

## The "Tabernacle Post Office" Petition for the Saints of Kanesville, Iowa

*Maurine Carr Ward and Fred E. Woods*

"As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country." Thus spoke wise King Solomon a millennium before the birth of Christ.<sup>1</sup> As America labored to give birth to a new nation, the United States Post Office Department was born when the Second Continental Congress met in 1775 at Philadelphia and agreed to appoint Benjamin Franklin as the country's first postmaster general.<sup>2</sup>

During the nineteenth century, America continued to grow in population as children were born and as immigrants crossed the Atlantic to the land of promise. This growth not only caused America to lengthen her borders but also created the need for an expansion of mail service. By 1840, both Britain and the United States were in need of a good source of communication because of the migrant activities of both countries. In the spring, Britain published the world's first adhesive postal stamp to be used commercially. This invention greatly benefited immigrants who were separated from their family, friends, and homeland by the vast ocean. At this time, the population of the United States swelled to over seventeen million, which included some 76,000 English and 207,000 Irish immigrants.<sup>3</sup>

In this same year, Latter-day Saint British converts began to gather to

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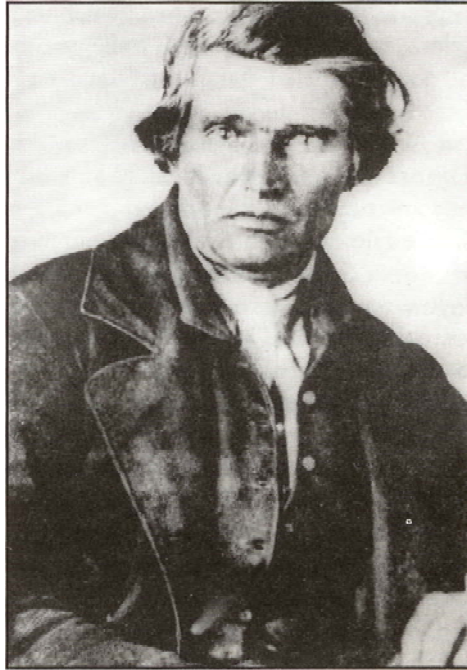
America to augment the building of Nauvoo. However, during the winter of 1846, they were forced to leave their beloved city. They crossed the prairie by the thousands, and Brigham Young established a temporary Church headquarters at Winter Quarters—on the west bank of the Missouri River near modern-day Omaha, Nebraska. In the spring and summer of 1847, Young led a vanguard company of Saints into the Great Basin. There they established a new home in the Salt Lake Valley where they prepared the desert to blossom as a rose. Like any inhabitants of a pioneer oasis, these Saints who settled in the desert West were eager to receive communications from their loved ones. Therefore, it was timely that 1847 also marked the establishment of postal service extending from the Atlantic Coast to the Pacific Coast and the adoption of the U.S. postal stamp by the United States government.<sup>4</sup>

Before the year closed, Brigham Young returned to the Missouri River; and at a Church conference held on 27 December 1847, the Church sustained him as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This important event occurred on the eastern side of the river opposite Winter Quarters. Here in Iowa Territory, Pottawattamie County had just been established on 24 February of this same year.<sup>5</sup> According to Wilford Woodruff, the Saints had just spent three weeks building a "Log Tabernacle for this & other Conferences."<sup>6</sup> Woodruff later noted that at the time Young and his counselors were sustained in the First Presidency, "about 1,000 souls got in the House [Tabernacle]."<sup>7</sup>

Before Brigham Young returned to the Salt Lake Valley, he appointed his thirty-three-year-old nephew, Evan M. Greene, to serve as the postmaster for this region, which was known as "Council Bluffs."<sup>8</sup> Here Greene served for nearly five years before immigrating to Utah in 1852. During his tenure as postmaster, he sent mail with each pioneer company as it departed Kanesville (Council Bluffs) for the Salt Lake Valley.<sup>9</sup>

The settlement and development of the West created the need for more post offices. One author noted, "There is perhaps no better register of the growth of the country than the record of the expansion of the postal service. The opening of a post office in some remote section of the West is a proof sufficient of the presence of the pioneer."<sup>10</sup> Not only did a Kanesville post office create a vehicle for better communication with the outside world for the Saints temporarily settled in Pottawattamie County but also, perhaps more importantly, the post office served as an important signal that this Latter-day Saint community was officially recognized by the federal administration in Washington, D.C. Therefore, with a successful petition for a local post office, a local government could be created, inherent with the legal rights that brought stability and security to a newly formed county.

