



From: Frederick Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (1855).

ASSEMBLING THE LANDSCAPE OF ZION

History and Perception in the Mormon Overland Experience

BY BRETT CULBERT

ON JULY 22, 1847, a company of Mormon pioneers began their final descent into the Great Salt Lake Valley. At the time, the official scribe for the journey, William Clayton, briefly separated from his brethren to “contemplate” the view of their new home. From an adjacent hillside, Clayton estimated that the “fertile and rich” landscape of the valley below extended for fifty miles to the south and twenty-five miles across, where it formed the shores of The Great Salt Lake—a body of water that he described as looking very “handsome” with its “dark blue shade resembling the calm sea.”¹ Clayton was one of one hundred and forty-seven travelers to complete the four-month crossing from the Mormon frontier settlement of Winter Quarters, in present-day Nebraska. This moment not only

captures his first clear prospect of the Valley, but, more subtly, a dedication to two ongoing projects: first, the gathering of empirical data through which he could describe the useful features of the landscape and second, his contribution to the brethrens’ mission of finding a “calm” space in the West that would come to emerge as their Zion. Having suffered through waves of anti-Mormon attacks and subsequent uprootings, the nascent community’s failure to settle a site for their terrestrial Holy Land within the contiguous United States led them to venture into the Territories. The Great Basin thus offered itself as a space within the landscape that was yet unsettled by Americans and Europeans; it could be surveyed, thoroughly *known*, and fortified against hostile outsiders. Clayton’s

1 William Clayton, *William Clayton’s Journal* (Chesterland, OH: General Bookbinding Co., 1921), 308.



Millroy & Hayes, *Route of the Mormon Pioneers from Nauvoo to Great Salt Lake*, 1899.

description of the Mormon Trail as being “set down by travelers” reinforces this point and it is clear that through his writing he endeavored to fix the ever-changing landscape into place and thereby protect those who followed the vanguard settlers by trail and text—as he writes: “...I dread nothing so much as the journey back again and when I think of the many dangers from accident which families traveling this road are continually liable to...it makes me shudder to think of it.”²

During his crossing, Clayton set about compiling his notes and measurements to draft *The Latter-Day Saints’ Emigrants’ Guide* and, upon his return to Winter Quarters that fall, the first edition of five thousand copies was printed and distributed to overland teams in order to aid in the next year’s wave of migration.³ With heavier traffic by mid-century, the pathways across became more clearly inscribed in the landscape and the need for basic way-finding books was minimized. This profusion and blurring of routes came to obscure the original Mormon Trail, thus motivating Brigham Young, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to set about visualizing a larger pathway for the progression of the Saints—to both

populate the kingdom from a broader geography and extend the trail through the Church’s recent history to educate converts along the way. To do so, Young sought the expertise of the English artist Frederick Piercy who became instrumental in the extension of the Mormon Trail to Liverpool, England, home to the largest concentration of Mormon converts at the time. Just five years following Clayton’s arrival, Piercy proceeded to Utah with a company of English settlers and, upon returning home, collaborated with the editor James Linforth to produce the guidebook: *A Route From Liverpool to the Great Salt Lake Valley*.⁴

In terms of the history of reading and information, these guidebooks collected fragments of the landscape, braiding travelogues and geography to establish pathways of spiritual meaning across land, and even sea. As the historian Mike Esbester notes, the mid-nineteenth century saw a profusion of information that gave rise to new media for what he calls, “functional reading” in timetables, maps, and guidebooks, of which Clayton and Piercy’s utilitarian texts are just two examples.⁵ Given the ephemeral nature of these sources, this history is difficult to trace; however, by putting these particular texts into conversation one can better decipher the changing landscape they describe as well as the subsequent

2 Ibid., 310.

3 William Clayton, *The Latter-Day Saints’ Emigrants’ Guide*, ed. Stanley Kimball (Gerald, MO: The Patrice Press, 1983), 7.

4 Brigham Young was especially aware of the growing number of Mormons in the British Isles. By 1853 the estimated population outnumbered all of Utah by thirty thousand. See: Wilford Hill Lecheminant, “‘Entitled to Be Called an Artist’: Landscape and Portrait Painter Frederick Piercy,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* (Utah State Historical Society) 48 (1980): 51.

