

Sanford Porter and Nancy (Warriner) Porter



A Family History

by Shelley Dawson Davies

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Chapter 1

Early Years

Childhood Challenges



The broad, fertile Connecticut River Valley attracted many settlers and traders after the American Revolution.

A woman's options in life were limited in New England during the late 1700s, but Susannah Porter¹ didn't let that stand in her way. She was a determined and hard-working woman who kept her household in order while earning enough cash from making cheeses and weaving cloth to single-handedly save her father's farm when it fell into arrears, covering his debts with three hundred fifty dollars² of her own savings.³

Susannah had already lost a husband⁴ and two small children when she became the wife of Nathan Porter⁵ in 1785. Nathan, whose first wife Hannah⁶ had died the year before, was a prosperous man. His farm and mill in Hopkinton, Rhode Island, promised to provide a good living and secure future for Susannah's new family. Even though Nathan's older children were married and living nearby, he decided soon after his marriage to seek his fortune elsewhere. He sold the farm where his father⁷ was buried, moving sixty-five miles north to Brimfield, Massachusetts, in time for the birth of Susannah's child, Joseph,⁸ in 1786.

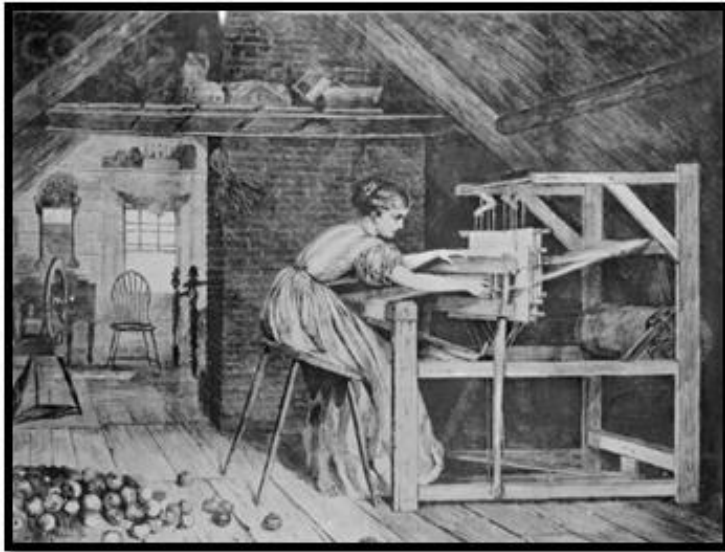
The Porters had every expectation of remaining on their Brimfield farm, and they worked hard to make it thrive. Susannah gave birth to three more children over the next six years, welcoming Susannah⁹ in 1788, Sanford¹⁰ in 1790, and Sally¹¹ in 1792. Their lives seemed steady enough until Nathan suddenly found himself unable to pay for his new farm.

“In the old days when Father lived in Rhode Island there were witches and misers and robbers and such,” said Sanford, who related how his father was deceived by a pair of swindlers by the name of Coone and Church, members of a local gang. “Father sold his farm to them in Rhode Island. He had taken Coone’s notes, payable at different times, but after a while Coone forwarded forged receipts with Father’s name signed to them, and witnessed by one of his gang. Father went after them, but could do nothing. Of course, the man who sold to Father stuck him for his pay.” The situation was serious. Nathan faced prison if he did not settle his debt, “but Father was in the hole and how to get out he did not know. He could see no way out but to flee the country, so he fled and went into York state to his brother, Samuel.”¹² Samuel,¹³ one of many men willing to tame western New York’s wild country, offered Nathan ten acres of land next to his farm in Oneida County, where Nathan worked fencing and improving the land for two years before he was once again able to support his family.¹⁴

It wasn’t long after Nathan left for New York that Susannah received word about her elderly father’s¹⁵ desperate situation in Vermont. She immediately packed up her loom and four children, driving her wagon over two-hundred miles of rutted roads to Vershire, taking charge of the farm by herself and paying off her father’s debts.¹⁶ To protect the land from Nathan’s creditor’s, Susannah convinced her father to deed his property to her sons Joseph and Sanford. “He had it fixed so that it could not be sold or by any means disposed of until I was twenty-one. Then we could manage it anyway we wanted to,” said Sanford.¹⁷

Susannah had been running the farm for three years when her father died in 1897, and did not see the wisdom of leaving when Nathan arrived in Vermont, announcing his plans to move the family to New York. But it wasn’t only his wife’s sensibility which convinced Nathan to remain in Vermont. Nathan’s health was broken. Once known as “Hoppity Kickity” due to his being able to “out-hop any man in the country,”¹⁸ he was now partially disabled from rheumatism in his hip and back and plagued by running sores from leg injury which refused to heal.¹⁹ To make matters worse, Nathan’s eyesight was failing and along with it his ability to do a man’s work.

It would continue to be Susannah's task to keep the family solvent. Over the years the rhythmic clacking and creaking of Susannah's loom could be heard whenever she wasn't busy in the kitchen or large garden she kept "weeded and looking perfect."²⁰ She was renowned for her skilled work, weaving up to ten yards of cloth a day and creating her own designs for fancy bedcovers.²¹ "She was indeed a smart woman for work," remarked her son Sanford. "I have never yet known a woman that could compare in any way with my mother."²² Nathan worked mainly around the barnyard at basic chores where keen vision was not required, such as caring for the animals and processing crops, often assisted by eight-year old Sanford.



A Vision

One day Sanford had an unusual and unsettling experience while he was helping his father husk a load of recently harvested corn. The ears were shucked and tossed into a pile on one side of the barn, while the husks were thrown into a stack about five or six feet high toward the stable. "There were two doors in the barn, one to the north, and one to the south," said Sanford. "As I stood there watching Father, I saw Beverly Yates [a friend his age] come in at the south door and go out at the north door. I called out, 'There goes Beverly Yates.' Father sort of twisted around in his chair and said, 'Where goes Beverly Yates?' I said, 'He came in at the south door and went out at the north door.' Said Father, 'What! You rascal! What are you telling me that lie for? How could he get over that pile of husks and I not hear him?'

“At that I ran to the north door and around the barn, but I could see nothing of him. The barn stood in an open meadow, with no fence within a hundred rods or more, and there was no place he could hide. I went back into the barn, and Father said, ‘Well, did you see anything of him?’ ‘No sir, I can’t see a sign of him anywhere.’ ‘No. You were lying. You didn’t see him go through the barn. I have a good will to give you a sound thrashing. I’ll learn you better than to tell such lies as that.’

“I was so scared and so grieved to the heart that I went to the house weeping and sobbing. I did not know what to think of it. Said Mother, ‘What is the matter, son?’ I told her and I said, ‘I have told the truth. I knew him just as well as I ever did. His hair was all fuzzeled up just like it always is. He wore neither hat nor cap, had on the same clothes he wears every day, and I know I am not mistaken.’ ‘Well, stop crying. I will talk to your father about it.’ Father came in and started scolding again, but Mother said, ‘Don’t scold him anymore. I believe he has told the truth. Something may have happened to Beverly; we may hear something by morning.’ And sure enough, as we sat at our breakfast, news came that Beverly had been killed by a horse.”²³

Sanford’s brief vision was the talk of the neighborhood for quite some time and it was a source of amazement to him. “How could it have happened?” he wondered. “I only know it did, and Father believed me then. But why in the world should his spirit appear to me? How could it be and why should it be?”²⁴ It was the first, but not the last time Sanford would experience visions and be perplexed by spiritual thoughts.



Lake Morey, fourteen miles east of Vershire, Vermont.



A peddler showing his wares to a frontier family.

Feathers and Indigo

Not long after Sanford's vision of Beverly Yates, the Porter family was visited by Nathan's oldest son from his first marriage, who was also named Nathan.²⁵ "He lived in the state of Connecticut, about one hundred and sixty miles away from our home, and it had been many years since he had seen his father, and mine, having left us when we lived in old Brimfield," said Sanford. "He went in search of his fortune, and came to let us know he had not found it. He persuaded Father and Mother to let me go back with him and stay until I was of age, for he had not a son of his own, and that I could help to do light chores night and morning." Nathan promised an education for Sanford in addition to a horse with saddle and bridle, "three suits of good clothes, and, if I remember right, a hundred dollars in money, besides my board and keep."²⁶ The elder Nathan hesitated at the request as Sanford was very young and too small for heavy work, but the younger Nathan persisted, explaining Sanford would be good company for his wife and children while he was on the road peddling his wares. He "so flattered Father until he consented to let me go. Mother was very much against me going with him, and so were the children, but he took me.

“Things went pretty good for a while, but not for long,” Sanford remembered. “I was not big enough or strong enough to do all they wanted me to do, and they would scold and fret and find fault, and cuff and jerk me about, and kick my behind and call me any mean name that happened to come into their heads.”²⁷

Nathan made his living by travelling across the countryside selling feathers and indigo, two items which proved to be very lucrative. “There were other men living in the same neighborhood that followed the same business,” according to Sanford. “The main road on which they lived went by the name of Feather Street. These men would go down around the seashore and buy feathers of merchants or other men who had quantities. They would buy large sacks weighing perhaps two or three hundred pounds. Then they would go far into the country and swap new feathers for old ones, and get about three pounds for one, more as they could flatter women to trade with them, or get new ones for a big price; any way they could get something for nothing.

“Their indigo they would make themselves. It was made of clay mixed hard and cut into chunks about two inches square, then put into strong blue dye until it got saturated. Then they would bake it and get as many small cracks into as they could, then put it into the dye tub again and let the blue soak in all it would, then dry it thoroughly. This homemade was called Spanish floaters. They would take a small sack of good indigo and one of homemade, and how they would cheat the women folk, that cheap stuff for feathers.

“When they brought the old feathers home, they would open the sacks and turn them loose in a tight room, and take a handful of brush and whip and thrash them about until they became lively and had every appearance of new feathers. I’ve had that job to do myself, strip off my clothes and go into a room full of feathers, naked. After they were done I would fetch their old dead feathers to the men and they would put them into sacks again and call them new feathers and make a lot of money on them. And thus they obtained their riches by fraud and deception.”²⁸

“Men who followed that business got property pretty fast. Nathan had a good home, frame house and barn, well finished off, thirty acres of land, well fenced, all kinds and sorts of fruit trees, young, just beginning to bear. Then he had forty acres of land about three-fourths of a mile from his home—mostly pasture land—ten acres of beautiful meadows and about three acres plowed. They had prospered much, and had good buildings, cows and horses and wagons, household furniture, beds, bedding, chairs, bureaus and tables, crockery, iron ware, etc.”²⁹

Nathan insisted on Sanford hitching up the horses and preparing the wagon for his peddling trips. "I was not tall enough or strong enough to put the saddle or harness on. Always I had to get up on the horse block, and the horses would always sheer off and get out of my reach, and plague me to tears before I finally succeeded in getting the outfit on their backs. Sometimes I would not get them on and he would come out raging mad and jerk or kick me off the block and call me a damned little pimpin west curse, or a damned come-by-chance, or any of a thousand mean things whereby he could vent his passion."³⁰

When Nathan wasn't busy abusing Sanford, his wife Tabbiathy³¹ took over. "She was a high-tempered fretful creature and deceitful, too," said Sanford. "She would knock and kick me around in the house, but never out of doors for fear somebody would see her. She nearly starved me, too. One of our common tin cups about half full of bread and milk or mush and milk was my allowance always. Sometimes she would let me eat dinner at the table, but she always put on my plate what she wanted me to have, and I got no more. And if I reached out to get more, as I sometimes did at first, she would stamp her foot, shake her head, and grit her teeth, let who would be at the table. No one would know what she meant but me. If Nathan and the girls understood, they did not care. It suited them well enough. The less I ate, of course, the less expense."³²

Sometime after Sanford arrived Nathan bought another farm of seventy-five acres with a large frame house "that looked old and weather-beaten, and another old frame building that they used to store feathers in and prepare the old ones for the market. There was a number of those big sacks of feathers there when Nathan bought the place. Everything about the place was run down, unkempt, forsaken, and I should say shocking to look at, but that wasn't half. The whole farm was a wilderness of weeds, as big as weeds could grow, some higher and bigger than I was, and I had to take an old heavy bush scythe to mow them with, and had to stay with it until it was done. Oh, it makes my back ache to think of it. All the water I had to drink was rainwater that had stood (sometimes it looked lye red) in holes that had been made by the cattle when the ground was soft after a rain. And I had to sup water that the cattle would not sup, or starve for a drink. I was a poor little boy, despised and abused by my own kin, who should have been my friends."³³

Rescue

Eventually Sanford's treatment at the hands of his relatives became public knowledge as Nathan "took life easy at my expense. Nathan was so fat and fussy that he could not get about very lively, and when he tried he would puff and blow and grunt like he had run a long race. His common weight was about two hundred and fifty pounds, sometimes more," recalled Sanford. Some of the neighbors sent word to Sanford's family in Vermont of the abuse and hardships brought on him by Nathan. His and mother and brother Joseph "took each of them a horse and came for me full speed. Mother rode sixty-five miles a day on a horse that was sprained in both hind legs. Joseph rode a two-year old colt. They were so anxious to get me they did not spare the horseflesh.