In his journal dated 18 January 1848, Wilford Woodruff wrote, "Two petitions were presented to the meetings for signatures, one for A county in the Potawattame tract of land in Iowa And the other for A Post Office. And the People were signing them daily."<sup>11</sup> Just two days later, a petition to the Iowa legislature for the organization of a county on the Pottawattamie lands was read and signed by many. In addition, a letter to the postmaster general for the establishment of a post office, near the Log Tabernacle, was read and signed. It included the request for semiweekly mail service from this point to Austin, the northwestern Missouri village.<sup>12</sup> Brigham Young sent the letter of request to the "Honorable Postmaster



*Evan M. Greene, postmaster for the  
"Council Bluffs" region.  
Photograph courtesy of LDS Church Archives.*

General of the United States," which stated the following:

There are many thousands Inhabitants in the vicinity of the Log Tabernacle, which is situated on the Government Purchase of the Pottawattamies and in the State of Iowa, whose interest is materially injured, and whose journey, business and improvements, are retarded or distroyed by non intercourse; there being no Post Office within forty or fifty miles of said Tabernacle, and the public good requires a convenient office: Therefore, We your Petitioners, Citizens of the United Sates and residents of said vicinage, pray your Honor, to cause, such an office to be located at or near said Tabernacle without delay, to be called the Tabernacle Post office; to appoint Evan M. Green Postmaster; and to cause the Semi Weekly mail of Austin or Linden, to be continued to said office and your Petitioners, etc.<sup>13</sup>

This petition was followed by eighteen hundred signatures, all males.<sup>14</sup> That Brother Brigham and the Saints were eager for this petition to be granted can be ascertained by the fact that a number of the signatures are those of boys. This document is useful not only in demonstrating who was

living in the Kaneshville, Iowa, region in 1848 but also in demonstrating the strong desire for the Church to be granted official recognition by the federal government so the Saints could establish their legal rights as United States citizens.

What follows is a list of names on the petition as found in the Journal History of the Church, dated 20 January 1848. These names were extracted at some time from the original petition pages found in the Brigham Young Office Files, Church Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, during this extraction, many of the names were misread. The list below was, therefore, checked against the original petition. These names were then checked against five other sources, as shown below, in an effort to correctly identify the individuals and to show where the individuals lived and how many of those named were children:

1. Susan Easton Black, *Membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1830-1848*.<sup>15</sup>

2. Susan Easton Black, *Early Members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*.<sup>16</sup>

3. Ronald G. Watt, *Iowa Branch Index: 1839-1859*. During the temporary stay in Iowa, between 1846 and 1849, nearly one hundred branches of the Church functioned in Pottawattamie County, Iowa. Records from twenty-three of these branches have been acquired by the LDS Historical Department, but these account for more records than any other period of the early Church. The intent of the records varies from names and branches to baptism dates, marriage information, priesthood ordinations, and more. Because the branch clerk likely entered the names as he heard them, some misspellings were inevitable. Names found in the Pottawattamie High Council Record are included in this index. The Iowa Branch Index, located in the reference section of the LDS Church Archives Reading Room, includes more than five thousand names, only about 20 percent of the Mormons in Iowa from the late 1840s to the early 1850s.<sup>17</sup>

4. *Winter Quarters Wards Index to Membership Lists: 1846-1848*. This index is located in the LDS Church Archives. It was compiled from a variety of sources, not comprehensive, including bishops' reports, high council meeting minutes, tithing records, "census" reports of widows, soldiers' wives, and other unassigned members of wards. The original ward records are in the LDS Church Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There

are a few problems with the index. Handwriting in the original record is difficult to read, making exact transcriptions difficult to produce. Many of the wards list only the widows, soldiers' wives, and others, so the membership is incomplete. As was the case in the Iowa branches, people often did not remain in one ward or branch but moved to be with family or friends or moved to better housing; therefore, in some cases, there are multiple listings for an individual.<sup>18</sup>

5. Beverly Boileau, *1850 Census: Pottawattamie County, Iowa*. The census shows ages, places of birth, family relationships, and occupations where known. This information greatly supplemented the information found in Susan Black's membership lists.<sup>19</sup> There are some serious misspellings of names, shown that way in the original census record. Some examples of the more serious errors are Edson *Bary* instead of *Edson Barney*, *Ephraim Winkcum* instead of *Ephraim Mecham*, and *John L. Balten* instead of *John L. Butler*.

The list that follows shows what has been determined to be the most correct rendering of each name,<sup>20</sup> the Pottawattamie County branch that individual resided in (where known) or the initials *PHC* if the name is found in the Pottawattamie High Council minutes, the Winter Quarters Ward the individual resided in (where known), an X if a person is found in the "1850 Pottawattamie Census, and a comment section, specifically showing the fathers and ages of their sons eighteen years old and younger. Some names are obvious duplicates. Other common names, such as *John Smith*, are impossible to correctly identify in any of the sources.

