

# The Way to the Shining City

a story of the early Mormons in Missouri  
and Nauvoo, Illinois

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HOW SHALL I BEGIN? How can I write the story of my people, and this city which meant so much to them? If ever my heart was broken for them all, it is now.

The things which have happened here are beyond belief. Even if I were to describe them one by one in detail, anyone reading it would only shake his head in wonder.

My friend Nathaniel said he had a strange feeling about it from the beginning. He settled across the river on the Iowa side, about four miles from Montrose. He was going to move his family closer to Nauvoo a few years ago, but thought better of it. A careful man, Nat. He said we must wait and be patient, but he says that about everything. I have run out of patience.

If I were to describe my feelings at this time, I would say that the sense of loss is overwhelming. The loss of what? My family is intact, my little group of close friends still surviving, albeit confused. But the city that we knew—the larger community—is in disarray.

Joseph Smith, our beloved prophet and leader, is dead, assassinated by a mob at Carthage jail. Our charter has been revoked, and even now, marauding groups of men are organizing ‘wolf hunts’ and attacking our citizens who live in outlying areas. The city is ruled by the Council of Twelve—the quorum of twelve apostles—under the direction of Brigham Young, the president of the Twelve. While I like Brother

Young personally, I question some of the steps he has taken to assume this position of authority.

What is worse—and this last makes me feel physically ill—we seem to have lost the Church as I first knew it. I came from another faith to join what I perceived to be the restored Church of Christ, a gathering of people like the New Testament church—simple, beautiful, truly a ‘marvelous work and a wonder.’ In just a short time, a matter of months, I find the ones who now lead it urging rebaptism. Celestial marriage, a man taking more than one wife, is being practiced, but with great discretion. They advocate other things too, such as sealing for eternity and ceremonies to be performed in the temple—‘endowments,’ they call them—which were never had in the church at Kirtland. They say these things were taught by Joseph, but I never heard him expound upon any of these, much less urge people to do them. They have an answer for that too—they say he did it secretly.

As if things were not bad enough, anyone who does not subscribe to these beliefs is being called ‘weak in the faith.’ I have heard these words applied to Sister Emma Smith, of all people, because she has not wavered in her stand against plural marriage. Brother William Marks, stalwart in his insistence that such things should not be taught, has been stripped of his position as Nauvoo Stake President. I understand they brought him before the Council two times, but have not yet excommunicated him. William Smith, the prophet’s youngest brother, goes about saying that the oldest son of Joseph should be the rightful leader, and that he, William, should hold the Church in trust until young Joseph is of age. I don’t think he will remain un-excommunicated for long.

Brother James Strang, a new convert, claims to have not only spiritual authority, but a letter from Joseph proclaiming him as the new leader. Strang has more followers than you might believe, but they are keeping quiet lest they be denounced as apostates.

Those who support the Twelve and the new doctrines—‘Brighamites,’ as they are being called—are planning to leave the City of Joseph, as it is now named, and travel in a body to a place west of the Rocky Mountains, where they can live unmolested. I have many friends among them, and I watch their preparations for departure with anguish and misgiving. I have wondered repeatedly—what is best to do in all this turmoil?

For myself, I can no longer sit by and wait as Nathaniel suggests.

I have chosen a course, and I will go and tell him tomorrow morning. I have not had that much to do since the Twelve announced through the *Times & Seasons* that good Christians should depend upon the priesthood rather than doctors when they are ill.

As a mental exercise, partly to keep from losing all sense of reason, I have tried to look back and determine how these strange notions crept into our religion. I have talked about it some with Nat, and he thinks things started going awry as early as the Far West days. He claims that the more militant portion of the church began influencing the actions of the body.

“They were a persecuted, desperate people,” he said. “Who can blame them for what happened?”

Nat seems very quiet these days, but I sense he feels torn apart—still grief-stricken at the death of Joseph.

Far West, Missouri...I am trying to think. What made it so different from Kirtland? It was settled by a persecuted people, to be sure—refugees from the disastrous attempt to ‘build Zion’ in Independence, and others fleeing from troubles in Ohio. Our little group, which Nat led out of Kirtland, was one of the latter, and we didn’t reach that part of Missouri till April of 1838.

Enough musings. They are calling me to supper, and I find that, even in the midst of trouble, I can always partake.

*—From the journal of Gabriel Romain, physician and elder in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.*



Drizzling when they reached the outskirts of the little settlement. A sorry lot they were by this time. Her husband Nat clicked to the oxen.

