks of ice harvested from the town's mill pond and stored under thick layers of sawdust.

Nathan was one of the many farmers who gathered around the coop's pot-bellied stove to share local news and a sampling of crackers from the barrels,<sup>109</sup> but most of his time was filled with work on his land. He was careful to share his prosperity whenever he could, lending the now-empty adobe house on his property to struggling emigrant families until they could support themselves,<sup>110</sup> or giving food to transients who knocked at the door. His friend and neighbor Cyrus Page recalled Nathan advising him to "never turn one of them away. You had better feed ten undeserving men than turn a hungry man from your door. If you have more than you can feed, send them up to my house."<sup>111</sup>

## ENDNOTES

---

- <sup>83</sup> Eliza (Ford) Porter (1841-1912), #KWCV-XN2, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>84</sup> John Ford (1807-1902), #KWJ7-S3L, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>85</sup> Rebecca (Chandler) Ford (1815-1881), #KWJ7-S3K, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>86</sup> Passenger list, Windermere, Liverpool to New Orleans, 22 February-23 April, 1854, [http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/Search/showDetails/db:MM\\_MII/t:voyage/id:437/keywords:eliza+ford](http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/Search/showDetails/db:MM_MII/t:voyage/id:437/keywords:eliza+ford)
- <sup>87</sup> William Ford (1838-1916), #KWZ7-FCG, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>88</sup> Thomas Ford (1836-1854), #K2X4-QDJ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>89</sup> Passenger list, Job Smith Company, Westport, Missouri, to Salt Lake city, Utah, 16 June-23 September, 1854, <https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/companyPioneers?lang=eng&companyId=271>
- <sup>90</sup> Sarah "Sally" Ford (1846-1854), #LCZM-K8P, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>91</sup> John Ford (1843-1928), #KWN2-WHR, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>92</sup> Mary F. Parrish, "Histories of John Ford, Sr., Rebecca Chandler and John Ford Jr.," typescript, 1938. Jr. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>93</sup> "Biography of William Ford," William Ford #KWZ7-FCG, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>94</sup> Amelia Ford (Porter) Walton (1883-1908), #KWCL-725, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>95</sup> Amelia Porter Walton, "Nathan Tanner Porter," undated typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>96</sup> Eliza Ann Porter (1860-1863), #KWVT-NXF, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>97</sup> Walton, "Nathan Tanner Porter," undated typescript. .
- <sup>98</sup> The house still stands at 370 West 400 South in Centerville.
- <sup>99</sup> Amelia Porter Walton, "Eliza Ford Porter," undated typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>100</sup> Nathan Tanner Porter (1865-1953), #KW89-6YC, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>101</sup> Nathan Tanner Porter, *The Village* (self-published, 1947), page 8.
- <sup>102</sup> The Centerville ward was noted for its unusual customs and characters. The congregation was for many years divided with the men seated on the right of the aisle and the women sat on the left. One woman was remembered for her eccentric behaviors, such as bringing her own pillow to sit on during meetings, and for including in her testimony an account of how one ward member who emigrated with her family hit her with a whip when she tried sneaking into the wagon instead of walking. "She never let him forget that he had not been forgiven. After she shook her finger in his face and gave him a good dressing down, she would pick up her pillow and march out." See: Mary Ellen Smoot, *The City In Between* (Bountiful: Carr Printing, 1975), page 48.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, page 243.
- <sup>104</sup> Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B.H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1980), page 80.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, page 401.
- <sup>106</sup> Chauncey Currier (1825-1881), #K87D-RHV, was the son of Sanford Porter's sister Susannah (Porter) Currier (1788-1850), #L8YS-KQ4, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>107</sup> Sarah "Sally" (Porter) Richardson (1792-1873), #2WFL-7T8, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

---

<sup>108</sup> “Nathan Was Called on a Mission to the Eastern States,” Nathan Tanner Porter, *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter* (Porter Family Organization, 2000) <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/NTPorter.html>

<sup>109</sup> Smoot, *The City In Between*, page 32, 58.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, page 243.