5 Esbester defines *functional* as opposed to *narrative* reading as, “reading for action, purposeful reading in which an item is read and an act is carried out as a result.” See: Mike Esbester, “Nineteenth-Century Timetables and the History of Reading,” *Book History* (Johns Hopkins University Press) 12 (2009): 156–185, 160.

disappearance or augmentation of historical evidence as it was reproduced in trail-reading material. Re-reading these guidebooks retrieves the ways in which Mormons perceived and experienced layers of a sacred geography in the American West. The Landscapes rendered in these guidebooks capture and sensitize otherwise ephemeral or hidden traces for the Saints, who envisioned themselves as being called forth to settle the Great Basin. How does the seemingly mundane and empirical content of these guidebooks enable their authors to smuggle-in myth and/or fabricate a sense of continuity that enabled readers to transcend the boundaries of given pathways?

To return to Clayton’s first view of the Valley: in his guidebook he appears to be standing at the “Summit of last ridge” or, what is later known as Emigration Canyon—a point from which he cautions, “the descent is very steep, all the way, till you arrive on the banks of the last creek.”⁶ Clayton locates this summit at precisely 1,020 ¼ miles from Winter Quarters and 10 ¾ miles from Great Salt Lake City. As the excerpt and full title of the guide make clear, the work was conceived of as a “Table of Distances...the whole route, having been carefully measured by a Roadometer...” This novel surveying device was comprised of a hand-crafted screw-mechanism that drove a series of gears, thus translating three-hundred and sixty revolutions of a wheel into the length of one mile, to be transcribed onto Clayton’s maps.⁷ By this, he systematically compressed the experience of the landscape into a manageable series of points on a timetable. What’s more,

6 Clayton, *The Latter-Day Saints’ Emigrants’ Guide*, 80.

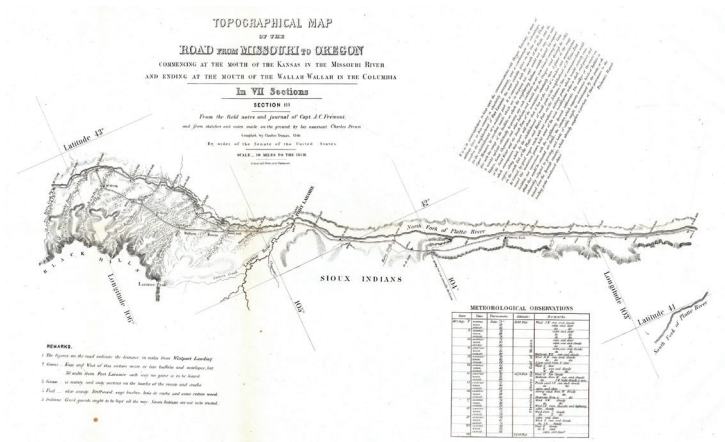
7 Clayton, *William Clayton’s Journal*, 136.



William Clayton’s “Roadometer” (replica)

as a compact object, the guidebook contains the landscape as a series of precise physical measurements and objective waypoints. These qualities rendered the trail manageable and encouraged future converts to migrate westward across, what would otherwise seem to be, a wild and unknown landscape.

Of course, this process of settling the western territories through measuring and drawing them into an ordered framework long preceded the Mormons. To reveal an earlier layer in their narrative, one finds that the Great Basin was first brought to the attention of the Saints in John C. Frémont’s, *Report of the Exploring Expedition to The Rocky Mountains* (1842). Frémont was a geographer