#### Notes

1. Proverbs 25:25.
2. Rita L. Moroney, *History of the U.S. Postal-Service 1775-1982* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Post Master General, 1983), 1.
3. James Trager, *The Peoples' Chronology* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1976), 220—22, quoted in Fred E. Woods, *Gathering to Nauvoo* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2002), 34, note 16.
4. LeRoy R. Hafen, *The Overland Mail 1849-1869: Promoter of Settlement Precursor of Railroads* (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 30.
5. "Pottawattamie County," [www.pottcounty.com/html/documentation2.shtml](http://www.pottcounty.com/html/documentation2.shtml).
6. *Wilford Woodruff Journals*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 13 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 24 December 1847, 3:299.
7. *Wilford Woodruff Journals*, 27 December 1847, 3:300-1.
8. Local Nebraska historian Gail G. Holmes notes that the name *Council Bluffs* was given to this Omaha, Nebraska, region, encompassing both sides of the Missouri River,

because of a meeting held in 1803 between Lewis and Clark and the Oto Missouri Indians. He further adds that Church leaders governed about ninety temporary settlements in this area. During the years 1849-52, the postal service received additional support for communication via the LDS newspaper, the *Frontier Guardian*, which was edited by Elder Orson Hyde of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. (See "Council Bluffs, Iowa," *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. Arnold R. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 254-56).

9. *History of Bear Lake Pioneers*, comp. Edith Parker Haddock and Dorothy Hardy Matthews, ed. F. Ross Peterson, Edith Parker Haddock, and Dorothy Hardy Matthews (Bear Lake County, Idaho: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1968), 218-19. In an article appearing in the *Woman's Exponent* titled "Called Home, Death of Elder Evan M. Greene," 11, no. 1 (June 1, 1882): 5, we learn the following information that was apparently prepared by editor Emmeline B. Wells: Evan M. Greene was the son of John P. and Rhoda Y. Greene and was born 22 December 1814 in Cayuga County, New York. He joined the Church in 1831 and was an intimate friend of Joseph Smith. He served as a high priest and was later ordained a patriarch in 1873. Evan died 22 May 1882 while traveling from Salt Lake City to Escalante, Utah. He died the father of eighteen children as well as many grandchildren and great-grandchildren to whom he left a legacy of faith. Evan served as a missionary to the eastern states and later served as the postmaster of Provo, Utah, as well as the mayor for two years. In addition, he served on the legislature for four years and worked as a farmer, stock raiser, merchant, and school teacher. (See Frank Eshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Utah Pioneers Book Publishing Company, 1913.)

For information concerning the western migration via Kanesville, see Walker D. Wyman, "Council Bluffs and the Westward Movement," *Iowa Journal of History* 47 (April 1949): 99-118. See also Fred E. Woods, "More Precious than Gold: The Journey to and through Zion in 1849-1850," *Nauvoo Journal* 11, no. 1 (spring 1999): 109-24.

10. Hafen, *The Overland Mail 1849-1869*, 26.

11. *Wilford Woodruff Journals*, 18 January 1848, 3:310. The Journal History, 20 January 1848, notes that the meetings Woodruff refers to lasted several days. President Brigham Young and others attended these meetings held in the Kanesville Log Tabernacle, 16-20 January 1848, on the occasion of the Seventies Jubilee. On the last day of the jubilee (20 January 1848), Brigham Young told the assembled Seventies that the event "could not be considered a Jubilee spoken of in the revelation for all bands were not broken and Pres. Young called it a jubilo."

12. Journal History, 20 January 1848. The Austin Post Office was near Hunsaker's Ferry in Atchison County Missouri (present-day Hamburg, Iowa). Mr. Thomas Tuttle worked as both the postmaster and a merchant at the Austin Post Office at the time of this 1848 petition. Before the Post Office was established in Kanesville, the Saints from Winter Quarters and Council Bluffs had to travel down a military trail to the Austin Post Office for their mail. (See *History of Fremont County, Iowa* [Des Moines: Iowa Historical, 1881], 177-78.)

13. Brigham Young to the Post Master General, 20 January 1848, Brigham Young, Office Files, Correspondence, LDS Church Archives. Note that an earlier draft of this letter (located just before the letter noted above) indicates that the name "Council Bluff Post Office" was considered before the name of the "Tabernacle Post Office" was selected.

14- The fact that no women's names were on the petition is probably because votes

cast by women did not officially count at this time in America. Women's right to vote was not won until the Nineteenth Amendment was passed in 1920. A women's suffrage amendment was first introduced in Congress in 1878, but it failed to pass. The amendment refused to die, however, and was doggedly reintroduced at every session until it finally passed in 1920.

15. Susan Easton Black, *Membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1830-1848*, 50 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1989).

16. Susan Easton Black, Earl<sup>1</sup> *Members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1993).

17. Ronald G. Watt, *Iowa Branch Index: 1839-1859* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1991).

18. *Winter Quarters Wards Index to Membership Lists: 1846-1848* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department, Museum Division, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998).

19. Beverly Boileau, ed., *1850 Census: Pottawattamie County, Iowa* (Henderson, Iowa: n.p., 1987).

20. Where the petition shows a first given name, middle initial, and surname, the authors have retained that format without trying to identify the middle name.