

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
JAMES L. DAVIS
JANUARY 22, 1917, PARIS, IDAHO
“REMINISCING THE SAN JUAN MISSION ”



“Imagine with me in the following paragraphs, the voice of Elder James Lionel Davis. Spoken with a London accent that had been changed somewhat from the days of his youth, by time, and his pioneering experiences in Zion.”

Part 1

MY BEGINNINGS

At the request of members of my family, I here write a history of the principle events of my life, so when I pass away, it may, I hope, strengthen them in the gospel of Christ.

I was born the 9th day August 1840 in London England. My father, George Davis, was born near London. He was a Good Honest man. Very hard working; very fond of horses, and all his life was spent among them. He was too poor to own one himself, but worked for those that did.

Mother was a good woman, but not so spiritual minded. Father would teach us children to pray when he was at home. There were five of us: George, Henry, James, Edward, and Maria. Two girls, Fanny and Sarah, died before I was born. When we were young, we would be in bed by about six o'clock. Father would not quit his work until nine or ten, and then had to be at his work at four, or half past, in the morning. Father

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would ask us about our prayers when he saw us on Sunday, so we all got in the habit of saying our prayers.

Sunday evenings he would read the Bible to us. He did not join any sect, but used to always go to meetings. I remember uncle David came calling, and told Father about Mormonism, and bore testimony of its truth. Father was soon converted. He took me and Edward, and us boys wanted to be baptized. I think it was in 1851, or somewhere about that time.

As a boy I was very sincere, but full of life and fun. I made the acquaintance of a Mormon boy by the name of John Middleton. I then was about twelve years old; he was about the same age. We then worked in the city; we were nearly always together, almost like twins.

In the year 1856, his family was going to Zion. They were better off financially than we were. Us boys, could not bear the thought of parting. My father decided to part with me. I was anxious to go to Zion, boy that I was, and I would fast and pray and would all for the gospel. I began to make ready, even gave notice to leave my situation. In fact did leave it

When it came time, Father could not part with me and (the) Middleton family sailed. The disappointment nearly broke my heart. I have seen my share of trouble in my life, but that was the worst.

Another Sunday school companion, older than us, went that same year. I thought, "Why does the lord favor them and not me?" I think some of my zeal went from me.

I fell in company with some people (*who*) although they were Mormons, were rather fast spent and sported around. Then the news came. My Sunday school companion, Bridges by name, nearly starved, and was so weak he froze to death.

My first companion, has since told me about the frightful scenes he beheld on the plains. When I saw him six years later. He went to help the poor across the plains with ox teams.

How often I have thought of the hymn, " Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face".

Had I got in Martins handcart company, I fear, I would be a dead Davis.

Six years later, it seemed I was not at all able to emigrate myself. Still, I

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was craving to gather to Zion, but (had) no prospects ahead of me. What money I earned slipped through my fingers. I had a good position, (coachman), (*although*) all my prayers and efforts seemed in vain.

Apostle Frances M. Lyman had just arrived in London, and my Branch President told me he would speak that evening in (*the*) home of a very poor widow. I went to hear him. At the close of the meeting, the President asked if anyone could accommodate Brother Lyman. He needed supper and a bed and breakfast.

There were only five or six present, and they were very poor; no one could do anything for him. I had some money in my pocket of which I had to pay expenses with the next day. The spirit prompted me to give it to Brother Lyman. I did so. I was last out of the meeting. I wanted to see if someone would give him something. Brother Lyman looked at it, took my hand, and blessed me and told me that I should soon have the greatest desire of my heart. That was to gather to Zion.

I can never forget the joyous feeling I had. So much so that every time I saw him after that, I would do the same. He had to stop me, and told me he was doing well and for me to save it for my emigration.

After that, money came to me. I had the spirit of saving, and sailed by the next ship in a very short time. I had only a shilling left for all my expenses, and when I bid Mother goodbye, I gave her that, and started from London without a cent. My mother was then a widow; Father having met with an accident that cost him his life about a year previous to my sailing.

The ship I sailed on to New York was named "The John J. Boyd". It left Liverpool 23rd April 1862. My fare was paid from London to Florence, six miles from Council Bluffs.

I stayed with Brother Bates a few days. Helped him get ready for his journey across the plains for my board. I then got a job as a cook and teamster for Kimball and Lawrence Merchants (*of*) Salt Lake City.

When I reached Salt Lake, I got my pay. And after getting a few clothes, I still had some money left. I left London with my pockets empty, here I was in Zion with money in my pockets, about fifteen dollars or more, and made my mind up to go with my old companion John Middleton. We were anxious to be together again. I felt truly grateful to the Lord, for I could see how he had blessed me, and the least thing I could do, was to show my gratitude by turning what money I had left in as a thank offering to the Bishop. I made my intentions known and got made fun of. (*Middleton's*

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words were,) “Why you are green. Nobody thinks of paying money in your circumstances. What are you going to do for clothes? No none can get clothes here except they have sheep. You have got to have them or go in rags”, etc.

I was simple enough to listen to them and bought sheep, but I never felt well about it. Things did not seem to go right with me. And I did not have any more promptings. I seemed left to myself, I was not making any headway; I worked very hard. I had to dispose of my sheep to live; I was frequently told I did not shape it right.

I had been in this country for about eighteen months when a young lady came from London who I had promised to wait for and marry. I got married in the Endowment House (*in*) Salt Lake City. We made very little progress; I remained very poor for a long time.

I felt to know in my heart, if I had only done what the Spirit prompted me and paid my surplus money to the bishop, I would be better off in this worlds goods, and far more happy. For I was sure I was being punished for my disobedience. I had made my mind up. If the Lord would only prompt me again, oh how quickly, I would respond.

But no promptings ever came. I asked the Lord in my heart many times to try me once again. I was ready to give up, for several years had passed away. I had then got a little more around me. as near as I can remember, I had been in this country about ten years.

Note: It appears from the text, that James and his wife Mary Elizabeth Fretwell Davis were at this time living in Cedar City, 220 miles south of Salt Lake City.

I was at meeting one Sunday afternoon. Brother Dan Jones had stopped in Cedar City as he was on his way to preach to the Navajo Indians. Being called on to speak, he told the Saints he could go no further unless he could get a pack animal.

