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“ . . . Mormonism did not ask its converts to renounce previous doctrines; rather it added an epic New World supplement to the Bible, and held out the prospect of a westward journey to a new, harmonious utopia.”

The Benson Exodus of 1833: Mormon Converts and the Westward Movement

By ERIK BARNOUW

Of the several dozen converts to Mormonism who had started in 1833 from Benson, Vermont, on Lake Champlain, only a few reached the great Salt Lake basin, where their long migration ended some eighteen years later. Ira Ames was among them, with members of his family—some born en route. Many of the original Benson group had died during the intervening years of exhaustion, cholera, Indian attacks, and the murderous assaults by Missouri frontiersmen, determined to drive off Mormon settlers. One Benson convert, Gideon Haden Carter, died at the hands of Missouri nightriders in the long-remembered Battle of Crooked River, Missouri, in 1838.¹ But Ira Ames and family were among the survivors, and they settled in the new country and thrived. In 1858, sensing he was finally nearing the end of his own journey, Ira called together his wives, sons, daughters, and their offspring, gave thanks, and pronounced a patriarchal benediction on his numerous descendants. Then he began writing a memoir, looking back on the great migration, and how it had all begun for him. After listing his genealogy, he wrote:²

I was born in Bennington County, State of Vermont on the 22nd day of September A. D. 1804. While I was still an infant my father moved with his family and purchased a farm in Schuyler Township, State of New York, about six miles from Utica. When I was about five years old, my father was building a large barn and while in the act of laying the last course of shingles the staging gave way and he was precipitated to the ground, falling across one of the staging poles, by which his back was broken. He lived three days without sense of feeling and then died.

His father's tragic death brought Ira back to Vermont to live with relatives.

Journal

Ira Ames am the Son of William Ames who was the Son of Joseph Ames. My Mother's name was Kannah Clark Daughter of William Clark who was son of Samuel Clark My Mother's Mother's name was Betsy Rogers who was the daughter of Mary Rogers who was the daughter of Bethuel.

My Grand father Joseph had eight sons. Nathaniel - Barnabas - William - Henry - Samuel - Abner - Othamer - & Joseph and one daughter names Lydia.

My father had three sons names Ambrose - Ira & Clark and two daughters - Lydia & Sally -

I was born in Bennington County, State of Vermont on the 22nd day of September A.D. 1804. While still an infant my father moved with his family and purchased a farm in Schuyler Township, State of New York, about 6 Miles from Utica. When I was about five years old my father was building a large barn, and while in the act of laying the last course of shingles, the staging gave way and he was precipitated to the ground, falling across one of the staging poles; by which his back was broken. He lived three days without sense of feeling and then died. My father's brother Samuel came shortly after to visit my mother in her affliction. And took myself, my eldest sister Lydia and my youngest brother, Clark home with him to bring up. He lived in Shelburne Addison County, State of Vermont.

When I was 18 Years old I commenced an apprenticeship to the trade of Tanning and Currying of leather with one Thomas Atwood in Shoreham. I would here state that my Uncle Samuel and his Wife Marcy. They always treated me with truly parental kindness. They were excellent people. They were very strict Methodists and lived strictly their religion and treated us with kindness, affection and tenderness. They had no children of their own. I was brot up by them also after the strictest order of the Methodists. My Uncle kept me at school every winter until I was 14. It remained working with Thomas Atwood about a year and he took a great liking to me and put me forward in the business. He a whole entertains me to purchase the hides, sell the leather

Many Mormons, later in life, recorded their memories of the exodus. These journals, collected by the Latter-day Saints History Department, are a valuable source for information about the Mormon move west. Reproduced here is the first page of Ira Ames's 1858 journal. Courtesy of Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints History Department, Salt Lake City.

My father's brother Samuel came shortly after to visit my mother in her affliction and took myself, my oldest sister Lydia and my youngest brother Clark home with him to bring up. He lived in Shoreham, Addison County, State of Vermont.

When I was 18 years old, I commenced an apprenticeship to the tanning and currying of leather with one Thomas Atwood in Shoreham . . . At the expiration of 18 months Jared Carter, my brother-in-law—he having married my sister Lydia—prevailed on me to leave Mr. Atwood and go to work with him. He and his father worked together tanning. I went with him to the town of Benson, Rutland County, State of Vermont.

