

# Ephraim Mecham and Polly (Derby) Mecham



## A Family History

by Shelley Dawson Davies

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## Chapter 1

# Kindred Clans

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## The Mechams and the Derbys



*Along the Connecticut River near Hanover, New Hampshire.*

The Derby farm was nestled against the foothills of New Hampshire's Moose Mountain, a low, round ridge thickly covered with trees so tall a man could fence in an acre of land simply by felling four gigantic pines in just the right direction.<sup>1</sup> The small town of Hanover seemed like a good place to start a family; Dartmouth College not only anchored the village along the Connecticut River, but kept its economy going, and there was plenty of room to expand.

Even though both of John Derby's<sup>2</sup> parents had died a year after his marriage to Sarah Currier,<sup>3</sup> the young couple was surrounded by Sarah's family. Her brothers John<sup>4</sup> and Abner<sup>5</sup> lived on farms close enough to pitch in during harvest season, and her parents' homestead was just down the road. John worked hard raising crops in this gravelly soil with an eye to the future, but everything changed with Sarah's sudden death three months after the birth of her second child, Polly,<sup>6</sup> in 1813. It was a devastating blow softened only by John's marriage a year later to Anna Currier,<sup>7</sup> Sarah's younger sister, who mothered little Elvira<sup>8</sup> and Polly as if they were her own daughters.

Not long after John and Anna settled into their new life, there was some talk about new opportunities opening up with New York's construction of the Erie Canal. With plans for Pennsylvania to link Pittsburgh to the Erie by way of an extension canal, there was money to be made in the surrounding communities for those adventurous enough to make a fresh start. It would be risky giving up their established farm in Hanover, but John and Anna decided to join the extended Currier family in relocating to the lush agricultural lands of Erie County, Pennsylvania, in 1818.<sup>9</sup>

Springfield was little more than wilderness when the Derbys and the Curriers settled onto their farms, cementing their family bonds tighter than ever. Elvira and Polly grew up secure in knowing they could depend not only on their parents, but on their aunts, uncles and Grandfather<sup>10</sup> and Grandmother Currier<sup>11</sup> as well. The girls enjoyed playing with their many cousins, becoming particularly close to Irene<sup>12</sup> and Mary Currier,<sup>13</sup> daughters of Uncle John and his wife Sarah,<sup>14</sup> but they spent most of their time learning how to care for a household by helping their stepmother at home. Both Elvira and Polly were skilled homemakers by the time they were teenagers, ready to begin families of their own.



*Polly's father John Derby and stepmother and aunt Anna Currier Derby.*



*The Neshannock River near Mercer, Pennsylvania.*

## Family Ties

Among the many New England families who relocated to northwestern Pennsylvania in the early 1800s were the Mechams from Canaan, New Hampshire, a neighboring town east of Hanover. Brothers Elam,<sup>15</sup> Joshua<sup>16</sup> and Joseph Mecham<sup>17</sup> followed the Mecham sisters and their husbands, who had taken up land in Conneaut, Erie County, around 1810.<sup>18</sup> All of the Mechams encouraged their married children to settle in neighboring towns across Erie and Mercer counties, from Springfield, at Lake Erie's shore, to Delaware and Mercer, fifty miles south along the canal route, and by the mid-1820s, the extended Mecham clan had made a sizeable contribution to northwestern Pennsylvania's population.

Joshua Mecham, his wife Permelia<sup>19</sup> and their younger, unmarried children were farming near Mercer in 1827, only a dozen miles from Delaware, where the Derbys had purchased land the previous year. It didn't take long for the Mecham sons to notice the Derby and Currier daughters. Moses Mecham<sup>20</sup> married Elvira in November, 1827, followed by the marriage of Ephraim Mecham<sup>21</sup> and Polly in November, 1828. Elvira and Polly's cousins Irene and Mary Currier married brothers Edward<sup>22</sup> and Caleb Mecham<sup>23</sup> around the same time.

Ephraim and his brothers prospered with the booming business created by the Erie Canal's completion in 1825. Both shipping costs and delivery time dropped dramatically, increasing ease of trade between rural supply points and larger towns. New markets for agricultural produce were also opening up farther west and the reports of farming in Indiana, Illinois, Iowa and Missouri were good enough to encourage Moses to take a chance in the mid-west. He moved his family to Liberty, Iowa, in 1836, the first Mecham brother to strike out on his own.<sup>24</sup>



*An early view of Kirtland, Ohio.*

## Believers

Sixty miles west of Erie County in Kirtland, Ohio, a new religious movement was growing during the 1830s. The Mechams had heard about the “Mormons,” as they were called, “but nothing good,” Moses later recalled.<sup>25</sup> Newspapers all over the States were warning their readers about the group of “fanatical and deluded beings”<sup>26</sup> who believed God had called the modern day prophet Joseph Smith to lead His restored church. Smith had recently organized a church with its headquarters in Kirtland, sending missionaries throughout the countryside with a book he claimed was translated from golden plates. Some of those missionaries travelled through Erie County along the Ridge Road, which passed straight through McKean,

Pennsylvania, where Ephraim's cousin Elam Mecham, Junior<sup>27</sup> lived. Here, and in towns and villages all through Erie County, the Mormon elders preached the gospel from house to house, meeting with enough success over the next few years that a spot along the east branch of Conneaut Creek became known as "Mormon Run" after the many people baptized there.<sup>28</sup> Elam was one of those convinced by *The Book of Mormon*, and he immediately set about spreading the good news to his family. Elam succeeded in converting his three sisters and half-brother Samuel before visiting his uncles, Joshua and Joseph Mecham in Delaware Township, where he baptized many members of their households,<sup>29</sup> among them Ephraim's brothers Joshua Junior,<sup>30</sup> Edward, Lewis<sup>31</sup> and their wives.