YORK, SCARBOROUGH, PICKERING, & WHITBY—York and North Midland.											
Fares from Newcastle & Darlington to York, p. 79 & 71.		Down.		SUNDAY DAYS.		Fares.		Up.		Sundays.	
Miles.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
York	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scarborough	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Pickering	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Whitby	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Malton	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Rillington	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Whitby Branch	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Malton Branch	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Rillington Branch	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
Whitby Branch	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Malton Branch	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Rillington Branch	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
Whitby Branch	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
Malton Branch	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
Rillington Branch	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Whitby Branch	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Malton Branch	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16
Rillington Branch	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
Whitby Branch	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Malton Branch	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19
Rillington Branch	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
Whitby Branch	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
Malton Branch	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
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Whitby Branch	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24
Malton Branch	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Rillington Branch	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26
Whitby Branch	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27
Malton Branch	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
Rillington Branch	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	29
Whitby Branch	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Malton Branch	31	31	31	31	31	31	31	31	31	31	31
Rillington Branch	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32
Whitby Branch	33	33	33	33	33	33	33	33	33	33	33
Malton Branch	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
Rillington Branch	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
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Malton Branch	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
Rillington Branch	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38
Whitby Branch	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39	39
Malton Branch	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Rillington Branch	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41
Whitby Branch	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
Malton Branch	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43
Rillington Branch	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44
Whitby Branch	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45
Malton Branch	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46	46
Rillington Branch	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47
Whitby Branch	48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48
Malton Branch	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49
Rillington Branch	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Whitby Branch	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Malton Branch	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52
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Malton Branch	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
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Whitby Branch	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57
Malton Branch	58	58	58	58	58	58	58	58	58	58	58
Rillington Branch	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59	59
Whitby Branch	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60
Malton Branch	61	61	61	61	61	61	61	61	61	61	61
Rillington Branch	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	62
Whitby Branch	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
Malton Branch	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64
Rillington Branch	65	65	65	65	65	65	65	65	65	65	65
Whitby Branch	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
Malton Branch	67	67	67	67	67	67	67	67	67	67	67
Rillington Branch	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68
Whitby Branch	69	69	69	69	69	69	69	69	69	69	69
Malton Branch	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
Rillington Branch	71	71	71	71	71	71	71	71	71	71	71
Whitby Branch	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72
Malton Branch	73	73	73	73	73	73	73	73	73	73	73
Rillington Branch	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74	74
Whitby Branch	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
Malton Branch	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76
Rillington Branch	77	77	77	77	77	77	77	77	77	77	77
Whitby Branch	78	78	78	78	78	78	78	78	78	78	78
Malton Branch	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79
Rillington Branch	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
Whitby Branch	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81	81
Malton Branch	82	82	82	82	82	82	82	82	82	82	82
Rillington Branch	83	83	83	83	83	83	83	83	83	83	83
Whitby Branch	84	84	84	84	84	84	84	84	84	84	84
Malton Branch	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
Rillington Branch	86	86	86	86	86	86	86	86	86	86	86
Whitby Branch	87	87	87	87	87	87	87	87	87	87	87
Malton Branch	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88
Rillington Branch	89	89	89	89	89	89	89	89	89	89	89
Whitby Branch	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
Malton Branch	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91
Rillington Branch	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
Whitby Branch	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	93	93
Malton Branch	94	94	94	94	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Rillington Branch	95	95	95	95	95	95	95	95	95	95	95
Whitby Branch	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96
Malton Branch	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97
Rillington Branch	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	98
Whitby Branch	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99
Malton Branch	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Top: John C. Frémont, *Road From Missouri to Oregon*, 1846.
Bottom: Bradshaw’s Railway Guide, England, 1839.

commissioned by the government to survey the continent in search of a clear East-West passage. His official report to Congress which was circulated to the Mormons prior to its publication in 1845 first seeded their imagination with the idea of a remote desert community.⁸ In the text, Frémont describes his team’s impression of a sublime “inland sea,” recounting that local trappers have long perpetuated the myth that “...somewhere on its surface was a terrible whirlpool, through

8 Richard H. Jackson, “Great Salt Lake and Great Salt Lake City: American Curiosities,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* (Utah State Historical Society) 56 (1988): 128–147, 138.

10 Clayton, *William Clayton’s Journal*, 164.

which its waters found their way to the ocean by some subterranean communication.”⁹ In these words, one finds the likely source for Clayton’s perception of a “calm sea,” and more generally, the mid-nineteenth century American’s vision for a connective pathway along which to direct the expansionist energy of The United States into the Western Territories. Subsequently, Frémont’s surveys, or “strip maps,” became the brethren’s primary navigational aid, which Clayton found to be “not all together correct in several respects....”¹⁰ By the use of his *Roadometer*, Clayton set out to resurvey this work and later paid homage to Frémont’s table of distances in the format of his guidebook—a mode of visual representation for which there are few other precedents prior to the emergence of railway timetables in the 1840s.¹¹

