

Volume LXI October 1966 Number 1

MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW

Published Quarterly by

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF MISSOURI
COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

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The MISSOURI HISTORICAL REVIEW is owned by the State Historical Society of Missouri and is published quarterly at 201 South Eighth Street, Columbia, Missouri 65201. Send communications and change of address to The State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri 65201. Second class postage is paid at Columbia, Missouri.

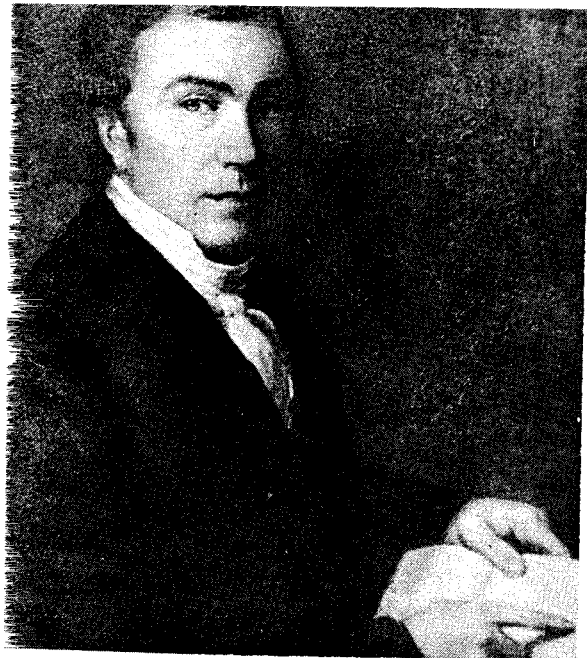
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THE COVER: General Nathaniel Lyon fell mortally wounded at the head of his troops while successfully charging the Rebel forces at the Battle of Wilson's Creek, August 10, 1861. This color lithograph, "Death of Lyon," was published by Currier and Ives in 1862. For other artists' interpretations of Lyon's death see pages 32 and 33.



ISAAC McCOY

AND THE

MORMONS

BY WARREN A. JENNINGS

Kansas State Historical Society

The historian's subjects, like those of the artist who works with canvas and brush, are almost without limit. He may choose to recreate some stirring movement of panoramic scope, splashed with color and alive with titanic forces in restless flux and constant conflict. He may sketch in disciplined strokes of black and white more tranquil scenes in man's eventful past. Or he may etch a work of delicate miniature. The relationship of Isaac McCoy, a prominent early settler in Jackson County, Missouri, to his religious-communitarian neighbors, the Mormons, represents such a study in miniature. It is illuminating in that it aids in understanding the factors which agitated and aggravated the conflict between Mormons and Missourians in western Missouri in the early 1830s.

Isaac McCoy was a Baptist missionary who spent many years among various Indian tribes, endeavoring to provide for their temporal and spiritual welfare.¹ In the long span of these activities he was often employed by the United States government or engaged in negotiations with it in an effort to ameliorate the condition

¹ Biographies and biographical sketches of McCoy include the following: Franklin G. Adams, "Rev. Isaac McCoy," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society*, I & II (1881), 271-275; Edward E. Dale, "Isaac McCoy," in *Dictionary of American Biography*, VI (New York, 1961), 617-618; Nellie McCoy Harris, "The Reverend Isaac McCoy," *Missouri Valley Historical Society Publications: Annals of Kansas City*, I (October, 1921), 85-89; Emory J. Lyons, "Isaac McCoy: His Plan of and Work for Indian Colonization," *Fort Hays Kansas State College Studies*, IX (Topeka, 1945); and Walter N. Wyeth, *Isaac McCoy: Early Indian Missions* (Philadelphia, 1895).

of the aborigines. He was a man of some note in his own day and of some repute in our own time. His opinions and records of the Mormons, therefore, carry weight and cast light on what contemporaries felt about the new religious movement.

McCoy was born June 13, 1784, in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, the son of a clergyman. While he was still a child his parents migrated to Kentucky where, in 1800, he was converted to the Baptist church. This event was followed three years later by his marriage to Christiana Polke. McCoy and his new bride moved to Indiana in 1804, and here he was licensed to preach. He assumed his first pastorate near Vincennes in 1809 and continued his ministry there for the next eight years. In the fall of 1817 he commenced the work which would occupy him for the remainder of his life, missionary activity among the Indians. He received an appointment to labor among the red men in the Wabash Valley and thus became the first missionary sent exclusively to the Indian peoples by the Baptist Board of Commissioners.² In 1822 McCoy established on the present site of Niles, Michigan, the Carey Mission to the Ottawa and Miami tribes. The following year he founded another mission, Thomas Station, near Grand Rapids, Michigan. It was during these years that he developed a durable friendship with Lewis Cass, who was then territorial governor of Michigan. McCoy, a man of indefatigable energy, inspired many younger men to take up his work. Among these were Johnston Lykins, who married Isaac's daughter Delilah in 1826, and Jotham Meeker, the first printer in that vast territory from which Kansas was created.³

In 1823 McCoy conceived the idea of having the Federal government designate all the area west of the state of Missouri and southwest of the Missouri River "for the exclusive occupation by all Indians then east of the Mississippi river."⁴ He wrote in a pamphlet: "This plan proposes the concentration of the perishing tribes in some suitable

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² William Gammell, *A History of American Baptist Missions in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America* (Boston, 1849), 314.

³ Douglas C. McMurtrie and Albert H. Allen, *Jotham Meeker: Pioneer Printer of Kansas* (Chicago, 1930), 17.

⁴ Lyons, "Isaac McCoy," 21.

portion of the country, under such guardianship of our Government as shall be found conducive to their permanent improvement.”⁵ He hoped to segregate all Indians from the pernicious influence of the whites and envisioned a federation of Indian tribes which eventually would be amalgamated into a separate Indian state.

