



Mormon Missionary Diaries

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William Clayton

by Jeffrey S. Hardy

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William Clayton was born on 17 July 1814 in Penwortham, Lancashire, England, to Thomas Clayton and Ann Critchley, the eldest of fourteen children. Little is known of his early life, but he apparently received at least a rudimentary education, and his father taught him the scribe's trade. He married Ruth Moon, also of Penwortham, on 9 October 1836. In 1837, during their first mission to the British Isles, Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde converted young William and Ruth to the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Later that same year, on 21 October 1837, Kimball baptized them in the River Ribble. William then succeeded in converting his parents and siblings. On 25 December 1837 he received a call to

perform missionary work in his native country. Impressed with William's efforts, Joseph Fielding, head of the British Mission, appointed him as second counselor in the mission presidency in March 1838. Over the next eighteen months he built up a branch of around two hundred and forty people in the Manchester area.¹

In September 1840 William emigrated with his family to America aboard the ship *North America*, arriving in New York on 11 October 1840. He then proceeded on to Nauvoo, Illinois, eventually settling on the Iowa side of the Mississippi River. There he demonstrated his abilities as clerk of the Iowa High Council of the church and on 10 February 1842 Joseph Smith called William to be his personal secretary. After moving to Nauvoo, he also served as city treasurer, and played in the Nauvoo Brass Band. He took four wives in polygamy in Nauvoo: Margaret Moon, Alice Hardman, Jane Hardman, and Diantha Farr. After the saints were driven from Illinois, they journeyed across Iowa to Winter Quarter, Nebraska. During this trying time William composed the hymn 'Come, Come, Ye Saints,' originally titled 'All is Well,' which immediately became a beloved hymn of the Latter-day Saints and a marching song for the subsequent trek to Utah.

In organizing the pioneer companies in 1847, Brigham Young selected William Clayton as clerk of the groundbreaking Brigham Young Company, the first Mormon country to traverse the plains. They departed from Winter Quarters on 14 April 1847, and arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in late July. Just months later, William returned to the mid-West to help prepare his family and others to make the overland journey the following year. They traveled in the Heber C. Kimball Company, leaving on 7 June 1848 and arriving at Salt Lake City on 24 September 1848. A notable contribution to the Mormon migration was made by William Clayton's *The Latter-day Saints' Emigrants' Guide*, ([view](#)) published early in 1848, which accurately described the entire trek from Winter Quarters to Salt Lake City with mileages, camping locations, potential obstacles, and the availability of water, grass, and wood. Such a guide was possible thanks to the 'roadometer' invented by William, which calculated mileage based on the revolutions of a wagon wheel.

In 1852 William received a call to return to England on a second mission. He received instruction from the church presidency to bear special witness to the doctrine of polygamy. William experienced some difficulty obtaining the means to travel to England, but remarked: "Although my outfit was of the poorest kind, I felt determined not to complain, but do the best I could."² He further stated: "I have often felt a deep desire to bear my testimony once more in my native country."³ On 13 September 1852 William left Salt Lake City and journeyed to the land of his birth. President Samuel W. Richards appointed him president of the Sheffield and Lincolnshire Conferences. But only a few months later, on 6 April 1853, William was released from his mission by Brigham Young; he subsequently left England, arriving home in October 1853.

William's home was located in downtown Salt Lake City and due to its size was known to locals as the "Big House."⁴ In Utah he married an additional five wives: Augusta Braddock, Sarah Ann Walters, Maria Louisa Lyman, Elizabeth Ainsworth, and Anna Elizabeth Higgs. Overall, his ten wives bore him forty-two children.⁵ In civic affairs he filled the posts of Territorial Recorder of Marks and Brands and Territorial Auditor of Public Accounts, the latter of which he held until his death. William also engaged in business, working as treasurer of ZCMI from 1868 to 1879. He further engaged his musical pursuits as violinist in the Salt Lake Theatre orchestra. After an extended illness, William Clayton died at home on 4 December 1879. Upon his

passing the *Deseret News* proclaimed him to be “a man of sterling integrity, remarkable ability, a faithful Latter-day Saint, and a good and useful citizen, whose death, though a happy relief from his sufferings, was felt deeply by hosts of personal friends.”⁶

Endnotes

¹James B. Allen and Thomas G. Alexander, eds., *Manchester Mormons: The Journal of William Clayton, 1840 to 1842* (Santa Barbara, CA: Peregrine Smith, 1974), 8.

²George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1991), 417.

³*Ibid.*, 416.

⁴Kate B. Carter, ed., *Our Pioneer Heritage* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958), 2: 577.

⁵James B. Allen, *No Toil nor Labor Fear: The Story of William Clayton*, (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 185.

⁶Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson Historical Co., 1901-1936), 718.

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