Ephraim had always been a religious man, who as a boy "was very exemplary," according to Polly. "He did not use bad language or tobacco or strong drink, he kept good company and before he was fifteen years of age he joined the Reformed Methodists."<sup>32</sup> Despite the negative reports he had read about the Mormons, Ephraim's spirit was in tune with the Lord, and he recognized the truth when he heard it. He was baptized in August, 1837, convincing Polly to follow him into the church that November.<sup>33</sup>



*An early view of Conneaut Creek Harbor.*

## A Vision of Polly's Mother

*Many years later, Sarah Currier Derby appeared to one of her granddaughters in a dream. Sarah Mecham Burdick, daughter of Moses and Elvira Mecham, was "in a very depressed spirit as she was going to have a baby, the tenth child I believe. Her husband, who was a shoemaker, was a drinker and she felt that she just couldn't go through with the ordeal. After praying one night she had a dream and a woman came to her by the bed. Sarah said, 'Why Donna, are you dead?' The woman was in the very likeness of Donna, Sarah's younger sister. She answered, 'No I am your grandmother Derby.' Her grandmother filled her with courage and she didn't worry any more about her condition. Sometime later when a group of Sarah's sisters were discussing how sorry they were that they didn't have a picture of their Grandmother Derby, Sarah spoke up and stated she looked just like Donna and she told them of the dream. She was tall, dark complexioned and very good looking." Sarah Currier Derby was buried in the Hanover, New Hampshire burial grounds, near the old meeting house. Leon Mecham, Family Book of Remembrance and Genealogy with Allied Lines (Salt Lake City, Utah: self-published, 1952), page 710.*



*Sarah Currier Derby's grave in Hanover, New Hampshire.*

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> John Derby (1789-1874), #LZFB-2SV, [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)
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- <sup>7</sup> Anna (Currier) Derby (1785-1868), #LZFX-N37, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
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- <sup>9</sup> Wasatch County Chapter Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, *How Beautiful Upon the Mountains* (1963), <http://www.rootcellar.us/mechpoll.htm>
- <sup>10</sup> Samuel Currier (1756-1842), #LZV3-Z51, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). See notes correcting long held misinformation on this line in “Life Sketch” for Samuel Currier (1756-1842), #LZV3-Z51, [www.familytree.org](http://www.familytree.org)
- <sup>11</sup> Anna (Collins) Currier (1790-1879), #LHRD-78B, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>12</sup> Irene (Currier) Mecham (1807-1864), #K246-868, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
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- <sup>14</sup> Sarah (Silver) Currier (1782-1841), #LHDS-JW8, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>15</sup> Elam Mecham (1776-1855), #KNZJ-2C6, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>16</sup> Joshua Mecham (1773-1846), #L6SW-4WR, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>17</sup> Joseph Mecham (1780-1845), LCZH-17M, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>18</sup> Judah and Temperance (Mecham) Wells and Noah and Zuba (Mecham) Kidder. See: Steve Mecham, “Elam Mecham, Jr.” #KVVH-4CG, and “Miss Meacham Kidder, 1772-1848” #LCFL-2NL, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>19</sup> Permelia (Chapman) Mecham (1777-1866), #LZ6Q-BXB, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>20</sup> Leonidas Moses Worthen Mecham (1804-1879), #LZ24-KDB, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>21</sup> Ephraim Mecham (1808-1891), #KWJ6-17T, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>22</sup> Edward Mecham (1802-1895), #LHVW-YT8, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>23</sup> Caleb Mecham (1810-1852), #LZ6Q-BJD, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>24</sup> Moses can be placed by the birth is his daughter Americus (Mecham) Orser, who was born in Liberty, Buchanan, Iowa, 11 October, 1837.
- <sup>25</sup> Diane Rawlins Mayo, “History of Leonidas Moses Worthen Mecham,” 1987.  
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<https://sites.google.com/site/thefamilythicket/Home/edward-furlsbury-carter/edward-mecham-carter/roxena-meacham>
- <sup>26</sup> *The Republican Advocate*, 16 July, 1831,  
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- <sup>27</sup> Elam Mecham (1799-1874), #KVVH-4CG, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>28</sup> Cheryl Harmon Bean and Pamela Call Johnson, “Rediscovering History: Mormons in Erie County, Pennsylvania, 1832-1833,” self-published, 1995, page 9.  
[file:///C:/Users/Shelley\\_2/Downloads/Rediscovering%20History\\_%20%20Mormon.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Shelley_2/Downloads/Rediscovering%20History_%20%20Mormon.pdf)
- <sup>29</sup> Mecham, “Elam Mecham, Jr.,” 3 September, 2014, Elam Mecham, #KVVH-4CG,  
[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>30</sup> Joshua Mecham (1802-1840), #LZ67-7G1, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>31</sup> Lewis Mecham (1814-1895), #LZXP-31R, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

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<sup>32</sup> Karen Bray Keeley and Sandra S. Bray, “History of Ephraim Meham.”