In 1828 McCoy served on a government commission to arrange for the transfer of the Ottawa and Miami Indians to the West. This resulted in the first of his many exploratory trips into the area that became Kansas and Oklahoma. In order to be near his work, he moved his family to Lexington, Missouri, in August, 1829. After passage of the Indian Removal Bill on May 26, 1830, which provided for the transfer of all Indians living east of the Mississippi River to west of Missouri, McCoy accepted appointments from the Federal government as surveyor to select sites for Indian settlement and agent to assist in their removal. One writer has noted, “If one were to name the person who above all others had a guiding hand in the Indian affairs of the territory, it would be Isaac McCoy.”⁶

In July, 1831, Johnston and Delilah Lykins, who had been appointed by the Baptist Missionary Convention as Indian missionaries and teachers, took up temporary residence among the Shawnees in Kansas “in the house of the sub-agent, Major [John] Campbell.”⁷ Lykins soon purchased a small tract of land in Missouri bordering on the western state line.⁸ At this time Isaac and Christiana McCoy were at Fort Gibson, Arkansas Territory, on government business.⁹ Thus they were not present when Joseph Smith and a number of his followers appeared in Jackson County. On August 2, in a solemn ceremony held twelve miles west of Independence, Smith dedicated the surrounding country as the “land upon which the Zion of God shall stand.”¹⁰ Zion was to be a perfect community for a perfected people. Delilah Lykins wrote from the

⁵ *Remarks on the Practicability of Indian Reform Embracing Their Colonization* (Boston, 1827), 25.

⁶ Earl Leon Shoup, “Indian Missions in Kansas,” *Kansas State Historical Society Collections*, XII (1911-1912), 66.

⁷ Isaac McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian Missions* (Washington, 1840), 422.

⁸ Edward Blair, *History of Johnson County, Kansas* (Lawrence, 1915), 48-49.

⁹ Fort Gibson was on the east bank of the Neosho River, two miles below the junction of the Arkansas and Verdigris rivers. See Isaac McCoy, *Annual Register within the Indian (or Western) Territory*, II (January 1, 1836). This series was published annually from 1835 through 1838 by McCoy on Jotham Meeker’s press, located in the Indian territory.

¹⁰ *Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ* (Zion [Independence, Missouri], 1833), 134.

Shawnee Agency to her parents at Fort Gibson on July 31 some portentous news:

The Mormonites are about to take the country. they are preaching and baptising, through the country, are trying to proceed west to find the New Jerusalem which they say is towards the rocky mountains[.] the agent has driven them off this side of the line and forbids their crossing it. Smith who is their leader came on a few days ago[.] he is a very illiterate man, has hardly common sense but by looking thro a transparent stone he has the prophecies revealed to him and all go according [to] directions. He can neither read nor write.

I think that they will take in Shanes family.¹¹ they gave Betsey Wells one of their Bibles last sabbath, it is said not to be even a good imitation of the Bible.¹²

When the first Mormon missionaries had appeared in western Missouri in January, 1831, McCoy had been on a trip to Washington, D. C. He had left there in April to return to Jackson County, a journey that usually required about a month. By May 6 he had arrived home and had departed again, this time on a surveying trip. Though he had been absent from Jackson County much of the intervening time, McCoy undoubtedly had heard something of the Mormons, even before receiving his daughter's letter. However, the above note does give insight into the first impression the Mormons made upon the people of western Missouri.

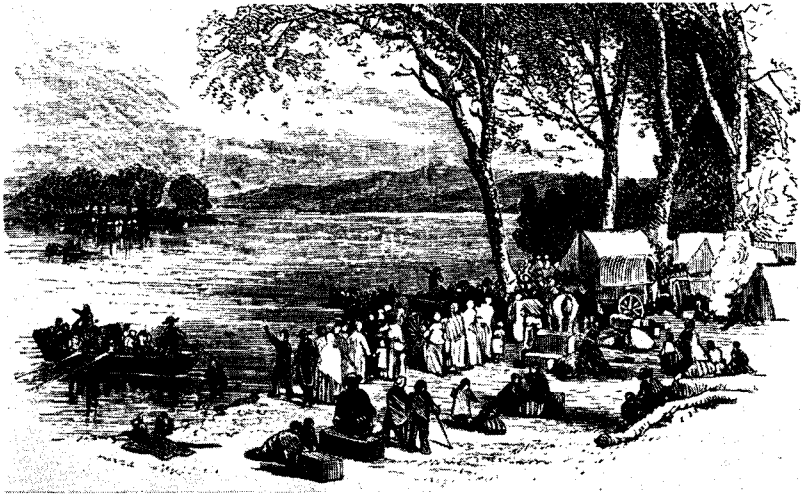
A rapid influx of Mormon immigrants into Jackson County occurred in the fall of 1831. Isaac and Christiana McCoy were kept informed at Fort Gibson by Delilah Lykins. She wrote on September 6:

A fresh cargo of Mormonites arrived in our neighbourhood yesterday, between seventy and 100. I think that they will take possession of this country for a while. they are crowding in as near the state line as they can get. they say that [they] can work miracles, and one woman in this last crew profeses to speak all languages but when Mr.

¹¹ Captain Shane was an elderly Ottawa Indian who was employed by the United States government as interpreter for the Shawnee Indians. He had assisted the United States during the War of 1812 and was a Baptist.

¹² The Isaac McCoy papers consist of 38 volumes of letters bound in chronological order [hereafter *Letters*] and McCoy's journal [hereafter *Journal*] housed in the Manuscript Division of Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. Punctuation and spelling in quotes from this material will be retained as in the original except where insertions are necessary for clarity. The agent referred to above was Richard W. Cummins.