Ira's narrative continues at a rapid pace. He relates that during a trip to Troy, New York, to buy Spanish hides, he fell ill with a fever. Jared completed the business in Troy, then speeded the journey home, while Ira lay helpless on the hides in the wagon. He tells us he was ill for two months, recuperating in the Carter home. He also tells of a Benson girl, Charity Carter—a distant relative of Jared—coming often to see to his needs, and helping to nurse him back to health. Ira's uncle in nearby Shoreham, who had grown prosperous, now wanted him to settle in Shoreham and to manage and inherit his large farm. But Ira's thoughts were on Charity and an independent life in the tanning business. He records that they were married in December, 1826, and for \$350 bought a farm and tannery in Mooers, New York, on the west side of Lake Champlain, some 130 miles north of Benson. They settled there and were soon doing well. Their first child came in 1832.

By this time they had begun hearing about the Mormons. The Book of Mormon had appeared in 1830, when the church was also established, and there was much amazement over what the book said. People seemed to be at once for or against it. Ira and Charity saw letters from a man in western New York who had joined the sect but had already apostatized, and was denouncing the Mormons. After a short while the talk subsided. But then further news reached them. To their amazement the name Jared Carter, of whom they had not heard for some years, was coupled with the new reports.

Jared Carter had become quietly involved in a turbulent history. In 1828 he and his wife Lydia and their children had decided to head westward. They left Benson, which had been torn by acrimonious religious quarrels, and settled in Chenango, New York, near the Pennsylvania border, where Jared set up business as a tanner. Late in 1830 he, too, began hearing about Mormons and the excitement stirred by the Book of Mormon. Going on business to buy hides, Jared came on a copy of the book at the home of a Mr. Peeks, who gave him shelter for the night. Mr. Peeks heaped scorn on the book. But as Jared looked into it, he felt an "astonishment" coming over him. The more he read, the more he

became convinced. Traveling further, he kept asking people what they knew about Joseph Smith and the Mormons. He found, as he wrote later in his journal, that “the most wicked and profane” were most ready to rail against the Mormons.³ This strengthened his own belief; perhaps it was time to “separate from Babylon.” In Coatsville, New York, he came on Hyrum Smith, brother of the prophet and a leader of the new church, and let himself be baptized. Jared wanted to travel to Kirtland, Ohio, where Joseph Smith was establishing temporary headquarters of the church, before the eventual move to a new Zion. It was said to be a scene of great excitement, and mass conversions. But Jared felt he must first head back to Chenango to convert his wife and friends to “the Church of Christ”—its official name at this time.⁴ Jared wrote: “I found I was completely unqualified for any business until I should go and assist the Church of Christ.”

However, he discovered that his friends in Chenango had become his “worst enemies.” They told his wife that Jared was “shockingly deluded,” and Lydia became deeply agitated. Then, amid unbearable tension, Hyrum Smith arrived for a visit, and his quiet presence seemed to have a calming influence. The children had been suffering from “hoopen cough” but soon seemed better. Hyrum Smith asked Lydia why she did not believe; she said she had heard “so many stories.” He asked why she believed them, rather than her own husband. She now became “more tender towards the work.” Jared’s journal, which he had started with the feeling that he was involved in events of great moment, tells us:

I realizing that the glorious time had come . . . commenced immediately to sell my things and make preparations to go on to the west, where it was to be made known of the building of Zion.

What made people ready to cut ties, leave homes they had built with their own hands, and in the face of scorn and denunciation embark on an uncharted course to a remote Zion? Its location was not known; Joseph Smith had said vaguely only that Zion’s location would be revealed “hereafter,” but would be “on the borders by the Lamanites”—in other words, in Indian territory. Conversions involved complex factors. The dream of a better life was invariably part of it: while some settlers in the northeastern states had prospered, many had suffered. Graveyards were littered with infant graves, reminders of devastating winters and endemic diseases. Meanwhile many factors—including the Erie Canal, opened in 1825—lured settlers westward. Ohio and the fabled lands beyond were powerful magnets. Some embarked there individually, but the risks encouraged group ventures. The cohesion and support of religious groups—especially within dissenting sects—were crucial elements in the westward surge. Beyond these considerations, the dramatic impact of the Book of Mormon had given many settlers a new vision of world history