<http://www.rootcellar.us/mecheph.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> Wallsburg ward records 1876-1888, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, FHL #164,612.

## Chapter 2

# The Gathering Begins

### Ephraim and Polly

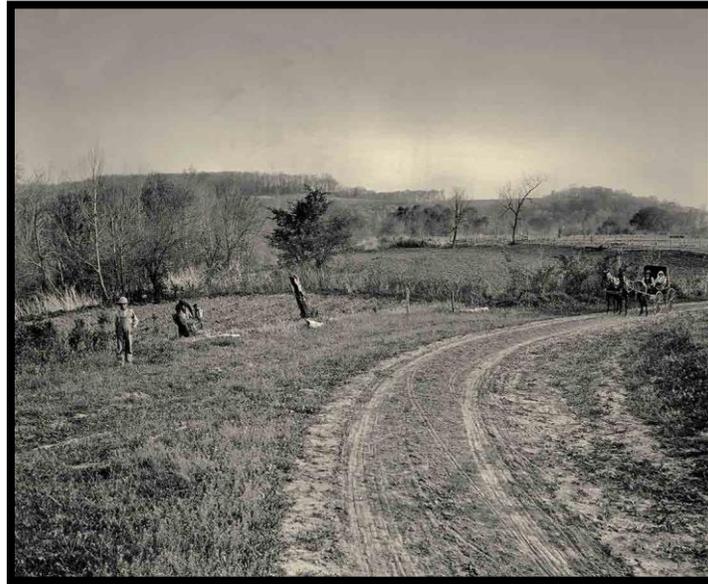


*The Kirtland temple as seen from its burial grounds.*

**B**ranches of the Church of Jesus Christ were established in towns all over northwestern Pennsylvania as hundreds of people gained testimonies of the restored gospel. Missionaries reported “large and attentive congregations” where “many were melted to tears” by the Spirit,<sup>34</sup> but not everyone who heard their message was convinced. Joshua’s brothers Samuel and Caleb, as well as his sisters Permelia and Elizabeth and their husbands, refused to join the church, creating a division in the once cohesive family. Polly’s father was so horrified by his daughter’s decision to align herself with the “Mormonites” he threatened to disown her, but she was committed to her new faith.<sup>35</sup> Polly and Ephraim proceeded, along with the Mecham brothers’ families, to join the main body of the church then gathering in Missouri.

The Mechams passed through Kirtland, Ohio, just in time to sign on with the fourth division of Kirtland Camp, a wagon train of Saints bound for the new church headquarters in Far West, Missouri. Led by Joseph Young, the fourth division was already significantly behind the other three by the time they reached Springfield, Illinois, where they were compelled to remain for some time due to illness in the

group. As chance would have it, Springfield was only several hundred miles south of Liberty, Iowa, and the forced stopover gave the Mechams a chance to visit Moses and Elvira. The yearning to be once again united with his parents and brothers was too great, and Moses agreed to move his family west with Kirtland Camp.



*Site of the Haun's Mill Massacre. Photo by George Anderson, 1907.*

## Haun's Mill

There had always been anti-Mormon sentiments in Missouri, and despite initial promises of peace, tensions spiked at the same time Kirtland Camp was making their way west. Scattered vigilante attacks and growing disorder caused Governor Lilburn Boggs to issue his infamous "extermination order," stating "the Mormons must be treated as enemies and *must be exterminated* or driven from the state." A state militia officer was appointed to carry out the order on 27 October, 1838, the day before Joseph Young's fourth division arrived at a small settlement along Shoal Creek known as Haun's Mill.<sup>36</sup>

The Mechams and their exhausted fellow travelers planned to spend several days resting at Haun's Mill before pressing on toward Far West. Ephraim and Polly's children were playing with their cousins and other youngsters in the late afternoon of 30 October, while their

parents tended to chores. “The weather was very pleasant, the sun shone clear, all was tranquil, and no one expressed any apprehension of the awful crisis that was near us—even at our doors,” Joseph Young later recalled.<sup>37</sup> Suddenly, several hundred armed men with blackened faces rode into the settlement with their guns drawn. Most of the women and children fled into the woods while the mob was drawn to the blacksmith shop where a number of men and boys had taken refuge. The building turned out to be a death trap where seventeen men and a ten year-old boy were shot without mercy. After killing seventeen people and wounding thirteen, the mob made off with food, clothing, horses, livestock, wagons and anything else of value, leaving the survivors destitute.

Word of the massacre spread through the settlement. Fearing another attack, survivors took shelter in the forest. Edward Mecham’s eight-year old daughter Roxena<sup>38</sup> recalled sitting with her father “in the rain all night in a wheat field when he was guarding our house. Mother was too sick to leave the house.”<sup>39</sup> The dead were buried the following morning in a dry well under the direction of Joseph Young.

