

## MORMON WARS

The attack upon the Mormons in Livingston and adjoining counties by the early settlers was a war of extermination and resulted in much blood shed. Although there are today two distinct bodies of the church, one known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the other the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, both have the same founder, Joseph Smith, who was born in Sharon, Vt., in 1805. Taken to Palmyra, N. Y., he became religiously concerned in 1820. He received "visions" from 1822 to 1827, and wrote "The Book of Mormon" in 1827. With Oliver Cowdery he was ordained priest by "an angel" in 1829; founded a church at Fayette, N. Y., in 1830; moved to Kirtland, Ohio, where he was joined by Sidney Rigdon in 1830, and Brigham Young in 1832. The presidency was established in 1833, the apostolate of twelve in 1835 and the foreign mission in 1837. A temple was built and a bank founded, but the latter proved a failure.

Rigdon and Young fled to Missouri, where a colony had been founded in 1831, but opposition arose here and in the winter of 1839 twelve thousand people were driven from the State of Missouri and took refuge in Illinois. The town of Commerce Ill. was bought and the name changed to Nauvoo (1840) and a charter obtained. Smith was mayor of the town and Mormons controlled the city council. The religious propaganda brought large numbers to the town, one thousand, six hundred and fourteen persons coming from England in 1842. The organization of the church aroused anxiety and widespread antagonism among those who knew its strength. "revelation" on "celestial marriage" is said to have been received by Smith at this time, though it was not published until 1852. In 1843 the Nauvoo Expositor, started by ex- Mormons for the purpose of exposing Mormonism and its founder, issued one number, after which its offices and equipment were destroyed by order of the city council. This act brought opposition to a head. Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were arrested and were shot by a mob while in jail at Carthage, Ill., June 27, 1844.

Referring to the expulsion of the Mormons from the State of Missouri by force in 1839. Preliminary steps had been taken by the people as early as 1838, when a petition, numerously Signed, was sent from Livingston and other counties to the governor asking him to expel the Mormons from the state. The petition from Livingston, Daviess and Caldwell counties was borne to His Excellency by one, Adam Black. The proclamation of the governor followed the presentation of the petitions quickly and the

organization of militia companies went forward rapidly. Livingston County raised two hundred men in a few days; these were joined by even greater numbers from Caldwell, Daviess, Ray and adjacent counties. The militia first encountered the Mormons at Haun's mill, situated on the north bank of Shoal creek in the eastern part of Caldwell County.

News that the militia of the state had been ordered to expel them had reached the Mormons, and following these tidings word was brought that a Considerable number of men living in Livingston county, together with some from Daviess had organized near Spring Hill, in Livingston county, and where preparing to attack them. A company of about thirty men indifferently armed with shot guns and squirrel rifles, was organized, and David Evans, a Danite, was chosen captain It was determined to defend the place. Learning that the force organizing against them numbered some hundreds, some of the older men among the Mormons urged that no resistance should be made but that all should retreat to the far West. It seems that the prophet had advised this, but nevertheless had given them permission to remain if they thought they could protect themselves.

North of Haun's mill, a short distance, was a body of timber and brush, and north of this, towards where Breckinridge now stands was a stretch of prairie for miles. For a day or two Capt. Evans kept a picket post in the northern edge of the timber, but having entered into a truce with Capt. Nehemiah Comstock, commanding one of the Livingston county companies, and no other enemy appearing, this post was withdrawn.

This truce was effected by means of a messenger, who rode between Comstock and Evans, and his terms were that the Gentiles were to let the Mormons alone as long as they were peaceable. The Mormons agreed also to disband their military organization if the Gentiles would disband theirs, and this it is claimed was agreed to. But the Mormons heard that over in Livingston, directly east of them, another company of Gentiles, under Capt. Wm. Mann, was menacing them; and so they did not disband, for while they confided in Capt. Comstock's company, they had no confidence in Mann's. Which for some time had been operating at and near Whitney's mill on Shoal creek, where Dawn now is, stopping Mormons on their way to Caldwell from the east, turning them back in some instances, taking their arms from them.

The Gentile force in Livingston county numbered about two hundred men and was under the command of Col. Wm. O. Jennings, then the sheriff of this county. Three companies composed it, led by Capt. Nehemiah Comstock, Thos. R. Bryan and William Mann. It took the field in earnest about the 25th of October, and for a few days prior to the 30th was encamped about three miles northeast of Breckinridge, at least Comstock's company was. Perhaps Mann's was employed in the southern portion of the county until the 29th.

