

MARITIME ARCHIVES & LIBRARY

INFORMATION SHEET 29

MORMON EMIGRATION

The first Mormons, or members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, arrived in Liverpool from America on board the *Garrick* on 19 July 1837 and were sent to preach the gospel by the President of the Church, Joseph Smith. The Church had been formally organised in America on 6 April 1830. Three of the seven missionaries were Canadian and two had been born in England, and they set up branches of the Church at Preston and throughout the Ribble Valley in Lancashire. Within eight months of their arrival membership had reached some 2,000 people. By 1850, 42,316 people had been baptised and another 52,192 had been baptised by 1870.

From 1840 the majority of these early converts were encouraged by the Church leaders to emigrate from Britain to North America to help build the community's own settlement, Nauvoo, on marshland alongside the Mississippi River in Illinois. The first company of 41 emigrant Mormons left Liverpool on the *Britannia* for New York on 6 June 1840. However, in 1846, persecution culminating in the assassination of the Church leader, Joseph Smith, forced the Mormons to flee west into unsettled territory in the Rocky Mountains, to found "Zion" at Salt Lake City in the State of Utah in July 1847. Many thousands of Mormon emigrants followed.

Many of these emigrants were poor, and were assisted to emigrate by their local Church branches, or from 1849 by the Church's own Perpetual Emigration Fund Company. By 1852, over £125,000 had been given to assist poor emigrants, and the Church had its own charter and supply agent in Liverpool.

In 1854 the Mormon agent and passenger-broker, Elder Samuel W. Richards, gave evidence to a parliamentary inquiry on how the Church organised this mass emigration. He described how the Church chartered its own ships, charging passengers £3.12s.6d. to New Orleans, and £20 for the full journey to Salt Lake City. The journey to Utah from New Orleans consisted of a 1,300 mile trip by steamboat on the Mississippi to St. Louis, then a further 800 miles on the Missouri River to Council Bluffs. From Council Bluffs they joined the wagon trains along the *Mormon Trail* to Salt Lake Valley, some 1,030 miles across the Rocky Mountains.

Between 1840 and 1870 some 45,000 Mormons emigrated to North America, and for the next 50 years the Church in America was composed of mainly English emigrants, leading to most of the branches of the Church being closed down in Britain. Emigration ceased in the 1950s when the Church leaders asked the members to cease emigrating to Utah and to build the Church up in their own country. The first temple in the UK, the London Temple, opened in 1958.¹

¹ Emigration figures and costs were taken from PICKUP, David M. *The Pick and Flower of England - The Story of the Mormons in Victorian Lancashire*. Burnley: Living Legend, 1991.

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints encourages its members to research their family histories and the Church has the world's largest genealogy record collection. These records are made available to members and non-members alike through Family History Centres around the world, including Liverpool. In addition the Church now runs a genealogy site, *Family Search* (see below) making available a database of over 400 million names online, and the International Genealogical Index which gives 240 million names with birth or christening and marriage details, and microfilm copies of parish registers in the Church's area.

Online details on Mormon emigration and other useful links, can be found at,

<http://www.lds.org.uk>

The website of the British Latter-day Saints Society, can be located at:

<http://www.ldshistory.org>

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, can be located at:

<http://www.familysearch.org>