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



*The Zarahemla settlement was near Montrose, Iowa,  
Across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo.*

## Iowa Respite

The Mechams were among the eight thousand displaced Saints who made their way to Quincy, Illinois, in the bitter weather of November, 1838. Fortunately, the charitable citizens of Quincy offered food and shelter for the refugees until other arrangements could be made. By December, Edward was able to rent a house in Columbus, eighteen miles east of Quincy; the rest of the Mechams found similar arrangements nearby, taking care not to let anyone know they were Mormons, just in case.<sup>40</sup>

Over the winter, Elam Jr., who happened to be travelling through that part of Illinois on church business, stopped by Moses and Elvira's home in a continuing effort to convert him to the gospel. "My cousin Elam Mecham was going to hold a Mormon meeting and asked me to come, but I would not, as I would be ashamed to let people know he was a relative of mine," said Moses. "He left a *Book of Mormon* with me and asked me to read it. I told him if I got time I would. Soon after I was too sick to . . . work, so I thought I would see what was in the book, but before I started I kneeled down and prayed that I might know if there was any good in it. I read all day; at bed time my wife went to bed, and I read on until 1 a.m."<sup>41</sup>

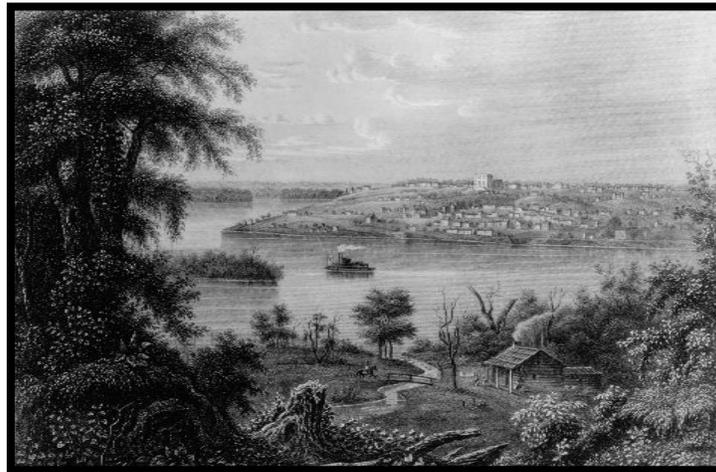
When Moses woke up the next morning he was not only burning with a testimony of *The Book of Mormon*, but was also speaking in tongues. Elvira, frightened and confused, sent for Ephraim and Polly, who lived on the neighboring farm. "They were very pleased, and said I was speaking in tongues," said Moses. "I was convinced of the truth of Mormonism. I thought I would never speak in my own tongue until I was baptized. I applied to Brother Snider for baptism, but he refused on account of so much excitement caused by the mob, but about the tenth of March 1839, my wife and I were baptized. . . I was perfectly convinced of the cause of this remarkable occurrence."<sup>42</sup>

A month after Moses' conversion, Joseph Smith and other imprisoned church leaders were allowed to escape from Missouri, arriving in Quincy that April, where the Prophet was successful in purchasing large parcels of land on both sides of the Mississippi River. The prophet moved his own family to a small town he renamed Nauvoo, located along a bend in the river. While thousands of Saints flocked to the new church center of Nauvoo, the Mecham clan decided to settle on Iowa's fertile farmland in village of Nashville. The Mecham Settlement, as the area became known, eventually grew to include over one hundred individuals,<sup>43</sup> most of them children and

grandchildren of Joshua and Permelia, who also made their home there.<sup>44</sup> “It was a fine place with plenty of deer and wild game,” said Roxena. “Father would go out every few days and shoot wild turkeys. Deer were as numerous as cattle. They came in herds around our place to eat hazel brush and other browse.”<sup>45</sup>

## Nauvoo the Beautiful

Polly and Elvira were content living so closely together on their Iowa farms. They often helped each other with housework and their children played together in the shared yard. By this time, Polly was mother to eight-year old Permelia,<sup>46</sup> five-year old Lewis<sup>47</sup> and three-year old Elvira.<sup>48</sup> Two more children were added to the family in Iowa: little Emma<sup>49</sup> arrived in May, 1840, followed by Hyrum<sup>50</sup> in August, 1842. The Mechams often gazed across the Mississippi River toward Nauvoo, noting how quickly the city was growing with the temple slowly rising above it on a hill. When temporary wooded baptismal font was installed in the temple’s basement Ephraim and Polly were among the many Saints who performed baptisms for relatives who had passed away. Ephraim was baptized for several of Polly’s male relatives, and Polly was proxy for her grandmother Jemima Derby, among others.<sup>51</sup>



*The city of Nauvoo rising above the Mississippi River in 1845.*

Nauvoo was quickly becoming one of the most important cities in Illinois, second only to Chicago. Not only was there an air of excitement in the city with so many new converts arriving almost every day, but it common to see church leaders and Joseph Smith himself as they went about their business in town. Joseph had encouraged many of the Iowa Saints to consider trading their farms for city life, and gradually, one by one, the Mecham brothers moved to the Illinois side of the river. Ephraim settled his family in Nauvoo in time for Polly's confinement in the early winter of 1844, and by the middle of February Polly presented him with a daughter they named Sarah Ann.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, the Mechams also lost one of their children in Nauvoo when eight-year old Elvira died the following autumn.