"When they got there, Nathan was all wrought up and said I should not go. He cursed around and said I should not have any clothes to go in, etc. But after he had given vent to his passion and cooled down a little, he said I might go and take all my belongings. He became quite good natured, and his wife also. Got so friendly they insisted on Mother and Joseph staying awhile to rest themselves and horses, which they did. When we left they gave us provisions to eat on the road.

"I was so full of joy I did not know how to contain myself, and when we got so far, so I was sure he could not hear me, I would laugh and skip and holler and whoop. Mother charged me time and again not to make so much fuss, lest I cause excitement among the people. But I was oh, so glad to get out of that hell and darkness I had been in for three years that I could not hold back."³⁴

Sanford and his family traveled slowly on the way home, giving their animals time to rest and taking turns riding and walking. They also stopped a few times to stay with relatives and friends along the way. Sanford was not allowed to work once he returned home and was told to sleep all he wanted. "Oh, how good it seemed when I would wake up in the morning, as soon as I could fetch my wits about me, to know I could go back to sleep and there would be no one to curse me!" he said.³⁵



The Mayflower Connection

Sanford could trace his family's origins in America back to the very beginning. His mother, Susannah (West) Porter, was descended from Mayflower passenger George Soule, apprenticed to Edward Winslow, one of several senior leaders on the ship and later in the Plymouth Colony. George Soule was provided with an acre of land at Plymouth, three years before he married Mary Beckett in 1626. George and Mary lived quietly in Massachusetts, where they became parents of eight children. The Porter line descends from their daughter Susannah, who married Francis West. Their son William married Jane Tanner, whose son Thomas West married Amie Colegrove, parents of Sanford's mother Susannah.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Susannah (West) Porter (1756-1840), #MM26-JPT, www.familysearch.org where verification of all vital dates can be found. Also see family group sheets at www.DaviesDawsonHistory.weebly.com
- ² Approximately six thousand dollars in 2014. <http://www.davemanuel.com/inflation-calculator.php>
- ³ Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1* (self-published, 1957), page 23.
- ⁴ Nathan Tanner (1753-1779), #MKB5-GDF, www.familysearch.org Blacksmith Nathan Tanner died from injuries sustained while lifting an anvil on a bet. Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 28.
- ⁵ Nathan Porter (1742-1815), #LZFD-N8J, www.familysearch.org
- ⁶ Hannah (Witter) Porter (1747-1784), #L83V-FM8, www.familysearch.org
- ⁷ John Porter (1699-1771), #LXQM-RS6, www.familysearch.org
- ⁸ Joseph Porter (1786-1841), #L8YS-KM2, www.familysearch.org
- ⁹ Susannah (Porter) Currier (1788-1850), #L8YS-KQ4, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁰ Sanford Porter (1790-1873), #KWJT-VMZ, www.familysearch.org
- ¹¹ Sarah "Sally" (Porter) Richardson (1792-1873), #2WFL-7T8, www.familysearch.org
- ¹² Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 22.
- ¹³ Samuel Porter (1737-1784), #LXQM-RG3, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁴ In the end, Nathan's sons by his first wife, John and Phineas, paid off the Brimfield farm, accepting the ten acres of New York land as payment. Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 23.
- ¹⁵ Thomas West (1732-1797), #MFC7-WCV, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁶ Sanford recalled this move took place in 1784, when he was four years old. Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 23.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ According to Sanford, his father could "hope three hops and kick a hat off a ten-foot pole that stood straight up and still keep on his feet." *Ibid.*, page 28.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, page 7.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, page 27.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, page 21.
- ²² *Ibid.*, page 27.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, page 9.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Nathan Porter (1768-1852), #L4WJ-FTH, www.familysearch.org
- ²⁶ Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 10-11.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, page 11.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, page 12-13.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, page 14.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, page 11.
- ³¹ Tabbiathy (Warner) Porter (1770-), #LHWZ-D97, www.familysearch.org
- ³² Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 11-12.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, page 14.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, page 15-16.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, page 18.

Chapter 2

Coming of Age

Growing Pains



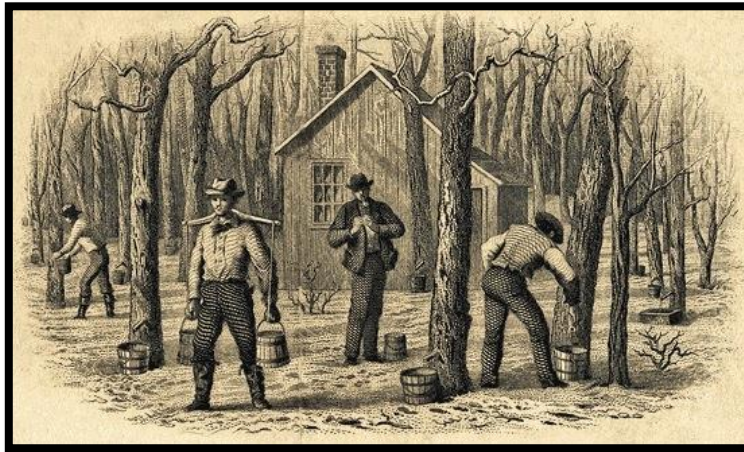
An early farm cut out of Vermont's wilderness.

A few mornings of sleeping in should have put Sanford back on his feet, but instead his health took a turn for the worse. He began feeling so “weak and sickly” as his strength faded he was soon unable to stand. His father sent for one doctor after another, but without results. Not knowing what the trouble was, the doctors diagnosed Sanford with “quick consumption” a general wasting away of the body for which there was no cure. “I had concluded I had to die,” said Sanford. “I was very thin and weak, but I had an awful appetite for food, and could not make out why I did not get heavier instead of wasting to nothing.” ³⁶

Fortunately, a new doctor took notice of the boy while visiting the house one day. “He looked steady and sharp at me for a bit,” said Sanford, “then came over and took hold of my nose and rubbed it a bit and said, turning to Father and Mother, ‘So they say he has quick consumption, do they? Well, I can cure that consumption damn quick. It’s the devilish worms that’s killing your boy, eating up all that goes into him and starving him to death.’ He soon came back with an armful of roots, washed and cleaned them good and poured boiling

water over them and steeped them just so long. Then he put something he had with him into this thin liquid and gave me a dose. He stayed all night and watched me and gave me this medicine. He wanted to see what reaction he got, he said. Then he told mother what to do and left.”³⁷

Susanna was very careful to follow the doctor’s directions and within two or three days the worms began to leave. “Mother watched and tended me close until she was sure the worms were all gone. I was so weak and sore inside I could hardly breathe,” he remembered. Sanford was put on castor oil for a few days and slowly regained his strength.³⁸



Maple trees were tapped to collect syrup used in sugar making.

Hard Work

His health restored, Sanford went to work on the family’s farm, where there was always plenty to be done. The property was fenced off into a meadow, pasturage, planting fields and timber land where maple sugar trees grew.³⁹ Every spring the family focused on tapping the maple trees to collect their sap, then transported the buckets a boiling pot. “We fixed what we called a sap yoke made to fit our shoulder, and we could carry two buckets full at one time to the boiling place. We made plenty of sugar for our own use and some to spare; also some molasses and vinegar,” said Sanford.⁴⁰

Fence mending followed when sugar season was over in May. Making sure all the fences were secure was the first step in readying the land for spring crops, which included wheat, oats, barley, rye, flax seed, peas, beans, corn and “plenty of potatoes. We always kept the weeds down well and usually had good crops. After the spring crops were in we went right to haying, and when the hay was in the barn we would be ready to harvest and get everything safe and secure before the cold days and frosty nights hit us. We were always the first people in our vicinity to have our winter supplies in and our work all done in the season thereof, and ready to prepare other things as needed,” said Sanford.⁴¹

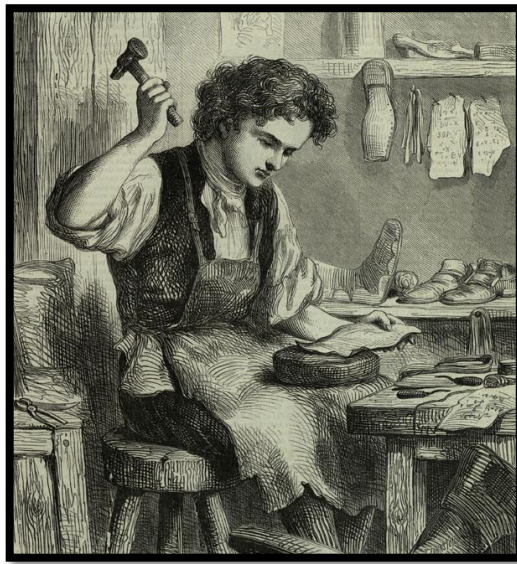
Some of those things included the birch sticks and branches Nathan needed to make brooms. Nathan had become completely blind by this time and was unable to do much of the farm work, but he kept as busy as anyone else in the household by doing light chores such as churning butter, carrying wood and making brooms. He made brooms summer and winter, selling them in a Shaker settlement forty miles away. He sometimes traded the brooms for clothes and shoes “that were rather the worse for wear. The shoes would usually have a hole about the size of a dollar worn through the sole right on the ball of the foot, caused by whirling on that part of the foot, which was a part of their worship. They gave him good bargains always on account of his blindness and lameness,” said Sanford.⁴²

Pondering

Each winter after the harvest was in, Sanford and his brother and sisters attended school until spring. The children put their education to good use by reading to their father in the evenings, mostly from the Bible. Nathan loved the scriptures and knew them so well “he could quote chapter and verse and [knew] where to find it.” Although he was not formally a member of any church, Nathan often attended the local Baptist meetings, sometimes chastising the parishioners in public. “He told them they did not practice the doctrines Christ taught his apostles...and proved it from their own scriptures,” recalled Sanford.⁴³

Sanford learned much from reading the Bible to his father, and after he was baptized into the Baptist church at thirteen, he became “an inveterate searcher of the Bible himself. I began early to compare the apostolic churches with the Baptist and other churches and they all lacked one essential thing, but what was that thing? I thought all their churches and ministers were just as deep in the mud as I was in the mire,” recalled Sanford, who spent many hours pondering the

precepts he was learning.⁴⁴ “One thing in the Bible troubled me a lot. It called on sinners everywhere to repent and be baptized, and to love God with all their heart, might, mind and strength, and their neighbor as themselves. I thought, ‘If there is a sinner in this world, it is me, for if there is a God, I do not love Him. I do not love my neighbor—or even my brother—as myself and I certainly do not love my enemy.’ And I was doubtful there was a man living who loved his enemy. For all men that I had ever known or seen would talk unkindly, even wickedly of better people than themselves if they got it ‘in’ for them and I had never seen or even heard or read of any person, people or nation that loved their enemies. Therefore all mankind were sinners.”⁴⁵



Shoemaking was a valuable skill, especially along the frontier where new goods were hard to come by.