Hyrum Smith, brother of the prophet, shown here in an undated portrait, played an important role in the conversion of the Carter family. Both Hyrum and his brother were killed by a hostile mob in Carthage, Illinois, in 1844. Courtesy of LDS History Department.

and America's place in it. To those for whom the Bible was the main source of knowledge about human history, it provided satisfying answers to scores of questions, and wrapped the westward adventure in a mystic and meaningful aura. This may have been especially true for Jared Carter.

The moment he picked up the Book of Mormon in the home of Mr. Peeks, he must have noticed the name Jared on the title page. Here, in a hint of the contents of the book, it was revealed that one Jared was among its major figures. Reading further, Jared Carter would have noted that about 2500 B.C., after events revolving around the Tower of Babel, this Jared and his followers were said to have fled westward and crossed the ocean in watertight barges made according to the Lord's instructions, taking provisions for the new life as well as animals—two of a kind, as in the ark. All this was ridiculed by many. But, if one had been raised on the Bible and believed it, was it really so strange?

The voyage of the Jaredites was at the heart of the Mormon view of world history. This view fully accepted the Bible account while providing a supplement. It explained the presence of old-world animals in the new world, which had often puzzled settlers. More importantly, it accounted for the Indians as descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel. The Book of Mormon made Indians fellow creatures to be welcomed into the new Zion. And the Mormons went further. Negroes, it was proclaimed, would also be welcomed. Such views contributed to the fateful conflicts in Missouri, a slave state, where the invitation to blacks seemed an incitement to slave rebellion, and where the only good Indian was, to many settlers, a dead Indian. To leading Mormons of the early 1830s these idealistic views seemed an essential part of their doctrine. Later, facing extermination during the westward migration, they would retreat from them.⁵

When Jared and his family reached Kirtland, his unschooled but ready eloquence apparently impressed Joseph Smith. In June, 1831, Jared was ordained a priest, and within weeks he was dispatched on a crucial mission—to win converts in New England. Jared knew where he would begin. He headed straight for Benson, Vermont. If he sensed that some in Benson might be ready for his message, his knowledge of earlier religious upheavals there must have contributed to this insight. The Carters had been one of several families that had migrated from Connecticut to Vermont in the 1780s and 1790s, settling in the southwest corner of Benson near Lake Champlain.⁶ They were Baptists, and in 1797 they had founded the Baptist Church of Benson, meeting at first in each other's homes. They purchased a book for their minutes (*minnets*, the title page said), recording the names of those admitted, those who had to be chastized for "walking disorderly," and occasionally those "disfellowshipped" or "excommunicated" for major derelictions. Jared and his three brothers and four sisters were all enrolled.⁷

In 1822 one of the brothers, John S. Carter, aged twenty-five, preached several sermons that so inspired the congregation that its members voted overwhelmingly to engage him as their regular pastor. They urged a

The Minutes of the
BAPTIST Church
 this **Book** of
 the Baptist Church of
BENSON Bought
 March The 2ND A.D
 1798

the Members
 Males and Fe-Males
 the above Written by Deacon Daniel Gibbs

Records of the Baptist Church of Christ
 in Benson. Interspersed With Historical and
 Chronological observations, on the Rise and
 progress of the Church which was Formed
 March 20 1797 which naturally includes
 entertaining to the Curious & Enquiring mind
 which relate to immediately & especially relate
 to the Church By Rev. Rufus Bapett Clerk
 until Jan^{ry} 15 1800 who was then
 in office by Rev. Isaac Trevelock
 until March 22 - 1806 Succeeded by another who
 name was Clerk
 another name was the Chapin

The minute book of the Benson Baptist Church provides important evidence of an earlier religious controversy in the town. Courtesy of Town Clerk's Office, Benson, Vermont.