<sup>111</sup> Annie Call Carr, editor, *East of Antelope Island* (Salt Lake City: Publisher’s Press, 1948), page 203.

## Chapter 7

# Firm in the Faith

---

## Enduring to the End



*Eliza surrounded by her daughters  
Eliza Ann, Amelia and Effie.*

**L**ife was busy for Rebecca and Eliza in their bustling home. Raising ten children was a full-time occupation for both women, each of whom also had many community duties to fulfill. Rebecca accepted a calling as the first counselor to the president when Centerville's Relief Society was organized in June, 1869, a position she held for seven years. The women's organization met every two weeks in a house donated by Sister Margaret Cherry, Rebecca's mother, where the ladies were instructed in gospel principles and urged to "give kind and cheering words to teach chastity and purity of thought." Nathan Porter spoke at the first anniversary meeting, advising the sisters to express their feelings toward the gospel openly, with a promise of the Lord's blessings if they did so. Rebecca followed her husband's remarks by stating she would rather work than talk, but would take the opportunity to declare

her love for the gospel. At another meeting the sisters were reminded that “polygamy was a true principle and teachers should teach it wherever they go. Mothers should teach it to their daughters and if they couldn’t live it themselves, to say nothing against it.” Rebecca afterwards stood and bore her testimony “that she knew the practice of plural marriage was right and enjoyed herself in it.”<sup>112</sup>

Centerville’s Relief Society sisters also contributed items such as fabric, thread, yarn, carpet rags and quilt blocks to be sold for cash to aid the less fortunate. By such efforts they were able to donate forty dollars toward the emigrating poor in 1871, all while attending to the needs of local families. For many years the Relief Society was also in charge of preparing those who passed away for burial.<sup>113</sup>

Soon after the Primary was organized as an auxiliary for children, Rebecca was called as president, an office she held for twenty years. She supervised instructional meetings in which the children were taught obedience, faith in God, prayer, punctuality, honesty and good manners. The boys and girls also contributed toward making rag rugs for the Salt Lake Temple, the boys each paying five cents for warp and the girls weaving the rugs.<sup>114</sup>

## Temple Blessings

Nathan continued his service to both community and church as he grew older. He served as the water master for Duel Creek for seventeen years and later water master for the town of Centerville. He was also a road superintendent and in later years was appointed an election judge.<sup>115</sup> After working for many years as superintendent of Centerville’s Sunday school, he was called to supervise the stake Sunday schools. His duties often required him to travel across Davis County in a horse and buggy, sometimes staying overnight in various wards. It sometimes took three days to complete a visit around the stake.<sup>116</sup> At the age of seventy-four, Nathan was called to the office of patriarch, charged with giving patriarchal blessings to worthy members of the stake, a responsibility he took seriously.<sup>117</sup>



*The temple in Logan, Utah.*

Nathan spent his remaining years not only serving his fellow Saints in church callings, but he became interested in accomplishing work for the dead, as well. A year after the Logan temple was dedicated in 1884, Nathan rented a home in Logan for the purpose of completing ordinances for the Porter ancestors. “Father did the lion’s share in keeping up this home that his sisters, brothers and relatives would have a place to live while they did the work for these dead ancestors,” said Amelia. “Father was a farmer and could supply all farm products that were needed in the home and he went for a month or two each winter until 1893, when the Salt Lake Temple was dedicated.” Among the first names Nathan placed in the temple were those of his little children who had passed away.

## The Challenge of Death

Nathan’s own death at the age of seventy-eight was a surprise to everyone. He seemed in perfect health and was as active as ever,<sup>118</sup> tending to his family and church responsibilities as always. His final thoughts were of the temple work he so diligently oversaw. “When I get up in the morning, don’t let me forget to send those names for the temple to those folks in Logan,” he asked his family when he retired on the evening of 8 April, 1897.<sup>119</sup> Nathan died early the next morning, only days away from his fortieth wedding anniversary with Eliza.