Both Ephraim and Polly were anxious to contribute to Nauvoo society and the building of Zion. Polly was accepted as a member of the Female Relief Society, an organization headed by the Prophet's wife Emma, with the goal of aiding the poor, donating to the temple's construction and general moral reform among the population.<sup>53</sup> Ephraim joined the Nauvoo Legion, serving as a corporal in the defense of the city,<sup>54</sup> and joined the other Mecham men as occasional bodyguards for Joseph Smith.<sup>55</sup>

Patrolling and keeping order in Nauvoo became an increasingly important task as the city's population exploded to almost twelve thousand by 1844, and protecting the Prophet from dangers both inside and outside the church was critical. A group of dissenters seeking Joseph's removal led a conspiracy against him, claiming he was a blasphemous, fallen prophet who practiced "spiritual wifery" and grasped for political power. On 7 June, 1844, the dissenters published their scathing views in *The Nauvoo Expositor*, a newspaper so negative the city council determined it should be destroyed. It was this action which began a series of events leading to the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum several weeks later. Ordered to stand trial on a charge of causing a civil disturbance, Joseph, Hyrum and several other church leaders were imprisoned in the county jail at Carthage, twenty miles from Nauvoo. In the late afternoon of 27 June, an armed mob stormed the jail, killing Joseph and Hyrum.

Persecutions from the church's enemies increased over the next few years as the population of Nauvoo continued to grow. As the new prophet, Brigham Young made plans to resettle the Saints where they would be safe from their enemies, all while making every effort to finish the temple before it was time to leave. Ephraim and Polly were among the many couples endowed in the Nauvoo temple<sup>56</sup> as it neared completion, an ordinance which would give them spiritual strength for the trials yet to come.



*The recently completed Nauvoo temple.*

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>34</sup> Cheryl Harmon Bean and Pamela Call Johnson, “Rediscovering History: Mormons in Erie County, Pennsylvania, 1832-1833,” self-published, 1995, page 1.

[file:///C:/Users/Shelley\\_2/Downloads/Rediscovering%20History %20%20Mormon.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Shelley_2/Downloads/Rediscovering%20History%20%20Mormon.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Leon Mecham, *Family Book of Remembrance and Genealogy with Allied Lines* (Salt Lake City, Utah: self-published, 1952), page 525. Also see: Mavis Greer Clayton, “History of Ephraim Mecham,” 1964, typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

<sup>36</sup> Living at Haun’s Mill were members of the Peter Huntsman family, connected to our line through Alexander Dawson, #KWZG-7KD, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>37</sup> Beth Shumway Moore, *Bones in the Well: The Haun’s Mills Massacre, 1838* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), page 51.

<sup>38</sup> Roxena (Mecham) Carter (1830-1919), #KN6V-8WM, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>39</sup> Carter, “History of Roxena Mecham.” Moses and his family were also present. See: “History of Leonidas Clinton Mecham,” Leonidas Americas Likurkus DeWitt Clinton Mecham, #KWJ8-XYP, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> “History of Leonidas Clinton Mecham,” Leonidas Americas Likurkus DeWitt Clinton Mecham, #KWJ8-XYP, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>42</sup> Mayo, “History of Leonidas Moses Worthen Mecham,” 1987.

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- <sup>43</sup> The Mecham settlement reported one hundred nine members at the Zarahemla stake conference held 8 August, 1841. Lyman D. Platte, “Early Branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1830-1850,” page 28. [http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NJ3\\_Platt.pdf](http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NJ3_Platt.pdf)
- <sup>44</sup> Joshua Jr., too ill to continue to Missouri with Kirtland camp, remained behind in Springfield, Illinois, where he died in 1840. His wife and children later made their way to the Mecham Settlement. “History of Elizabeth Lucina Mecham,” Elizabeth Lucina Mecham, #K2QX-845, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>45</sup> Carter, “History of Roxena Mecham.”
- <sup>46</sup> Permelia (Mecham) Bigelow (1832-1911), #KWNV-6FQ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>47</sup> Lewis Mecham (1835-1907), #KWNK-QNY, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>48</sup> Elvira Mecham (1837-1845), #KWVH-21K, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>49</sup> Emma Maria (Mecham) Brownhill (1840-1923), #KWJ8-8JR, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>50</sup> Hyrum Moroni Mecham (1842-1917), #KW6D-C37, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>51</sup> Susan Easton Black and Harvey Bischoff Black, *Annotated Record of Baptisms for the Dead 1840-1845* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), pages 2431-32, 2437-38.
- <sup>52</sup> Sarah Ann Mecham (1844-1847).
- <sup>53</sup> *Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book*, 14 July, 1842, page 63, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book#!paperSummary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book&p=63>
- <sup>54</sup> Ephraim Mecham, file #11909, Nauvoo Land Records, Nauvoo, Illinois.
- <sup>55</sup> Mecham, *Family Book of Remembrance and Genealogy with Allied Lines*, page 710.
- <sup>56</sup> 6 January, 1846.