Learning a Trade

Formal schooling was always secondary to farming along the frontier where survival depended on getting the crops in or earning money by practicing a trade. Instead of attending school when he was in his mid-teens, Sanford spent the winter learning the trade of shoemaking from local resident Reuben Green. “I learned other things too,” said Sanford. “One was not to lie as he did. People would go to him with leather to be made up into boots or shoes for which they were suffering the need and he would promise to have it done ‘by tomorrow night or the day after tomorrow’ when he knew it was not possible to come within ten days or two weeks of fulfilling his promise. ‘Well no, they are not quite done, but they will be tomorrow

night—not later than the day after tomorrow.’ And when they came back again he had some very good excuse to offer: had to do this or that, go here or there. I mind even now how those little lies affected me. It wasn’t long until Israel Comstock and his two daughters had all the business in those parts, and I was downright glad, for they were honest and did excellent work. After that winter I was afraid to promise people anything for fear some accident or unavoidable thing might happen to keep me from filling my promise. I have said I went to the best school that winter I ever went to. I learned a lot more than shoemaking.”⁴⁶

Sanford was practiced shoemaker by the time he turned seventeen, but found it difficult to work in the orders around his farming responsibilities. “There were the fences to repair and the plowing to be done and putting in our spring crops, and by the time I had got that done, then I had to go to work and not let the thistles and weeds get so as to injure the crops, and it kept me very busy,” he said. “I could not get time to be idle or to play, for it was highly necessary to keep what we planted clean from weeds in that country as it is in any country. I had to keep on hoeing until haying came on; then the haying to do. I did all my mowing this year and hauled my hay with one horse. It took me a while to get all the hay in the barn. I think there was about ten acres to mow over. Well, about as I had finished the haying, there was the small grain to harvest, and by the time that was done it became time to haul beans, corn and potatoes and secure all for winter. When all was secured—well now you may rest a few days, but you must get up a big pile of wood for winter before the snow comes deep and before school commenced.”⁴⁷

As if working on his own farm weren’t enough, Sanford hired himself out in the spring of 1808 to pay off a debt of thirty dollars the Porters had accumulated at Major Mann’s store. “I went directly to see the old man and after some talk and parley, he gave me work at ninety dollars a month. I did all the chores, tended the garden, and did errands for the housekeeper and a lot of running around for everybody else,” said Sanford. “Come haying time, the old Major notified all the men who were owing him to come and work off the debt in the hay. After we got the haying and harvesting done that fall, my time was up and more too. We settled up and I took a receipt from him in full of all demands against father and he paid me up what he was owing me for my work.”⁴⁸

ENDNOTES

³⁶ Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, Porter Family History, Volume 1 (self-published, 1957), page 18.

³⁷ *Ibid*, page 19.

³⁸ *Ibid*, page 19-20.

³⁹ *Ibid*, page 23.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, page 24.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, page 24-25.

⁴² *Ibid*, page 25-27.

⁴³ *Ibid*, page 7-8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 59.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, page 59-60.

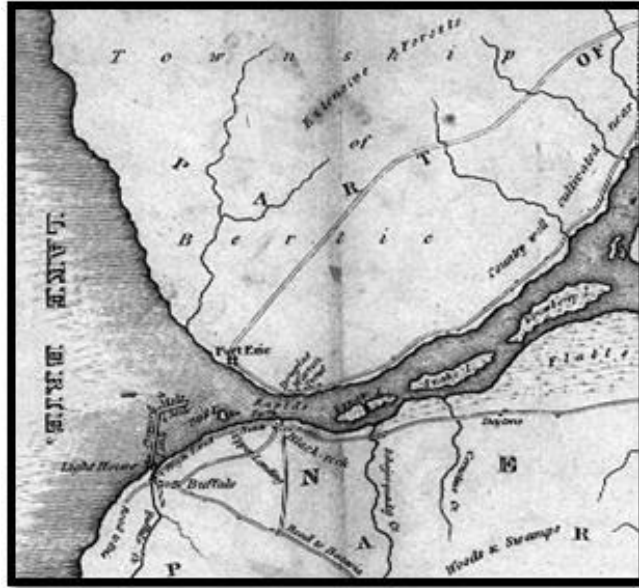
⁴⁶ *Ibid*, page 26-27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*,), page 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, page 31, 33, 40.

Western New York

The New Frontier



The trading town of Buffalo was perfectly situated along Lake Erie's southern shore.

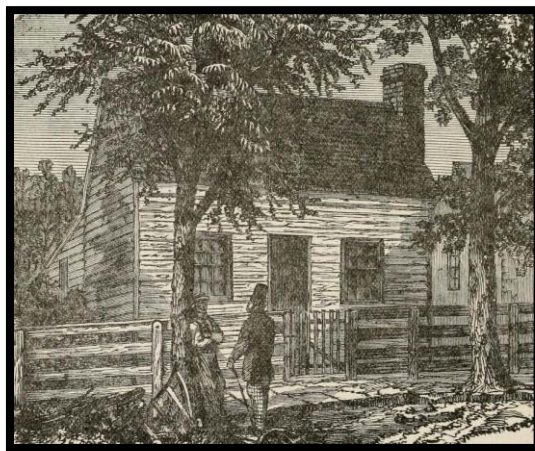
There was plenty of land available along New York's western in the early 1800s and Sanford was determined to make some it his own. He left the family's Vershire farm soon after his twentieth birthday, travelling five hundred miles to where his sister Susannah and brother-in-law Abner Currier⁴⁹ lived, some thirty miles southeast of Buffalo. "I found land that was not claimed by anybody, and it lay very handsome. I took up my claim of a hundred acres and stuck stakes and put my name on the stakes," he said.⁵⁰

Sanford had not only left his family behind when he ventured so far to the west, but also his betrothed, Nancy Warriner,⁵¹ with a promise to return for her as soon as he had his own homestead. Distance and the difficulty of communication eventually led Sanford to believe he had lost Nancy's affections. "I had written two or three times to her, but received no answer and I concluded she had given up the bargain and

thought she would not go so far from her father and mother,” said Sanford. “I wrote a letter to that effect and told her to marry to suit herself if she could. I would not stand in her way and I gave up the idea of going back to see her.” Fortunately, Sanford received Nancy’s next letter, in which “she wrote with so much affection that I sat down and wept freely. She wrote that she was astonished at the last letter I wrote her, that she had written three or four letters and I had got none of them. She had not changed her mind at all, and had been preparing to go there just as soon as I thought proper.”⁵²

Sanford immediately returned to Vermont and made plans for his wedding to Nancy. According to custom, the young couple’s intentions for marriage were announced at church for three weeks. “It is called being ‘cried off,’” said Sanford. “The young couple must be there and stand up together so the whole congregation can see them. There was no one in the congregation who made any objection to me and my partner getting married, so on the morning of the first day of January, 1812, I made her mine.”⁵³

Sanford and Nancy left for “the stern country” the next month, making their way to the Currier home over snowy winter roads. As soon as spring arrived, Sanford went to work on a house for his new wife, proving that day his great capacity for work. “The snow was about a foot deep and soft. I had made up my mind to build one room of my house that day. I hauled the logs and split them, laid them to the height I wanted, put on the roof and laid the floor and got back to Abner’s before dark,” Sanford said. “The next morning we moved into the house-that-Sanford-built-in-one-day. And right then the War [of 1812] was declared and stopped everything.”⁵⁴



A typical log cabin along the frontier.



The War of 1812

The United States had been an independent nation for only twenty years at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a young country benefiting from trade with both Great Britain and France, dominant powers who were then at war. When Britain began pressing American merchant sailors into service aboard their warships and moving to restrict trade, Congress declared war in June, 1812. The United States suffered many costly defeats at the hands of British, Canadian and Native American troops during the two-year conflict, including the capture and burning of the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., in August 1814, but American troops were able to prevent British invasions in New York, Baltimore and New Orleans, boosting national confidence and fostering a new spirit of patriotism. Even though the Treaty of Ghent in February, 1815, ended the war in a stalemate, the War of 1812 was celebrated as a "second war of independence" which allowed for decades of stability, improved diplomatic relations and economic growth. The war allowed the new nation to break free of its colonial past, and gave people a sense of self-confidence on the international stage.



British forces attacked Black Rock in retaliation for the burning by American troops from the Canadian village of Newark.

Drafted for War

“Many a home was broken up and family separated, mine among them,” said Sanford, whose new wife was expecting their first child in three months’ time. “I have passed through many a trial in my life, but leaving my young wife, my new home, and the joy of seeing my own crops mature was about the keenest pang I ever endured.”⁵⁵ Sanford was drafted by lot in July, 1812,⁵⁶ and mustered out soon afterwards for Black Rock, an important harbor near Buffalo on Lake Erie. Nancy moved in with the Curriers, where her child, Chauncey,⁵⁷ was born in October.

“The people all through the country were a good deal like a swarm of bees that had been molested and robbed of their honey. They didn’t know where they wanted to go or what they wanted to do. Neither did I, for I had to check out without either knapsack or blanket. We all got our guns and ammunition and little did we know what would be our fate: life or death—which?” said Sanford, who came close to dying not from war wounds, but from a “cold plague” which ran through the ranks like wildfire. “The doctors had no skill that would cure it. They would be taken with it and die within twenty-four hours. They would go to the hospital and I never knew or heard of one that came out alive. We soldiers got it in our heads that the doctors were traitors and wanted to kill as many as they could. I was taken with it and our officer said I must go to the hospital. I told him I would not go there. I had rather die out where I could have fresh air. I asked him to go to the colonel and see if he would not let me go on parole a few

days. He went and they gave me a parole of four days. I took my pack and blanket and what belonged to me, and my gun and cartridge box and bid the ensign goodbye, and started.”⁵⁸ Sanford walked thirty-six miles back to Abner and Susannah’s home, where he was cared for him until he was well once again.

A Few Turns of Luck

Sanford petitioned successfully for a furlough and a few weeks later he and Nancy moved back to their claim where they comfortably spent the winter of 1812-13, but a series of unlucky events beginning the next spring disrupted their hope for a tranquil life. It all began when Sanford accidentally chopped his foot with an axe while cutting trees for sugar that spring. It was a serious injury which almost severed his foot, but thanks to expert care and a dose of faith, Sanford healed enough over the summer to put himself to work planting corn, potatoes, beans and oats.

“That fall I had a lovely crop of everything,” said Sanford. “Indeed, it looked as though we should be well provided for another year, but on the sixth of October there came a fierce snow storm which did not quit until the snow was two feet deep. It was wet and heavy and it lodged on the trees and broke off great limbs and branches and crushed the bushes. Things were crashing all around us every which way. Then after this the sun came out bright and beautiful, smiling as if nothing had happened, and the snow soon melted with the result that my corn and oats and potatoes lay flat on the ground in a foot of water. It could not drain off, for the ground was too level.”⁵⁹ Sanford managed to save his oats by drying them on poles, but in the end he lost his farm in the chaos of war.

On 30 December, 1813, British forces crossed over from Canada, burning the city of Buffalo. “Our army was stationed at Buffalo, but fled in fear and dismay and scattered every which way. The country was all in an uproar and you would see people, some going this way and some that, with no thought of where they might end,” said Sanford. Like everyone else in the region, Sanford and Nancy ran away in panic. “About all that any of us took was our wearing clothes; some did not even do that. I lost all on my place,” he recalled.⁶⁰ The Porters headed for Oneida County, one hundred and eighty miles to the east, where they hoped to find temporary shelter with Sanford’s half-brother John.

“We made a very poor show, I can tell you,” said Sanford. “After we crossed Lake Erie on a barge a mile long, we felt more safe and wondered why we did not keep our heads and bring more things with us. We were in a sorry plight. I felt so ashamed jogging along that sometimes I felt mad. We got accommodations at taverns charge-free, and at the turnpike gates we got through free on our looks. The way we were rigged out told our pitiful story better than I could tell it. When we got within five miles of John’s I was ready to go back...[but] I took my courage, swallowed my pride (but oh how it choked me!) and went on. And oh, what a happy surprise awaited us! How different the effects from what I had imagined! They had heard that I had been drafted, and that so many hundreds had died, and feared I was among them. They did not know my wife and baby, and that made them all the more happy to have us there safe and sound, especially after we told them of the frightful conflagration we had been through.”⁶¹

Sanford supported his family that winter by making a lot of shoes which he peddled around the countryside along with calico fabrics, shawls, handkerchiefs, pins and needles he obtained on credit. “It was a paying trip and I settled up all the accounts I had left behind me,” said Sanford. “That winter I made rising of three hundred dollars, and in the spring I rented land to plant crops. I was very anxious to get a home of my own, for we were paying too high rent.” After a series of setbacks, Sanford eventually prospered. “I made, by economy and hard work, more than fifteen hundred dollars in less than three years, besides building up my home and farm and providing for my family. We were then called very well to do, or well situated, and I had robbed no man, defrauded no man, cheated no man, and stolen nothing except one sheep, and that was my own. I knew it was.

“One morning I went out to my pasture, which adjoined John Hubbs’ place, and one of my sheep was missing, and he had one extra one. So I said to John, ‘You have one of my sheep among yours (I would know that sheep by its countenance anywhere). When you drive them in I will come and get it.’ ‘Oh no, you will not come and get it. I bought that sheep of Wells Rooney.’ ‘No, John, you did not buy that sheep of Wells Rooney.’ ‘I did, and I’ll be damned if you shall have it.’ ‘Well, I think I shall be damned if I don’t.’ Then began a tongue lashing that was not pleasant to hear, both being hot-headed and fiery.