The spirit told me to get one for Brother Jones. I was so overcome with joy I could scarcely wait until the meeting was over. I offered as much as one hundred dollars for a pack horse but could not get one. I had sold a nice young mule to Brother Mousley for fifty dollars only a few day previous. He did not want to sell it. I told him I would give him seventy-five for it back, if it suited Brother Jones.

Brother Jones was pleased with it, and pointed to me, said to Bishop C.

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J. Arthur and those present, "Those are the kind of men the Lord will not part with. He will chasten them as they go but he will never part with them. The Bishop said, "Amen. I believe every word of that."

Brother Jones said a mule was what he wanted, but he did not think there was one on the place to be got, and especially so young. I had a feeling in me that the lord had forgiven me for not paying due attention years ago, when his spirit prompted me to pay my surplus money to the Bishop as a thank offering.

I well remember how surprised Bishop Arthur was. He said I could not in my circumstances donate so much. Thought it should be the settlement. He seemed as if he was not going to let me do it.

I had to tell him how I was prompted, and it was that, (*what*) caused Brother Jones to say what he did
Since then I have been very careful to give heed to the Spirits promptings, and I have paid strict attention to them ever since.

I then made good headway. Got considerable means around me. In fact, was considered well off. Had a nice brick house. Orchard on six city lots. Cows enough in the dairy to keep us in cheese and butter, besides steers and young stock, sheep enough in the heard so the dividend would keep us in all our clothes. All the land I could attend good.

I was very proud of my home surroundings, but my wife had very poor health. Scarcely ever well. In fact it was of the general opinion of everyone that she would not live long.

When to my great surprise, a brother told me he had just heard I was called on a mission with others to go to Arizona to build up a settlement there. I, at once, thought it was a mistake. I went to my Bishop, he also thought that those who called me did not know my situation, and told me so. And offered to write and let me know.

But I was prompted to go. And told him so. And for him not to write. He asked me if I thought my wife could stand the journey. I said I did not know. He seemed, I think, a little surprised but not more so than anyone else. Especially her brothers, who were quite angry with me, and said I ought to know better than to start on such a journey with so delicate a woman. For she would never live to get there. They said I was a crank of the worst kind, and ought to be stopped from going.

President Erastis Snow called a meeting of all those he had called as missionaries, and was very anxious that all who possibly could go would

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go by the first of April.

I told him I would go by that time if he wanted me to. Some were very indifferent and did not know when they could go. He told them, consider themselves released.

I was then about to go into polygamy. But the young lady, after everything was arranged for our marriage, when she heard I was going to start on my mission in April, told me she could not leave her parents, as she had only just come from England.

Her parents had been in this country some time. If I would only put my mission off until fall so she could be with her parents until then, we could get married right away. I had made up my mind to go, and had given my word to President Snow to that effect, so our marriage had been called off.

I, with others left for San Juan River 13 April 1879, and from the time I started, my wife's health improved. When we got to San Juan, she was another woman. Healthy and strong, and has had her health ever since.

We crossed the Colorado River at Lee's Ferry and stopped at a small place called Moencopi. A small indian village settled by some Mosquis tribe and Navajos. A very few of each. In all not more than six or seven families. Their small village was forty miles distant.

John W. Young, son of President Brigham Young, was building a factory there made of rock, to work up the wool. He kept an indian trading post. Brother Wilford Woodruff was also there on vacation to escape his persecutors.

I was quite surprised to see the friendly spirit of those Indians. One of them was named Tubey. He and his wife were Latter-Day Saints. There was a small village about two miles from Moencopi named Tubey City.

Those Indians used to practice running. One of them was very swift. They called him Lightning. He lived in the village forty miles away, but by crossing hills, it was called thirty-five. He had a small patch of land in Moencopi, and he used to run the whole distance back and forth each day. As well as do quite a lot of work.

He would be at his work between nine and ten o'clock in the morning, and quit work about four in the afternoon. He was a special favorite with everyone that knew him. Always a smile and a hearty handshake for everyone. He was one of the best specimens of manhood I think I ever saw

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among the Indians. I took him to be about thirty-five years old.

A short time after I got to San Juan, I asked about him, for I thought he was about one of the best Indians I ever got aquatinted with. I will tell the sad end of him, as it was told (*to*) me by different parties. And all reliable.

There was rough, bad men who stopped a short time a Moencopi. They were hunting mines. One of them had a very bad disorder through his immoral conduct, and got with Lightning's squaw.

Lightning caught the disease and died, as it were, by inches. His sufferings were so great he used to beg someone to kill him. No one could do it.

But they dug a deep hole. He sat on the edge of the pit and cried. Bid all goodbye. (*Then*) rolled into the hole and was buried alive.

Very few could believe a man (*c*)ould run seventy miles. And do at least six hours work in a day. Neither would I mention it only I can bring witnesses if necessary. One living here in Paris, Idaho, who you all know. Namely, Christian Tueller. He is known to be a good, truthful man.

We concluded to rest our teams just below the settlement for a few days. Our captain thought it wise to go to the settlement and have a chat with Bros. Woodruff and Young.

To our great surprise, they told us the country ahead of us was not safe to take women, and children especially, into, and advised myself and Brother H.H. Herriman not to go. But let men go and seed for them. To leave all their stock here. Let them find a suitable country. Then come back for us and the stock.

Brother Young said, "Of course, you are sent as missionaries, and I have no right to stop your going. But, there are some of the worst Indians ahead of you, I ever saw, and I would not think to take women and children among them just now." Brother Woodruff said, "I endorse Brother Young's advise."

We all felt very disappointed, for it was a wretched looking place, (Moencopi as it were), with the wind blowing all the time. The air was filled with sand, and poverty everywhere around. The brethren that were there, were anxiously waiting their release.

When we got to camp, the brethren felt very sorry, but still they said it

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was their only advise. The opinion of most of them was, it was better for all to keep together. Our brethren who called us first knew the best. Our captain said he had no advise to give. He thought we were justified either way.

Brother Herriman concluded, as it was, to go on with the company while I felt prompted to stop. The brethren finally concluded, as I was going to stay, they would leave their stock with me. (As) they could travel faster without the stock.