As the official scribe for the journey, Clayton was instructed to note more than distances and utilitarian waypoints; he was observant of the techniques that Indians and transplanted Americans employed to survive within the harsh landscapes of the Plains and Rocky Mountains. For example, after ten days on the trail—or, what Clayton estimates to be one-hundred and thirty-eight miles from Winter Quarters—Brother Kimball asked him to describe a deserted Pawnee village, above the team’s camp site.¹² Clayton spent hours and several pages of his journal thoroughly

11 Clayton, *The Latter-Day Saints’ Emigrants’ Guide*, 23. Clayton documented instances of railway travel in his missionary journal from Britain at that correspond with the release of the first railway timetable by George Bradshaw in 1839. See: Esbester, “Nineteenth-Century Timetables and the History of Reading.”

12 Clayton, *William Clayton’s Journal*, 94.



about four feet high, running from the bank of the river around the village till it again strikes the bank, and when perfect, has formed a good fortification...The village is composed of about 200 houses or lodges varying in size but all similarly constructed, as appears from the remnants of some left standing.¹³



William Henry Jackson, Pawnee Village, Loup, Nebraska, 1871.

documenting the abandoned community, creating a catalogue of information on site-specific building techniques. The description is particularly interesting when taken as precedent for the Saints’ settlement in the Great Basin, and while Clayton makes general observations about the village’s formal engagement with the landscape of the Plains, he seems more interested in the planning and architecture of the community; he writes:

The village occupies a space of about 40 acres of land, and is mostly enclosed by a ditch about five feet wide, and a bank inside the ditch

13 Clayton, *William Clayton’s Journal*, 96–97.

14 Ibid., 309.

In the same passage where Clayton observes the Valley, just before his final descent, he notes the scarcity of timber, writing: “There is no prospect of building log houses without spending a vast amount of time and labor, but...we can build lodges as the Pawnee Indians do in their villages.”¹⁴ This moment not only demonstrates the utility of documenting pre-existing settlements along the trail, but further reveals the Mormons’ appreciation for the ingenuity of the Indians or “Lamanites,” as they were known from *The Book of Mormon*. In the text, the Prophet Nephi’s wayward brothers Laman and Lemuel defy his instructions and, thus failing to receive the Holy Spirit, they are marked with a “skin of blackness.”¹⁵ Clayton’s description of the Pawnee village and his reference to their precedents for settlement gives

15 Joseph Smith, trans., *The Book of Mormon*, Third, trans. Joseph Smith (Nauvoo, ILL: Robinson and Smith, 1840), 72.

the reader the sense that he is attempting to write the Indians *into* the past while they were still the dominant inhabitants of the West.

There are moments further along the trail where this tendency is more vivid and the filter of the sacred text leads the Mormons to see ruins of a preceding civilization. At one point Clayton and two brethren climb a rock escarpment to gain a better prospect of the path ahead. In his journal, he writes, “... we viewed the surrounding scenery which looks more like the ruins of an ancient city with its castles, towers, fortifications, etc., on all sides.”¹⁶ This view of the mythic overland sites of Chimney Rock and Scotts Bluffs “covered with ruins,” calls to mind a passage from *The Book of Mosiah*, in which the King describes his peoples’ attempt to return to Zarahemla—the original promised land of the Nephites—only to find that they were: “lost in the wilderness, for the space of many days... but returned to this land, having traveled in a land among many waters; having discovered a land which was covered with bones of men, and of beasts, and was also covered with the ruins of buildings of every kind.”¹⁷

While this connection can only be inferred, there are parallels between the Mormons’ search for a wilderness Promised Land in the West and the failed attempt of the Nephites to reunite with their people in Zarahemla, as both groups discover traces of the past within unfamiliar wastelands. By passing through the landscape of the Plains and making observations—both empirical and literary—Clayton constructed the landscape as a sacred geography and inscribed this view into the pathways and texts that subsequent pilgrims would inherit.