**Encampment of
Mormons
on the
Missouri River.**



Blanchard¹³ spoke to her in ottow [portion missing] he speaks very well she said that she had never been [portion missing] there in the spirit, that there was a few tribes that she had not been with in the spirit. I do think that they ought to be punished and I also think—(as Mr. Lykins says) that Alex. Campbel ought to claim them as his grand children for they preach very much like him. they are starving here at present. I know of a widow with eight children who it is said threw three thousand into the common stock and who is now living on boiled wheat.¹⁴

It appears that McCoy's *Letters* and *Journal* make no further references to the Mormons until November, 1833, when these people were forcibly expelled from the county. For this reason McCoy's attitude toward them while they were his neighbors must be reconstructed in other ways. It should be pointed out, however, that during the two-year period of Mormon residence, McCoy was often out of the area. He made another trip to Washington in February, 1832, and did not return home until June, at which time he purchased a small piece of land in Missouri from Lykins for fifty dollars. This was near the state line and adjacent to the Shawnee reservation.¹⁵ That same month Lykins began to erect mission buildings in an area seven miles south of the Missouri

¹³ "A young man, Mr. I[ra] D. Blanchard, though not a member of our church, had gone among the Delawares from benevolent motives, and was studying the Delaware language with the view of being useful to them." McCoy, *Indian Missions*, 456.

¹⁴ *Letters*. There was a persistent, though false, rumor that the Mormons were starving in their western paradise. See letter of B. Pixley to editor of the *Christian Watchman*, October 12, 1832, William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen (eds.), *Among the Mormons: Historical Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (New York, 1958), 73-75.

¹⁵ Nellie McCoy Harris, "Farms Owned by Isaac McCoy," *Missouri Valley Historical Society Publications: Annals of Kansas City*, I (December, 1922), 90-92.

The *Evening and Morning Star* was published at Independence from June, 1832, until September, 1834.

EVENING AND MORNING STAR

Vol. I. No. 11. INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI, JUNE, 1832. [Whole No.]

The *Evening and the Morning Star*, WILL BE PUBLISHED AT

Independence, Jackson Co. State of Missouri.

As the forenoon of the night of the ad, and the message of the day of redemption, the Star will be given its high form and source, and be divided into the relations of God to man, known to his servants by the Holy Spirit, at sundry times, since the creation of man, but more especially, in these last days, for the reformation of the nation of Israel. The

according to the promises of old, we know that the coming of Joseph is near at hand. For he will be by the aid of his Father, and his Father, the Father of the world, with them he shall push the people back to the front of the earth, to the place of the world, of the Lord of hosts, the most just, for an account on which the Lord of hosts shall make unto people a feast of change, a feast of wisdom on the part of all things full of nature, of wisdom on the law of the Lord, and he will destroy in this mountain face of the covering of all people, and the world shall be a great and noble nation. Wherefore it is a must, know and submit to the world be the

River and three miles west of Missouri.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Isaac McCoy set out for Arkansas and was gone a month. This was the pattern of his life during these years. Though he was away much of the time, he still had opportunity to become personally acquainted with many of the Mormons, for they tended to concentrate their settlements in the western part of the county.

It has not been ascertained whether or not McCoy played any part in the events of July, 1833, when the Mormons were coerced into signing an agreement to leave the county by the first of the year. This was the occasion when the printing establishment for the *Evening and Morning Star*, the Mormon monthly, was destroyed. At that time McCoy was making preparation for another survey trip into Indian territory, upon which he departed July 28, not to return until August 17. Of this first clash none of the contemporary accounts by either Mormon or non-Mormon mentions McCoy as being involved in any manner, and he does not even note the episode in his *Journal*.

McCoy went on another tour of the wilderness on September 13, 1833, and was gone a month. Going farther west than usual, he contacted Indians of greater ferocity. As a consequence, his party was heavily armed and made a point of never staying at the same camp site two nights in succession. This fact may (or may not) explain the reason for one of the accusations by the Mormons against McCoy. Philo Dibble, a Mormon resident of Jackson County, remembered:

In the fall of 1833, a sectarian preacher by the name of McCoy came to the Whitmer settlement where I was living to buy up all the guns he could, representing that he wanted them for the Indians. We suspected no trouble, and quite a number of us sold our guns to him. The sequel of his action was, however, soon apparent to us, for rumors soon reached us of mobs assembling and threats being made to drive us from the County.¹⁷

¹⁶ This site became known as Shawnee Mission.

¹⁷ *Early Scenes in Church History* (Salt Lake City, 1882), 81-82.

Whether these two incidents are related is, of course, unknown.

During the last days of October and the first days of November the situation reached a crisis in Jackson County. Hostilities against the Mormons were renewed and after several skirmishes and one battle (the so-called Battle of the Big Blue River), the Mormons were disarmed and forced to flee. In an editorial, "The Outrage in Jackson County, Missouri," which appeared in May, 1834, it was charged by the Mormon editor:

When their arms were given into the hands of what [the Missourians] called civil authority, or rather the authority that ought to have been civil, then every mean and cowardly villain, who had previously stood back, rushed out to gratify his revenge; and among these was the *Rev. Isaac M'Coy*. Yes the *Rev. Isaac M'Coy*, a Missionary; a baptist Missionary! sent to convert the Indians! Not content with the calamity which was brought upon an inoffensive and defenceless people, he grasped *his* gun and marched at the head of a company of ruffians, and ordered women and children to flee for their lives.¹⁸

In an article, "A History of Persecution," published six years later, the Mormons repeated this accusation.

The mob now felt safe, and were no longer militia, they formed themselves into companies, and went forth on horseback armed, to harrass the saints, and take all the arms they could find. Two of these companies were headed by baptist preachers. The Rev Isaac McCoy, headed one of about seventy. . . . They went forth through the different settlements of the saints, threatening them with death, and destruction if they were not off immediately. They broke open houses, and plundered them, where they found them shut, and the owners gone.¹⁹

Parley P. Pratt, another Mormon resident, recalled:

Companies of ruffians were ranging the county in every direction; bursting into houses without fear, knowing that the people were disarmed; frightening women and children, and threatening to kill them if they did not flee immediately. At the head of one of these parties appeared the Rev. Isaac McCoy (a noted Baptist missionary to the Indians), with gun in hand, ordering the people to leave

¹⁸ *Evening and Morning Star*. This paper had been re-established in Kirtland, Ohio, with Oliver Cowdery as editor.