Rebecca and Eliza anchored the family after Nathan's death, providing love and support to their children as they always had. Rebecca missed her only child, Aaron, who was now living in Idaho with his wife and children, and so welcomed Eliza's children and grandchildren into her home. Eliza and her younger children had moved into a large brick home Nathan built several years earlier, and it was there she remained for the next fifteen years. "Mother was always busy caring for her children," said Amelia. "If ever a woman's joy, love, her very life were wrapped up in the welfare of her children, that was mother. The advantages that her youth had been denied, the comforts that she had missed, she made for her children, providing comfort and beauty for us at home. Schooling and education as training were also provided. Our greatest gifts were those she so unconsciously gave: her high ideals and the example of a beautiful life."<sup>120</sup>

Running the farm eventually became too much for Eliza, who turned over the operation to her son John<sup>121</sup> upon his marriage in 1910. When she wasn't busy with her family, Eliza spent her time working with the Primary and Relief Society.<sup>122</sup> "Mother's children and grandchildren lived near, this brought her joy and comfort," said Amelia. "She spent many days in the temple and enjoyed them so much. She was an officer in the Relief Society and had many friends who were dear to her."<sup>123</sup>

Eliza remained active and healthy until she developed breast cancer in her late sixties. Her doctor recommended a stay in a South Dakota sanitarium in the autumn of 1910, and she returned to Centerville "much improved,"<sup>124</sup> but the cancer proved to be incurable. She spent her last days visiting friends and relatives in Utah and Idaho.<sup>125</sup> "Despite the skill of the best physicians in the land, and after months of cruel suffering, she passed away, 17 September, 1912, but her memory will live with us forever," said Amelia. "It will be the memory of a life of unselfishness and a beautiful face, made more beautiful by the purity and loveliness of her soul."<sup>126</sup>

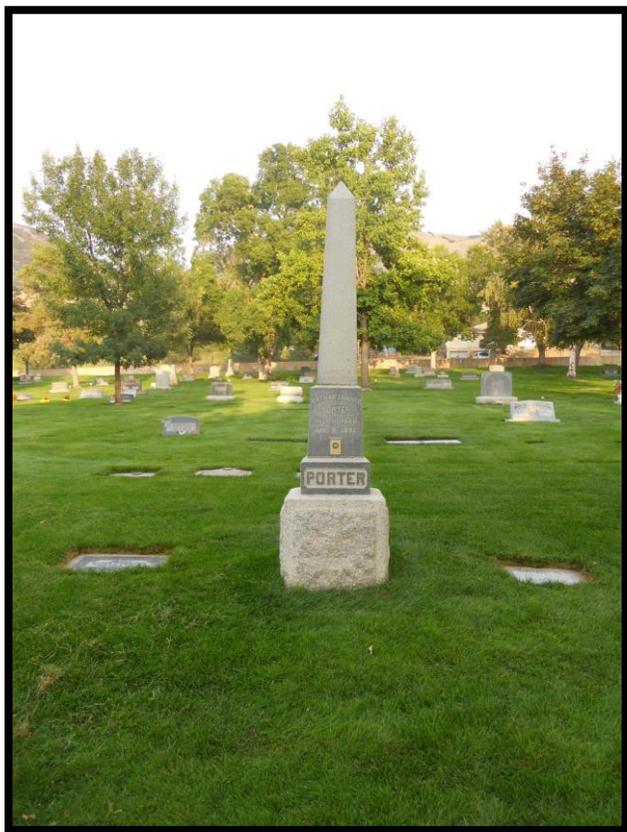
Rebecca served many years as a Sunday school teacher, finally resigning in 1903.<sup>127</sup> She was honored as one of the few remaining 1847 pioneers every July during Pioneer Day celebrations, particularly in 1919, when she and her sisters Mary,<sup>128</sup> Caroline<sup>129</sup> and Amelia<sup>130</sup> and brother John<sup>131</sup> were noted as the pioneer family with the most surviving members. "It is doubtful if there is another such living family in Utah," noted *The Davis County Clipper*.<sup>132</sup>