“The next morning I took some salt in a pan, went to Hubb’s pasture and got my sheep, took it down to the house and butchered it. I looked every few minutes to see if the Hubbs were stirring, but they showed no signs until I got it all safely in and out of sight. But that was the most stealing I ever did, even though I knew the sheep was my own. He never mentioned that sheep again, nor did I.”⁶²

A Dark Omen

Sanford and Nancy lived contentedly, close to John and his wife Hulda,⁶³ who helped welcome the couple's second child, Malinda,⁶⁴ born on 14 November, 1814. It had been some time since Sanford had visited with his parents, who were still living on their Vershire farm, and although they were getting on in years, he was taken by surprise by his father's death. It began with an omen Sanford experienced in December, 1814.

"Early one morning I went to the barn to get some oats for my horses," said Sanford. "I got up on the big beam to get the oats that were on the scaffold over the floor and there was something black that rose up from the floor and went to the gable end of the barn and vanished out of my sight. It surprised me and set me to wondering what under heaven it could be. I stood and looked at the place where it disappeared, but could find no living thing there at that end of the barn. It had the appearance of a big, long black overcoat with the end of the sleeves together and the elbows spread each way. It went [right past me] and I had as good a chance to look at it as could be expected, but I could not tell whether it was cloth or not.

"I found there was no natural cause for it at all, and it caused me to shudder and tremble for fear something was going to happen to some of us, but I got the oats and went off to the mill and got my grinding done and brought my grist home with me. But I thought much of what I saw that morning and tried to contrive some natural cause, but I could make out no reasonable natural cause.

"It was my foundation in those days that anything that was unnatural or unreasonable I would not believe. I did not believe in anything supernaturally caused whatever. I called them fish stories such as Jonah and the whale. I did not believe any of those unnatural stories. I did not know that there was so much power in faith, but I have learned quite a different lesson since those days. I think now there are not many men on earth that know by experience what power there is in faith.

"It was not long before we got word that Father was dead, and that he died such a day in last December, and as near as we could reason it, it was the same day or the day after that I saw that frightful sight. Father's death was a very grievous thing to all of his family, for he was very highly esteemed by his wife and children."⁶⁵

ENDNOTES

- ⁴⁹ Abner Currier (1783-1859), #LCTP-F9N, www.familysearch.org
- ⁵⁰ Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1* (self-published, 1957), page 41.
- ⁵¹ Nancy (Warriner) Porter (1790-1864), #KWJT-VMH, www.familysearch.org
- ⁵² Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 42-43.
- ⁵³ *Ibid*, page 44.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid*.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid*, page 44-45.
- ⁵⁶ According to papers Sanford filed in 1871 for a pension from the war, he was “drafted in Captain Ezra Knott's Company in Colonel Warren's Regiment in Holland Township, Erie County, New York in July 1812.” See Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 46-47.
- ⁵⁷ Chauncey Warriner Porter (1812-1868), #KWJZ-67F, www.familysearch.org
- ⁵⁸ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume*, page 46-47.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid*, page 48-51.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*, page 50.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*, page 50-52.
- ⁶² *Ibid*, page 53-54.
- ⁶³ Hulda (Witter) Porter (1772-1816), #KL17-YP5, www.familysearch.org
- ⁶⁴ Malinda (Porter) Chipman (1814-1870), #KW47-4XF, www.familysearch.org
- ⁶⁵ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 54-55.

Chapter 4

Spiritual Stirrings

Sanford is Prepared

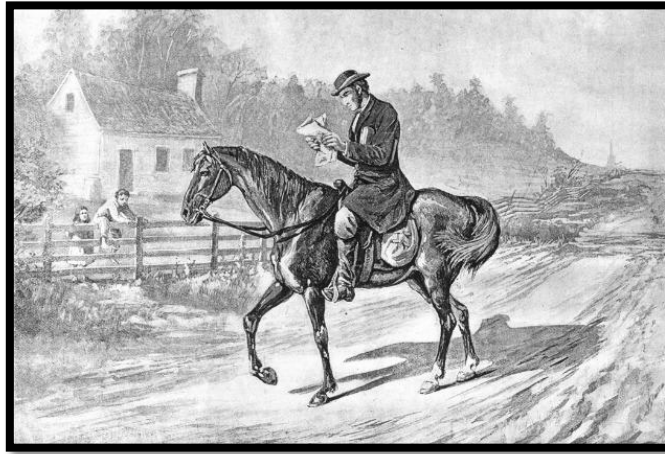


An engraving of Jesus Christ from a nineteenth century Bible.

His father's death triggered an internal debate about the meaning of life in Sanford's soul, causing him to spend many hours questioning himself about God. He was particularly concerned about his father's fate. "Has he found what he expected—a seraphic home where none but God and angels dwell? Or was he just dead, dead to him, to us, and to all things forever? These thoughts pained my soul," said Sanford. "If there was a God as the ancients declared, why was there so much confusion written in regard to Him?"

"I thought much of these things after his death and wondered if that black, coffin-shaped thing I had seen in the barn came to convince me that there was a power living and moving independent of the natural

power of man. And I recalled the time when I saw Beverly Yates, my playmate, go through the barn and over a pile of husks six feet high, and make no sound, and learned he had died that day, and we knew not that he was sick. What did it all mean? ‘Oh God, if there be a God, what is it and why can I not find out, so that my mind can rest? I will think of these things no more! No more! No, not at all, not at all!’”⁶⁶



Methodist circuit riders were an important connection to religion along the frontier.

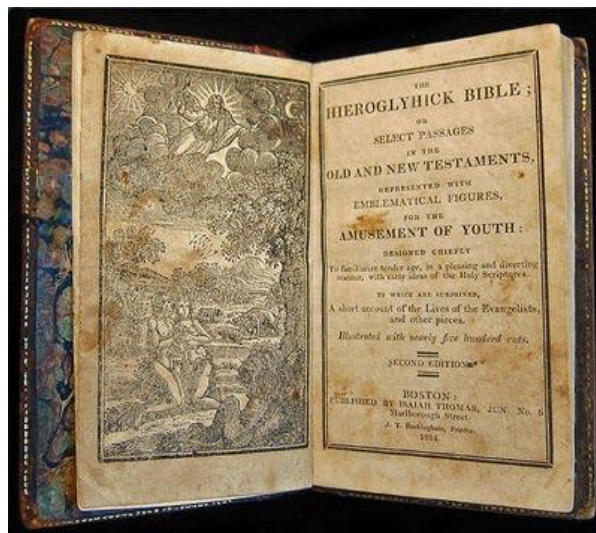
Methodist Ministers

As hard as Sanford tried to ignore these promptings and go about his business, he was drawn into situations which kept the thoughts alive. He had ceased attending church some time before, for which he was constantly scolded by others, “then there would be more arguments, for I could not refrain from speaking my mind when people nagged me,” he said.⁶⁷

One day a pair of Methodist preachers called at John’s house and “begged John to join their church, but John was very hard in these matters and told them there was nothing to their church or any other church,” said Sanford. “They began to quote scripture to him and tell him the law and the word of God, and John not being much of a scriptorian, they soon had him whipped—drove him to cover as they say. John got powerful mad and said, ‘I wish to God Sanford was here. If he couldn’t knock up your trotters, I’ll be damned.’ Just then I knocked at their door, not knowing that they had visitors. ‘Welcome, Sanford!’ said John. ‘I want you to show these men a few things.’ ‘What would you have me do?’

“[Mr.] Shepherd then told me about their argument and said he was sure they could convince me wherein I was wrong. ‘I shall be very happy indeed if you can clear my understanding and convince me of the truthfulness of the scriptures; this is the Bible which you claim is the word of God.’ Old Uncle Shepherd started quoting scripture. I brought him up a few times by quoting other parts of scripture, which disproved all that he had tried to prove, and our argument grew very warm indeed. Finally, Mr. Jackaway sided in with me; said he had never stopped to think out the unreasonableness of the things written in the Bible, but it seemed to him I was nearer right than Old Uncle, nearer right than anything he had ever heard before. ‘It may sound reasonable,’ said Uncle Shepherd, ‘but it is all from the devil. You have advocated ideas that no evangelist ever thought of, and it is all from the devil.’ He had been wiggling and twisting one way and another and finally jumped up from his chair and hotly condemned all that I had said.

“I have since learned, of course, that we were all wrong,” said Sanford. “We were in a dark chamber and could find no window or door that would admit light, groping in darkness, terrible darkness. Those were the days of witchcraft and dreams and apparitions, all of which I think was necessary to prepare men for the light that was to come. There is still darkness on the earth and in the minds of men, but nothing to compare with the gross darkness that existed before the advent of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel had diffused light and warmth upon the earth, and to some extent all men are partakers of it, but they do not realize it.”⁶⁸



Every household on the frontier had a Bible similar to this 1814 edition.

Contemplations

“I was very near, if not quite, an atheist or infidel,” Sanford recalled. “I believed in what I could see and feel and hear, and maintained that there was no life after death. I looked upon all churches as a scheme of ministers to make an easy living by plying their trade on the minds of the ignorant, and weak-minded. But about the time Mormonism was revealed, though I had heard nothing of it at that time, I became disturbed in my mind, and something was telling me there was a God, a life after death.”⁶⁹

“What should I do? How could I bring myself in harmony or subjection to these things? For to me there was no God, and as for a devil, there certainly was not any, only as they call evil in men. So I worried by night and by day for many years, and got no ray of light. And I would think of my father, how his soul, if there was such a thing, must be troubled because of me. These thoughts did bear great weight upon me and my soul did suffer greater sufferings than the body could know. What in the world could I do to get relief?”⁷⁰

“I pondered upon it, then tried to put it off my mind, but it would not leave me. I did not speak of it to anyone, nor could I satisfy my own mind as to any cause why I should be thus disturbed in my ideas of atheism, but I realized that some unseen power was holding a stubborn argument with me upon the existence of a God and a life after death. I became so much disturbed as to break my rest. All day I would walk in the barn and all night in the house. I spoke to no one, nor they to me, not even my wife and children. I guess they thought I was stark mad, and I doubted my own senses. I did not eat, drink nor sleep for three days and nights, and was neither hungry, dry nor sleepy.”⁷¹ While at work, it would be continually on my mind, and after my family were all asleep, I would get up and walk the floor, and at last I came to the point of extreme, and I spoke out in an audible voice and said, ‘Oh! Is there a God? If so, may I know the way that is right?’⁷²

“The last night there came a voice, clear, audible and distinct. ‘There is a God and He has known the desires of your heart this number of years. I will instruct you three times this night the way that is right, that you need never again doubt, but shall be satisfied in your mind concerning God.’ The voice was a mild one, but it went through me like a shock and I trembled in every limb.

“I gathered myself and I thought someone had learned of my state of mind and had been standing at the door and heard me speak, and answered me in these words, thinking I would believe it was

supernatural being that had spoken. The outside door did not close tight. There was quite a crack at the top and I concluded that someone of those professors of religion had by some means found out I was much troubled and concerned in my mind about religion and had rode up to the door, and sitting on the horse, had put their mouth to the crack and said those words. So I opened the door.

“Light snow had fallen, light enough so anyone could be tracked, but a track of anything could not be seen, so I went back into the house, thinking someone may have gotten into the house and sprung a trick on me. Then I lit a candle and made a thorough search, but I found no one, so I seated myself before the fire to await developments. I knew I heard an audible voice and understood plainly the words ‘three times this night,’ and it filled me with fear to hear it again, that I might be overcome, but I waited a while and all was quiet, so I thought I would lie down and rest while I waited.”⁷³

A Remarkable Vision

“But my head had no sooner touched the pillow than I was caught away from things of the earth. Whether I was the body or out of the body, I could not tell, but I felt of myself, and said, ‘It is no dream. I am awake.’”⁷⁴ A guide was with me. We passed through a cloud of darkness. Then we came to a world of light, and the light surpassed the light of the large body of light. The body of light reached up so high I could not see the top, but close around the large body light were many people and they were all bowing to the big body of light in an attitude of worship and praise and their countenance showed they were most happy. They were in pews or boxes formed like honeycombs. The sides of one formed the sides of the others. In those that were occupied there was a male and a female. There was none with a single person in. Some were empty, and behind the first circle was another large circle of people who looked happy, but not so supremely happy as the first, and they also were in an attitude of worship and praise, and still farther back from the second were the third host of people. But they were in darkness and in torment, so much so that they were wringing their hands and going into contortions of bodily pain, until I turned from the sight.