Hannah, huddled under the blankets with three-year-old Jody, tried not to think how wet and tired they looked. Eleven persons—three married couples, one child, two young single men, one freedman with a wife still in slavery, and a young woman. All riding or walking beside a team of oxen and a wagon, a carriage pulled by two bays, and another, smaller wagon pulled by an old piebald horse. Oh, yes, and one small dog, who trotted at Nat’s heels in the muddy road.

“Keep covered.” Nat’s voice came at her above the rising wind. He looked at her, half-frowning in the misty light, his eyes narrowed, the

lines around his mouth and eyes etched deeper than she'd ever seen them. A scar over his mouth gave him a rugged, weather-beaten look. Worried about her, she knew. She'd seen the glances exchanged by Nat and Gabriel, their young physician-friend, who'd lately studied and worked with a doctor in Mentor, Ohio.

*Unbelievable.* Tears stung her eyes. Always so strong, the picture of health. Doing things most women wouldn't consider—traveling, leaving her father's house in Pennsylvania to seek out a new religion, following her betrothed across four states only to lose him in the Missouri persecutions. Finally returning to Ohio and having the good fortune to marry Nathaniel. Now, when she needed to be strong, she felt weakness in every part of her body.

*The miscarriage.* She remembered how she'd asked for Gabriel when the pains began, and how they'd sent word to fetch him from his medical apprenticeship, a partnership by this time. Wiry, short of stature, with unruly black hair and temperament to match, he nonetheless had a gentle, reassuring manner with those who sought his help. With firmness and good sense, he'd tried to shepherd her back to health.

She was in the process of recovery when they had to leave Kirtland. An unfortunate time to depart, before the winter had even ended. She had her choice of jouncing in the wagon or walking beside it. Each day she walked a bit less before the weakness hit her. In these last days she walked very little.

"Give her a few weeks rest, with warmth and good food," Gabe had told Nathaniel. "I reckon she'll pull through good as ever."

But where was rest and warmth, and food other than dry johnnycake? She looked at the collection of cabins and clapboard shacks, some in the process of construction, and wondered what help she could possibly find here. She saw a dry goods store and a grocery, and what looked like a school building. The caravan came to a stop in the middle of a grassy square.

"I told you to keep covered up," Nat said. Didn't he see the blankets getting soaked? Jody stirred in her arms and gave a little cough. Poor baby. Any more traveling, and he'd be as sick as she was.

Voices behind her. Sarah, her father's new wife: "If this ain't the place, I vote we stay here anyway. I reckon I've gone far enough."

Then her father: "It has to be Far West, less'n that map's completely cockeyed."

People hurried from the houses and stores and gathered in a little crowd around the wagons. She thought she recognized faces from her first trip to Missouri; others she knew from Kirtland. More voices echoed around her.

“Hello, Brother Ephraim.”

“Well, if it ain’t Nat Givens. And Sister Hannah. You look soaked clean through. Come set by the fire till we have a place to put you.”

“There’s wagons from Kirtland comin’ in every few days now. The question is, where to put ’em all.”

Nat’s voice: “Give me a hand. My wife is poorly.”

“Brother Gabriel, we’re right glad to see you. Got some sick folks down in one of them cabins.”

Hannah remembered someone lifting her out of the wagon—she thought it was Nat but she couldn’t be sure. Someone else carried Jody, and the next she knew, she was sitting in a rocker by the hearth, a cup of warm broth in her hands. She sipped the broth as the comforting smell of fresh-baked bread drifted to her. A cheerful, well-padded woman, round-faced, sat on the settle with Jody in her lap.

“Now, then. You’ve come a far piece. Brother Joseph and his family got in here just a few weeks ago, with Brother Brigham Young. The people went out and met them eight miles from town with a brass band.”

Nat came into the room, rubbing his hands together. “The animals are all warm and fed. And we have a place to stay, big enough for six of us—a little cabin just down the way. Gabriel and Eb and Rusty be stayin’ here, with these good folks. And the Crawfords found some friends t’other side of the blacksmith shop.”

“Have some warm soup, Brother Givens,” their hostess said. When she smiled, her eyes became little slits.

“I sure do thank you, Sister Peck. But we should get to our resting place. Are you about ready to move, Hannah?”

Hannah, half-asleep, tried to raise her head.

“Land’s sakes, brother,” Sister Peck said. “Look at her. Exhausted. Let her rest a spell. At least wait till the rain stops—give ’er a chance to dry out some.”

Hannah was thinking she would miss the boys. Wrong to call them boys. Gabriel after all was twenty-one already, and Eb the freedman