As Piercy came to build on Clayton’s work, he reached further back in time to recover the fundamental history of the Church. To do so, he enhanced his predecessor’s guidebook with engravings that more suggestively entangle the progression of the Saints with that of their founder and prophet of the Mormons, Joseph Smith. The artist thereby cloaks the

history of the Church with the emblematic material of the Western Landscape. Being one among the thousands of migrants who followed the pioneers, Piercy had the benefit of distance from his subject matter. What’s more, his assignment to fuel a converted English audience’s imagination prompted a more affected description than Clayton’s. For example, at “Scotts Bluffs,” Piercy writes:

*They were certainly the most remarkable sight I had seen since I left England. Viewed from the distance at which I sketched...the rock illuminated by the setting sun partook of its gold, making a beautiful harmony of colour. They present a very singular appearance, resembling ruined palaces, castellated towers, temples and monuments.*¹⁸

In the print that accompanies this narrative there appear to be actual buildings on the distant bluffs—perhaps a quality that was heightened by both the Pioneers’ experiences of the sacred landscape over time and the ease with which the medium of engraving allows for the layering of information. Piercy’s tendency for embellishment—especially his penchant to interweave past accounts into his views, in a medium that is built-up through adding layers of detail—is further evidenced by the “emigrants hunting the buffalo” within this same print. Here, three men appear in pursuit of buffalo and one animal is heaped in the foreground while a rider heroically wrangles others into the range of the shot-gun: a visual portrayal that is at odds with Piercy’s account of his company’s first hunt, of which he writes, “[there was] no smoke and no report, consequently death did not result.”¹⁹

One assumes that this view is partially constructed from the stories that preceded the artist and, by comparison, while Clayton’s first hunt was more successful, his description of the brethrens’ feelings captures the general atmosphere of myth that Piercy would



From: Frederick Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (1855).

have encountered at the time. During a chase, which Clayton observed from his wagon, he writes: “having heard and read so much about the mad ferocity of the buffalo when hotly pursued...the desire to taste the much famed buffalo meat created a longing desire to see some of the herd fall.”²⁰ While it is highly unlikely that Piercy’s rendering was based on Clayton’s unpublished journal entry, he makes reference on several occasions to the fact that he *was* traveling with Clayton’s *Guidebook*. There is one moment in particular where the two accounts clearly overlap at the site of what was known as the “Lone Tree.” In a similar manner to the Saints’ longing for an encounter with buffalo, Piercy prepares himself to view the tree. As his imagination feasts on the scant information within the guidebooks, Piercy writes:

In the guides there is a notice of a “Lone Tree.” All through the journey the lone tree had been in my imagination until at last I had associated an interest, a sort of romantic idea, with it, which

*became quite exciting...I started off ahead of the company with the intention of making a complimentary and therefore careful sketch of this tree, but I could not find it. Some unpoetical and ruthless hand cut it down...*²¹

This moment makes particularly clear the changing nature of the trail, as information in guidebooks became out of sync with the observed landmarks of the environment. Further, Piercy’s account conjures the drawn-out time and space of the crossing that led one’s imagination to explore otherwise mundane qualities from within the confines of the wagon and trail. While Piercy did not have the opportunity to capture the “Lone Tree,” the artist James F. Wilkins’ ink drawing, from 1849, depicts the tree as growing from an Indian burial mound—perhaps an embellishment in itself.

16 Clayton, *William Clayton’s Journal*, 174.

18 Frederick Hawkins Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to the Great Salt Lake Valley*, ed. Fawn M. Brodie (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1962), 119.

19 Ibid., 114.

17 Smith, *The Book of Mormon*, 168.

20 Clayton, *William Clayton’s Journal*, 113.

21 Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to the Great Salt Lake Valley*, 117.



James Wilkins, *Lone Tree with Indian Burial*, 1849.

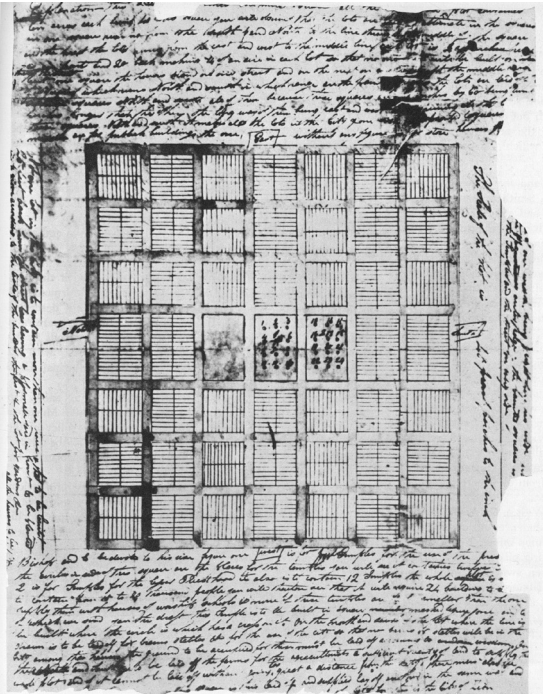
The complicated layering of time and space that Piercy’s work evokes is not only captured in the visual content of his prints, but in the very material and methods behind the production of his guidebook. The work itself was not conceived as a single intact object, like Clayton’s, but rather a subscription series of fifteen volumes to be printed over a year-long period and assembled by the emigrants upon receiving the final issue, which contained the cover page and table of contents.²² While Piercy’s first-hand writing and engravings occupy the top half of each page, the editor flooded the footnotes with statistical, geographical, and historical data that provided “statistics down to the latest time.” By this, the reading material provides a sectional view into a continuum of observations that was absorbed and transmitted by the Saints as they were in the very process of recording their history.²³