¹⁹ Nauvoo (Ill.) *Times and Seasons*, January, 1840.

homes immediately and surrender everything in the shape of arms.²⁰

This indictment has been reiterated by a later generation of Mormon historians. Brigham H. Roberts, one of the more prolific writers, claimed: "The priests in the county, it seems, were determined not to be outdone by the politicians, for the Reverend Isaac McCoy and other preachers of the gospel (!) were seen leading bands of marauders from place to place; and were the main inspirers of cowardly assaults on the defenseless."²¹

Since this charge has been made so often, it may well be asked—did McCoy personally lead armed men against the Mormon settlements? Or, has he been the victim of misrepresentation? There is a third alternative: his actions may have been misunderstood. Fortunately, this whole episode and the part Isaac played in it was recorded in his *Journal*.

Friday Nov. 1st In this place I must begin to say something upon the sickening subject of Mormon difficulties. The history of the affair, as far as I write it, will be found upon separate sheets dated a few days since.

Monday Nov. 4. In the Mormon disturbances on Saturday night a young man was badly wounded by a shot from a Mormons gun.²² A war among our neighbours is almost commencing. Hitherto I have not meddled in the matter in any way—Now I feel it to be my duty to endeavour to make peace. I went early to talk to such Mormons as I could see. Went to the other party, at their rendezvous at Witsons²³ & proposed to the leaders that the difficulties be settled by recourse to law, and without the shedding of blood. The party agreed to suspend severe measures for that day and I had strong hopes that on the next day prosecution would be instituted to such an extent as to quiet both parties. On the way home I narrowly escaped falling into the hands of an armed Mormon war party. Perhaps they saw me, & did not choose to injure me. I was unarmed, as I ever remained to be throughout those difficulties. This same war party presently attacked their antagonists, as is stated on the separate sheets referred to above.

²⁰ *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (New York, 1874), 108.

²¹ *The Missouri Persecutions* (Salt Lake City, 1900), 107. See, also, Brigham H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1902), I, 392.

²² The one wounded was the son of "Squire" Manship, and he had been shot in the thigh while attacking a Mormon settlement on the night of November 2.

²³ Moses G. Wilson was the leader of those most violently opposed to the Mormons.

Went the same evening and Mormons in two places to lay down their arms and be peaceable, &c. But my advice was without effect.

Tuesday Nov. 5 Visited both parties, that is a few persons of each. Most of Mormons were somewhere embodied and were inaccessible, for the purposes of making peace—offered to each to carry a message of peace from one to the other. This was the day of the difficulties at Independence of which I heard early on Wednesday.

Nov. 6. The last was almost a sleepless night with me. I had too much reason to believe that the Mormons were embodied somewhere, and that they would make a stroke about this time, where, we knew not, but probably at Independence, as we afterwards learned was the case. Had they destroyed that village they would have turned upon others and we should all have been massacred who could have saved ourselves by flight. I had resolved to make the best of my way with my family across the Missouri or Kanza. But even if my family could escape I had reason to fear the loss of my papers, and of my moveable property. But the Lord ordered it otherwise and saved us from distruction by the hands of our neighbours, to whom I had ever been kind, and on many of whom I had often bestowed favours.

I set out for Independence, and met a small company who desired to make an excursion in the upper Mormon settlement in order to take the guns which might yet be found among them. Fearing that the Mormons would be rashly used by them I requested to forbear until I returned from town, & I would then accompany them. This they agreed to. A few miles farther I met a company of 30 or 40 persons coming up on the same errand. Believing that some of the Mormons, now conquered, would likely be killed by them, I proposed to turn back with them, to this some who were bent on avenging the deaths and wounds which had been occasioned by the Mormons, objected, though in respectful terms. Several advised me to proceed to town, a few expressed a wish that I should go with the company—the one party lest I should be present when some one would be killed—and the other that I might prevent the killing of any. I however turned and went with the company, many of whom I discovered were determined to kill. I embraced the earliest opportunities of conversing alone with the most murderously disposed. We immediately entered the Mormon settlement, and I as soon perceived that my anticipations had not been erroneous—there was need of some to regulate the conduct of the rash. Two guns were at one time cocked for the purpose of shooting a Mormon, when I rushed forward

and prevented. I had to use similar efforts afterwards to prevent one from being beaten with a stick, and another with a gun. I prevailed upon the company to stop a little from houses, and allow me with one or two only to approach and ask for their guns, &c. Had it not been for this measure the alarm and injury to the Mormons would have been much beaten and the injury considerable. In some instances I had to pacify some of our party by telling them that the Mormon had laid himself liable to prosecution, and it would be better to hang him by law, than kill him & thus expose themselves to prosecution. The mormon men were generally hid, though we spoke to several. My business in approaching their houses alone was dangerous, for I knew not at what moment some one of them in their alarm might knock me in the head. We found two guns.

The company dispersed at night, and I returned to my house fatigued in the extreme yet satisfied that I had been the means of saving several mormons from being murdered on that day, and from suffering severely in other respects.

Thursday Nov. 7. On my way to Independence I met a company [of] men coming up to patrol the settlements, to see that the Mormons should not be molested in their preparations to get off, to guard them when necessary, and to show them that they certainly could not be allowed to remain here any longer. In town I first learned that the Mormons had surrendered only 53 guns. I felt assured therefore that our danger was not over. On our side was no order—or arrangements—every one was doing what seemed right in his own eyes. I hastened home and found many of the Guard at my house.

Friday Nov. 8 Busy all day devising and writing arrangements by which we hoped to lessen afflictions of the Mormons, and at the same time prevent them from rallying at an unexpected moment and butchering us all. In these deliberations had the company of several sober minded men, especially from among the guard.

Friday Nov. 9 Early one of the guard and myself started to Independence to carry into effect our late decisions in regard to the restoration of public tranquillity. There was a great rain last night. Blue river was high and road gone. Our business was urgent and we constructed a raft and crossed. Here we were in our business till night.

