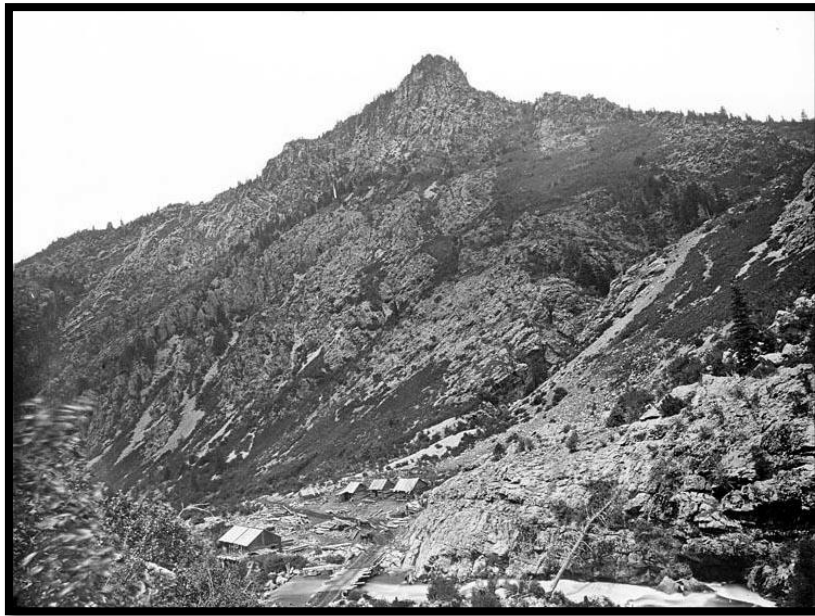


# John Dickson and Mary (Henderson) Dickson



## A Family History

by Shelley Dawson Davies

Cover photo: Utah's American Fork Canyon in 1869.

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## Chapter 1

# Good News

### The Gospel Restored

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*Brockville, Leeds, Ontario in 1840.*

John Dickson<sup>1</sup> had led a full life before the autumn of 1836, one with few regrets. His childhood along New York's frontier wilderness hardened his body, taught him how to hunt to supplement what he helped his father David<sup>2</sup> grow on the land they cleared with their own hands. He followed his father to Brockville, Ontario, one Canada's Loyalist settlements just over the New York border, where he continued the same lifestyle for another ten years before he began a family of his own. He labored diligently to support the eight children his wife Mary<sup>3</sup> bore him by working the land as he always had.

Now, at the age of fifty five, he was getting on in years. His expectations that fall were modest. He planted and tilled as many acres as he could, but it was rocky soil, difficult to coax out a crop even in the best seasons, and he looked forward to cutting back a little

more each year. His sons were already lending a hand during harvest, and they would gradually take over for him as he aged, caring for him the way he cared for his own elderly father.

John found comfort in the rhythm of life's responsibilities. As a firm believer in the Lord, he also found comfort in the Bible, and so he was intrigued by news of missionaries travelling across the countryside claiming God had broken centuries of silence. These men bore testimony of a latter-day prophet and new scriptures translated from golden plates by revelation. Enough folks in neighboring towns had been converted to establish small congregations in Earnestown and West Loughborough, only sixty miles from the Dickson farm. When Elders John E. Page and James Blakesley were said to be preaching in Brockville, John determined to judge their message for himself.

Perhaps John intended to dispute these new teachings, or perhaps he was simply curious. Whatever reasons brought him to the meeting, John was so struck by what he heard he committed himself to baptism. Almost everyone in the family followed. Sons Billa<sup>4</sup> and David<sup>5</sup> were not only baptized, but ordained as priesthood holders at a November conference,<sup>6</sup> and by next August the Dicksons and most of their friends were among the three hundred members<sup>7</sup> of the Church of Jesus Christ. "The Lord truly crowned the above conference with his holy Spirit, poured out upon the brethren and sisters to the great joy and comfort of all the Saints," reported Elder Page.<sup>8</sup>

Joy in the Dickson family increased as a flurry of marriages occurred among the newly baptized young people over the next year. Billa married Mary Ann Stoddard<sup>9</sup> in April, 1837, followed by Mary's<sup>10</sup> marriage to Harmon Chipman<sup>11</sup> in May and David's June marriage to Nancy Stevens.<sup>12</sup> Sarah<sup>13</sup> and John Myers<sup>14</sup> were wed seven months later in February, 1838. John had originally courted Sarah's older sister Mary, who declined his proposal since he had not yet been baptized into the church. John declared he would "not join the church to win a wife," but both he and his brother William<sup>15</sup> were soon converted "and left their folks who were not members of the church, to go live among the Mormons."<sup>16</sup>