subscription of funds for this purpose. But the elders were apparently alarmed, feeling that young John Carter might not be sufficiently orthodox. They assembled ministers from various neighboring towns—Brandon, Cornwall, Hampton, Hubbardton, Orwell, Poultney, West Haven, Whiting—to advise them on the matter. This group solemnly catechized John S. Carter for many hours and emerged horrified. Their conclusions were recorded in the minute book. Young Carter, questioned about communion, had expressed the opinion that anyone repenting his sins should be allowed to take communion. This, they had warned him, was heresy. Was he not aware that, under Baptist doctrine, “baptism by immersion on a profession of faith” was a prerequisite to communion? If confirmed he would—unless he recanted—be practicing a “licentious communion.” Did he not realize that the views he expressed made him virtually a Methodist? The group was aghast to note that he had, in fact, spoken favorably of Methodists as an acceptably orthodox Christian sect, “when it is notorious that the Methodists in this country are on the ground of Arminianism.” He dismayed them again on the subject of salvation. He seemed to think this a matter for individual choice. “He denies,” said the ministers in their report, “that God has eternally appointed a definite number of sinners to salvation.” They concluded: “We greatly mourn the advantage the adversary has obtained of Br. Carter in these matters.” They exhorted the Benson congregation to “put him away and to heal the wounded feelings of their aggrieved Brethren.”

Repercussions from Carter’s examination were swift and dramatic. A minister from Putnam, New York, across Lake Champlain, urged John S. Carter to join him in starting a Free Will Baptist congregation dedicated to the proposition that “salvation is possible for all.” Carter agreed. Most of the Benson Baptists, some thirty members of the church, followed. The elders faced catastrophe. For months they “labored with” the defectors and issued dire threats, but to no avail. Eventually all defectors were listed in the minute book as “excommunicated.” They included John S. Carter’s father, a founder and long a deacon of the church, who had joined the defectors in support of his son. The elders denounced the “licentious communion,” but meanwhile their own supporters dwindled in number. The congregation disintegrated. The minute book shows no entries after 1827.⁸

Meanwhile, in 1823 the Free Willers began their own minute book, which recorded that an “extraordinary shower of grace” visited the area through the ministry of John S. Carter, a rebirth of religion “glorious to behold.”⁹ They welcomed “Christians of every order.” They set themselves not only against “lewdness and wantonness” but also against “tattling, backbiting and evil speaking.” In 1825 they erected in Benson a stone

meetinghouse with a vaulted ceiling and walls two feet thick, apparently built for the ages. One of the most celebrated preachers of the New England Free Will Baptist movement, the Negro evangelist Charles Bowles, came to its dedication and lent his inspirational presence to the event.



The old stone meetinghouse, which passed from Baptists to Mormons, offers an architectural illustration of a segment of Benson's religious past. This recent photograph in possession of the author.

The Free Will Baptists, a movement formed in 1793, had grown rapidly in the following decades. Old hierarchies were crumbling, and ordinary men, imbued with a spirit of independence, were taking charge of their own destinies. The Free Willers were in the forefront of progressive causes of the time, including temperance and the abolition of slavery. New England had few blacks but its Free Will Baptists had at least two black ministers. Charles Bowles, at meetings in Huntington, Vermont, preached regularly to thousands, and he roamed the state winning converts to the cause.¹⁰ The Free Willers also had women preachers, including Clarissa Danforth, who was widely praised for her eloquence and "common sense."¹¹ This was the movement that John S. Carter had injected into the village of Benson. If it had brought euphoria, it had also brought irreconcilable bitterness. Not everyone liked the new ideas. When Carter's father, the defecting Deacon Gideon Carter, died in 1828, he could not even be buried in hallowed ground. He was interred on a hilltop behind the Carter home, which became a graveyard of the excommunicated. It was a measure of the bitterness the disputes had left behind.

To this village with its history of religious discord Jared Carter, younger

brother of John S. Carter, returned in 1831. He held few meetings en route. He wrote in his journal: "I felt it was my privilege to hasten my journey." He arrived in Benson October 25. John S. Carter was not there, having been called to Huntington to preach to the Free Will Baptists. But Jared soon showed his own brand of eloquence. Like his brother, he proved to be a prophet with honor among his own people. Within days he had converted twenty-seven people — virtually the entire Free Will Baptist congregation. The stone meetinghouse with the vaulted ceiling became a Mormon meetinghouse. Ardent meetings continued throughout the fall.