“Then I asked my guide what the body of light was that seemed to be filled with moving life and he said, ‘It is God.’ And I asked him who the people were that were so happy, and he said, ‘They are those who have kept the commandments of God and have gone through great trials, but have proved faithful.’ Then I asked, ‘Who are those that are in darkness and in such torment?’ He said, ‘They are the

commandment breakers and doers of all kinds of sin.’ Then I asked if their torment would ever have an end. He quoted scripture in answer to all my questions, giving chapter and verse.⁷⁵

“Then he said, ‘There is no true church upon the earth at the present time.’ Then I said, ‘Will there ever be a true church?’ He said, ‘There will.’ I said, ‘Will I live to see it?’ He said, ‘You will.’ Then the guide said, ‘Come, let us go.’ So we went back through the darkness and in an instant we were back on the barn floor. I came to a full sense of realization with a prickly feeling all over my body, but only for a short time until I was carried away again and shown the order of the spiritual life and what mortals must do to gain an entrance into our Father’s kingdom. And as the voice had said, three times that night, I was shown the things of heaven and told the way that was right, that I need never doubt more, and so it has ever been since that time. I am convinced that if I lose my inheritance in the Kingdom of God, it will be by my own negligence.”⁷⁶

ENDNOTES

⁶⁶ Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1* (self-published, 1957), page 56-57.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, page 57.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 57-58.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, page 75.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, page 60.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

⁷² *Ibid*, page 76.

⁷³ *Ibid*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, page 77.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, page 77-78.

Chapter 5

Frontier Fever

Another Move Westward



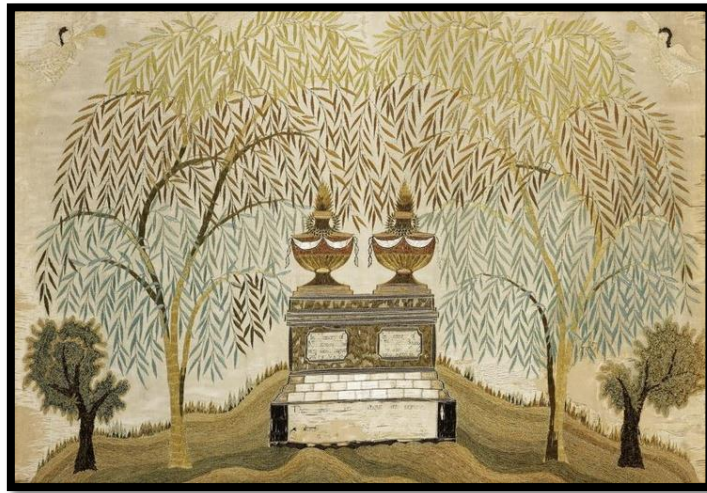
Travelers long country roads like this one in Vermont were often met with deep ruts in the mire and mud.

On the surface, Sanford's life continued as usual. Nancy presented him with another daughter, Sarah⁷⁷ in 1816, followed by the birth of John⁷⁸ in 1818. With four children to support, Sanford spent long hours working on the farm to provide for his growing family. Yet all during this time religious questions troubled Sanford's mind and his thoughts continually returned to the visions and signs he had experienced. "[When] I went into the barn, my father's coffin would come in my mind and that angel of light would seem to appear," said Sanford. "I got so I was almost afraid to go in the barn. I could not bear to stay on the place, and I sold out my farm to my brother, John."⁷⁹

Sanford moved his family several times over the next few years. Soon after he bought land five miles west of the Oneida farm, Sanford was visited by Joseph, who convinced him to return to Vermont, where he took over the old West farm and mill. Sanford was too ill and weak to

run the mill, however. He ended up renting out the mill and purchasing another farm in Corinth, where Nancy gave birth to their fifth child, Nathan,⁸⁰ in July, 1820.

Not long after Nathan's birth Sanford returned to New York to visit John, who convinced his brother to moved back to New York. "I went to Vermont and got my family and moved back. John was highly pleased to have me back, but our friendship was of a short duration. He and his wife went on a visit down to old Brimfield about three hundred miles to see some kin and he was taken sick and died."⁸¹



Embroidered tributes like this one were a common way to memorialize the death of a loved one in the early 1800s.

Vision of John's Death

Not long after John left for Connecticut Sanford "went into a trance and my spirit went down as if going past John's house," he said. "I saw a wagon covered with a black oil cloth cover and a white horse standing by it. I heard John's girls crying and screaming, 'Oh, Father, Father, can it be that Father is dead?' My spirit went into the home. There was John's wife [Susan]⁸² dressed in mourning, weeping with the girls. She said that John was dead and buried in Old Brimfield.

"As quick as thought I came out of the trance. Said I, 'Nancy, John is dead. Have they got a letter from him?' 'No,' [said Nancy]. I thought I would go down there in the morning and tell the girls. I told them I had had a vision and that their father was dead and that Susan would be home without him with a wagon covered with black, and a white

horse. They fairly laughed me to scorn. They said they didn't care about my dreams. They didn't believe but that he would come back as well as he went away. They jumped and danced about the house as if the devil was in them. I suppose they thought to cheer me, for I was in deep mourning.

"I was going to the store in a few days and then I saw the wagon and the white horse that I saw in the vision. I went to the house and the girls were screaming and [saying], 'Father, Father, can it be that Father is dead?' I told her [Susan] all the particulars [of my vision] and she said, 'I declare, you have told the truth. You could not have told my story better if you had been on the journey with us.'⁸³

"John died without making any will concerning his property. [The girls] were willing to let the widow have all she brought there. She brought nothing but her clothes and trunk. 'Don't you think that your father would have willed her more than that if he had made a will before he died?' [I asked]. They didn't know what his will would have said about it. I went home and could not help but think of John's affairs. I went into the bedroom and lay down and cried to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to let me see my brother, John. Immediately, I was in a trance and there came an angel from the spirit world and told me God had heard my prayers and he was sent to tell me I might go and see my brother and learn what his will was concerning his widow and the girls. The spirit vanished and my spirit took its flight to the spirit world. John was in a dreary looking place in an old dilapidated cabin.

"I told him I had been permitted to come and see him and see his will was concerning Susan and the girls. 'Well,' said John, 'you tell the girls it is my will that Susan should have a good, comfortable living. She has been a kind mother, now let them be kind to her. Tell Susan and the girls not to be too much worried about getting gain while on earth, for all things upon the earth are perish and pass away.' I took my flight back to my body. I told my wife and Susan I had had a vision and what John's will concerning them was. My wife told people she knew it was true as the sun shines. I went and told the girls [what I had seen and heard], that Susan was to have it unless she married again. Things went very well for a few weeks, but Nathan⁸⁴ flattered up Susan and they went off and got married. Then she had no more right to the house.'⁸⁵



An Ohio farm in a contemporary illustration.

Living by the Spirit

Sanford was anxious to leave New York after John's death, trading his farm for Nathan's wild timberland in Ohio. "We made a bargain, and I settled up my affairs and prepared to move to the state of Ohio. We started sometime in February [1823]," said Sanford. "I found the land, what I could see of it, but the most of it was covered with water and it looked like a bog. I worked hard that summer, but thought I could never raise bread on it to support my family. I cried again to God to let me know what was best to be done, and immediately I was in a trance and in a vision. A messenger was sent from the spirit world to tell me what was best for me to do. He informed me that I had better sell the place I was on, for it was too hard a place for a man to support a family. He said I had better go to the state of Illinois, not far from Lake Peoria, what was called Fort Clark. He vanished from out of my sight."⁸⁶

Heeding the spiritual messenger, Sanford moved his family to Vienna in Liberty Township, where two children were born: Sanford⁸⁷ in June, 1823, and Nancy Areta⁸⁸ in August, 1825. Little Nancy was soon taken with a serious illness, as were many infants and children in the area. "There were many that died. They would be taken with what was called croup or rattles, and choke and turn purple, for they were so filled with phlegm they couldn't breathe. The doctors could not save them," said Sanford, who retained his distrust of doctors, trusting instead the skills of a local wet nurse, who cured Nancy with natural medicines. "She was the only child that was heard of that had distemper that young and lived."⁸⁹



Ohio Country

One of the first frontiers of the United States was the region of the upper Ohio River south of Lake Erie. This Northwest Territory became a desirable for pioneers seeking new lives and inexpensive land.

“For some time before I left, the people of the neighborhood were in a high fever in old Connecticut about the state of Ohio, getting rid of all their possessions as fast as they could and moving. I remember a little song they used to sing:

We will plow and we will sow, we will reap and we will mow,

We'll all get ready and we'll go to the state of Ohio.

And we'll settle on the banks of the pleasant Ohio;

Yes, we'll settle on the banks of the Ohio.”

(See Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, Porter Family History, Volume 1 (self-published, 1957), page 16)



The Ohio River became a highway for pioneers moving west.

On to Illinois

The need to move father west prompted Sanford to sell out once again in the spring of 1827, and this time he headed for Indiana with a neighbor, John Morgan. "We constructed a flat boat, which we launched on the Mahoning River, not far from our home at Liberty," said Sanford. "Loading it with our effects, we floated down the Mahoning, then into the Beaver, then into and down the Ohio. This journey was fraught with danger and adventure as the country was wild and uninhabited, but our first danger was going over the falls of the Beaver River some distance above its confluence with the Ohio. As we neared the falls, we drew to shore, and disembarked all the women and children, in fact, all except Mr. Morgan and two pilots, leaving them with the boat, and the rest followed down the stream, watching the boat with intense interest as it drew near the suck which plunged it over the falls. For a few moments, we thought all was lost, but she soon came in sight, right side up, and no material damage was done."⁹⁰ The Porter and Morgan party arrived near Evansville, Indiana, at the beginning of May. Sanford rented a farm, supplementing his income by teaching school that winter while he prepared his family to move into Illinois the following spring.

Conditions were finally right for the move in March, 1828. Sanford constructed a wagon "in the form of a truck, the wheels being made of pine logs, mortised together with a large hole through the axle for the lynch pin. We used tallow for wagon grease. With this rude construction, drawn by two yoke of oxen, we traveled northwest from Evansville, crossing the Wabash River into Illinois," said Sanford,

who noted that while they encountered stormy weather, he and his family were “filled with wonder and admiration at the beautiful country lying before us as far as the eye could see, covered with luxuriant growth of natural vegetation.”⁹¹ The Porters arrived in Tazewell County, Illinois, in time for the birth of Justin⁹² in May, three miles east of Pekin.



The Farm Creek section in Tazewell County, Illinois.

Farm Creek

Sanford scouted out a piece of property along Farm Creek where the only neighbors were the families of Joseph and Charles C. Rich and Morris Phelps. “I found a place that pleased me very well, about forty acres covered with beautiful white oak, thrifty and good sized, with a good road running from the Wabash to Port Clark, now called Peoria. I moved my family up there and once more we went to clearing land and making logs to build a house, a barn, and other things; to plow again and to plant and to reap and get ready for winter. We had plenty of work to do and then some.”⁹³ Everything must be made at home: utensils, farming implements, shoes, clothing, etc. We had to work on the principle, “if you want anything, make it,” and few tools to work with. [There was] no school that the small children could reach. But with all, we prospered and had plenty to eat and wear.”⁹⁴

The opportunity to prosper increased with an influx of new settlers the following year, a situation Sanford and Morris Phelps decided to cash in on by building a saw mill together along Farm Creek, three miles from the Porter place. Phelps eventually sold out to Sanford, moving north to DuPage, thirty miles from Chicago, in 1830. The mill became so successful Sanford was unable to keep up with both his farm work and milling. He sold the farm and moved his family to the mill.⁹⁵

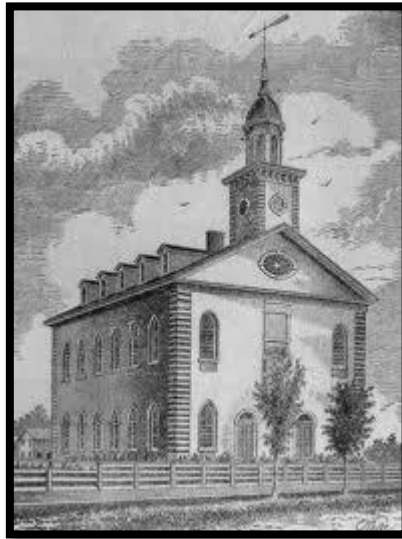
ENDNOTES

- ⁷⁷ Sarah (Porter) Willard (1816-1841), #KWVH-7ZT, www.familysearch.org
- ⁷⁸ John President Porter (1818-1895), #KWJV-9J6, www.familysearch.org
- ⁷⁹ This took place in 1818. Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1* (self-published, 1957), page 64.
- ⁸⁰ Nathan Tanner Porter (1820-1897), #KWCV-XNL, www.familysearch.org Sanford and Nancy named their son after Susannah West's first husband.
- ⁸¹ John died sometime in 1822. Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 64-65.
- ⁸² John's second wife, Susan (-) Porter (1790-).
- ⁸³ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 65.
- ⁸⁴ Nathan, Sanford's oldest half-brother, had been abandoned by his wife some time beforehand.
- ⁸⁵ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 66.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid*, page 67.
- ⁸⁷ Sanford Porter (1823-1913), #KWJ8-KD6, www.familysearch.org
- ⁸⁸ Nancy Areta (Porter) Stevenson Clark (1825-1888), #KWJZ-8FT, www.familysearch.org
- ⁸⁹ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 67-68.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid*, page 74.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid*.
- ⁹² Justin Theodore Porter (1828-1841), #L4MJ-KDK, www.familysearch.org
- ⁹³ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 68.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid*, page 75.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid*, page 69.