*The Cherry siblings in 1919: Amelia, Mary, John, Rebecca and Caroline.*

Rebecca was healthy enough to travel for many years, taking the train to visit Aaron and his family on their farm outside of Rexburg, Idaho from time to time.<sup>133</sup> She continued her visits even after Aaron's premature death in 1904, maintaining a loving relationship with her grandchildren and daughter-in-law Rebecca Margaret.<sup>134</sup> Rebecca was also a frequent visitor to her granddaughter Jeanette Hale's<sup>135</sup> home in Salt Lake City,<sup>136</sup> and when she became too frail to live on her own, it was Jeanette who cared for her. When Rebecca came down with an acute case of pneumonia in the winter of 1922, Jeanette called a doctor, who treated Rebecca at home. Granddaughter Leona<sup>137</sup> recalled the doctor lancing an infection on her grandmother's neck. Rebecca's screams from the painful procedure remained with Leona for the rest of her life. Although the doctor certified Rebecca's death on 2 December to bronchial pneumonia,<sup>138</sup> Jeanette "blamed the doctor's bungling."<sup>139</sup>

Rebecca left a righteous posterity of eleven grandchildren and thirty-three great-grandchildren when she died at the age of ninety-two. The family mourned their beloved matriarch at funereal services held in the Centerville chapel the following day, after which she was laid to rest next to Nathan and Eliza in the Centerville Cemetery.<sup>140</sup>



*Nathan, Rebecca and Eliza are buried side by side in the Centerville City Cemetery.*

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>112</sup> Mary Ellen Smoot, *The City In Between* (Bountiful: Carr Printing, 1975), page 156.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, page 154-156.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, page 154-157.

<sup>115</sup> Anson Call, *Utah Sketches* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Historian's Office, 1880), page 86, 128, 229, 267.

<sup>116</sup> Smoot, *The City In Between*, page 243. Travel by horse and buggy could be hazardous, as demonstrated one day while Nathan was driving to a local amusement park for a ward picnic. "All had a good time with the exception of Brother NT Porter, Senior, who fell from his carriage through running into a rut, while on his way to the park, resulting in a skinned face

---

and a bruised side; injuries were, however, not serious.” *The Davis County Clipper*, 7 September, 1892.

<sup>117</sup> Smoot, *The City In Between*, page 243.

<sup>118</sup> *The Deseret News*, 9 April, 1897.

<sup>119</sup> Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1* (self-published, 1957), page 245-246.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, page 145.

<sup>121</sup> John Ford Porter (1874-1951), #KWCC-R5H, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>122</sup> *The Davis County Clipper*, 25 November, 1910.

<sup>123</sup> Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 145-146.

<sup>124</sup> *The Davis County Clipper*, 30 December, 1910.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 19 May, 1911.

<sup>126</sup> Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 145-146.

<sup>127</sup> *The Davis County Clipper*, 23 January, 1903.

<sup>128</sup> Mary Margaret (Cherry) Brandon (1836-1925), #KWVH-6KW, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>129</sup> Caroline (Cherry) Harries (1845-1936), #KWJ6-FLV, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>130</sup> Amelia Mariah (Cherry) Smith (1838-1923), #KWJR-XTS, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>131</sup> John James Cherry (1834-1925), #KWNJ-GL6, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 31 January, 1919.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 20 September, 1907; 15 July, 1910; 1 August, 1913.

<sup>134</sup> Rebecca Margaret (Poole) Porter (1855-1935), #KWCT-DNG, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>135</sup> Jeanette Rebecca (Porter) Hales (1877-1851), #KWCX-P7W, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>136</sup> *The Davis County Clipper*, 19 November, 1909.

<sup>137</sup> Leona (Hales) Ashton (1902-1991), #KWCZ-3FJ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>138</sup> Rebecca Ann Cherry Porter death certificate, no. 636 (1922), Utah Department of Health, Salt Lake City.

<sup>139</sup> Letter from Barbara (Ashton) Fickinger (Washington, Utah) to Janice P. Dawson (Layton, Utah), 16 February, 1995. Held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

<sup>140</sup> Plot A-36-3-7.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Arrington, Leonard J. *Charles C. Rich: Mormon General and Western Frontiersman*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974.

Bell, Stella Jacques. *Life History and Writings of John Jacques, including a diary of the Martin Handcart Company*. Rexburg, Idaho: Ricks College Press, 1978.