## Chapter 3

# Iowa

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## Driven Westward



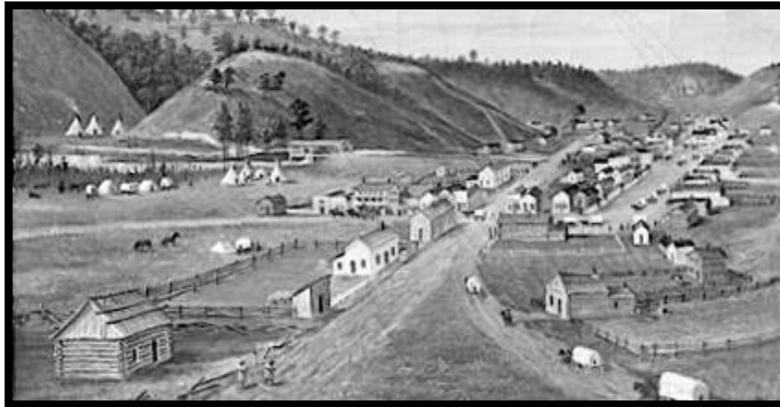
*Bonaparte, Iowa, where the Mechams sought shelter after evacuating Nauvoo.*

The evacuation of Nauvoo began in February, 1846, as Brigham Young lead the first group of refugees across the Mississippi to temporary church headquarters at the Missouri River where members could regroup and prepare for the final journey to Utah. Many wagon companies followed over the spring and summer, until by September, only those too poor or too ill to travel were left in the city, the Mechams among them.

The Mecham brothers and their families joined together as they abandoned their homes and farms, travelling across Iowa to the town of Bonaparte, where they hoped to find work and shelter for the winter. None of them had enough food to last very long. “The day we left Nauvoo, we had no flour for weeks,” recalled Moses’ daughter Lucina Mecham.<sup>57</sup> “We soon ran out of food and none of us could get work. One day, a man called to us and asked if we wanted some turnips. We had them that night seasoned with pepper, salt, and milk. The next morning we had the same for breakfast. While there a lady brought a pig’s ham and tried to sell it to my uncle, and my aunt said she didn’t have the money to buy it. She felt like something was wrong and would not have taken it if she would have given it to her. She found out later the hog had died with ‘colliery’ and the woman said it would be good to kill the Mormon’s with.”<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, the Mechams found illness and death despite their best efforts. Grandfather Joshua died within weeks of their arrival in Bonaparte, followed by Lewis and Lydia's<sup>59</sup> eleven-month old daughter and Ephraim and Polly's two-month old son Ephraim Junior,<sup>60</sup> who was born along the trail side only weeks after the families were forced out of Nauvoo. Somehow the Mechams made it to the way station of Garden Grove, half the distance across Iowa, where they wintered until the spring of 1847,<sup>61</sup> and where Ephraim and Polly buried three-year old Sarah Ann.

Ephraim and Polly moved on as soon as they were able, finding a home in one of the many cluster settlements outside of Kaneshville, Iowa, in 1848.<sup>62</sup> Although they knew their stay in Harris Grove would be temporary, the Mechams couldn't help be excited by the fertile soil, plentiful streams and lush groves of oak, walnut, hickory and elm trees at their disposal, and Ephraim made his family comfortable in time for Polly to give birth to Mary Henrietta<sup>63</sup> in their new log cabin that summer. Sixteen-year old Permelia supervised the household while her mother recovered, assigning chores such as berry gathering from the woods to eight-year old Emma and six-year old Hyrum, while Lewis, at thirteen was an invaluable help in his father's fields. Moses had settled his own family only a few miles away, and when Elvira cut her hand so badly she needed special care, it was Polly who answered the call, moving her sister into her own home until she was well.<sup>64</sup>



*Kaneshville, Iowa, later became known as Council Bluffs.*



*One of the many river crossings along the Mormon Trail to Utah.*

## The Trek

Ephraim and Polly were finally ready to make the trek westward to the Rocky Mountains in 1852. They signed up with the Allen Weeks Company, which left Kaneshville 13 July, the season's last company.<sup>65</sup> Even with Permelia's expert help, Polly had her hands full crossing the plains with three-month old Polly Celestina.<sup>66</sup> Although the baby and four-year old Mary were made comfortable in the rear of the wagon, Polly knew the constant jostling and dusty air was unhealthy for her youngest children. They had to be closely tended to even while Polly cooked and cleaned up after three meals a day along the road, as the risk of accident was high. There was an outbreak of cholera early on in the journey, resulting in fifteen deaths, but much to Polly's relief, her family was unaffected.

Most days on the trail passed hour after tedious hour as the company walked across the desolate landscape, but everyone was fascinated by the great herds of buffalo thundering across the plains, and found the dried buffalo meat obtained by trade with the Indians nourishing and tasty. Some of the men organized a buffalo hunt of their own in early September, furnishing the train with fresh meat they deeply appreciated.