Chapter 6

Conversion

Among the Elect



*The first temple of the Church of
Jesus Christ at Kirtland, Ohio.*

During the summer of 1831, Morris Phelps attended a religious meeting in DuPage directed by Lyman Wight and John Corrill, two missionaries from a new church headquartered in Kirtland, Ohio. They claimed God had spoken to a latter-day prophet by the name of Joseph Smith, restoring the original church of Jesus Christ along with its priesthood. It was revolutionary news that stirred Phelps to his soul. He knew right away his old friend Sanford Porter would be interested in the message carried by Elders Wight and Corrill. As Phelps gave the missionaries a letter of introduction to his former neighbor, Lyman Wight prophesied, “We shall baptize Mr. Porter and ordain him an Elder and he will come here four weeks from today and will preach here and will baptize all four of you [meaning Morris and John Cooper and their wives].”⁹⁶ Lyman Wight and John Corrill made their way to Tazewell County soon afterwards.

One morning in July, 1831, Sanford stepped out of his house ready to begin his day at the mill when he met “two strange men. We passed the time of day and one of them handed me a letter, sealed. I opened it and found it was from Morris Phelps,” said Sanford. “Morris told me in his letter that these men had been preaching in their neighborhood and had set the Methodist, Baptist and every other religious profession in an uproar, and he wanted me to search them to the bottom and find out if possible what their belief was and write him my conclusion.

“‘My friend tells me you are preachers of a new profession. We will walk into the house, gentlemen.’ I bade them remove their knapsacks and be seated. I went into the house and said, ‘Well, gentlemen, I am ready to hear you expound your doctrine.’ They told me that they had a prophet, seer and revelator; that they had apostles, and that their church was organized just as the ancient church of Christ was organized; that they had the same gifts, the same power to heal the sick and to cast out devils, the power to ordain every male member to the priesthood, and that these men were given authority to preach their gospel to every nation and kindred, tongue and people. If people believed and repented of their sins, the elders of their church were commanded to baptize them by immersion in water and to lay their hands upon their heads and bestow upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost, which would lead them into all truth.

“As they talked, I surely prayed in my heart that what they were telling me was true! They showed me a new book they had with them and explained where and how it was obtained. I took the book and together we searched it. For three days and nights, almost without sleep, we searched it. I asked them what their interpretation was to many passages of scripture About daylight of the third night I told them I had asked all the questions I could think of, and they wanted to know what I thought of their doctrine.

“‘If you have told me all the truth, gentlemen, and I have not the least doubt of it, your church is the right church and the only one on the face of the whole earth,’ [I said]. I knew, for a personage from another world had told me that all mankind had transgressed the laws of God, changed the ordinances of the gospel and broken the everlasting covenant, and I had been commanded to join none of them, for they preached for hire and the adulation of men. And I thought that of all the crafts on earth, priest craft was the most rotten and deceptive They tell the people there is no need of prophets or visions or revelations these days; that we have a Bible, and when that was given to man, the canon of scripture was closed (and you can prove anything, right or wrong, from the Bible).⁹⁷

“The elders of this new church tried hard to persuade me to join their church and be baptized, but I told them it was no good to make haste, [but should] take your time to repent. I would reflect upon it, and if my belief and faith strengthened after further consideration, I would join.”⁹⁸ I felt that I should be cautious, as this might not be the [church] my guide had spoken of, but I felt confident he would come and let me know if this was the right church. The elders asked me if I would let them know if I got notice that this was right. I told them if I got assurance that they were right I would follow them to the ends of the earth if need be.

“The time drew near that their labors in that vicinity would close. The day before they were to leave”⁹⁹ they came to my house to hold a family meeting and I received them cordially, and the best of feelings prevailed, but I felt that I should wait. But very early in the morning as I lay pondering, I heard the same mild voice as before. He said, ‘This is right. Arise, and be baptized.’

“I lost no time in finding the elders. They held a meeting at my house again and we went to the place prepared, and the ordinance of baptism was performed for myself, my wife, and eldest daughter [Malinda], and I was ordained an Elder and set apart to labor as a missionary in and around the vicinity where we lived. The elders then went to the home of Nathan Sumner, about six miles from our place, whom they also baptized and ordained an Elder, and set him apart also to labor with me as a missionary in the adjoining towns.”¹⁰⁰

Sanford and his mission companion travelled north to visit Morris Phelps, who he baptized along with John Cooper and several other old neighbors, fulfilling Lyman Wight’s prophecy. Shortly after returning to Tazewell County, Sanford met two elders passing through on their way from Jackson County, Missouri, to Kirtland, Ohio, “informing the Saints that Independence, Missouri, had been designated as the gathering place of the main body of the church,” said Sanford. “Shortly after this, I offered my property for sale and prepared to go and instructed the Saints over whom I was called to preside to do likewise.”¹⁰¹



*Joseph Smith declared Independence, Missouri,
the site of the New Jerusalem in 1831.*

Gathering to Missouri

The families of Morris Phelps, James Emmett,¹⁰² and William and John Aldridge joined the Porters on the first of December, 1831, ready to make their way five hundred miles west to Independence, Missouri in the dead of winter, a test of faith if there ever was one. They crossed the Illinois River on ice ten inches thick, giving some traction to their teams by spreading dry grass in front of them, but by the time they reached the Mississippi River, the ice had softened.

“It was considered unsafe to cross, even for horsemen,” said Sanford, “so I and James Emmett went to a secluded place and in humble prayer inquired of the God of Heaven what was best to do, and by inspiration these words were given to us: ‘Be of good cheer, for behold I will prepare the way before you. Get ye up early in the morning and cross this river with your teams and wagons. Use wisdom, and no harm shall befall you, but you shall cross in safety.’ And this gave us a peaceful assurance, and all night long. I and Brother Emmett were awake, thinking the wind would surely change to the north and freeze the ice harder, but in this we were mistaken. The south wind continued to blow, but the ice was a little harder, and according to the inspiration of the previous day, we made ready to cross.

“Chauncey, my eldest son, was sent ahead with the first wagon and two yoke of oxen hitched to it, and was told to stop at a certain sand bar more than half way across the river and there wait until the main body of the company came up. But he disobeyed our instructions and

drove on across while many people on both sides of the river were holding their breath in fear, but he went over all right, and a shout of wonder and surprise went up from the people, and many said they saw the ice rise and fall in waves behind the wagon. But more care was taken when crossing the rest of the company. They all crossed the sand bar one team at a time, then unhitched the teams and drove them over, then hitched a horse at the end of the tongue to distribute the weight to as long a distance as possible. In that way we all crossed in safety by ten o'clock.”¹⁰³

The miraculous crossing of the Mississippi was followed by a miracle of healing some days later when eight-year old Sanford Junior was kicked in the head by a horse. “He was to all appearance dead when carried into the tent,” said Sanford, who immediately anointed his son’s head with oil. “Laying our hands on his head, we invoked the life giving power of the God of Israel, and soon after taking our hands from his head, his muscles began to show signs of life. In a short time consciousness soon returned. He opened his eyes and seemed to recognize those around him, and in a short time was able to walk around.”¹⁰⁴



George Andersons 1907 photograph of the temple lot in Independence, Missouri.

An Inheritance

The emigrants finally arrived at Independence on 1 March, 1832, after two months on the road. It had been “a cold and tedious journey,” said Sanford, “but by the blessings of the God of Israel, we were all alive and well and happily united with those of our faith, and feeling fully repaid for all the hardships we had endured.”¹⁰⁵

The Porters agreed to live the law of consecration, dedicating their worldly goods to the church, receiving in return an allotment of land, or “inheritance,” in exchange. Sanford’s inheritance was twenty acres in Prairie Branch, a settlement under the direction of Lyman Wight, fifteen miles west of Independence. Sanford immediately built a home and began improving his land, anxious to be a part of Zion.¹⁰⁶ It was here where Sanford baptized his sons John and Sanford Jr. in June, 1832, and where Nancy gave birth to a son¹⁰⁷ the couple named after their dear friend Lyman Wight in May, 1833.

“We expected to reside in peace until the second coming of the Savior, and we were to build a magnificent temple to His most Holy Name,” said Sanford,¹⁰⁸ who served the community as counselor to Lyman Wight when his friend wasn’t away on various missions, bringing more converts to the gospel truth.¹⁰⁹ While the gathering in Missouri was initially optimistic, it didn’t take long for the “gentile” settlers surrounding the Saints to feel threatened by their growing presence. Attacks on scattered Mormons as they worked in their fields progressed to wholesale persecution during the summer of 1833.

Driven to and Fro

“We were driven from our homes without court or council, and that at the point of the bayonet and the muzzle of the gun,” recalled Sanford.¹¹⁰ A general exodus from Jackson County began in November, with most of the Saints relocating in nearby Clay and Caldwell counties. On the cold and clear night of 12 November, 1833, the Porters were among a large group of Saints camped along the south bank of the Missouri River with no way of making an immediate crossing. “The mob who had driven us were still in pursuit, and as they said they were under a pledge to kill men, women, and children as soon as overtaken,” said Sanford. Suddenly, just when the refugees seemed most vulnerable to the approaching mob, a storm “broke in meteoric violence, the worst that any of us had ever seen, and in seeming fear the mob fled from their intended victories. We looked upon the storm as a miraculous deliverance by the hand of God.”¹¹¹

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.¹¹² 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,¹¹³ eventually settling in for the winter at the head of the Osage River. The following spring Sanford’s group moved farther up the Grand River in an area the natives called Pleasant Valley.¹¹⁴

Provisions

The valley may have pleasant, but the people had fled their homes in such a hurry that they found themselves with very few supplies and provisions to see them through the coming winter. Sanford suggested putting together a party of men who would return to their former homes to recoup their stores, all with a prayer that “the Lord would soften the hearts of our enemies, that they would let us have some of our own to bring back with us. I had left plenty of grain and hogs at home if I could get it, so I took my team and went with the company, but when I arrived at my home, all was gone. My bins were empty, my hogs were stolen or had strayed off, and nothing remained to get; and in this condition my feelings can be imagined rather than told. I was among my bitter enemies with no money to buy with, and my family out in the wilds with winter upon them and nothing to live on.

“While in deep trouble, a Mr. Cantrel, one of my neighbors, though a bitter enemy to our people, came up to me and said, ‘Good morning, Mr. Porter. You seem to be in trouble.’ ‘I am,’ I said. ‘My family is out in a wild country with winter upon them and nothing to live on, and I have no money to buy food to take to them.’ His heart seemed to soften, for he said, ‘Drive over to my place. You can have what you want and it will not cost you anything.’ And with a thankful heart I accepted his offer, although I felt that I was getting my very own. We had suffered so much persecution we were forced to take the stripes and bow to the giver. The other members that were going back found as much as they could haul, so we were soon on our way back to our families.”¹¹⁵

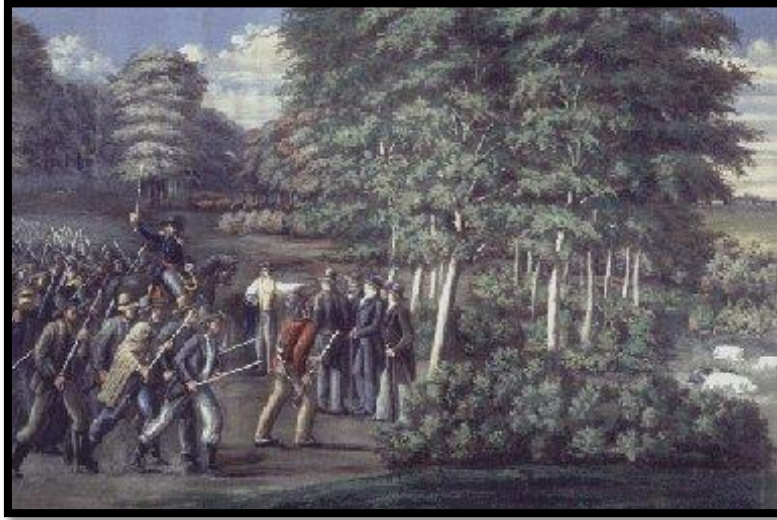
ENDNOTES

- ⁹⁶ Leonard J. Arrington, *Charles C. Rich: Mormon General and Western Frontiersman* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), page 16.
- ⁹⁷ Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1* (self-published, 1957), page 71.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid*, page 72.
- ⁹⁹ 10 August, 1831.
- ¹⁰⁰ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 78.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, page 78.
- ¹⁰² James Emmett (1803-1852), #LZT6-LJP, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁰³ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 79-80.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, page 80.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁰⁶ 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 13-14. http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2-MHS_2007_Prairie-Branch-Jackson-County.pdf
- ¹⁰⁷ Lyman Wight Porter (1833-1914), #KWNV-42J, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁰⁸ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 80.
- ¹⁰⁹ Porter and Romig, "The Prairie Branch, Jackson County, Missouri: Emergence, Flourishing and Demise, 1831-1834," page 18.
- ¹¹⁰ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 82.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid*.
- ¹¹² This portion of Jackson County became Van Buren County in 1835 and Cass County in 1849.
- ¹¹³ Porter and Romig, "The Prairie Branch, Jackson County, Missouri: Emergence, Flourishing and Demise, 1831-1834," page 27.
- ¹¹⁴ "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.
- ¹¹⁵ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 83.