“Biography of William Ford.” William Ford #KWZ7-FCG. [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

Bond, John. “Handcarts West in ’56.”

<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&pioneerId=20558&sourceId=5317>

Burton, Robert T. “To the Members of the Handcart Association, 1 October, 1907.” Handcart Veterans Association scrapbook, 1906-1914.

<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&companyId=148&sourceId=84869>

Call, Anson. *Utah Sketches*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Historian’s Office, 1880.

“Camp Journal, 15 December, 1856.” *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, page 16-37.

<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&companyId=148&sourceId=3147>

Carr, Annie Call. *East of Antelope Island*. Salt Lake City: Publisher’s Press, 1948.

Charles C. Rich Company. Winter Quarters, Nebraska, to Salt Lake City, Utah, 21 June-2 October, 1847.

<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/companyPioneers?lang=eng&companyId=250>

Cheney, Eliza Jane. “Autobiography,” Eliza Jane Cheney. #KWJC-7H3.

[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

*Church History in the Fullness of Times*. Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989.

*The Davis County Clipper*: 7 September, 1892; 23 January, 1903; 20 September, 1907; 19 November, 1909; 25 February, 1910; 25 November, 1910; 15 July, 1910; 30 December, 1910; 19 May, 1911; 21 July, 1911; 1 August, 1913; 31 January, 1919.

*The Deseret News*: 9 April, 1897.

Fickinger, Barbara (Ashton), letter. 16 February, 1995, from Washington, Utah, to Janice P. Dawson, Layton, Utah. Held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

Godfrey, Kenneth W. *Women's Voices: An Untold History of the Latter-day Saints 1830-1900*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1982.

Job Smith Company. Westport, Missouri, to Salt Lake city, Utah, 16 June-23 September, 1854.

<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/companyPioneers?lang=eng&companyId=271>

Lewis, Wayne J. *Mormon Land Ownership as a Factor in Evaluating the Extent of Mormon Settlements and Influence in Missouri, 1831-1841*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1918.

Madsen, Truman G. *Defender of the Faith: The B.H. Roberts Story*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1980.

McBride, Heber. "Autobiography of Heber Robert McBride." LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Parrish, Mary F. "Histories of John Ford, Sr., Rebecca Chandler and John Ford Jr." Typescript, 1938. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

Phelps, Mary Ann Rich. "Autobiography of Mary Ann Phelps Rich."

<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/trailExcerptMulti?lang=eng&companyId=250&sourceId=16596>

Porter, Jeffrey Lyn. "You Never Know Whom You May Save." Lyman Wight Porter #KWNV-42J. [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

Porter, Larry C. and Ronald E. Romig. "The Prairie Branch, Jackson County, Missouri: Emergence, Flourishing and Demise, 1831-1834." *Mormon Historical Studies*, Volume 8, No. 1 and 2, Spring/Fall 2007. [http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2-MHS\\_2007\\_Prairie-Branch-Jackson-County.pdf](http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2-MHS_2007_Prairie-Branch-Jackson-County.pdf)

Porter, Nathan Tanner. *Autobiography of Nathan Tanner Porter*. Porter Family Organization, 2000. <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/NTPorter.html>

Porter, Nathan Tanner. *The Village*. Self-published, 1947.

Porter, Nathan Tanner. "Nathan Tanner Porter-Rebecca Ann Cherry family group sheet," supplied 1979 by Cleo (Hales) Page. This sheet offers only a generic list of materials consulted.

"Rebecca Ann Cherry." Undated typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

Riverton Wyoming Stake, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Remember: The Willie and Martin Handcart Companies and Their Rescuers, Past and Present*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Publishers Press, 1997.

*The Salt Lake Herald*: 15 December, 1878.

Smith, David F. *My Native Village: A Brief History of Centerville, Utah*. Self-published, 1943.

Smoot, Mary Ellen. *The City In Between*. Bountiful, Utah: Carr Printing, 1975.

Stevenson, Joseph Grant, editor. *Porter Family History, Volume 1*. Self-published, 1957.