Learning that the Mormons at Haun's mill had not disbanded, and yielding to the almost universal desire of his men, who were eager to seize upon any pretext for a fight, Col. Jennings set out from his camp in the afternoon of the 30th of October, intending to attack and capture Haun's mill, and encamp there that night. The route lay via where Mooresville now stands and on across the prairie towards Breckinridge. The march was made swiftly and without interruption.

Suddenly from out of the timber north of the mill the Livingston militia burst upon the hamlet. In a few seconds the air was filled with wild shouts and shots, and the fight was on. It can scarcely be called a fight. The Mormons were thrown into confusion and many of them ran wildly and aimlessly about. The women and children cried and screamed in excitement and terror, and the greater number, directed by the men, ran across the mill dam to the south bank and sought shelter in the woods south of the creek. Perhaps half of the men, Evans among them, ran with their guns to the blacksmith shop and began to return the fire. Some were shot down in an effort to reach the shop or as they were trying to escape.

The fire of the Mormons was for the most part wild and ineffective; that of the militia was accurate and deadly. The cracks between the logs of the shop were so large that it was easy to shoot through them, and so thickly were the Mormons huddled together on the inside that nearly every bullet that entered the shop killed or wounded a man. Firing was kept up all the while on the fleeing fugitives, many of whom were shot down.

After the engagement was over, and all the able-bodied male Mormons had been killed, wounded or driven away, some of the militia men began to "loot" the houses and stables at the mill. A great deal of property was taken, much of it consisting of household articles and personal effects but just how much can not now be stated. The Mormons claim that there was a general

pillage and that in two or three instances the bodies of the slain were robbed. Some of the militia or their friends say only two or three wagons were taken, one to haul off three wounded, and sufficient bedding to make their ride comfortable; but on the other hand two of those who were in a position to know say that the Mormon hamlet was pretty thoroughly rifled. Colonel Jennings did not remain at Haun's mill, in all, more than two or three hours. Twilight approaching, he set out on his return to his former camp, for one reason fearing a rally of the Mormons with a large reinforcement, and doubtless desiring to reflect leisurely on his course of future operations. Reaching his camp near Woolseys, northeast of Breckinridge, Colonel Jennings halted his battalion and prepared to pass the night. But a few hours later he imagined he heard cannon and a great tumult in the direction of Haun's mill, betokening the presence of a large Mormon force, and rousing his men he broke camp, and moving rapidly eastward, never halted until he had put the west fork of Grand river between him and his imaginary pursuers.

The story of the fight at Haun's mill as related from a Mormon standpoint, is given in the following somewhat extended report by Joseph Young, a brother of Brigham:

On Tuesday, the 30th, that bloody tragedy was acted, the scenes of which I shall never forget. More than three-fourths of the day had passed in tranquillity, as smiling as the preceding one. I think there was no individual of our company that was apprised of the sudden and awful fate that hung over our heads like an overwhelming torrent, which was to change the prospect, the feelings and circumstances of about thirty families. The banks of Shoal creek on both sides teemed with children sporting and playing, while their mothers were engaged in domestic pursuits and their fathers employed in guarding the mills and other property, while others were engaged in gathering their crops for the winter consumption. The weather was very pleasant, the sun shone clear, all was tranquil and no one expressed any apprehension of the awful crisis that was near us even at our doors.

It was about four o'clock, while sitting in my cabin with my babe in my arms and my wife standing by my side, the door being open, I cast my eyes on the opposite bank of Shoal creek and saw a large company of armed men on horses, directing their course towards the mills with all possible speed. As they advanced through the scattering trees that stood on the edge of the

prairie they seemed to form themselves into a square position, forming a vanguard in front.

At this moment David Evans, seeing the superiority of their numbers (there being two hundred and forty of them according to their own account) swung his hat and cried for "peace." This not being heard, they continued to advance, and their leader, Mr. Nehemiah Comstock, fired a gun which was followed by a solemn pause of ten or twelve seconds when all at once, they discharged about one hundred rifles, aiming at a blacksmith's shop into which our friends had fled for safety; and charged up to the shop, the cracks of which between the logs were sufficiently large to enable them to aim directly at the bodies of those who had fled there for refuge from the fire of their murderers. There were several families tented in the rear of the shop, whose lives were exposed, and who, amidst a shower of bullets, fled to the woods in different directions.