I, with all my family stayed. I worked on Brother Young's factory as a mason, on wages. My boy Edward (Ted) would heard the stock.

I had an organ with me, and a very nice large chest. The first organ that was at Moencopi. They had a very nice choir, but small. Brother Young's wife played the organ, and we used to take turns playing. This seemed to liven up the place, and being in company with such a noble man as Brother Wilford Woodruff, the time passed very pleasantly.

In about two months some boys came back. I think, about five reported finding a country. Many, not pleased with it, also reported the company had no trouble with bad Indians. But the Indians had stolen two of their horses as they were coming in for me.

So I bid farewell to Moencopi. Brother John W. Young, did not like me to take the organ, so I let him have it for a span of small mules.

We traveled three days and stopped at noon at the place where our boys had had their horses stolen. They got their horses back, but it made the Indians mad. Especially one named Pearcon.

He had been chief, but had killed some Whites and gave the tribe so much trouble, they put him out. It was him, they say, (*that*) caused the son of Apostle George A. Smith to be killed, and it was near us where he was killed.

This Indian came into our camp in a very bad mood. He would kick the sand over our food, and take knives, and hit the edges of them on a large rock. And got pushing our boys around, wanting to wrestle with them etc. Most of our boys were young, and lacked judgment. Like most boys.

This Indian took hold of Brother Smith, I think his name was. He had a dog. And seeing the Indian handling his master, flew at him and bit him.

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There was a long handled shovel handy, and the Indian grabbed it (he said after, it was only to hit the dog). Smith grabbed an ax, and made for the Indian.

I was quick enough to jump at Smith while Brother Decker jumped at the Indian. When a fuss started, our boys made for their guns; One of the Indians ran to get more help, while I was begging of our boys not to fire the first shot.

I pointed to my wife who was in the wagon crying. For the Indians were drawing their knives across their throats, giving her to understand, that our throats would be cut.

When more help came, she was nearly frightened to death. She had three of her little tots clinging to her: Emily; six years old, Orson commencing three, and Harry; about eight years and six months.

I could not be with her. For our boys acted as if the time had come for them to kill or be killed. My boy Edward, then about fourteen years old, had his rifle ready.

We had with us a rough cowboy. He was not a Mormon. He did not want to wait until the Indians got help. I had quite a time with him. A young man named Brother Brown thought, as we were well armed and had plenty of ammunition, we might fort up with our wagons, and keep the Indians off. And he would jump on a quick horse, and cross the hills and reach Bros. Woodruff and Young that night, and get help. We concluded it was for the best, and he quietly slipped away, jumped on his horse and was off.

Just as things were at their worst, one or two fresh Indians came in. I looked in the distance and saw an Indian on horseback coming to us. It proved to be the great chief of all around that part of the country.

He rode up to me, after looking about him seeing I was the oldest, and asked what the trouble was. He saw old Pearcon with blood on his leg, for he had a bad bite. I got my son Edward to act as interpreter, for during our stay at Moencopi, he had picked up the indian language.

The chief told Pearcon to go and sit on a big rock, pointing to one about eight rods away. He first heard our side, then beckoned for him. He came and told his side.

The chief told us we would have to pay for the dog bite and get his

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friendship as far as we could. We paid the Indian quite well in money, tobacco, etc. But he would have the ax that Smith was going to strike him with.

I did not like his spirit. I gave the ax but wanted to buy it back again. Offered him money and a better ax, but no, he would have that ax.

When peace was patched up, another man offered to go to Moencopi with the later news. He got there about ten o'clock. This was the 4th of July. They were having a party when the first arrived (*then*) they immediately dismissed and were getting up another party to help us.

Brother Brown brought me a very nice letter back from Brother Young and told me to be very careful, and be sure never to take anything but your hands to strike an Indian with. As it is considered a challenge, and he would be justified in shooting you. But if you use your hands, he is supposed to do the same.

The big chief told me he could manage the old Indians, but the young ones were not so good. And Pearcon was a bad Indian and to be on the watch for him. He said he would do his best to help us.

We could not break camp that night. Neither could we sleep. Those Indians are Sun Worshippers. For they believe the sun can see them, and tell the Good Spirit. But if the sun don't see them, the Great Spirit can't know. We were powerful uneasy that night. I don't think anyone slept. We thought we might have to fight very early next morning before the sun was up.

The boys put a very heavy load in all their guns. I told them I would not use my gun. My son Edward had the rifle, and Brother Decker I let have my shotgun, and went unarmed myself.

Daylight came and no Indians. Sun up but no Indians came. We felt better and decided to cook breakfast when an old Indian came hurrying up to me, and told me to get my horses quickly, and hitch them up quickly, and get away. Some of the boys said it was a trap we were being led into, and were not going. I felt different; I got all ready to travel. Most of them were staying to think it over and having breakfast, but did not want us separated, and all to keep together. The Indian seemed very uneasy. (*Eager*) to be going. So we all decided to travel, although some were full of doubt as to the result.

I had a high seat on my wagon, and the Indian sat beside me. He kept us hurrying. And it being a sandy country, we could only travel very slow.

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And often had to stop.

This seemed to annoy Mr. Indian. He would stand up on the seat every time I stopped, and look around, then jump down and keep hurrying us up until our team was about to give out. Then he told us we could stop. He seemed pleased, took out his tobacco, and had a smoke and was not in a hurry at all. We could rest as long as we liked, and after that we could travel as slow as we liked.

He turned to me and asked me if I did not know him. I thought, when I first saw him, I had seen him before. But I could not place him. He told me my name, and where I used to live, and said he had been to my house many times. And that I had always fed him and was good to him. He knew I was there with my family. He had seen us and we did not know it.

He said Pearcon was a bad Indian, and he was showing his leg to some of the young Indians. Also the ax that we were going to kill him with, and they were planning to kill us and rob us out of revenge. He came to save us.

That was why he was in such a hurry. He did not know how long it would be before he (*Pearcon*) got volunteers enough. But this Indian knew if he got us off his land, he dare not come on another Indians claim to do anyone any serious harm. As the Indians are very strict.

This old man was a Piute, but he had married two Navajo squaws, and was quite a favorite among them. He did not ask for any favors in return for his kindness.