*The Kirtland, Ohio, temple.*

## Firm in the Faith

As much as accepting the restored gospel brought families together, it would also continue to divide them. John's father David, by then eighty-three years old, refused to be swayed by Joseph Smith's "gold Bible" and the new doctrines being taught, remaining steadfastly Presbyterian in the wake of his family's conversion to the church.<sup>17</sup>

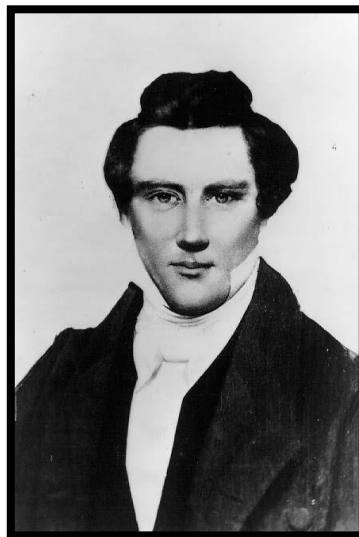
But the spirit was strong among those who had joined themselves to Christ's people and they yearned to share in the promised blessings. The Lord's commandment to build a temple had been fulfilled in Kirtland, Ohio, where a large number of Saints witnessed spiritual manifestations at its dedication in 1836. The Savior Himself had appeared in the temple, where even ordinary members could come to be endowed with knowledge and "power from on high."<sup>18</sup> John, filled with the desire to receive everything the gospel offered, set out with his older sons for Kirtland in the fall of 1837.<sup>19</sup> There he would be given a patriarchal blessing by the prophet's father, Joseph Smith, Senior, in which he was granted "the blessings of Abraham" and "victory over the enemy." Although Mary was home in Brockville, she was not forgotten, as the Lord made clear by instructing John to "bless thy companion. Tell her of this blessing. She shall be delivered from the calamities that shall come to this generation."<sup>20</sup>

It was timely advice, as a variety of calamities awaited the Dicksons, beginning with the pressing need to leave their comfortable home in Ontario. Not only was there political turmoil brewing in Canada, but persecutions against the church forced the Saints to leave Ohio for

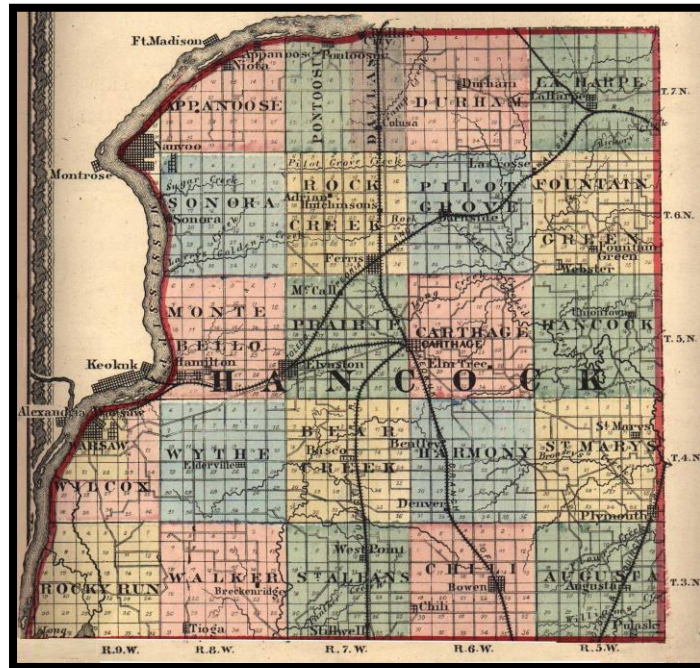
new headquarters in Missouri, where the Canadian faithful would unite with them. The Dicksons joined a group of thirty wagons led by John E. Page, who departed in mid-May, 1838,<sup>21</sup> knowing they would never again see John's elderly father or their oldest son, John Junior,<sup>22</sup> who elected to remain behind.