The act of precisely imprinting this topographic knowledge to direct the actions of the Saints calls to mind Joseph Smith’s original planning scheme for the first Mormon settlement in Independence, Missouri—a diagram that instructed the Saints in his absence and served as a basic framework with interchangeable parts in nearly every Mormon

10				
PROMINENT POINTS AND REMARKS.		Dist. miles.	From W. Can. miles.	From Col. S. L. miles.
Duck-weed creek, 10 feet wide. - -	-	1	346½	684½
Abundance of good, cold spring water, Oct. 1, 1847.	-	2	348½	682½
Shoal stream, 3 feet wide. - -	-	3	352½	678½
Dry, October 1, 1847.	-	1	354	677
Rattlesnake creek, 20 feet wide, 1½ ft. deep.	-	5	359	672
Swift current, sandy bottom, but not bad to cross.	-	1	359½	671½
Cedar Bluffs. - -	-	1	359½	671½
On the south side the river. Lat. 41° 13' 44" Long. 101° 30'	-	4	363½	667½
Creek, six feet wide. - -	-	4	367½	663½
Water plenty, September 30, 1847. Land, in this neighborhood, sandy.	-	1	368	663
Creek, four feet wide. - -	-	1	369½	661½
Plenty of water, September 30, 1847.	-	2	370½	660½
Crooked Creek, five feet wide. - -	-	3	373½	657½
Plenty of water, September 30, 1847.	-	3	378	653
Camp Creek, eight feet wide. - -	-	2	380½	650½
Two creeks here, about the same size, but a few rods apart—water cold and plenty, September 30, 1847. No doubt they rise from springs.	-	3	383½	647½
Creek, three feet wide. - -	-	4	388	643
Plenty of water, May 20, but dry, September 30, 1847.	-	1	388½	642½
Pond Creek, four feet wide. - -	-	1	390½	640½
Dry, September 30, near the river, but further north many ponds and tall grass.	-	7	397½	633½
Wolf Creek, 20 feet wide. - -	-	3	400½	630½
At the east foot of Sandy Bluffs, which are bad to cross, you will probably have to double teams, if heavy loaded.	-	-	-	-
Sandy Bluffs, west foot. - -	-	-	-	-
Two hundred yard further, is a creek five feet wide.	-	-	-	-
Watch Creek, 8 feet wide, and 2 feet deep.	-	-	-	-
After this, the road runs pretty near the river banks to avoid some swamps near the bluffs.	-	-	-	-
“Lone Tree,” north side the river. - -	-	-	-	-
About three hundred yards south from the road.	-	-	-	-
Ash Hollow, south side the river. - -	-	-	-	-
So named from a grove of Ash timber growing on it. It occupies a space of about fifteen or twenty acres, and is surrounded by high bluffs.	-	-	-	-
Castle Creek, 6 rods wide, 2 feet deep.	-	-	-	-
Swift current, quick-sand bottom, water muddy. Low banks, but not good to cross, on account of quick-sands.	-	-	-	-
Castle Bluffs, south side the river. - -	-	-	-	-
You cross no more creeks of water, until you arrive at Crab creek, twenty-five and a half miles from here. The road good except in one place, where you travel three-fourths of a mile over sand.	-	-	-	-
Sand Hill creek, 12 feet wide, south side the road. - -	-	-	-	-
Near some sandy mounds, on the north side the road	-	-	-	-
Creek or slough. - -	-	-	-	-
Dry.	-	-	-	-
Creek or slough. - -	-	-	-	-
Dry.	-	-	-	-
Sandy Bluffs, east foot. - -	-	-	-	-

From: Frederick Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (1855).