Sunday Nov. 10 I preached in Independence, from “and God saw that the wickedness of man was great, &c—” Busy all day. Had a meeting of a few influential citizens, who adopted resolutions which I had prepared. Providing that the Mormons should be allowed to take care of their property, & providing for their safety and comfort, and

for our future security. Left town near dark and rode home in the night.²⁴

Sarah Givens, another of McCoy's daughters, wrote her father on November 28 from Potosi, Missouri, about public sentiment in regard to the eviction of the Mormons. "The people of Jackson County," she noted, "are very much abused here. . . . I wish the true state would be published to make the people hold their tongues if nothing more."²⁵ The "history of the affair" to which McCoy referred in his *Journal* under November 1 was not found among his papers. However, he recorded the following under date of November 29, 1833:

I have been requested by sundry gentlemen to write a brief history of the Mormon difficulties for the benefit of the public. This request has been made in such a way that I have been induced to comply, and have written 12 pages, which I have not time to copy, but which I have requested them to return to me after they shall have used them.²⁶

This "brief history" is undoubtedly the same that appeared in numerous Missouri newspapers during the month of December, 1833.²⁷ It was in the form of a lengthy letter, dated November 28, as if in answer to Sarah's request—which, of course, had not as yet been received by her father.

McCoy wrote that he had resided among the Mormons for a year and a half and had on occasion given employment to some of the men. He stated that he would have remained silent but that he had been requested to make some remarks "and that this request has emanated from a source which gives it a claim to a respectful notice." The source was probably Lieutenant Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, who resided in Independence, and who had written an account of the Mormon difficulties which also re-

²⁴ It is apparent that the entries in McCoy's *Journal* were not made on a day by day basis as they occurred. It should also be noted that McCoy intended that others would read his *Journal*. His will, made at Westport on July 30, 1835, provided that his *Journal* "and all my other papers" should be preserved and that "careful persons" should be allowed to examine them for "laudable purposes." Harris, "Farms Owned by McCoy," 93-95. McCoy died in 1842.

²⁵ *Letters*.

²⁶ This account was evidently returned, for John C. McCoy mentions having had a manuscript of twenty or thirty pages written by his father dealing with Mormon difficulties which he had loaned to the Union Historical Company. *Kansas City Journal*, April 24, 1881. This account would have been used in the writing of *History of Jackson County, Missouri* (Kansas City [Union Historical Co.], 1881). It may not have been returned to John C. McCoy, because it was not found among the Isaac McCoy papers at Topeka.

²⁷ *St. Louis Missouri Republican*, December 20, 1833, and *Columbia Missouri Intelligencer*, December 21, 1833.



MORMON TROUBLES IN MISSOURI.

ceived wide circulation in the Missouri press.²⁸ It was penned two days earlier than McCoy's account, which continued:

An impression seems to prevail abroad, that the Mormons are here persecuted on account of their peculiar notions of religion. This I think, is entirely a mistake. . . . The Mormons, as I suppose from information, came here so ignorant of laws, regulating intercourse with the Indian tribes, that they expected to pass on into the Indian territory, procure lands of the Indians, aid them in adopting habits of civilization, and attach them to their party. . . . Frustrated in this design, they located in this county, and procured land, to a small amount only for so great a number of person. . . . They were introducing a state of society which would evidently become intolerable to others and would rid the county of all who did not belong to their party. . . . The citizens became confirmed in the belief that, among others, they designed to introduce such free blacks as had been proselyted to their faith. . . . The emigration to this county, of others than the Mormons, decreased. . . . Some had considerable possessions, if they should be compelled to leave, the Mormons alone would be the purchasers of their property, and consequently at their own prices, as they often boasted would be the case. . . . Hitherto, the Mormons had been quiet upon the subject of politics, but it was easily perceived that as matters were progressing, at no distant day they would carry with them an influence which would control all county business. . . . About the last of October, matters upon both sides grew more and more alarming every moment. About this time they became strongly suspected of

²⁸ *Ibid.*, December 14, 1833.

secretly tampering with the neighboring Indians, to induce them to aid them in event of open hostilities.

McCoy went on to admit that some of these charges against the Mormons could not be proven but he, nevertheless, believed them to be true. He further asserted that he had not personally countenanced mob action and had offered to mediate between the parties, but for some unknown reason the Mormons had been suspicious of him. He did admit, however, that after the Mormons had been disarmed, companies rode through the settlements seeking arms. "[The Jackson Countians] allowed me to be one of those to go in advance under these arrangements."

Almost immediately the Mormons repudiated McCoy's statement. In a handbill dated December 12, 1833, and signed by Parley P. Pratt, Newel Knight, and John Corrill,²⁹ they ascribed their persecution "not to any criminal violation of the laws or the rights of others, but to their religious opinions." Furthermore, "they accuse[d] the Rev. Isaac McCoy, instead of acting the part of a peace-maker, (as he has stated,) of appearing at the head of a company, with a gun on his shoulder, ordering the Mormons to leave the country forthwith, and surrender what arms they had."³⁰

Although McCoy denied that he had threatened anyone, he probably had carried a gun when riding through the Mormon settlements. It would not have been out of character for him to have done so. Joseph Chambers, who knew McCoy intimately, wrote:

Mr. McCoy had all the elements of a soldier, and there were circumstances in his history that were well fitted to develop them. . . . During the early part of the war of 1812 we all lived together at a fort in [Indiana], when I had abundant opportunities of seeing that he was not afraid of the face of man. . . . With his rifle he used to lead us on in pursuit of the Indians, and took it with him also to the house of God, never knowing but that the service would be interrupted by a hostile attack.³¹

On the face of it then, it is quite understandable how the Mormons came to believe that McCoy was one of the leaders of the marauders.

²⁹ However, Corrill makes no reference to McCoy in *Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints* (St. Louis, 1839).

³⁰ St. Louis *Missouri Republican*, January 30, 1834.

³¹ Wyeth, *Isaac McCoy*, 13-14.

Certainly one of the most intriguing items in the voluminous McCoy papers is a four-page document, "Proposed plans in Relation to the Mormons," written by McCoy. It reads as follows:

Shawanoë, Jackson Co. Mo.
Nov. 8, 1833.