Kirtland had been almost abandoned by the Saints when the Page Company reached town, their lives threatened and homes vandalized. "Kirtland, then, was no place for Mormons, therefore we were not long in making ready to follow on their trail to Missouri," said fellow immigrant Zadock Judd.<sup>23</sup> The situation was not much better as the company approached Missouri, where increasing hostilities were mounted against the Mormons by old settlers seeking to drive them out of the state. The Page Company hoped to build homes in DeWitt, a new settlement along the Missouri River, but they were immediately surrounded by an armed mob who attacked them for two weeks, until help from church headquarters in nearby Far West arrived. As conflicts continued to escalate in northern Missouri, the governor called out over two thousand state militiamen to put down what he termed a "Mormon rebellion."

It was during the siege of Far West, when the Dicksons found themselves without shelter and very little food, that Mary shared a loaf of bread with the Prophet Joseph Smith, who promised her that none of her descendants would ever want for bread.<sup>24</sup> The church leadership, directed by Joseph Smith, finally surrendered at the end of October, 1838. They were tried for treason by the state, who then forced the Mormons to sign over their Missouri properties before leaving the state.



*Joseph Smith*



*The Townships of Hancock County, Illinois.*

## Refuge in Illinois

Thousands of families found themselves turned out into the coming winter with little more than the clothes on their backs. Fortunately, the Saints soon found sympathy and shelter in Quincy, Illinois, where almost the entire town volunteered food, clothing and a place to live until the church found a place for its members to settle.

Joseph Smith purchased land on both sides of the Mississippi River near Commerce, Illinois, in the spring of 1839, and made plans for a city where the faithful could gather in peace. The Dicksons soon made their way to what was renamed Nauvoo, where they huddled together in makeshift tents until more permanent log cabins could be built.

By this time John and Mary, who were nearing an age where they should have been easing into retirement, found themselves forced to start over again. But the Dicksons were committed to the gospel they had sacrificed so much for, and with an eye toward the future, they worked to establish their family in the new Zion.



Nauvoo was the center of Mormon settlement along the Mississippi, supported by a series of smaller surrounding agricultural communities in Hancock County and across the river in Lee County, Iowa. While son Billa maintained a lot in Nauvoo,<sup>25</sup> the extended Dickson family travelled back and forth between the city and their farm ten miles away on the outskirts at Camp Creek, where John plowed and harvested alongside his sons and served in the local priesthood as an elder.<sup>26</sup> Mary spent most of her time running the farmhouse kitchen and lending a hand at her grandchildren's births, all while attending to her spiritual responsibilities. She travelled back to Nauvoo in October, 1842, where she stepped into the cold Mississippi to perform proxy baptisms for her deceased mother, father, sister and brothers.<sup>27</sup>

Nauvoo's growth was rapid as new converts from England joined in the gathering. Soon rough cabins were replaced by more attractive frame and brick homes, and businesses sprang up all over the city. Everyone was anxiously engaged in building the temple, where sacred ordinances would soon be given to the faithful. The city was large enough to rival Chicago by 1843, with a population nearing twelve thousand. Such a bustling city excited the Saints, but disturbed many of the area's old settlers, who feared being politically outnumbered by people whose values were opposed their frontier culture. Anti-Mormon newspapers began a relentless campaign against the church, spreading rumors and falsehoods which inflamed local prejudice, encouraging persecutions throughout the countryside. Efforts to destroy the church by arresting Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum resulted in their assassination on 27 June, 1844, in nearby Carthage.

The Saints were stunned at the loss of the beloved prophet and a deep sadness settled over Nauvoo, along with questions as to who would now lead the church through the troubled days ahead. A crisis began to develop as Joseph's first counselor, Sidney Rigdon attempt to assume leadership on his own accord, a move which led to his excommunication soon after a conference sustained Brigham Young as the new prophet. Several splinter groups formed in the wake of this crisis as Rigdon and a recent convert James Strang appointed themselves Joseph's successors. Minutes from the Camp Creek branch recorded several members being "cut off" for following Rigdon and Strang, but the Dicksons remained steadfastly loyal to President Young as head of the church.<sup>28</sup>

Nauvoo and the surrounding communities continued to grow, despite Joseph Smith's death and the succession crisis which followed. More homes and public buildings were under construction than ever before, but the main focus remained on finishing the temple. A capstone ceremony was held in May, 1845, and workers began carving a stone

baptismal font to replace the temporary wooden font still in use. Mary was one of the many Saints privileged to receive an endowment in the temple when it was completed.<sup>29</sup>

All of this activity only served to enrage the Saint's enemies, who renewed their attempts to destroy the church. "Wolf hunts" were organized to persecute Mormons in outlying towns by burning homes, barns and crops, as well as driving off livestock and beating any men trying to defend their property. Unable to depend on protection from the government and faced with a formal request to leave the state, Brigham Young made plans to evacuate Nauvoo the next spring when weather would allow for travel. The Dicksons followed President Young's advice to gather for safety in Nauvoo, abandoning their farm in Camp Creek.