We traveled about as near as I can remember some seven or eight mile, to a place called Gulch Creek. And saw there, a cross between a goat and a sheep. It was something I had not seen. I could not believe (*that*) some of them, had from three to six horns on, and a mixture of wool and hair on their bodies.

Brother Thales Haskell, the Indian Missionary, told us he had never known such a thing to happen. Only at one place. The Indians said it was the water of Gulch Creek what caused it. That they drank.

We traveled on to the San Juan River. I liked the looks of of the country very much. but we could see many difficulties to be overcome. Such as getting the water from the river on to the land. Etc. After we got there, the company built me a log room. Also one for Brother Herriman. As we were the only ones with families.

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In speaking with President Snow when I was first called, he told me he was very glad I was going, as it takes men of families to build up a country. I was just planning to prove the truth of his words, for they were all getting very uneasy, but not any seemed to want to stay. They were all homesick and wanted to be on the move.

Finally all, but S.S. Smith and one or two more, struck for home. I was expecting an increase in my family, and Brother Smith was anxious to see that everything was all right before he left.

There was a woman, a Mrs. Mitchell, who lived about six miles from us. I hired her during my wife's confinement. She was very kind, but no midwife.

My girl, Ethel, (born Aug. 2, 1879) was the first child born in the San Juan Mission. She was born (at what became known as Monezuma Settlement) not more than two weeks after we got there.

Brother Smith left us about two days after the child was born. The boys that had started for home agreed to wait at the Blue Mountains for Brother Smith. About two days journey on the way home, Brother Smith told us he would try to get some of the boys back, as it was not safe for us to be alone. No boys ever came back.

My wife and four small children, Sister Herriman and four small children, Brother Herriman, myself, and Edward our son, were the only ones left in that country. The nearest settlement was Mancos of about twelve families, sixty-five miles away. Nearest market was three hundred miles.

Shortly after we were left, the Indians were reported on the war path. The Navajo's, across the San Juan River appeared to be friendly. It was the White Water Utes, that were on the war path. They had already killed the Meeker family, and were heading toward us, was the word that the friendly Navajo's brought us. The Mitchell family got help, and had a fort, and were prepared for them. But what were we to do?

My house was very small, and not fit as a fort, and brother Herriman had a large part of one end of his cut out for a fireplace. The Navajo Indians told us to come to their land, and we would be safe. They could hide us up. The folks thought it over, and we decided to stay where we were. I told them, as they had got all the rocks ready, I would build the fireplace and chimney in a short time. And I did so. Our guns were loaded and handy.

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Sister Herriman was crying, and wanted us not to eat anymore, but fast and pray. I was in favor of getting the house safe. She, (Sister Herriman) was begging of us, that if the Indians came, to shoot her first of all, and not let her fall into the hands of the Indians. We were told by the friendly Indians, they (the Utes) would be at San Juan about nightfall.

We all got ready, and got into the room. Got prepared for them the best we could. The children were all very frightened. I had a very large dog. Brother Herriman also had one. And they seemed to both know there was something the matter.

About twelve o'clock, the dogs started barking. We grabbed our guns. But the yelling of the children, especially my boy Harry, was deafening. We could do nothing. The dogs started running up the river bank. We all felt certain it was the Indians. After a while, the dogs came back, but they were uneasy for a long while.

It was the White River Utes. They had crossed the river at a ford about a mile above us, and were making for the stronghold of the renegade Indians in the Navajo country.

There are many places where it is impossible to get to shore, on account of very narrow passes where two horseman cannot go abreast. One Indian can stand off a whole regiment of soldiers, the country is so rocky.

When things got a little more quiet, I ventured as far as Mancos, a small settlement sixty-five miles off, for some wheat. When I got home, I had the pleasure of finding Brother Thales Haskell at my house.

President Snow had heard we were all killed by the Indians, and Brother Haskell being a Indian missionary, and at Moencopi, He sent word for him to go see. And if we were killed, to gather up our bodies, and give them as decent a burial as possible.

But he told my family, when he saw at a distance, smoke coming out of our chimney, he was very thankful. He brought some flour in a sack with him, but we kept that for special occasions. We had been living on wheat ground in a coffee mill so long, we got to like it. We all had the best of health. Especially my wife, who it was thought, when I left Cedar City, she never would live long enough to get to San Juan.

We were all very anxious for the company to arrive, or The Second Company as we called it, and did not know what was keeping it so long. We felt sure we had plenty of wheat to last us until they came. But after a

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month passed, and still no signs of the company, our wheat gave out, and it was not safe for me to leave on account of the restless state of the Indians.

As we ground the wheat in a coffee mill, we had saved the bran. And this was what we had to live on. I confess I got feeling very bad. Brother Haskell did not know what to do. He was afraid to leave us alone. As President Snow (had) told him to be sure, if they were alive, to stay until the company came.

I had plenty of stock, but no bread. My boys used to roast the meat until it got black and lost the flavor of meat and try to fill up on that. When meal time came, my children would want some bread, and cried for the lack of it. The smaller ones wanted, for they could not swallow the bran. This made me feel very wretched.

One of my boys took my pickax to dig for sego roots, but after several hours hunting was not successful. He got three or four very small ones and about ruined the pickax.

Brother Harvey Dunton, an old man (*who had been*) left with us, had eaten up everything he had, as he thought, and made his mind up to leave. But in cleaning out his wagon, he found a sack with a little shrunken wheat in it. He gave it to me, telling me he had to strike out. Begged me to take it.

He said he had a good gun and plenty of ammunition, for he could kill snakes and squirrels. He would travel in the direction of the Colorado River. For he had heard the Indians say, that other Indians had told them that there were lots of White Men and families on the other side of the Colorado and could not cross. We all felt sure it was The Second Company. He said the wheat would keep us alive for two or three days after he left.

A young man by the name of George Hobbs, Sister Herriman's brother if I remember right, made a raft and crossed the (*Colorado*) river and brought some supplies for the Herriman family, but scarcely enough to do them. I had (*by*) then built me a log house about half a mile from Herriman's on my land.

Brother Dunton used to live alone most of the time. I always felt safer in that country with my family along, than I did in company with others. And I always had faith in the promptings of the Spirit. I felt certain as long as I was faithfully trying to serve the Lord, in my weak way and trusting in him, I would come out all right.