By early October temperatures began to fall. The company encountered a fierce snowstorm at the last crossing of the Sweetwater River, where snow drifted three feet around the wagons. There was some concern about what conditions awaited the pioneers on these last miles to Salt Lake City, but the weather warmed and by the Weeks Company entered the valley two weeks later without further incident.



*Salt Lake City in the early 1850s was still little more than a town of log cabins.*

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>57</sup> Lucina (Mecham) Boren (1841-1925), #KWNV-6N8, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>58</sup> Kate B. Carter, compiler, "Journal of Lucina Mecham Boren," *Treasures of Pioneer History*, Vol. 6 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1952-1957), page 301-348.
- <sup>59</sup> Lydia Knight (Wells) Mecham 1817-1890, #KWJY-F7B, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>60</sup> Ephraim Don Carlos Mecham (1846-1846), #KWVH-218, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>61</sup> Early Latter-day Saints: Remembering the People and Places, [www.earlylds.com](http://www.earlylds.com)
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> Mary Henrietta (Mecham) Batty (1848-1899), #KWJZ-5ZH, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>64</sup> Carter, "Journal of Lucina Mecham Boren," *Treasures of Pioneer History*, Vol. 6, page 301-348.
- <sup>65</sup> Allen Weeks Company, Kaneshville, Iowa, to Salt Lake City, Utah, 13 July-12 October, 1852, <http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/companyPioneers?lang=eng&companyId=15>
- <sup>66</sup> Polly Celestina (Mecham) Haws (1852-1890), #KWVH-215, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

## Chapter 4

# Journey's End

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## Safe in the Mountains



*Ephraim and Polly Mecham pose in their later years.*

**B**y 1853, Ephraim, Lewis and Moses were once again living near each other, having set their families up on forty-acre farms south of Salt Lake City in the village of Lehi. Named after the *Book of Mormon* patriarch who found the Promised Land, Lehi was a young, prosperous community with its own school and meeting house. Wheat and sugar beets grew well in the fertile soil, and when apple and peach trees were planted in the spring of 1855, the early settlers agreed they had found a promised land of their own. Even after punishing winters and insect damage, farming in Lehi seemed like a sure thing. Ephraim's fortunes grew with supplemental income from his barrel shop,<sup>67</sup> and by 1860, he and Polly were living comfortably on their farm. Polly gave birth to her last two children in Lehi: John<sup>68</sup> in June, 1854, and Adelia<sup>69</sup> in December, 1856.

A combination of Indian unrest and rapid growth in the early 1860s persuaded Ephraim and his brothers to search for new opportunities east of the Wasatch Mountains in beautiful Round Valley.<sup>70</sup> The Mechams joined a handful of other families in what became the Wallsburg settlement in 1862, initially living in one room, dirt-roofed cabins protected by a rough fort at the head of Spring Creek. Farming was done on a cooperative basis where all families worked together for the survival of the group. Sunday school and social gatherings were held in the log meeting house at the fort's center.<sup>71</sup>



*Left to right, standing: Permelia (Mecham) Bigelow, Miles Batty holding Zina Batty. Seated: Miles Batty holding Vilate Batty, Polly (Derby) Mecham, Permelia Mecham, Ephraim Mecham, Mary Henrietta Mecham.*



*Ephraim and Polly's daughters. Standing: Mary Henrietta, Adelia Vilate. Seated: Permelia, Emma Maria.*

## Pioneer Doctoring

Nestled as it was in the high mountains, Wallsburg was quite isolated from civilization, forcing the Mechams and their neighbors to rely on the Lord and each other for all things. During one of Round Valley's winters, the snowfall was so heavy the settlers were snowed in until spring. It wasn't long until their supply of flour gave out, and by the first thaw, anxious residents made their way down the canyon to buy flour.<sup>72</sup>

With no medical care available anywhere near Wallsburg, townsfolk looked to Polly for frontier doctoring and midwifing. She spent summer afternoons gathering any number of plants and herbs not already growing in her garden, drying them from the rafters for use in caring for the sick. When any woman within travelling distance went into labor, it was Polly who remained at the mother's bedside until the child was delivered. She often stayed on a few days, caring for the entire family until the new mother was back on her feet.<sup>73</sup>

Over the years Polly served as midwife to over five hundred women, sometimes for little or no pay, but when it came to curing herself of a progressive, unknown illness, she was at a loss. Polly gradually became so weak she was only able to move her big toe. Her family took care of her as well as they could, but almost no one expected Polly to survive in such condition. Granddaughter Celestia B. Rasmussen was told how one day, when Polly was at her worst, “a man came to her bedside and taking the wasted hand said, ‘Madam, you are a very sick woman, but you are not going to die. If you could see your liver it would scare you. It has ulcers on it as big as my thumb. Have watercress brought and eat as much of it as you can every day and you will get well.’ Watercress was brought from the spring close by and the simple directions followed. Polly soon became well again.”<sup>74</sup>

Many in the family believed Polly had been attended to by a heavenly messenger sent by the Lord to extend her useful life.<sup>75</sup> After all, Polly was known for her spirituality and dreams, such as the one about her niece, Emily Haws,<sup>76</sup> who was living twenty miles away in Provo when Polly saw her in a dream. “Why, Emily, are you dead?” asked Polly. Emily replied, “Yes they wrapped me in a cold, wet sheet and it killed me.” It wasn’t until later that Polly learned Emily hemorrhaged while giving birth to a child, who also died. Emily’s midwife had tried to stop the bleeding by wrapping her with sheets dipped in cold water.<sup>77</sup>



*The Wallsburg chapel, built in the late 1870's.*

## Polly's Poem

Polly was talented as well as spiritual. Her handwork and sewing was remarkably beautiful, and she enjoyed writing poetry, such as this poem written for her sixtieth wedding anniversary in 1878.