Faced with the challenge of not only providing financial support for their families but enough cash to outfit them for the coming exodus from Nauvoo, John and his sons found work several hundred miles north in Wisconsin's lead mines. There were already several dozen Mormon settlements in the southwest by then, where natural resources such as lumber and lead were acquired and shipped down the Mississippi to Nauvoo.<sup>30</sup> The Dickson men did well in the mines, eventually earning enough over the next few years to purchase a wagon and team as well as a number of sheep.<sup>31</sup>



*A contemporary woodcut of Nauvoo.*

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> John Dickson (1781-1860), #KWJY-8RL, [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>2</sup> David Dickson (1754-1837), #LHXX-NCN, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>3</sup> Mary (Henderson) Dickson (1785-1851), #27GN-T31, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>4</sup> Billa Dickson (1815-1878), #KWJY-8VV, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>5</sup> David Dickson (1817-1903), #LC5L-T8X, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>6</sup> *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. III, 4 Jan 1837, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/7468>
- <sup>7</sup> *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. III, No. 11, August, 1837 <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/7468>
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> Mary Ann (Stoddard) Dickson (1817-1903), #KWJY-8VJ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>10</sup> Mary (Dickson) Chipman (1813-1902), #L78X-H3X, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>11</sup> Harmon J. Chipman (1812-1892), #LFCG-5JZ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>12</sup> Nancy (Stevens) Dickson (1813-), #LC5L-T6Y, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>13</sup> Sarah (Dickson) Myers (1822-1870), #KWJY-DRV, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>14</sup> John Myers (1814-1900), #KWJY-DRK, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>15</sup> William Myers (1809-1873), #K24B-6XH, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)
- <sup>16</sup> "The Life of Tyresha Mary Myers Woolsey," undated typescript. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>17</sup> Narlynn Nielsen Dickson, *Dicksons of the Scottish Diaspora: Notes on the Ancestry of John Dickson 1781-1860* (South Ogden, Utah: self-published, 1998), page 1-2.
- <sup>18</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 38:32.
- <sup>19</sup> Herbert Dickson, "Autobiography of Albert Douglas Dickson," undated typescript prepared from Albert's 1911 dictation to his son, Able Dickson. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>20</sup> Joseph Smith, Senior, "Patriarchal Blessing given to John Dickson, 23 October, 1837," Patriarchal Blessing File, Volume 4172, page 4, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>21</sup> "John Dickson (1781-1860)," undated typescript, Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, Salt Lake City, Utah. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.
- <sup>22</sup> John Dickson (1811-1894).
- <sup>23</sup> Roy E. Halladay, "Where Did All the Mormons Go? A Study of the Exodus of Pioneer Mormon Converts from Leeds County, Ontario, circa 183-1850," <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=park&id=11718>
- <sup>24</sup> Barbara Matthews, *Philo Hodge (1756-1842) of Roxbury, Connecticut* (Gateway Press, 1992), page 117.
- <sup>25</sup> Billa Dickson's property in Nauvoo was Block 52, Lot 2, on the corner of Hibbard and Partridge Streets. Billa Dickson file, Nauvoo Land and Records Office, 8 May, 2014.
- <sup>26</sup> Lyman D. Platte, "Early Branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1830-1850," [http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NJ3\\_Platt.pdf](http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NJ3_Platt.pdf)
- <sup>27</sup> Susan Easton Black and Harvey Bischoff Black, *Annotated Record of Baptisms for the Dead, 1840-1845, Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois, Vol. 2* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), page 1037-1038.
- <sup>28</sup> Lyman D. Platte, "Early Branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1830-1850," [http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NJ3\\_Platt.pdf](http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NJ3_Platt.pdf)
- <sup>29</sup> Mary was endowed on 9 January, 1846. Mary (Henderson) Dickson file, Nauvoo Land and Records Office, 8 May, 2014.