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Brother Hobbs could not tell when The Company would reach us, as they would have to blast a road to the river, and it would take them some time. Brother Hobbs ran a very great risk, and was made of the right stuff to run the risk he did in finding us. For he had, or no one else of The Company had traveled that country before.

Note: Indians later told them that no White Men had traveled that route since 1540, when the Spanish, on trading missions, and searching for gold, first traveled the Hole in the Rock Trail as it would later be named, until the Mormon Pioneers made their terrifying way through the deep rock wall pass, and across the Colorado river.

It was several days journey from the river to where we were, and no one to direct him. A few days later after Brother Hobbs had gone back to the company to report, an indian missionary by the name of Llewelyn Harris called, and told us the Company would be in in about ten days.

My wife told him we did not have bread enough to last two days. He was hungry and very ragged, and said he wanted to stay three days to rest up. My wife told him he could stay, but she was at a loss to know what we could eat.

He told her, she had seen her worst times and the way would open up. He stayed his time, and I felt sure everything was eaten up in the way of bread stuff. And my wife dreaded to tell me.

About the next day after he had gone, I asked Sister Davis, (my wife), where she was getting the grain from to make the bread. She said, "Out of the Sack." I handled the sack, and told her, it looked as much as it was when Brother Dunton left it. And it had lasted us until The Company came in. And we all seemed to have enough. And The Company did not come in for ten days, or near it.

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Part 2

LIFE BEGINS AT THE NEW MISSION

After Brother Haskell came to San Juan, a young Indian called to speak with him. It was dinner time. I called Brother Haskell to come to dinner and bring the Indian with him. Brother Haskell had to tell the indian I wanted him to come to dinner, before he would come. He washed his face and combed his hair, as we did, and we shook hands.

I treated him as I would any White Man. After he had gone, Brother Haskell asked me if I always treated Indians that way, I told him, I always have had a great sympathy for Indians, and always treated them well. He said, "Brother Davis, you never will have trouble with the Indians, like most people do."

Some time before Brother Haskell was sent to us, and the indians were not to be trusted, one cold evening, three young Indians came to my house. My family was unwell. I asked them (the Indians) if they were cold, and they seemed to enjoy the warmth of the fire. We gave them all they could eat. I saw they did not like to leave. They were on foot, and told me they had a long way to go. I told them they could stay the night in the house.

I had my gun in the rack over the fireplace. I let them sleep in the same room as the gun was, and my family and I slept in the next room. We did not sleep much, but something told me it was all right.

Next morning we gave them breakfast, and they did not know how to thank me enough. They had hard work to keep their tears back; they hugged me and said, "Weno se Kish." (good friend in english) Folks told me I ran more risk with Indians than they would.

After The Second Company came in, I started a trading post, and bought their wool, furs, skins, etc. About this time, I had some very heavy losses. My cattle would disappear. Some got in the quicksand, and some were stolen by bad Indians or White Men.

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I had six cows I expected to calve shortly. Brought up and herded on my claim. We got up one morning and they were gone. We knew they were stolen, but it was not safe to go far away from home. Of course we all felt bad.

My son Edward, was about fifteen years old. He wanted to track them up and get them back. I thought it was too dangerous for a boy of his age to go alone, but he never seemed to know any fear, and felt bad when I told him the risk he would run. He seemed so confident, and his mother favored him. I finally told him he could go, but told him to be sure and be home the next day at noon. Cows or no cows.

Noon came the next day, but no boy. About two o'clock I was determined to hunt him up. His mother was feeling terrible, and was beside herself. I left the folks and set out on foot. I climbed on top of a mountain, but it was such a broken up country; I could not see far ahead.

I was at a loss what to do. I commenced to reflect (*and*) consider, when something seemed to say to me, the Lord knows where your boy is. Ask him. I felt very unworthy. Then again, when I thought of selling my home, and how anxious I was to fill my mission and serve the Lord, not withstanding my many weaknesses, I began to get faith. For I knew he could make it known to me.

I knelt down and asked the Lord, as I was on my mission, trying in my weak way to serve him, to make it known to me if he was alive or not, and what to do. I got up and looked at a hill not very far off, and saw my boy as plain as ever I saw him in my life.

The hill was cone shape(*d*) (*and*) the boy was riding his horse with his gun on his shoulder. I felt so thankful he was alive, that when I saw he had no cows, I did not care. As long as I had him.

I ran all the way home, and told his mother not to cry, for Edward was all right. He had no cows but he was safe. "Are you quite sure you saw him?" she repeated several times. I had hard work to convince her. I told her he would be home in about one hour. But it got sunset, and he never came.

I knew I had seen him, but came to the conclusion something had happened to him after I saw him. It got dark; he did not come, and we were all feeling very bad. Dark as it were, I started out to look for him. I only got three steps away when I saw him.

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I asked him what kept him so long, for I told him I saw, and I knew, he had no cows. He seemed surprised, and told me he never was there. But told me, he was miles away at the time I mentioned I was quite sure I saw him, but he told me, he would not think of climbing up the hill where I thought I saw him. He would not expose himself in any such manner. He traveled on the bottom lands out of the sight of the Indians as much as possible.

When it came to me, I had asked the Lord to make it known to me if my boy was alive or dead, and my prayers were answered. I was very anxious to see the place where I saw him in vision, and went there, but found it impossible for a horse to travel. I had hard work to get there on foot. I am quite sure no horse could get to the place. And very few men. This was a strong testimony to me, and I can never forget it.

Some time after this happened, some friendly Indians came to see me, and told me some of their tribe were mad, and were going to kill a White Man. As one of their number had just been killed.

They were then at a place six miles up the river. Mitchell's ranch. These Indians were quite excited, and afraid of being seen, but came to warn me. I closed up my store. I always kept a powerful needle gun loaded under the counter as a precaution. But strange to say. I was prompted to take and unload it and hide it. I did so, but did not let anyone know it.

Shortly the Indians came. They acted bad. Wanted to know why my store was closed. I wanted to talk to them, but they seemed full of the devil. I thought I would be as kind as I could, and told my boy Ted to open the store. He did not want to do it. He said the Indians would steal everything we had. I told his to do just as I asked him. He very unwillingly opened the store.