To-----

Independence

We whose names are undersigned beg leave to report the State of things as we discover it to be in relation to the Mormon difficulties—we merely state the facts and our views of the most eligible measures which ought to be adopted in relation to this difficult subject and for *reasons* we refer you to the heavens—the Mormons will be forbidden by the Clay county people to go there. They will also be forbidden to go South—They cannot go West. They must, therefore, go east. If they leave us either to South, east or north as travellers seeking places as they can find them, and do not go in a *body*, to stop and remain together no objection will be made to their entering either of the adjoining counties. Some are ready to start today.

We believe that the danger with us, is *not* over. We are persuaded that they have still among them, a greater amount of arms, than they have surrendered. It, has been ascertained that, in one instance, they had four guns concealed at one house. They often report that particular persons have left the county, when shortly afterwards it is ascertained that those very men are at or about home.

We think it highly probable that they contemplate rallying and taking possession of the country, and in that event they would select an unguarded moment with us, while we were supposing that they were vanquished. We have too much reason to suspect them of using their influence to corrupt both the blacks and the Indians.

Were they to stop in a body in Clay county, and pass and re-pass to take care of their stuff, they could select their time to strike a dreadful blow, when their women and children would be out of the county. If it should be objected to this idea that they would not thus rashly risk the consequences which would ultimately follow, we answer, by asking why did they risk equally dreadful consequences in their late attempt to massacre our people.

If they design to relinquish their hold in this country, why are they not adopting permanent measures to this

object?—All the preparations which appear to be [portion missing] merely temporary.

They have land which will bring cash in hand. Let them take the cash and aid themselves in removing. By this means the difficulties respecting wagons, teams, and money, will be much diminished. If they and the purchaser cannot agree upon a price for a tract of land, let the same be appraised by disinterested persons. Much of their land would bring cash this day, and all would do it in a few days by advertising. If they will not do this, we shall have just cause to suspect them. If we make them this proposal we shall be clear in the estimation of the world and in our own consciences in regard to calamities attending their removal.

We recommend that the arms taken from the Mormons be kept so secure that a Mormon party could not take them by force. Also, that a few persons in and about Independence be selected to give constant attention to the Mormon subject until the matter shall be finally settled, and that a committee for similar purposes be appointed in this upper settlement, and that these committees act in concert.

We further think some men should be kept constantly in arms to patrol the settlements in order to prevent them from forming into a body. Let those men who may spend their time, be remunerated by those who stay at their homes.

The terms of this communication should be kept within a confidential circle and attended to without a moments delay, lest Partridge³² who owns the land should disappiar. He and others can be arrested and detained upon the charge of forming a conspiracy to murder and rob the other inhabitants of the county.

[Three fourths of a line missing] without *delay* to prosecute every Mormon who has laid himself [two words missing]. Hereafter some of our citizens will be prosecuted by them. Our citizens will remain *here* and can be found any day—they can send away their most guilty persons, so that they cannot be found. If we would institute prosecutions to the full extent to which they have become liable, they would readily, thereafter, be brought to withdraw all their suits if thereby they could escape heavy penalties that were hanging over them, and further, this course would go far towards justifying the conduct of the county in the estimation of the world.

³² Edward Partridge was the first Mormon bishop and trustee for most of the land owned by the Mormons in Jackson County.

We are confident that matters are in a critical condition. An hour delay, or want of concert in our movements may be the cause of the massacre of many of us.

James H. McGee
Henry Barker
Isaac McCoy
Saml C Owens
Smallwood Noland

McCoy's interest in the disposal of the Mormons' lands as indicated above opens a possible area of explanation for his conduct. On April 24, 1834, the Mormon elders in Clay County sent a letter and petition to President Andrew Jackson, praying his assistance in restoring them to their abandoned lands. They warned the President to beware of "certain individuals, who are disposed to cover the gross outrages of the mob, from *religious, political,* and *speculative* motives."³³ Did McCoy have speculative motives?

Under date of April 14, 1833, McCoy wrote in his *Journal* that he had received a copy of "a Roman Catholic paper, printed in Cincinnati, in which is published an anonymous letter accusing me of Speculation and many other bad things which would have occurred when I had charge of Carey." He later termed this "a scurrilous piece,"³⁴ but it does hint at the possibility that McCoy was deeply involved in land speculation and that the Mormon influx represented a threat to future profits. But the facts hardly support such a supposition. It is true that McCoy was in financial trouble by mid-summer of 1833. He recorded in his *Journal* on May 5: "I am compelled, daily, to increase debts for our support." His biographer wrote of this period: "In pecuniary matters he was barely even with the world."³⁵ McCoy's services with the government had come to a temporary halt about this time and he had been compelled on August 17 to sell back to Lykins the land he had bought from him earlier.

In his defense it should be pointed out that McCoy did not wish to engage in any activity inconsistent with his efforts among the Indians. He and the others under his direction in western Missouri had agreed to live by what was known as the "Rules for the Mission Family," which had been drawn up in Michigan. The first article to which they subscribed stated: "We agree that our object in becoming missionaries is to meliorate the condition of

³³ Reprinted in Nauvoo (Ill.) *Times and Seasons*, December 1, 1845.

³⁴ McCoy, *Indian Missions*, 461. The paper was the *Catholic Telegraph*.

³⁵ Wyeth, *Isaac McCoy*, 195.

the Indians, and not to serve ourselves.”³⁶ All income was to be thrown into a common missionary fund. “Thus [McCoy] actually received no material compensation for his labor.”³⁷ There is no denying that the McCoy family underwent many personal privations in order to engage in missionary activity. During their period of labor among the Indians, they lost eleven of their fourteen children.

However, if Isaac McCoy was not personally involved in speculation, it should be noted that his son John Calvin had opened a store on the road that led from Independence westward to the plains. This business prospered and in January, 1835, John McCoy laid out the town of Westport on land he bought from Robert Johnson and Johnston Lykins. The latter parcel of land appears to have been the one previously owned by Isaac McCoy. Westport was to be the nucleus around which a great city would grow, and for this and other reasons John C. McCoy became known as the “Father of Kansas City.”