This isolated "graveyard of the excommunicated" in Benson is testimony to the intense feelings aroused by religious differences at the time. Photograph (n.d.) in possession of the author.

Although later generations of Americans would think of the Mormon religion as something quite different from any other, in 1831 a feeling of continuity with other faiths was strong. Still calling itself the Church of Christ, Mormonism did not ask its converts to renounce previous doctrines; rather it added an epic New World supplement to the Bible, and held out the prospect of a westward journey to a new, harmonious utopia.

Jared preached in Benson until mid-January, 1832, when he received instructions to return to Kirtland. Kirtland appreciated his extraordinary achievement in creating the church's first congregation on New England soil. This gave Jared, as well as the town of Benson, a prominent place in further Mormon plans. In March following Carter's return to Kirtland, Joseph Smith announced a "revelation."

Verily I say unto you, that it is my will that my servant Jared Carter should go again into the eastern countries, from place to place and from city to city, in the power of the ordination wherewith he has been ordained, proclaiming glad tidings of great joy, even the everlasting gospel.¹²

Consequently a meeting would be held in Benson that summer, to start August 10. A number of leaders of the church were to attend, and Jared Carter would lead a concentrated New England missionary effort from Benson.

In Mooers, New York, reports of these Mormon developments reached Ira Ames in a letter from his mother. Some time earlier she had settled in Chenango, New York. Now she wrote that she and her daughter Sally—sister of Lydia, Jared's wife—had been baptized into the Mormon movement, joining Jared, Lydia, and others. The letter affected Ira deeply. In his memoir he later wrote:

When reading over my mother's letter it ran through me like lightning. It aroused every feeling of my mind, the effect was powerful. I read the letter to my wife and to my wife's sister, Rebecca. . . . My wife and Rebecca laughed mockingly at the letter and cast much ridicule. Rebecca said, turning on her heel, "I'll bet five dollars that Ira will believe in that book."

Ira retired to his bedroom and spread the letter upon his bed, and thought long and hard.

In Mooers, as elsewhere, conversion tended to take a zigzag course, often with unexpected turns. One day in June, 1832, Ira Ames saw Jared Carter coming toward his front gate.

Quick as lightning a spirit flashed into me to oppose him. However, I met him at the gate and after saying "how d'y do," I said something like this: "I don't want you to say anything about your Mormonism to me." I felt as though I did not want to speak to him.

But later Ira began questioning Jared, and soon agreed to be baptized. Ira records that they went quietly to the Champlain River and it was done. Jared explained many things, and told him about the Mormon conference to begin in Benson on August 10. Ira wanted to be there.

Ira had been a Methodist, and had recently been appointed a "class leader" in his church. The sudden shift to Mormonism deeply troubled his wife Charity, who had also become a Methodist. As they talked about Ira's conversion, she became increasingly fretful and angry. A visit from Mormon leaders Orson Pratt and Lyman Johnson made her deeply resentful.

She became so bitter that she almost lost her reason. One morning in the forepart of August I had been reasoning with my wife in mildness, meekness and calmness, when she suddenly seized her infant son and left the house, determined never to live with me again.

She knew that the Methodist circuit preacher was at John Shadin's house, about a mile from my house. When she reached the house they were at breakfast, the doors all open, and the Methodist preacher sat in such a manner that he saw my wife as she approached the kitchen door. He called aloud to her as she approached: "Ah, Mrs. Ames, how is that Mormon husband of yours? If I had been at your house when those two fellows were there I would have cracked their heads together." (Slapping his hands together over his head). All this was said in a sneering, jeering, mocking tone and manner. It had a powerful effect on the mind of my wife, who turned instantly without speaking, and returned home. She told me she was convinced I was right, told me of the preacher's words and that she saw that he was full of a devilish spirit. And from that moment she was a humble, obedient, quiet, dutiful wife. I never saw so great change in anyone. She said she was willing to be subject to me, to gather with the Saints or do whatever I saw proper for she saw the difference in my spirit and that preacher's.