Utah. Salt Lake City. Department of Health. Death registrations. Eliza Ford Porter death certificate.

Utah. Salt Lake City. Department of Health. Death registrations. Rebecca Ann Cherry Porter certificate.

Walton, Amelia Porter. "Nathan Tanner Porter. Undated typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

*Windermere*. Liverpool to New Orleans, 22 February-23 April, 1854.

[http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/Search/showDetails/db:MM\\_MII/t:voyage/id:437/keywords:eliza+ford](http://mormonmigration.lib.byu.edu/Search/showDetails/db:MM_MII/t:voyage/id:437/keywords:eliza+ford)

# INDEX

---

This index lists the names of people related to Nathan Tanner Porter, Rebecca Ann (Cherry) Porter and Eliza (Ford) Porter. Women are listed under both their maiden names (in parentheses) and married names [in brackets].

## A

### ASHTON

Leona (Hales), 49.

## B

### BRANDON

Mary Margaret (Cherry), 48-49.

## C

### CHANDLER

Rebecca [Ford], 37, 39.

### CHIPMAN

Malinda (Porter), 7-8.

### CHERRY

Aaron Benjamin, 16, 23, 28.

Amelia Mariah [Smith], 48-49.

Caroline [Harries], 48-49.

John James, 48-49.

Margaret (Yelton), 16, 18, 45.

Mary Margaret [Brandon], 48-49.

Rebecca Ann [Porter], 16-18, 23-24, 27, 37, 39, 45-46, 48-50.

### CLARK

Nancy Areta (Porter) [Stevenson], 7.

### CURRIER

Chauncey, 41.

## F

### FORD

Eliza [Porter], 37-40, 45, 47-50.

John (1807), 37-39.

John (1843), 37.

Rebecca (Chandler), 37, 39.

Sarah "Sally," 38.

Thomas, 37-38.

William, 37-38.

## H

### **HALES**

Jeanette Rebecca (Porter), 49.

Leona [Ashton], 49.

### **HARRIES**

Caroline (Cherry), 48-49.

## P

### **POOLE**

Rebecca Margaret [Porter], 49.

### **PORTER**

Aaron Benjamin, 23, 27, 37, 48-49.

Amelia Ford [Walton], 39-40, 45, 47-48.

Chauncey Warriner, 8, 11, 14.

Effie May [Smith], 45.

Eliza (Ford), 37-40, 45, 47-50.

Eliza Ann, 39, 45.

Jeanette Rebecca [Hales], 49.

John Ford, 48.

John President, 7, 11, 14.

Justin, 12.

Lyman Wright, 35.

Malinda [Chipman], 7-8.

Nancy (Warriner), 7-8, 27.

Nancy Areta [Stevenson] [Clark], 7.

Nathan Tanner (1820), 6-14, 16-17, 19, 21, 23-26, 28-33, 35, 37-47, 49-50.

Nathan Tanner (1865), 40.

Rebecca Ann (Cherry), 16-18, 23-24, 27, 37, 39, 45-46, 48-50.

Rebecca Margaret (Poole), 49.

Sanford (1790), 5, 7, 11, 14, 24, 27, 40-41.

Sanford (1823), 7-8, 11..

Sarah "Sally" [Richardson], 12.

Sarah [Willard], 7-8.

Sarah Jane, 22-23, 26, 37, 40.

## R

### **RICHARDSON**

Sarah "Sally" (Porter), 12.

## S

### **SMITH**

Amelia Mariah (Cherry), 48-49.

Effie May (Porter), 45.

### **STEVENSON**

Edward, 26.

Nancy Areta (Porter) [Clark], 7.

## W

### **WALTON**

Amelia Ford (Porter), 39-40, 45, 47-48.

### **WARRINER**

Nancy [Porter], 7-8, 27.

### **WILLARD**

Sarah (Porter), 7-8.

## Y

### **YELTON**

Margaret [Cherry], 16, 18, 45.

**WILLARD**

Sarah (Porter), 6-7, 11.

**Y**

**YELTON**

Margaret [Cherry], 16-17, 22, 46.