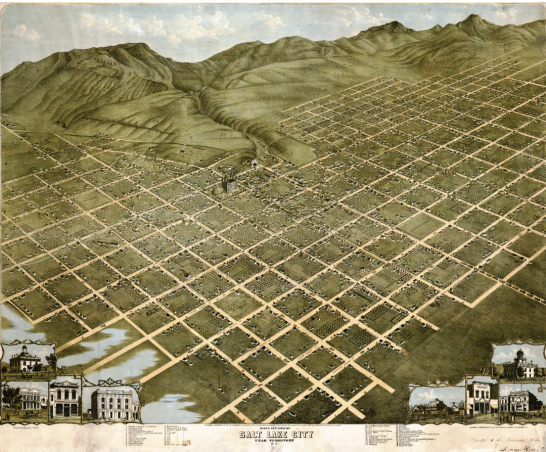
community that followed in the West. The Prophet’s utopian design was illustrated in a letter and its plan projects an alternating array of gridded residential plats, creating the effects of privacy and expansiveness within a dense urban fabric. In the surrounding text, the Prophet describes the programmatic features of the idealized community—especially the importance of an agricultural belt that would surround the one-square mile city module to sustain its inhabitants. As C. Mark Hamilton has written, this module conveniently aligned with the Land Ordinance Survey of 1785, which abstracted a grid



Joseph Smith, *Zion Plat – Missouri* 1833.

over the Western territories to facilitate the settlement of what was willfully deemed to be uninhabited land. By plugging into this underlying system—laid down by the Federal government—Smith envisioned the alienated Saints as paradoxically revealing the Americans’ abstract settlement scheme, as they multiplied their colonies across the land.²⁴ As Smith’s letter was in itself an ephemeral document, it conveyed his authority by absence; as if the parameters for settlement were so thoroughly understood and natural to the Mormons that the Prophet’s plan simply emerged wherever they settled. This would be the case in Utah where, shortly after their arrival in the Valley, Clayton envisioned a future city, writing:

...At the east part there is a considerable creek of clear cold water



Bird’s Eye View of Salt Lake City, Utah Territory, 1870.

descending from the mountains and just above this place it branches into two forks, one running north-west and the other southwest and the two nicely surrounding this place, and so well arranged that should a city be built here the water can be turned into every street at pleasure.²⁵

Based on Clayton’s description, we can place his view as taken from the same vantage point as the earliest engraving of the city, made by Piercy in 1855. As Clayton’s journal entry suggests, the streams were turning in such a way as to direct themselves into the future streets of the city and, by this, the plan for Zion was revealed by the nature of the place itself. What’s more, two days following this scene, Clayton observed that: “[the] brethren are more and more satisfied that we *are* on the right spot.”²⁶

However, while the effort to bring forth Joseph Smith’s visionary plan set a pattern and course for future generations, Piercy’s engravings reveal a darker, less abstract, vision of the past. When the artist departs from his emigrating company, he sets out

22 Piercy and Linforth’s entire work was reproduced with an introduction and notes by Fawn Brodie. For information on the assembly of the text and it’s design see the editors’s “Notes on the Text” in: Ibid., xxix–xxx.

23 Ibid., 4.

24 John W. Reps, *Town Planning in Frontier America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 413. On Mormon Planning and the Land Survey see: C. Mark Hamilton, *Nineteenth-Century Mormon Architecture and City Planning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 16.