The Indians were very saucy, and wanted to quarrel with me. Ted kept answering them back. I kept telling him not to do so. One of them was very mad. Ted asked him if he was sick. He thought Ted told him he would make him sick. Many of them think the Mormons talk with the Great Spirit and can make them sick. He drew his gun on Ted, but I jumped in front of him. Ted made for the needle gun but it was gone.

The Indians knew I was in the employ of the government as Postmaster, and had to write out their passes, and they were a little afraid I could give them trouble if they hurt me. But I am sure if I had not hidden the gun, Ted would have been killed.

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I talked to the Indian, and he put up his gun. His eyes filled up with tears. I told them all to come into the house and I would give them something to eat, and talk with them. We parted good friends. But they killed a cowboy, and a government scout shortly after.

It came about this way, after the killing of the Indian at Mitchell's, word was sent to Fort Lewis, and one hundred negro soldiers were sent, and about twenty-five cowboys volunteered and joined them.

They stopped at the place to post letters, etc. I had a long talk with one of them. I told him I feared that the Indians would get even, for they had told me so.

In a few days they came back and were quite excited. Two of their number had got killed. A cowboy and a government scout that were asking me what I thought their chances would be.

I learned that as the soldiers were heading toward the Indians, some of them saw them at a distance and made up some fresh tracks that led them into a box canyon. The Indian ponies can climb like goats. They got out, but the soldiers could not. They were in a trap, as the Indians could shoot down upon them.

They wanted some of the soldiers to come and talk with them. Some thought they could make peace with them. The scout said he would risk it if one or more would go with him. A cowboy took him up. They managed to get near the top when they were shot down.

One was killed, the other was badly wounded and could not get up, but begged of some of them to put him out of his misery, and not to leave him to the Indians. But the soldiers all jumped upon their horses and left their baggage, etc. behind. Also the poor fellow to the mercy of the Indians, who set their dogs on him and finally killed him.

About this time an old man, named Wolcott, (*and*) a young man by the name of McNally, with horses came. They told me they were fitted out by a firm in Baltimore, who had heard of rich mines in the Navajo country.

The name of the firm was Fred Fickey and Company. In speaking to them, Brother Haskell he told me they might get into where the mines were, but they would not get out alive.

All those who knew Brother Haskell, knew him to be a man of very few words. and he was very reliable. I wanted him to tell the men. So he said,

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“If they want to know let them come to me. I won’t run after them.” I told the men all that Brother Haskell had told me.

The older man was pig headed. the younger was not so much. I could not make any impression on the elder one, but the young man would listen to me. I nearly got him converted (*converted to the Church or convinced*) that he was going to his death. He felt bad, on account of his drawing his wages, and told me he was very favorable impressed with the Mormons, and was going to live among them when he got back.

He said he had a mother, and felt sure he could get her to end her days among the Mormon people.

They stayed about a week; they got their supplies at my store. Just as Wolcott was leaving, he said, “Mr. Davis, I will have some registered mail sent to me, and if I’m not back in thirty days, you may conclude I won’t come at all.” Thirty days passed, but no Wolcott or McNalley.

Several registered letters from Fred Fickey and Company came. I began to make inquiries of some of my Indian friends. I learned from them that Pealacons (or Americans) went among the bad Indians, and stopped to cook dinner. They had a very nice looking rifle. The Indians picked it up and would not give it back. Wolcott lost his temper and shot the Indian.

The bullet went through the cheek of the one that had the rifle. Some Indians jumped on the old man and dragged him about by his hair, while the others riddled him with bullets ‘till he was dead. The young man got on his horse. The old indians wanted them not to kill the young man, as he had not hurt them, but some of the young ones followed him and shot him to death.

I received a letter from Baltimore asking about them. I sent word of their being killed by Indians. They sent me word to be sure and get the body of Wolcott, as he was a prominent Freemason, and they would pay all expenses. They never mentioned McNalley. I was trying to get the Indians to bring both of their bodies in, but they were afraid of the bad Indians.

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Part 3

SOLDIERS AND INDIAN TROUBLE

Then I received a second letter from Fred Fickey and Company. They heard it was the Mormons (*that had*) killed their men and robbed them, and was blaming it on the Indians. I wrote back telling them to write to Fort Wingate (*in New Mexico*) and let the soldiers (*go*) get their bodies, as it was their place, and they would then find out who (*had*) killed their men. They did so, and the Indians scared the soldiers back. So they hired some Indian scouts and got to find out all about it.

When the news reached Wolcotts wife, the poor woman started out all the way from Baltimore to find out about her husbands death, but (*she*) was (*at this point*) losing her reason. She got as far as Fort Lewis, Colorado. She lost her mind and got no further.

It does not take many Indians to scare soldiers. It was only nine that fought with those hundred soldiers and twenty-five cowboys, and (*had*) killed two of them and many more if they (*had*) wanted to. They have so many advantages in their own country, and (*also*) by their mode of fighting.

The soldiers built a stockade six miles from us on the Mitchell's ranch. And (*they*) did not care about going far from it. The Indians knew the soldiers were afraid of them and used to have fun with them sometimes.

One morning, the stockade being small, they (*the Indians*) would camp, and eat, and cook close by. The Indians, not more than three or four, sneaked up on them fired a gun and gave a yell. The soldiers jumped up and made for the stockade while the Indians gathered up what the soldiers left on the ground and rode calmly away with it.

On one occasion the Indians had a fight with some stockmen and stole some of their horses near the Blue Mountains. A description was given to the soldiers of the property stolen so as they might get it back.

A few days later I met an Indian riding a fine horse. He also had a

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splendid saddle. I asked him where he was going. He said to see the soldiers. He told me he had stolen the horse and saddle. I asked him if he was not afraid they would take the horse and saddle from him and put him in prison. He laughed at me and rode on to their stockade.

The soldiers captured him, took the horse and saddle from him, put a strong guard over him, and sent word to Fort Lewis to send some soldiers. As they had one of the Indians, and had no place to keep him.

A strong guard was sent, but before the guard arrive some Indians came to my place to trade. They asked me if I saw the Indian with the horse and saddle. I told them yes. They told me they were going to get him, and were all quite good natured about it. Sure enough they brought him back, horse and saddle and all.