Chapter 7

Iowa Interlude

Starting Over



Events surrounding the Battle of Crooked River in 1838 eventually led to the expulsion of the Saints from Missouri.

The main body of Saints had moved north into Clay County during the winter of 1833-34, finding temporary refuge until they were forced into Caldwell and Daviess Counties, areas where the state hoped to isolate the controversial church and avoid further conflicts. Joseph Smith dedicated a temple site in his new headquarters of Far West in July, 1838, and the Saints anticipated a future where they could live in peace. However, by August, persecutions began again after a mob refused to allow Mormons to cast their ballots on election day. The ensuing brawl led to mob action against the Saints, and the growing disorder caused Missouri governor Lilburn Boggs to issue an extermination order, calling for the Mormons to be “driven from the state if necessary for the public peace.”¹¹⁶ The Saints were once more compelled to leave their homes at gun point.

The area Sanford had selected for a new settlement in southern Jackson County¹¹⁷ was so far removed from the main body of the Saints that he and his neighbors lived in relative peace during the volatile years of Missouri unrest. Their main battle was against nature, not man. “The country at that time was almost an uninhabited wilderness, and our little company were thrown on upon their own resources,” said Sanford, who eventually decided it would benefit his family to live closer to Far West.¹¹⁸ However, by the time he planned to sell his land in Pleasant Valley, his non-Mormon neighbors knew the Saints’ days in Missouri were numbered and Sanford was unable to sell at any price. The Porters and their friends abandoned their settlement in 1839, joining the rest of the Saints as they made their way toward Illinois, where they hoped to finally find peace.



*A view of Montrose, Iowa, looking toward Nauvoo
across the Mississippi River.*

A Prairie Farm

Sanford and his family were among those disposed Saints who huddled together during the winter and spring of 1839, sheltered in the abandoned barracks of Fort Des Moines along the Mississippi River at Montrose, Iowa. That spring Joseph Smith arranged to purchase lands on both sides of the river, choosing the city of Nauvoo, Illinois, as the new church headquarters and location of a temple. The Prophet also selected a site for the city of Zarahemla, five miles west of Montrose, where a local stake of the church was organized. Chauncey and Malinda, both now married and with families of their own, moved across the river to Nauvoo, while Sanford and Nancy found land suitable for their new farm in Zarahemla.¹¹⁹

Sanford was fifty years old by this time, and he relied on his sons' help clearing the land and building a new home, but the work slowed after nineteen-year old Nathan injured himself handling heavy timber, resulting in his inability to work for several months.¹²⁰ Eventually, with John and Sanford Jr. pitching in, the fields were planted and the Porters settled in.

Later that summer Sarah fell in love with a man who was not a member of the church. Her parents were distraught. "We were all opposed to her marrying him, but like many others, she made her own choice," said Sanford. "He had made a solemn promise that he would join soon after they were married, so she trusted in his word, but soon after their marriage she found that he did not intend to join the church, and when out of her presence he would speak against the Mormons and vilify them. When she learned of his true character it had a fatal effect on her sensitive nature. She grieved very deeply and it undermined her health, and she passed away within a year after her marriage."¹²¹

Sanford and Nancy lost another one of their children to death in August, 1841, when thirteen-year old Justin was dragged to death by a team of horses as he was leading them back from watering. He was attempting to accomplish two chores at the same by tying the horses' ropes around his waist, freeing his hands to carry two buckets of water, but the plan ended in tragedy when the animals became frightened and bolted.¹²²

Temple Ordinances

The Porter farm was close enough to Nauvoo for the family to watch as the temple slowly rose above the city across the Mississippi. They were among the faithful Saints who donated their means and talents toward constructing the sacred building, looking forward to the day when they would be allowed to receive saving ordinances there. As soon as the baptismal font was dedicated in the basement, Sanford and Nancy travelled to Nauvoo in order to be baptized by proxy for their death relatives. Nancy was baptized for her mother Sarah Warriner,¹²³ sister Sarah Malthy¹²⁴ and sister-in-law Cynthia Warriner.¹²⁵ Sanford was baptized for his grandfathers John Porter¹²⁶ and Thomas West,¹²⁷ his father Nathan Porter, his uncles Johnathan West¹²⁸ and Samuel Porter,¹²⁹ and his half-brothers John and Phineas Porter.¹³⁰



The temple nears completion on a hill rising above Nauvoo.

Sanford and Nancy were among those Saints endowed as the temple was completed. They both received their endowments on New Year's Day, 1846, returning to the temple on 3 February to be sealed for time and all eternity.¹³¹

The Porters proved themselves dedicated and faithful members of the church time and again. Sanford was ordained as a high priest in 1840, and both Sanford and Nancy supported Nathan while he served two missions, the second one in 1844, when Nathan was in Ohio promoting Joseph Smith's candidacy for President of the United States, along with many other missionaries, including family friend James Emmett.¹³² Sadly this mission was cut short when the Prophet and his brother Hyrum were martyred on 27 June, 1844.¹³³

Exodus

Nathan and James Emmett, like every missionary who was away at the time, hurried back to Nauvoo as soon as they heard the terrible news. The Saints were stunned and crushed at the Prophet's death. The Saint's enemies thought the death Joseph Smith would collapse the church, and for a brief while the church struggled under a crisis of succession, with a number of men contending for leadership. Brigham Young claimed authority as head of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, and in a prayer meeting held that August where several men spoke of their qualifications to lead the people, Brigham Young miraculously took on the appearance of Joseph Smith as he spoke. The majority of the people accepted Brigham Young as their new prophet, but a few continued to have their doubts, creating splinter groups which plagued the church for some time.



The first party of evacuees left Nauvoo in the cold of early February, 1846.

The main church continued to grow under Brigham Young's presidency, much to the anger of anti-Mormons, who launched another wave of persecutions upon the Saints in an effort to drive them from Illinois. It became clear to Brigham Young that his people would have to leave Nauvoo, and he was determined to find a place where they could once and for all live their religion in peace. While Young favored settling the Saints in the Great Basin, there were others who proposed different locations, including two of the Porter's close associates, James Emmett and Lyman Wight.

As members of Joseph Smith's Council of Fifty,¹³⁴ both Emmett and Wight had been intimates of the Prophet, and had both received commissions from Joseph to explore locations in the west suitable for future settlement. Lyman Wight, who believed he had been assigned to pioneer in Texas, led his own group there in 1845. Brigham Young tried several times in vain to convince Wight to return to the main church, but Wight broke with Brigham Young and was eventually ordained president of his own church.¹³⁵ James Emmett was anxious to fulfill what he saw as his duty to Joseph Smith by pressing for movement into Indian country. He convinced a number of people to join him in a journey across Iowa to the border of South Dakota in September, 1844, against the church leadership's wishes.¹³⁶

For their part, Sanford and Nancy remained loyal to Brigham Young, supporting the church however they could. Their location in rural Iowa made their assistance important in keeping an eye out for hostile forces. Sanford was key in organizing intelligence gathering, as noted by Hosea Stout recorded in his diary entry for 14 January, 1846. "I was there notified by President B. [Brigham] Young to send spies off in different parts of the country to watch and report the proceedings

of the mob. I committed the business of sending spies out in Iowa to Sanford Porter who lives in Iowa. He was to send some three or four in different directions to watch their movements and let us know when anything is going on among them against us.”¹³⁷

Brigham Young had planned the evacuation of Nauvoo to begin in April, 1846, but threats from the state militia forced his hand, and the church leadership agreed the Saints should depart as soon as possible. The first company left under Brigham Young’s direction in February’s freezing weather, headed for the Missouri River on the western edge of Iowa. Other wagon trains followed over the next few months, all of them passing through Montrose. Sanford succeeded in selling his farm, although he was forced to accept “a low figure,”¹³⁸ and led his family to Winter Quarters, Nebraska, where Brigham Young had established a temporary camp for the Saints until they could prepare for their final push to the Great Salt Lake Valley.

Joining Sanford and Nancy were all of their children and their families with the exception of one. Malinda’s husband Ezra Chipman,¹³⁹ had thrown his support behind Lyman Wight during the succession crisis, moving his family to Wight’s settlement in Texas. Even though Malinda “had no faith” in Wight, she followed her husband to Texas, where she remained with her children until 1867, when after a visit from her brother Lyman, she and her youngest son moved to Utah.¹⁴⁰

ENDNOTES

¹¹⁶ *Church History in the Fullness of Times* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989, page 201.

¹¹⁷ This settlement was a few miles east of today’s town of Drexel, just north of the Cass County line. See 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 28. http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2-MHS_2007_Prairie-Branch-Jackson-County.pdf

¹¹⁸ Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1* (self-published, 1957), page 84.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, page 209.

¹²³ Sarah (Colton) Warriner (1757-1816), #LX3B-GW9, www.familysearch.org

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- ¹²⁴ Sarah (Warriner) Maltby (1783-1813), #F8M7-4NX, www.familysearch.org
- ¹²⁵ Cynthia (-) Warriner (1786-1802), LWXR-CGB, www.familysearch.org
- ¹²⁶ John Porter (1699-1771), #LXQM-RS6, www.familysearch.org
- ¹²⁷ Thomas West (1732-1797), #MFC7-WCV, www.familysearch.org
- ¹²⁸ Johnathan West (1754-1800), #LJGS-RD8, www.familysearch.org
- ¹²⁹ Samuel Porter (1837-1784), #LXQM-RG3, www.familysearch.org
- ¹³⁰ Susan Easton Black and Harvey Bischoff Black, *Annotated Record of Baptism for the Dead 1840-1845, Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002) page 2936-39.
- ¹³¹ Sanford Porter entry, "Early Latter-day Saints; Remembering People and Places," <http://earlylds.com/getperson.php?personID=I13215&tree=Earlylds>
- ¹³² Dale Morgan, *Dale Morgan on the Mormons: Collected Works, Part 2, 1949-1970* (Norman, Oklahoma: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2013), page 345.
- ¹³³ Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 84.
- ¹³⁴ The Council of Fifty was organized by Joseph Smith in 1844 to symbolize and represent the future government of a Kingdom of God on earth. Members were primarily advisors to Smith.
- ¹³⁵ Wight later sided with the leadership claims of Joseph Smith's brother William Smith and eventually with Joseph's son, Joseph Smith III. After Wight's death most of his followers joined with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints under the direction of Joseph Smith III.
- ¹³⁶ For an in-depth history of James Emmett's expedition, see Richard E. Bennett, "Mormon Renegade: James Emmett at the Vermillion, 1846" (*South Dakota History*, Fall, 1985), pages 217-33.
file:///C:/Users/Shelley_2/Downloads/Vol.%2015%20No.%203%20Mormon%20Renegade.pdf
- ¹³⁷ *Diary of Hosea Stout* (1810-1889), 14 January, 1846, <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/HStout.html>
- ¹³⁸ Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 86.
- ¹³⁹ Ezra Alpheus Chipman (1817-1913), #LHCB-W8V, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁴⁰ Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 118.

Chapter 8

Zion at Last

Settling In



The extended Porter family spent the winter of 1846-47 with the Saints at Winter Quarters, Nebraska.