Ira began planning to dispose of his properties. On August 6 he hired a horse and rig and started the 130-mile trip to Benson for the important meeting. The New England Mormons who came together in Benson on August 10, 1832—presumably in the stone meetinghouse with the vaulted ceiling—must have been elated at the words they heard there. It was prologue to the great adventure that would lead them to the gathering in Zion. Of this meeting Ira Ames wrote in his memoir:

I met Orson Pratt, Lyman Johnson, Sylvester Smith and Jared Carter and Gideon and about twelve other members of the church. I was very young in the church and knew but little but I thought I knew it all. And then when Orson Pratt, Lyman, Sylvester and others spoke to us, they unfolded new principle after new principle, glory after glory, until my soul was fed with fatness, and I wept many tears of joy. And not to this day have I ever attended a conference where I enjoyed myself and my religion more than I did that day. Conference held Saturday and Sunday, and at this conference I was ordained a priest under the hands of Jared and Simeon Carter. I returned from this conference to my home and commenced at once gathering up my means, disposing of my property, preparing to gather with the Saints.

Ames does not mention John S. Carter, who had led the Free Will Baptist defection, but he was there, too, as we know from the diary of Gideon Haden Carter. Gideon, the least loquacious of the brothers, wrote in his diary: "I spoke some at the close." On Monday he and others "went to the waters" to baptize a number of converts.¹³

It must have been strange for John S. Carter, central figure in the Free Will Baptist revival, to espouse Mormonism. In Huntington early in 1832 he had learned of Jared's activities in Benson, and he decided to attend the August meeting to meet his younger brother "on gospel ground." He came, listened, and finally converted. His diary of these months often



Orson Pratt was one of the Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church established in Utah. In 1853, he became involved in a dispute with Brigham Young over the publication of Lucy Smith's (Joseph's mother) memoirs about her son and the early history of the Mormons. Courtesy of LDS History Department.

expressed self-doubts; he speaks of "my own unworthiness." His wife opposed the conversion. When their infant child died after John's conversion, it shattered their marriage. She went home to her father's house, never to rejoin her husband. However, John Carter was joined in the movement by four daughters from an earlier marriage.

In the months after August, 1832, Jared and John Carter and others performed prodigies of missionary travel. Mostly on foot, they covered dozens of miles in a day, roaming large areas of Vermont and eastern New York. Now and then they were "blessed with sheaves"; every convert brought rejoicing. Still, Jared noted with despair "how few there appear that are disposed to receive the truth. . . . Oh how shocking to the human mind!" Even in Benson, most people seemed to be "ignorantly wrong or blind."

In Bolton, New York, on Lake George, Jared won a convert of exceptional importance to the church. John Tanner, a prosperous Baptist, had been unable to walk for months. He had black sores on one leg, and sat with his foot up. But he attended some Mormon meetings and seemed impressed. Jared's journal describes what followed.

He had been lame for months but we found he was a believer in the Book of Mormon. I asked him to endeavor to walk in the name of Jesus Christ and he agreed to undertake it. I then took him by the hand and commanded him to walk and by the power of God he was enabled to walk.

Family tradition quotes John Tanner himself:

I arose, stepped my foot to the floor, threw away my chair and my crutches, and walked back and forth, praising the Lord.¹⁴

When Tanner later arrived in Kirtland with large sums from the sale of his properties, he offered to pay off the mortgage on the Kirtland temple.¹⁵

Gradually groups of converts assembled for the journeys that lay ahead. John S. Carter organized the departure of those converts from the Lake George area, where he had concentrated his final missionary work. His journal for 1833 records final meetings in Benson and across Lake Champlain in Dresden, after which he returned to Bolton.

August 21. Returned from Dresden to write the covenant and certificates for the Brethren to go to Zion.

August 22. Brethren started for the Land of Zion.

September 5. It being the counsel of the brethren and I trust the will of God, after many trials I start for Zion in company with Brother Ripley and family, Brother Clements and family, the family of Brother W. Burgess and my family.

We are indeed but poorly equipped as to the good things of the world, our clothes being but ordinary and having but seventeen dollars in money (of that Dr. More gave me ten, and Brother John Tanner

ten more; three dollars, or nearly, I paid out before I came from home) for four families consisting of thirty persons. We have but two wagons drawn by oxen.