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<sup>30</sup> “Mormons in Wisconsin: A Closer View of the Early Settlements (1835-1875),”  
<http://www.strangite.org/Wisconsin.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Dickson, “Autobiography of Albert Douglas Dickson,” undated typescript, 1911.

## Chapter 2

# Westward

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### Going Forth with Faith



*The settlement at Kaneshville, Iowa, in 1849.*

The exodus from western Illinois, originally planned for April, 1846, was moved to the beginning of February when anti-Mormon threats increased to dangerous levels. The first company of Saints crossed the Mississippi on 2 February, followed by a number of other groups over the next few months, all headed for temporary camps along the Missouri River.

The Dicksons were among the four thousand people who found lodgings at church headquarters in Winter Quarters, Nebraska,<sup>32</sup> where Brigham Young organized the settlement into blocks with houses on each side of the street and garden lots for each family. Most homes were simple dwellings made of sod or logs, like that of the Dickson's neighbor, Sarah Southworth, who described her cabin as having a dirt floor, sod chimney and a slab which served as a door.<sup>33</sup> The less fortunate families lived in wagons or dugouts along the riverbanks.

The coming winter was a harsh season with limited food supplies and rampant disease, which spread quickly among the exhausted, poorly housed people. Despite their privations, the Saints worked to support

one another and make their society as self-sufficient as possible with a number of industries designed to make items to trade for grain and other necessities. In addition to a factory which produced baskets, washboards and tables, a large flour mill was constructed near the north end of town to meet the growing need for processed flour. Other employment was available in the fields outside of town once the spring planting season began.

The onset of spring also made travel possible, and Brigham Young wasted no time in heading an advance wagon train to explore settlement farther west. The “Pioneer Camp” left Winter Quarters in April, 1847, returning in October after establishing a settlement in the Salt Lake Valley. Plans to abandon Winter Quarters were announced for the spring of 1848, when those unable to proceed to Utah would move east across the river to Kanesville.

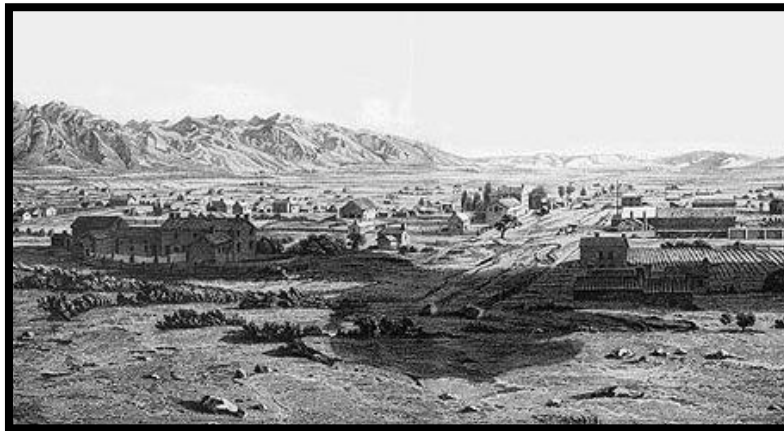
John and Mary hoped to settle in Bluff City, Iowa, three miles north of Kanesville, where farmers like John grew crops to support the larger Mormon communities. John even accepted a calling as counselor in the McOlney’s Branch presidency in July, 1849,<sup>34</sup> but by 1850, he and Mary were living in Kanesville proper with their daughter Sarah and her husband John Myers.<sup>35</sup> At the age of sixty-nine, John was no longer able to keep up with the work required to run a farm, and Mary longed to be close to her children and grandchildren. It was there in Kanesville where Mary died the next year in 1851, at the age of sixty-six.<sup>36</sup>

## The Final Push

Kanesville had become a bustling boom town by 1851, an outfitting center for California-bound gold miners and Mormon emigrants alike. Over five thousand residents worked to provide wagon trains with goods and services, and with numerous shops, a concert hall, a newspaper and three ferries, it was becoming an attractive place to settle permanently. But Iowa was never meant to be more than a temporary stopping place, and the church leadership emphasized this point in November, 1851, with a call to gather in Utah as quickly as possible. “There is no more time for Saints to hesitate,” read a letter written by the First Presidency to members still living in the Midwest. “What are you waiting for? Have you any good excuse for not coming? No! ... We wish you to evacuate Pottawattamie [County], and the [United] States, and next fall be with us.”<sup>37</sup>