Oliver Cowdery, newly-appointed editor of the *Evening and Morning Star*, which was re-established in Kirtland, Ohio, declared: “That this persecution came in consequence of the religious belief of an innocent society, must be admitted by every candid unprejudiced man the moment he takes the time to examine the circumstances and testimony which are published to the world.”³⁸ As the Mormon interpretation of that which transpired in Jackson County this statement has echoed down to the present. While this is not satisfactory as a complete explanation, it does contain elements of truth. It should always be remembered that the 1830s was a period when organized protestantism was being seriously challenged and new religious sects were proliferating. These movements made many fearful for the older faiths. For instance, in 1834 the Missouri Fishing River Association of Baptists met in annual conference. In their minutes it was noted:

This is a time, Brethren, that calls for great zeal and energy to perpetuate the Doctrine and Discipline of our ancient and honorable Church. New sects of jaring [*sic*] and conflicting views are continually rising up, each claiming for itself the name of Christian Church.³⁹

³⁶ McCoy, *Indian Missions*, 170.

³⁷ Lyons, “Isaac McCoy,” 12.

³⁸ January, 1834.

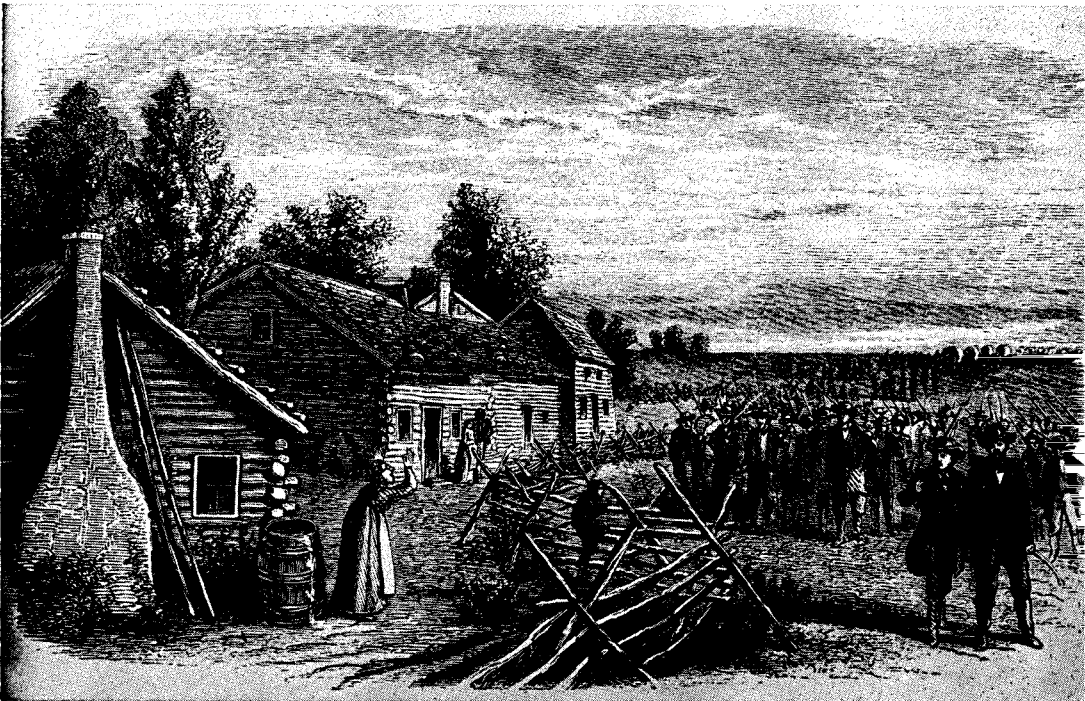
³⁹ *Minutes of the Fishing River Association of Baptists. Begun and Held at New Garden Meeting-House, Ray County, Missouri, on 22nd Day of August, and Two Days Following* (Liberty, 1834), 4.

One of the most aggressive of these new sects was the Mormons. McCoy, as a loyal son of his own church, would have been disturbed by Mormon doctrine and dogma. Inevitably, his attitude toward the Mormons would have been shaped by his own religious background.

On February 11, 1834, McCoy left for Washington, D.C., where he conferred on several occasions with his old friend Lewis Cass, who was then Secretary of War. Whether they discussed the troubles in Jackson County is unknown, but it would have been a natural subject of conversation, considering the wide interest in the episode. Besides, Cass had a personal reason for delving into the matter. President Jackson had referred the Mormon petition to him for disposition. On May 2 Cass wrote the Mormon elders in Clay County:

In answer I am instructed to inform you that the offences of which you complain, are violations of the laws of the State of Missouri and not of the laws of the United

The "Lord's Army" Marching to the Deliverance of "Zion."



States. . . . The President cannot call out a military force to aid in the execution of the State laws, until the proper requisition is made upon him by the constituted authorities.⁴⁰

It was a time when states' rights were guarded jealously. The nature of Cass's reply was almost inevitable, whether or not he discussed that affair with McCoy.

McCoy returned home on May 11 to find Jackson County in a turmoil. Joseph Smith was on his way from Ohio with a small army known as Zion's Camp, which, by the time it reached western Missouri, contained 205 armed men. Hasty preparations were made to meet this force. On May 24 James Campbell wrote McCoy that since the latter was soon to leave on an expedition into Indian territory:

If it should be convenient for you to [let us] have a few of your guns I would be glad as we expect to have difficulties with the Mormons, before your return[.] I have latly visited the county of Clay and find them making every necessary preparation for war and say they expect a re-inforcement from the East and from the statement of a letter we have latly rec'd from a post Master in Ohio we have no doubt of the truth of it.⁴¹

Whether or not McCoy supplied the guns is not known. It is known, however, that Campbell never lived to use them. On June 16 he drowned in the Missouri River when Everett's ferry sank while returning with the Jackson County delegation from Liberty, where it had been sent in a futile effort to effect a settlement with the Mormons.⁴² When Zion's Camp arrived in Clay County it made no attempt to cross into Jackson County.