*We heard the gospel in our youth  
A still small voice said "It is truth."  
We left our homes and friends in tears,  
And now it's over fifty years.*

*And now, dear children, I say to you,  
The path of truth and right pursue,  
You have been to me a constant care,  
For I have offered my daily prayer.*

*I want you to be plants of honor and renown,  
And come up to receive your crown;  
That I may present you in the courts above  
To my friends who are gone, which I so dearly love.*

*I have tried to polish my jewels bright;  
Of your virtue and honor, I have never lost sight.  
Prepare to meet me on the other shore,  
Where pain and sorrow are known no more.*

*Where I have done wrong, pray forgive,  
I do not know I have another day to live.  
I have lived to see full seventy-six years;  
My path has been strewn with sighs and tears.*

*Now I hope you will remember,  
The twenty-second day of November  
When you will come home to celebrate,  
The sixtieth year of our wedded state;*

*Full sixty years have passed away,  
Since our happy wedding day.  
We traveled on together,  
Through both fair and stormy weather,*

*And now we are nearly down the hill  
We love and cherish each other still.  
We are holding fast to the iron rod,  
And love to obey the commands of God.*

William James Mortimer, compiler, *How Beautiful Upon the Mountains: A Centennial History of Wasatch County* (Wasatch County Chapter of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers: Deseret News Press, 1963), p. 962.

## Final Days

Ephraim and Polly lived out the rest of their lives on their quiet Wallsburg farm, receiving visits from their many children and grandchildren. Ephraim died at the age of eighty-three on 6 July, 1891. The town cancelled its Fourth of July party out of respect for Ephraim. “We did not have a celebration on our nation’s birthday owing to the death of Ephraim Mecham, and old and highly esteemed resident of this place,” noted the *Wasatch Wave*.<sup>78</sup> Polly was at her husband’s side to the end. “Always firm in the principles of the gospel, he has left a name that is worth more than gold or silver,” she wrote. “He had no fear of death. He said he knew just what his condition would be when he got beyond the veil. He was a kind husband, a loving father, and a good honest Latter-day Saint.”<sup>79</sup>

Polly lived on for another seven years, many of them spent suffering as an invalid. “Death was a great relief,” according to the *Wasatch Wave*, which recorded her passing at the age of eighty-four on 1 December, 1898.<sup>80</sup> Polly was buried next to Ephraim in the Wallsburg Cemetery.<sup>81</sup>



*Ephraim and Polly’s head stone bears the inscription,  
“In life we loved, in death we were not separated.”*

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>67</sup> Ephraim Mecham household, 1860 U. S. census, Utah County, Utah, population schedule, town of Lehi, Page 843, Roll M653-1314, image 312, FHL 805314, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)
- <sup>68</sup> John Albert Mecham (1854-1934), #KWCV-GX8, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>69</sup> Adelia Vilate (Mecham) Glenn (1856-1941), #K246-C9R, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>70</sup> William James Mortimer, compiler, *How Beautiful Upon the Mountains: A Centennial History of Wasatch County* (Wasatch County Chapter of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers: Deseret News Press, 1963), page 961.
- <sup>71</sup> Mavis Greer Clayton, "History of Ephraim Mecham," 1964, typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>72</sup> Mortimer, *How Beautiful Upon the Mountains: A Centennial History of Wasatch County*, page 961.
- <sup>73</sup> Kate B. Carter, editor, *Our Pioneer Heritage, Volume 2* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1958), page 111.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>75</sup> "The spring in Wallsburg, which still has lots of watercress growing in it today, is near the old Wallsburg school and the monument which commemorates the Wallsburg fort and the founding of the settlement." *Ibid.*
- <sup>76</sup> Emily (Mecham) Haws (1834-1861), #KWVS-2SD, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org), daughter of Moses and Elvira Mecham.
- <sup>77</sup> Robert Bernard Mecham, *Mecham Family History* (Provo, Utah: self-published, 1985), page 526.
- <sup>78</sup> *The Wasatch Wave*, 21 July, 1891.
- <sup>79</sup> Mortimer, compiler, *How Beautiful Upon the Mountains: A Centennial History of Wasatch County*, page 962.
- <sup>80</sup> *The Wasatch Wave*, 9 December, 1898.
- <sup>81</sup> Grave 8-M. Nathan W. Crandell, *Monument Inscriptions of Wallsburg Cemetery* (self-published, 1997), page 16.

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