Leaving Iowa would mean yet another sacrifice, one not everybody was ready to make. While most of the Dickson family wasted no time in preparing for a spring departure, Mary and Harmon Chipman elected to remain behind when the John B. Walker Company pulled out of Kanesville in June, 1852, with the rest of the family.<sup>38</sup>

John Myers was appointed as one of the sub-captains, with the responsibility of managing a group of ten families,<sup>39</sup> including his own wife and toddler,<sup>40</sup> father-in-law John; Billa, Mary Ann and their five children; and Stuart and Mary Jane<sup>41</sup> with their one-year old baby.<sup>42</sup> It was a long, difficult trip for John, who even at the age of seventy-one, walked the entire thousand mile length of trail, but like many of his fellow immigrants, he was strengthened by the journey and heartened by the sight of the Salt Lake Valley when it finally came into view after fourteen weeks of trekking.



*Salt Lake City as it appeared in 1853.*

American Fork, a small settlement thirty miles south of Salt Lake City, seemed like a good place to winter, and so it was at the foot of Mount Timpanogos where John helped Billa and John Myers built a pair of log cabins and a blacksmith shop. Increasing tensions with local Native Americans may have encouraged the Dicksons to move farther north to Davis County, where Billa and John Myers reestablished their blacksmithing business two years later, in 1854.<sup>43</sup>

John might have spent the rest of his life in Davis County if it hadn't been for the approach of government troops in 1857, sent by Washington to deal with "the Mormon problem." With past persecutions still fresh in their memories, all of Northern Utah took Brigham Young's advice to head south, leaving only a few men

behind to burn every settlement rather than allow invading soldiers to profit from their labors. All winter long, militiamen harassed the troops, hindering their progress across Wyoming, until a political compromise was arranged that spring.

Most people, including John's children, gladly returned to their homes in the north, but one more move proved too much for John, who at the age of seventy-seven, remained with friends in American Fork. It was there where he died two years later, firm in his faith and testimony of the gospel.



*John's earthly journey ended in 1860 while living with friends near American Fork canyon*



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<sup>32</sup> John Dickson entry, Winter Quarters Wards Membership Lists 1846-1848, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,

<http://www.earlylds.com/getperson.php?personID=I6682&tree=WinterQuarters>

<sup>33</sup> Lois Dickson Anderson, "John Myers: Blacksmith and Pioneer of 1852,"

<http://www.meredithroots.org/Documents/0048-0002.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> John Dickson entry, McOlney's Branch (Iowa) Records, Early Latter-day Saints,

<http://www.earlylds.com/getperson.php?personID=I17844&tree=Earlylds>

<sup>35</sup> John Myers entry, Iowa Branches Members Index 1829-1859, Vol. I and II, Watt, Ronald G., (Historical Department, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1991),

<http://www.earlylds.com/getperson.php?personID=I13402&tree=Earlylds>

<sup>36</sup> Mary's death date is listed as 1851 on family group sheets and online sources. She may have died the previous year, as indicated by the 1850 U.S. census, taken 3 October, 1850, which shows John living with the John Myers family, but there is no mention of Mary. See: John Myers household, 1850 U.S. census, Pottawattamie County, Iowa, District 21,

Roll: M432\_188; Page: 101B; Image: 208, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

<sup>37</sup> William G. Hartley, "Pushing on to Zion: Kanesville, Iowa, 1846-1853," The Ensign, August, 2002, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2002/08/pushing-on-to-zion-kanesville-iowa-18461853?lang=eng>

<sup>38</sup> David and Nancy Dickson are shown travelling to Utah in an unknown company. They were in Utah by the time their son Edward was born in American Fork in 1852. Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Index, 1847-1868, <http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/searchPage?lang=eng>

<sup>39</sup> John B. Walker Company, Kanesville, Iowa to Salt Lake City, Utah, 26 June-2 October, 1852,. Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Index, 1847-1868,

<http://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/companyDetail?lang=eng&companyId=309>

<sup>40</sup> Tyresha Mary (Myers) Woolsey (1850-1939), #KW83-YBL, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>41</sup> Mary Jane (Champlain) Dickson (1830-1906), #KWVS-DBQ, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>42</sup> William Stuart Dickson (1851-1892), #K2W3-9Q4, [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

<sup>43</sup> Albert Douglas Dickson, "Autobiography of Albert Douglas Dickson," typescript, 1856. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

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Iowa, Pottawattamie County, 1850 U.S. census, population schedule.  
Roll: M432\_188; Page: 101B; Image: 208. [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

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