When the soldiers came for him, it was reported that a big lot of Indians (*had*) overpowered them and took their prisoner. They went back without him. The soldiers were sent to protect the settlers (*and*) keep track of the indians as far as possible. But they were never anxious to meet up with many of them. Some of the soldiers would come as far as my place to get what information I could give them. It would go at that.

Some Indians camped on the next claim to me. I told the soldiers about it, (*and*) they asked me if it was safe for them to go to them. One of the soldiers told me he had been all through the war between the North and the South. And he would rather fight it over again than he would be hunting Indians.

I told them the Indians had killed two white men to pay for killing one Indian, and if let alone, there would not be any more trouble. They wanted me to go and talk with the Indians and bring word back. I told them I had to be neutral. I could not get the soldiers to go near them. They offered to pay me, but all to no purpose.

Next morning a young soldier came to talk with me. He was corporal Kelly. An Irishman. He had agreed to see the Indians and tried hard to get me to go (*with him*) as interpreter. He was anxious to be promoted (*which*) was the reason he (*had*) volunteered to see the Indians, and wanted me to be a witness. I said (*to him that*) I was certain the Indians would not kill him. I had talked with them, and they, if left alone, would be peaceable.

He was riding a very good horse, and had a nice pearl handled pistol. Quite an important person (and a) little conceited. He went alone. I got very uneasy at his long absence, but just before sunset we saw at a distance

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what looked like an Indian having some trouble getting his horse along. When he got close by, we saw it was Corporal Kelly with a yearling colt that had a piece of rope around its neck.

He was trying to lead it. He was dressed up in some old indian clothes. I asked him if he had been trading. He said, "Trading be damned. They made me trade." He got to the stockade after dark that night, and reported the state of the Indians. He did not need a witness to his bravery for when they saw him they were convinced.

(And probably laughing)

Later on, when I came home for dinner, my wife told me there had been a man near the house hollering out his name, and wanted to know if we did not have a letter with the name Peter Tracy on it. He would not come up to the house. My wife had to take it out of the house and lay it on the ground. Then he very cautiously picked it up. He was armed with a shotgun but seemed very timid. When he saw nobody wanted to hurt him, he came in the house and told me he had heard that we Mormons were very dangerous people.

He got quite sociable. I often had talked with him. He told me he was an Irishman and a Catholic, but he (*soon*) got a little interested in Mormonism. I loaned him books to read and explained the principles of the gospel to him.

He said his wife was dead (*and*) he had two sons. One was in the States somewhere, and the other was in Utah and used to write him. He came one day to get his mail. He seemed a little low spirited, and called me aside and told me something told him not to go back home or he would get killed. I advised him not to go home but to stay with us.

I advised him that we would take care of him until that (*Feeling*) went from him, and would not charge him anything. I begged him to unsaddle his mule and I would care for that also. I felt to sympathize with the old man, he felt so lonesome. He said, "Mr. Davis, I would give anything to see my boys." I could not get him to stay. He seemed very sorrowful and it made me feel the same.

The very next morning, the mail carrier, Bob Allen, asked me if I had heard Peter Tracy was killed. He said he had a letter for him and saw him laying dead just outside his house. His dog was howling and keeping guard over him. He seemed a good honest man and I got to like him.

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Mr. Mitchell had a son John. And a man by the name of Merrick was talking of going hunting for the same mine as Wolcott and McNally was hunting and they got killed. They were warned not to go but they went. The Indians also killed them. Their bodies were never recovered. Their bones were seen by some friendly Indians, but their folks never got to hear any particulars of how their deaths were brought about.

As I before stated, I was always kind to the Indians. I remember Brother Amos Barton. He called on me one time, and told me he was not like me. For he said, "You seem to make pets of the Indians." He said he just despised them. "After I have done trading with them, I want them to clear out." He said.

He thought I was very foolish to let them come in my house, and put them on a level with White Men. He (*had*) struck several of them at different times, so it was reported.

As he was doing some trading, a strange Indian rode up with a lasso. He never got off his horse, but bent over and threw the lasso over Barton's head. (*He*) spurred up his horse, and dragged Barton into the street. The Indians then shot him to death. His wife saw it all and started screaming. Some of the Indians held her while they shot her husband.

This caused much excitement, and there (*also*) was some trouble at another post up the river, kept by two men named: Spencer and Doolittle.

These men were at my store buying up my wool. They had left a boy in charge of their place. The Indians raided their trading post (and) stole what they wanted. Their boy saved himself by getting out of a window. They set the store on fire. But I afterwards heard (*the two men*) they put a claim in and got pay from the government for damages.

Folks were forting up, and they wanted me to do the same. The fort was then overcrowded, and some cowboys were mixed (*in*) with our people. I felt safer out of the fort.

Bishop Nielsen of Bluff City, came to me to know how it was (*that*) I would not go to the fort. I told him, I felt safer where I was. He told me, if I felt that way, to act as I was prompted. The fort was half a mile distant. We sat up that night.

About midnight a lot of Indians came, about eight or nine (*of them*), and wanted to know why I was not afraid and in the fort. I told them there was nothing to be afraid of. I knew I had treated them good and they would

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(likewise) treat me good. This seemed to please them. I gave them something to eat, *(and)* we all shook hands but *(they)* told me not to leave my place, but keep inside my fence. Maybe a fight. They did not know.

Up to that time, Not a Mormon was killed. Only Brother Barton. Brother Lyman had a narrow call. One night some bad White Men went to Bluff and cleaned them out of their horses, except *(for)* a small white mare belonging to a Brother Samuel Cox.

PART 4

THE INDIANS GRATITUDE, NEW LIFE, THE FLOOD, AND THE END OF THE MISSION

In the morning, when they found out, they followed them. they took the little mare along. All had to go it on foot. They overtook the thieves and exchanged shots. Joseph got hit in the thigh, a bad wound. They had to leave him.

Some friendly Indians took him in charge, and kept prickly pears on him, and kept it up, day and night, or mortification would have set in. I think he will lay his life today to the kindness of the Indians.