The first day they made about fourteen miles. They stopped at farms and homes where people seemed friendly.

Ira Ames, after the August, 1832, church conference in Benson, returned to Mooers. His journal states that he was able to negotiate the sale of his farm and tannery for \$400—more than he had paid for them. Early in 1833 he and Charity and their three children were ready and equipped for the journeys to come, which would start from Benson after a visit to Shoreham to bid goodbye to Ira's kind uncle. The memoir tells us that the uncle had been displeased with Ira's espousal of Mormonism and had changed his will—but without cutting Ira off completely. The uncle left him \$200 instead of \$400. In Benson the Ames family tarried for other converts anxious to journey with them, including the widow Prudence Gibbs, whose husband had given the land for the stone meetinghouse; also their children, and Amos Herrick who had been their neighbor in Benson. A last-minute convert was Jabez Carter, father of Charity Ames. Born in 1752 in Killingsworth, Connecticut, he had been among those migrating to Benson in the 1780s. At eighty-one he was ready to embark on one more migration.¹⁶ Finally, in September, 1833, they were ready to start.

There would be many deaths en route; also births. Today in Utah and surrounding areas, descendants of the Benson Mormons are thought to number in the tens of thousands. In Benson the stone meetinghouse stood empty. It was later taken over by the town for use as one of its one-room schoolhouses, always known as the Temple Schoolhouse. The dirt road on which it stood became known as Temple Road. These names were soon the only visible traces of Benson's Mormon interlude, as the town expunged the emigrants from its memory. No Mormons remained in Benson.

NOTES

¹ Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* (7 vols., Salt Lake City, 1974 ed.), III, 171. Also the unpublished Carter Family History; the author is indebted to Helen Carter Warr and Mildred Carter Christopherson for giving him access to this compilation. In quotations from unpublished diaries, memoirs, and minute books our spellings have followed current usage except for occasional emphasis. Punctuation has been added for clarity.

² Unpublished ms in Office of the Church Historian, manuscript section, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, hereafter designated as OCH.

³ Unpublished diary, OCH.

⁴ The church was organized April 6, 1830, as the Church of Christ. The words "of Latter-day Saints" came into use in the mid-1830s and were officially added in 1838. For a general history see Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-Day Saints* (New York, 1979).

³ For discussion of the race issue see Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York, 1966 ed.), pp. 130-133.

⁴ The town was chartered in 1780, but settlement began in 1783.

⁷ The minute book, for reasons unknown, is in the files of the Office of the Town Clerk, Benson. The author is grateful to Judith Munger, Town Clerk, for calling his attention to its existence.

⁸ The last entry was for the covenant meeting for April, 1827. Some unsatisfactory "labor" efforts were reported. "But in consequence of the inclemency of the weather there was but very few present and it was thought expedient and accordingly voted to postpone any order on the reports till our next meeting." No such meeting is recorded.

⁹ Two surviving Free Will Baptist minute books for the Putnam-Benson congregation are in possession of Dorothy Offensend of Wells, Vermont. The author is grateful for her cooperation.

¹⁰ John W. Lewis, *The Life, Labors and Travels of Elder Charles Bowles of the Free Will Baptist Denomination* (Watertown, 1852), pp. 10, 171; also Moses C. Henderson, *An Historical Sketch of the Vermont Yearly Meetings of the Free Will Baptists from 1808 to 1889* (St. Johnsbury, 1890), p. 15; David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York, 1939), pp. 35, 157.

¹¹ I. D. Stewart, *The History of the Freewill Baptists for Half a Century* (Dover, N.H., 1862), p. 441.

¹² *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1982 ed.), 79:1, March 1832.

¹³ Unpublished diary, OCH.

¹⁴ George S. Tanner, *John Tanner and His Family* (Salt Lake City, 1974), pp. 46-50, cites seven accounts of the event.

¹⁵ Brodie, *op cit*, p. 161.

¹⁶ His arrival in Kirtland was noted in the *Latter-Day Saints Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio), August 19, 1836. Clipping in Carter Family History, *op cit*.