This is all the primary evidence this writer was able to find which gives direct clues to McCoy's opinion of and relation to the Mormons. There exists another source of information from which some inferences may tentatively be drawn, and that is the reminiscences of McCoy's son John Calvin. The latter was in his early twenties when these events took place.⁴³ Five decades later he remembered that his father had employed some Mormons on surveys and that "an old, gray-headed Mormon named Pryor

⁴⁰ Reprinted in *Times and Seasons*, January 1, 1846.

⁴¹ *Letters*. The postmaster was P. M. Henderson of Chagrin, Ohio. His letter was published in *Columbia Missouri Intelligencer*, June 7, 1834.

⁴² See Washington (D. C.) *National Intelligencer*, July 9, 1834.

⁴³ John C. McCoy was born September 28, 1811.

. . . was a frequent visitor at our house.”⁴⁴ John McCoy recalled that the Mormon immigration into western Missouri had come as a surprise and that for “the first year they were regarded as harmless fanatics.”⁴⁵ However, the attitude of the original settlers soon changed. Many, “in view of the speedy ascendancy of the Mormons, socially and politically in the county, were unwilling to risk their fortunes here, and indeed, . . . many already here were disposed to get away. . . . Already in 1833 the Mormons more than held the balance of power between the two political parties.” Furthermore, “no one but a Mormon could be induced to buy land to settle upon, and they in the few purchases by them fixed ruinous prices.”⁴⁶

John McCoy also remembered how and by whom resistance to the Mormons was organized.

One mile west of the Blue, on the old road from Independence to the state line . . . there was a country store kept by one Moses G. Wilson, a brigadier general of militia, a restless partizan, very prominent and influential with a certain class. This store was, during 1833, the rendezvous for the anti-Mormons, where they were want to meet to discuss the situation and form plans, and to organize raids upon the Mormon settlements up toward the state line. There was no pretense of legality in any of their proceedings, only a unanimous determination to drive out the Mormons from the country or be themselves driven out.⁴⁷

John McCoy also indicated the dilemma that faced the more moderate of the original settlers after the Battle of the Big Blue River on November 4, 1833. “Those of the citizens who had steadfastly refused to join in these raids . . . knew full well that the issue was then made up—and the alternative was, now fight, flight, or submission to a fanatical hierarchy.”⁴⁸ Isaac McCoy undoubtedly had to make his choice. He personally found the Mormons repugnant but disliked violence. However, like other moderates before and after him, when extremists have forced an issue and the middle ground has dissolved, he had to pick a side.

With an effort toward impartiality, John McCoy reminisced:

There is no use at this remote day in denying the

⁴⁴ *Kansas City Journal*, April 24, 1881.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1885.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

fact that the Mormons received at the hands of their Gentile neighbors very harsh treatment. . . . It was cruel. . . . In nearly every instance the overt acts of aggression were perpetrated by the party opposing them. The respectable, law-abiding portion of the old settlers had become convinced that the time was rapidly approaching when they would either be compelled to give way to that fanatical horde of newcomers . . . and leave the field, or they would be overwhelmed and absorbed in the brotherhood.⁴⁹

True history, however, must record the fact that the deluded followers of the so-called prophet, Joseph Smith, in their first effort to organize and establish a religious socialistic community in Jackson county, Mo., were unjustly and outrageously maltreated by the original settlers, and that in the tragic and pitiful scenes which occurred the last part of their sojourn . . . with scarcely one exception, the settlers were aggressors so far as overt acts of hostility were concerned. During the last year of their stay the continued persecutions to which they were subjected excited the sympathy of many outside the county.⁵⁰

Were Isaac McCoy's opinions and attitudes in regard to the Mormons passed on to his son? Of course, no definite and final answer can be given to this question or to other questions pertaining to the overall problem of why there were outbursts of violence against the Mormons in Jackson County. But, more primary evidence exists on Isaac McCoy during the period of Mormon residence than on any other non-Mormon. This, and the fact that he was a man of some repute, makes McCoy's papers an important source for anyone attempting to understand this interesting facet of American history.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, February 16, 1879.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1885.



A Timely Warning

Hamilton News-Graphic, September 13, 1877.

People coming in from the country with teams, should not under any circumstances hitch them to trains which may be standing at the station, as accidents are liable to happen from such carelessness.

Missouri Women In History

Mary Easton Sibley



Courtesy Lindenwood College

Mary Easton Sibley won distinction in Missouri history as the first American woman to establish a home in Jackson County and as the cofounder of Lindenwood College, St. Charles.

The daughter of Rufus Easton, prominent in Missouri territorial history, Mary Easton was born January 24, 1800, in Rome, New York. In 1804 she moved with her family to St. Louis. In 1813 she traveled on horseback to Washington, D. C., and then by boat to Shelbyville, Kentucky, where she attended Mrs. Tevis' boarding school.

At the age of 15 she was married to George C. Sibley, Indian factor at Fort Osage. During their month-long keel boat journey from St. Louis to Fort Osage, the young Sibleys transported Mary's riding horse, her piano with drum and fife attachments and furnishings for their newly built log home. At Fort Osage they entertained many distinguished travelers to the West in their home, described as a model of taste and comfort. George wrote in 1816, "You may be sure Mary is a great favorite with the Indians, indeed they literally idolize her since they have heard her play."

In 1826 the Sibleys moved to St. Charles and the next year Mary taught a small group of girls in a school at her home. In 1831 they erected the first college building in a forest of linden trees overlooking the Missouri River and named the college Linden Wood.

Mary's faith in her cherished project never wavered. In the 1840s she secured \$4,000 from friends in the East for the support of the college and she refused to be discouraged when enrollment declined during the Civil War. With views advanced for her time, she was an early advocate of women's rights and a personal friend of Susan B. Anthony.

In 1853 the Sibleys transferred the control of Lindenwood College to the St. Louis Presbytery. In 1870 it was placed under the control of the Presbyterian Synod of Missouri, U.S.A. Mary took an active interest in the college until her death in 1878. She is buried beside her husband on the Lindenwood campus. On display in Sibley Hall, built in 1856 and still standing on the campus, are many of her personal possessions.