One evening, quite a lot of Indians came in to do some trading with me. It was very cold, and getting late. They asked leave to sleep in an out building. I consented. That night I did not lock my store door.

The lock did not catch, and the door blew open. The Indians saw the door open. All their women and children went in and slept the night. I was

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well stocked up with goods of all kinds: crackers, cheese, silver ornaments, tobacco, etc. One of them called my attention to the open door. When I entered the store, not a thing was missing that I could find out.

An Indian called one day on me. He had two companions with him. His gun got broken. They, like most of them, sympathize with each other more than White men do. Could I fix it for him?

I had a spring I got off an old gun. I also had an extra nipple. His gun was fixed, but he was afraid to shoot it off for fear we had put a job on him. I got Ted to shoot at a mark. When they saw it was safe, one of them put his arms around me, and could not express his joy. (*He*) wanted me to take a nice blanket.

Brother Dunton's team got away. They spent some days hunting it. and brought it to him. They went and killed a nice fat sheep. All to pay for fixing their gun. We did not charge a cent. They were always our friend after that.

On the 7th day of February 1920, Elder James Lionel Davis passed away peacefully. He did not live to finish his life story. His wife, Mary Elizabeth Fretwell Davis, added the following:

After Leaving the fort, we took up a quarter section of land. We built a two roomed house on it about the year 1880.

Father commenced to build a water wheel on the river to bring water on the land. Father and Ted, spent many days building cribs and making the wheel. Finally they got the water on the land, and we had planted the garden and raised cabbages as big as washtubs, and fixed tomato vines. We had more tomatoes than we could do with, and corn and sugar cane grew to a great height.

On the 15th of August 1881, another daughter was born. Sister waited on me. We named the baby Cordelia. Sister Herriman did my washing for the first month, for both Ethel and Cordelia. After that we, had to do the best we could.

I was greatly blessed, although I had no help, I never got along so well before. I got well and strong in a few days.

While I was in bed a flood came down the river, and came nearly to the house. Father and Ted watched the river night and day until the flood went down, for they thought they might have to take me to higher ground.

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In about 18 months after that, an Indian came to the house covered with a rash. He sat down for some time, as he was cold. A short time after, my six children came down with the measles. We were all alone with them. I bathed them in sage brush, and gave them yarrow to drink. That was all I could get, for we were hundreds of miles from any store or help. Father built a house on higher ground, where he kept a store.

On the 22nd day of July 1883, another baby girl was born. There was no midwife or doctor on the river, so a Sister Hide waited on me, and I got along fine. Irene Haskell came and stayed for a month, so I had help this time.

In June 1884, a dreadful flood came down the river and washed away a good deal of the land. Garden patches and small houses came down the river.

It washed away the wheel the people had built. But ours, it left on a sand bar. A brother Allen lived above us on the river with his family. He had two wives, and some children. He was away when the flood came, but his family was there.

Father and Ted went to see if they were safe, and found them surrounded with water. They had a large molasses boiler. Ted got that. Floated it to the house, and saved them and got them to higher land.

I had often prayed earnestly that the way might open up for us to be delivered from that country, and I felt that my prayers had been answered when I seen the flood. For I felt that the river bottoms were no place to live. As we would always have problems with floods and Indians.

We worked hard for over five years, and the flood had washed everything away. But I always wanted to do what was right. And if the Brethren had told us to stay, we would have done so. But they gave us our release.

After we left, some of them that stayed found a large country and plenty of land and made settlements. But I was very glad to get away. For all the country I saw was rocks and sand, except the river bottoms. And there was good soil on them, but they were liable to floods.

Father had a brother living in Bear Lake, and he wrote for us to come. Brother Lyman told us that Bear Lake, or the Snake River Country, was a good country for us to go to. We decided to go to Bear Lake. So we started in August 1884 to leave the San Juan. We traveled up from Bluff 'till we

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came to the Blue Mountains.

While camping, there was a fearful electric storm. The next day we came down to Moab, a settlement surrounded with mountains and the Green River. There were no bridges or ferries, so we had to take our wagons to pieces and take everything over in little row boats, and swim the horses and cattle.

After we got on the other side, we put them together and started on our way rejoicing. We filled our barrels with water, for we had a 50 mile desert to cross.

It was on that desert, that our children first saw a train, all but Edward, and they thought it was a fearful thing. They thought it was going to run over them, and we had a job to stay their fears.

At the end of 50 miles, we came to the Green River and crossed that on a ferry. We traveled over Soldier Summit through Spanish Ford Canyon in the settlements of Utah.

Oh how glad we were to see civilization again. For we had traveled through a rough country. Hills and hollows, rocks and sand, and very little good road.

We passed through Salt Lake City, Brigham City to Logan. Through Logan Canyon to Garden City. How beautiful the valley was, with a clear water lake, about 30 miles long, and 8 miles wide at the south end of the valley.

THE END

AFTER WORD

Some real thought went into the re-transcribing of this document. There were numerous spelling and grammar errors, typing and transcription errors, and there possibly still are. Some cannot be avoided.

In keeping with the spirit of this autobiography, it is my belief, that to make major changes to accommodate correct grammar, would have destroyed the words of Great, Great Grandpa Davis.

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I wish that an original draft were available today. One that was in James L. Davis's own handwriting. But all that is presently available is a typed archived version. I received some 11" by 17" inch sheets with this story from Aunt Linda Robinett and she told me that she had copied this autobiography word for word years ago from a book in the library.

I only made changes on a few words, and deleted one, that I am positive were misspelled.

I also tried to hear the words in my head as I typed, and imagined that a person originally from London was speaking.

I changed the words: Bro. and Pres. to Brother and President to make it easier to understand, and some dates were changed to reflect the British form of writing dates in that period, and also into a genealogical format. example, 9th day of August 1840

There were already some words in parentheses in this document. I added some "in italic parentheses" words to make the document more clear and understandable. If you would like to read this autobiography how I believe it was originally written, just bypass the words in italic parentheses.

I also added a few Notes or comments that were not part of the original version, and I separated the story into chapters, or parts. These are in red.

Scott Jansen March 2009

Source; Davis, James L., Autobiography, in James L. Davis, San Juan Mission Reminiscence 1917, fd 3, 5.

The Autobiography of James L. Davis