The Porter family spent the winter of 1846-47 at Winter Quarters in Ward 14,¹⁴¹ among the over three-thousand members of the church who huddled together against the elements in primitive log cabins and dugouts. They lived the best they could on limited rations of corn bread, bacon, and occasionally game, but the lack of fresh vegetables caused an epidemic of scurvy which spread through the cabins. Other diseases also stalked the camp, including tuberculosis, malaria and unidentified fevers and chills, ultimately causing the deaths of several hundred people.

Somehow the Porters survived these difficulties and were prepared enough to be included in the first wave of immigrants to Utah in the summer of 1847, joining the second wagon train to follow Brigham Young's vanguard group, under the direction of their old friend Charles C. Rich.¹⁴² The Rich Company left the outfitting post at the Elkhorn River, twenty-seven miles west of Winter Quarters, on 21

June, 1847. The journey over a thousand miles of desert, prairie and mountain took fifteen weeks to accomplish, but the Saints were joyful to finally be travelling toward a location outside of the United States where they would no longer be harassed by villainous mobs.



Sanford and Nancy initially settled near Mill Creek Canyon, thirteen miles south of Salt Lake City's pioneer fort.

A New Farm

When the Charles C. Rich Company rolled out of the Wasatch canyons into the empty valley of the Great Salt Lake near the first of October, they were met by members of the first pioneer party, who had already fashioned a stockade and built a cluster of rough cabins for shelter. Sanford and his sons elected to move four miles farther south of the main fort, selecting a location where a handful of other settlers had congregated along Mill Creek.

Sanford and Nancy were content to remain at Mill Creek until 1850, when they decided to move twelve miles north to a small settlement along Deuel Creek in Davis County. Their son Nathan and his new wife Rebecca¹⁴³ had relocated there the previous year, making claim to a homestead in what became known as Centerville.¹⁴⁴ Sanford was made the presiding elder under the first church organization in Centerville in 1851, and ordained bishop of the ward in January, 1852.¹⁴⁵ Bishop Porter was highly regarded by the community, especially since he and Nancy were known as “hard workers and good managers [who] always had enough to help others.”¹⁴⁶

With the Saints now settled in the Great Basin, Brigham Young initiated a program of reformation among the people, many who had gradually lapsed into bad habits and haphazard church attendance. Church leaders were sent to preach reform in settlements north of Salt Lake City in early September, 1856, including Centerville, where Apostle Wilford Woodruff found that Bishop Porter had not held Sunday meetings for months.¹⁴⁷ Saints all along the Wasatch front were committed to reform, submitting to rebaptisms to signify their dedication.

Plural Marriage

One of the effects of the “Mormon Reformation” was an increase in plural marriages, especially among men who held leadership positions. Since exaltation in God’s kingdom could be assured only through temple ordinances, men were encouraged to be sealed to women whose situations left them vulnerable. Sanford had already been sealed to a second spouse by then,¹⁴⁸ Phebe Emmett,¹⁴⁹ former wife of the family’s old friend James Emmett.

Despite multiple attempts by Brigham Young to convince James Emmett to give up his quest of settling the Saints in Indian Territory, Emmett refused to accept Young’s authority and was disfellowshipped from the church while at Council Bluffs in 1847. Phoebe, who had remained with her husband during the difficult journey to South Dakota and back, finally disowned him.¹⁵⁰ James “declared he would go where [his family] would never hear of him,” according to former Emmett Company member James Holt. “He left all his family but one daughter. He stopped a few days in Salt Lake Valley and Brigham had a long conversation with him trying to get him to stop with the church, but for some cause unknown to me, he had rebelled and would no longer follow the church. He went on to California where he died. His family never heard a word from him until his death, although his daughter¹⁵¹ had written over twenty letters to him, thus fulfilling his famous prediction.”¹⁵²

Emmett forced his eighteen-year old daughter Lucinda¹⁵³ to accompany him to California to serve as his housekeeper, leaving Phoebe with their two small daughters, four-year old Marinda,¹⁵⁴ and five-month old Sarah.¹⁵⁵ Lucinda was distraught at having to leaving her mother, and she feared that by moving to California she would never again see the man she had promised to marry, Sanford Porter, Jr. Sanford Jr. happened to be in Salt Lake City by the time James and Lucinda stopped there, and he immediately found James to ask

him for his daughter's hand. James refused his permission when Sanford Jr. would not renounce polygamy. When Lucinda cried over losing her love, James beat her with a whip.

Emmett continued on to San Bernardino, California, where he grew watermelons, and where Lucinda continued to suffer beatings by her father until his death in December, 1852. Lucinda eventually made her way back to Utah, finding a place in the home of her sister Mary Jane,¹⁵⁶ who was living in Ogden with her husband Armstead Moffett. Lucinda became Armstead's second wife in April, 1855.¹⁵⁷

Phoebe left Council Bluffs for Utah in June 1850, with Mary Jane and Armstead Moffett and her married son Moses¹⁵⁸ and his family.¹⁵⁹ She remained with Armstead and Mary Jane in their Ogden home,¹⁶⁰ where she raised Marinda and Sarah. Armstead continued to support Phoebe after her younger daughters married, Marinda in 1861, and Sarah in 1865. Marinda became the second wife of Lucinda's old love, Sanford Porter, Jr., while Sarah became the second wife of the youngest Porter brother, Lyman.

ENDNOTES

¹⁴¹ Sanford Porter entry, "Early Latter-day Saints; Remembering People and Places," <http://earlylds.com/getperson.php?personID=I13215&tree=Earlylds>

¹⁴² 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>

¹⁴³ Rebecca (Cherry) Porter (1830-1922), #KWCV-XNL, www.familysearch.org

¹⁴⁴ Edward W. Tullidge, *Tullidge's Histories (volume II): Containing the History of all the Northern, Eastern and Western Counties of Utah* (Tullidge: Salt Lake City, 1889), page 58.

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- ¹⁴⁵ Annie Call Carr, editor, *East of Antelope Island* (Salt Lake City: Publisher's Press, 1948), page 323.
- ¹⁴⁶ Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1* (self-published, 1957), page 212.
- ¹⁴⁷ David F. Smith, *My Native Village: A Brief History of Centerville, Utah* (self-published, 1943), page 13.
- ¹⁴⁸ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 104.
- ¹⁴⁹ Phebe Delphia (Simpson) Emmett Porter (1805-1883), #LZT6-LJP, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁵⁰ Richard E. Bennett, "Mormon Renegade: James Emmett at the Vermillion, 1846" (*South Dakota History*, Fall, 1985), pages 232.
file:///C:/Users/Shelley_2/Downloads/Vol.%2015%20No.%203%20Mormon%20Renegade.pdf
- ¹⁵¹ James' oldest daughter, Mary Jane (Emmett) Holden Moffett (1825-1909), #KWJF-9S5, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁵² Steve Pratt, "James Holt, 1844-146, 1852, Emmett and Other Companies," <http://heritage.uen.org/companies/Wcea7fff91778b.htm>
- ¹⁵³ Lucinda (Emmett) Porter (1831-1915), #KWJC-957, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁵⁴ Marinda (Emmett) Boss (1844-1912), #KWVZ-96F, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁵⁵ Sarah Catherine (Emmett) Porter (1848-1896), #KWJ8-2QP, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁵⁶ Mary Jane (Emmett) Holden Moffett (1825-1909), #KWJF-9S5, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁵⁷ Nancy Porter Moffett, "History of Lucinda Emmett," Lucinda Emmett, #KWJC-957, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁵⁸ Moses Simpson Emmett (1824-1907), #KWJZ-HBK, www.familysearch.org
- ¹⁵⁹ Passenger list, Wilford Woodruff Company, Kanessville, Iowa to Salt Lake City, Utah, 16 June-14 October, 1850,
<https://history.lds.org/overlandtravels/companyPioneers?lang=eng&companyId=325>
- ¹⁶⁰ Armstead Moffett household, 1860 U.S. census, Ogden City, Weber, Utah Territory; Roll: M653_1313; Page: 443; Image: 456; Family History Library Film: 805313, www.ancestry.com

Chapter 9

Porterville

At Home in the Mountains



The Weber River as it flow through the hills of Morgan County.

The shoreline of the Great Salt Lake has always fluctuated dramatically due to its extreme shallowness, a fact Sanford discovered much to his dismay during the spring of 1858, when snow melt raised the lake's level so high his entire farm was flooded with salt water. With no hope for growing future crops, Sanford was forced to abandon the fields and home he had worked so hard to build.¹⁶¹

The previous year while on duty as a scout, Lyman discovered a canyon east of Salt Lake City that was so rocky he named it Hardscrabble. After Chauncey and Sanford Jr. built a saw mill along a stream in Hardscrabble in 1859, Sanford and Nancy decided to settle the area along Canyon Creek with their sons and their families. Sanford built the first home in what became known as Porterville, five miles east of the mill¹⁶² in 1860. "It is a good country, fine land,

good water and plenty of wood, although winters are a little harder than in Davis County where I had my home,” said Sanford. “My boys soon all left Centerville, except Nathan, and made their homes on Canyon Creek with me.”¹⁶³

The Porters worked hard clearing the wild, knee-high grass with a scythe and putting in crops. They worked even harder once the grain was harvested, as it had to be transported to Salt Lake City for milling. The rough roads were almost impassable until the men and their teams improved the road and soon not only family wagons could make the trip, but loads of logs and lumber were rumbling down to markets in Davis County.¹⁶⁴



Nancy and Sanford lie side by side in the Porterville Cemetery.

End of Days

Not long after Sanford and Nancy moved into their new home, Sanford was chopping timber on the mountainside when he fell, breaking his leg above the knee. “I was then in my seventy third year. It was thirty six hours before we could get a doctor to set it, and by that time it had a bad color,” said Sanford. “The doctor said my leg would have to come off, but I said, ‘When I go, I will go all together.’ I told him to set the bone the best he could, then before he bound it up, to anoint it well with consecrated oil, then for him and my sons to administer to me, and if the Lord was willing I should live and it would heal. If not, it would be all right, anyway. But my time had not come yet; my leg healed all right.”¹⁶⁵

Sometime after Nancy's death, Phoebe came to live with Sanford in Porterville.¹⁶⁷ Sanford spent his remaining years mending shoes in his mountain home, growing more cantankerous with age. Sarah White recalled her grandfather was "an awfully cross man, and when the boys would take their shoes to him he would say to them, 'No, I won't mend your shoes,' and then they would turn to go and he would say, 'Come back here and throw your shoes in the corner.'"¹⁶⁸

Phoebe returned to Mary Jane and Armstead Moffett's household after her husband's death.¹⁷¹ By this time, Armstead had moved his family to a small valley called Eden, at the head of Ogden Canyon, where he built a home for each of his wives.¹⁷² Phoebe died in Eden on 14 November, 1883. She was buried in the Moffatt-Froerer family cemetery. When the graves in this small cemetery were threatened by the construction of Pineview Reservoir in 1936, the family transferred the remains to the nearby Huntsville Cemetery, where they were buried in a common grave.¹⁷³



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ENDNOTES

¹⁶¹ Joseph Grant Stevenson, editor, *Porter Family History, Volume 1* (self-published, 1957), page 90.

¹⁶² The home was located at the present day address of 3075 South Morgan Valley Drive. Linda H. Smith, *The History of Morgan County* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah State Historical Society, 1999), page 73.

¹⁶³ Stevenson, *Porter Family History, Volume 1*, page 90.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, page 213-214.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, page 90-91.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, page 91.

¹⁶⁷ Sanford Porter household, 1870 U.S census, Morgan, Utah Territory; Roll: M593_1611; Page: 382B; Image: 112; Family History Library Film: 553110, www.ancestry.com

¹⁶⁸ Sarah (Nellie) White, "History of Sanford Porter and Nancy Warriner," undated typescript. Mrs. White was a granddaughter of Sanford Porter. Copy held by Shelley Dawson Davies.

¹⁶⁹ Minerva Adaline (Deuel) Porter (1843-1873), #KWJ8-K8C, www.familysearch.org, wife of Chauncey's son Alma.

¹⁷⁰ Sanford and Nancy Porter are buried in plot S9.

¹⁷¹ Armstead Moffett household, 1880 U.S. census, 1880; Census

Place: Eden, Weber, Utah; Roll: 1339; Family History

Film: 1255339; Page: 468A; Enumeration District: 099, www.ancestry.com

¹⁷² "History of Armstead Moffett," Armstead Moffett, #KWJC-95W, www.familysearch.org

¹⁷³ The Moffatt-Froerer Cemetery,

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ut/county/weber/cemetery/moffatt/index.htm>

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