25 Clayton, *William Clayton’s Journal*, 319.

26 Ibid., 326.



From: Frederick Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (1855).

to incorporate a description of the ruins at Nauvoo—Smith’s first and failed attempt at building Zion—as well as the Carthage Jail, where the Prophet and his brother Hyrum were murdered by the antagonists who forced the Mormons further West. While these sites were physically abandoned, they were kept alive in the minds and practices of the Saints and Young and Piercy saw the importance of incorporating this increasingly marginalized material into the experience of the trail. Piercy’s engraved views further enhanced by his narrative, bringing these ruined moments to the foreground of the traveler’s textual experience of the landscape. For example, at Nauvoo he writes: “the visitor’s first steps are over evidences of ruin and desolation...houses, once noted for neatness, cleanliness and order... have been abandoned by their ruthless destroyers, and are now monuments of their selfish, jealous and contemptible hate.”²⁷

Given that most of the emigrants who would read Piercy’s *Guide* were unlikely to separate from the established infrastructure

of their planned route, Piercy again had freedom to evoke the awfulness of these sites by way of their historical and physical distance from the reader. As the artist sought to capture Carthage Jail, he depicted the building as shrouded in shadow with the exception of an elevation that looks to the left of the frame. If one considers this edge to signify the West, the building faces the future of the Mormon Church, with a living tree in the foreground to enhance this claim; the view is optimistic for the Saints in suggesting a way forward from their ruinous past.

Piercy’s final scene takes us inside of the jail itself, into the very room where Joseph and Hyrum were held and eventually killed. In the engraving, the artist renders *himself* as standing where Smith was murdered and in his narrative he writes that the bullets that killed the Prophet “still remain unstopped”—a statement that evokes the continuity of the Church’s history as it was kept alive in the experiences and imaginations of the Saints.²⁸ By standing on what he calls a “hateful spot,” Piercy ultimately absorbs this experience and translates its effects into his guidebook, to direct the momentous force

and movement of the Mormons on an eight thousand mile journey.

As Brigham Young addressed the first English settlers to Zion, he cautioned the group that while they may have had a difficult journey, nothing compares to the labor of their many brothers and sisters who have been “under the harrow for the space of 21 years...be patient until the way opens before you.”²⁹ Young instructed the emigrants to join a seemingly infinite yet ordered progression, to continue with the brethren along an expanding path that would ultimately transcend the limitations of the terrestrial world. In the text of his sermon, Young reveals his concept of this eternal progression, writing:

*...to simply take the path pointed out in the Gospel, by those who have given us the plan of salvation, is to take the path that leads to life, to eternal increase: it is to pursue that course wherein we shall NEVER, NEVER lose what we obtain, but continue to collect, to gather together, to increase, to spread abroad, and extend to an endless duration.*³⁰

These words capture the spirit of western settlement for the Church and the significance of the Mormon Trail, not only as a space that connected Winter Quarters to the Great Basin, but as a much larger progression that drew from an ever-expanding field of meaning within the landscape.



From: Frederick Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (1855).

To build on Young’s words with an anecdote from Piercy’s travels: as the artist made his way up the Mississippi he encountered a peculiar person who “professed to have discovered perpetual motion.” While this individual, an engineer, could not quite demonstrate his findings, he presented Piercy with a seemingly random assembly of wood, informing the Englishman that “if he could get it to move once, *only once*, he verily believed that it would keep on.”³¹ This scene—perhaps fabricated to serve as metaphor—is telling not only in regard to the eternal progression of the Mormons, but of this greater period in the history of The

27 Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to the Great Salt Lake Valley*, 94.

28 Ibid., 96.

29 Ibid., 32.

30 Brigham Young, “Journal of Discourses Vol. 1, page 350,” *Journal of Discourses* (F.D. and S.W. Richards), July 1853: 350.

31 Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to the Great Salt Lake Valley*, 80.



From: Frederick Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (1855).

United States: a time that was flush with innovation, when people sought to dig deeper for meaning and new knowledge in order to uncover the forces behind the advancement of society. As the Mormons set out into a cloud of information, with preconceived views of their future home, they were forced onto a pathway by the pressures of antagonistic Americans. With the murder of their Prophet and the inheritance of his incomplete project, the emigrants directed this energy and the impression of his absence into the landscape of the Great Basin. Clayton and Piercy's guidebooks are ephemeral traces of this progression that reveal the Mormons' imagination as seeded with knowledge that prefigured their experience of Zion. Overall, these texts are moments in a stream of unbroken movement, and it is difficult for the pilgrim to ascertain where migration begins and ends, as people, knowledge, and history seem to flow continuously along pathways that concentrate a sprawling landscape into views and meaning.



[xvi.] Room in which Joseph and Hyrum Smith were imprisoned



[xvii.] Well against which Joseph Smith was placed and shot at after his Assassination

From: Frederick Piercy, *Route From Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (1855).