After standing and gazing on this bloody scene for a few minutes, and finding myself in the uttermost danger, the bullets having reached the house where I was living, I committed my family to the protection of heaven, and leaving the house on the opposite side, I took a path which led up the hill, following in the trail of three of my brethren that had fled from the shop. While ascending the hill we were discovered by the mob, who immediately fired at us, and continued so to do till we reached the summit. In descending the hill, I secreted myself in a thicket of bushes, where I lay until eight o'clock in the evening, at which time I heard a female voice calling my name in an undertone, telling me that the mob was gone and there was no danger. I immediately left the thicket and went to the house of Benjamin Lewis, where I found my family (who had fled there) in safety, and two of my friends mortally wounded, one of whom died before morning. Here we passed the painful night in deep and awful reflections on the scenes of the preceding evening.

After daylight appeared some four or five men, with myself, who had escaped with our lives from the horrible massacre, repaired as soon as possible to the mills to learn the condition of our friends whose fate we had too truly anticipated. When we arrived at the house of Mr. Haun we found Mr. Merrick's body lying in the rear of the house. Mr. McBride's body which was found in the front was literally mangled from head to foot. We were informed by Miss Rebecca Judd who was an eye-witness, that he was shot with his own gun after he had given it up, and then cut to pieces with a corn

cutter by a Mr. Rogers, of Daviess county, who kept a ferry on Grand river, and who has since repeatedly boasted of this act of savage barbarity. Mr. York's body we found in the house, and after viewing these corpses we immediately went to the blacksmith's shop where we found nine of our friends, eight of whom were already dead, the other, Mr. Cox, of Indiana struggling in the agonies of death, who expired. We immediately prepared and carried them to the place of interment. This last office of kindness, due to the relics of departed friends, was not attended with the customary ceremonies or decency, for we were in jeopardy every moment expecting to be fired upon by the mob, who we supposed were lying in ambush waiting for the first opportunity to dispatch the remaining few who were providentially preserved from the slaughter of the preceding day. However, we accomplished without molestation this painful task. The place of burying was a vault in the ground, formerly intended for a well, into which we threw the bodies of our friends promiscuously. Among those slain I will mention Sardius Smith, son of Warren Smith, about twelve years old, who through fear, had crawled under the bellows in the shop, where he remained till the massacre was over, when he was discovered by Mr. Glaze. of Carroll County, who presented his rifle near the boy's head and literally blew off the upper part of it. Mr. Stanley, of Carroll, told me afterwards that Glaze boasted of this fiendlike murder and heroic deed all over the country.

The number killed and mortally wounded in this wanton slaughter was eighteen or nineteen, whose names, as far as I recollect, were as follows:

Miss Mary Stedwell, while fleeing was shot through the hand, and, fainting, fell over a log, into which they shot as many as twenty balls. To finish their work of destruction this band of murderers, composed of men from Daviess, Livingston, Ray, Carroll and Chariton counties, led by some principal men of that section of the upper country (among whom I am informed, were Mr. Ashley, of Chariton, member of the state legislature; Col. Jennings, of Livingston county; Thomas R. Bryan, clerk of Livingston county; Mr. Whitney, Dr. Randall and many others), proceeded to rob houses, wagons and tents of bedding and clothing, drove off horses and wagons, leaving widows and orphans destitute of the necessaries of life, and even stripped the clothing from the bodies of the slain. According to their own account, they fired seven rounds in this awful butchery, making upwards of one thousand, six hundred shots at a little company of men, about thirty in number. I hereby certify the above to be a true statement of facts, according to the best of my knowledge.

Sheriff Wm. O. Jennings who led the Livingston county and other militia volunteers in this Mormon war, was a man of indomitable courage. He was one of the best known citizens in the county and the first sheriff, an office he held for a long term but on the evening of January 30th, 1862, Col. Jennings was struck down by the assassin's bullet as he was returning to his home on Calhoun street in Chillicothe. At the time of his death Col. Jennings had passed his three score years.

In the Haun's mill fight seventeen Mormons were killed or died from mortal wounds, while twelve were more or less seriously wounded including two boys aged nine and ten years. A young Mormon woman, Mary Stedwell, was also shot through the hand while attempting to escape from the fire of the contending forces.

Several days after this encounter Col. Jennings moved his men in the direction of the far West. When he had reached the northern part of Caldwell County he received information that the Mormons had surrendered. He then returned with his command to Haun's mill, where he remained in camp a fortnight or longer, caring for the widows and orphans of those slain in the battle and keeping watch that no further outbreak should occur. Here the militiamen remained until peace was restored.

The above account was taken from the book "Past and Present of Livingston County Missouri" by MAJOR A. J. ROOF