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A LETTER FROM STEPHEN S. HARDING
TO WILLIAM H. SEWARD

By MRS. ETTA REEVES FRENCH

Foreword

Since Mormonism is celebrating its hundredth anniversary this year, it would seem an appropriate time to introduce to

the readers of the *Indiana Magazine of History*, a Hoosier, Stephen S. Harding, who served as Territorial Governor of Utah and who was offered earlier the first foreign stewardship of the Mormon Church by Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet. Although acquainted with Mormonism from its inception, Harding was never, at any time, in sympathy with its tenets or its leaders.

Stephen S. Harding was one of thirteen children who accompanied their parents, David and Abigail Harding, from New York westward to Indiana in 1820. Coming into an undeveloped country at the impressionable age of twelve, young Stephen early learned to shift for himself. He began teaching school in his home community in Ripley County, Indiana, at the age of sixteen, although he had received but nine months' formal school training himself. The first public address given by the young schoolmaster, who later was to become one of the outstanding orators in the abolition cause in Indiana, was delivered at a local Independence Day celebration in his seventeenth year. Eager to learn in order to advance himself, Harding studied law, being admitted to the bar of Indiana at the age of twenty in March, 1828.

In the fall of that year, Harding went to New Orleans by steamboat. It was upon this trip to Louisiana that Harding met slavery at its worst in the slave markets of New Orleans. Needless to say, the young Hoosier was shocked at the horrors of the slave traffic.

It is an interesting coincidence that Harding and Abraham Lincoln saw Louisiana and the slave markets of New Orleans for the first time in the same year, 1828. There is no evidence, however, that Harding made the acquaintance of Lincoln on this trip. The impressions of slavery which Harding acquired during his brief sojourn in the South helped make of him an ardent anti-slavery man.

Unable to subdue the wanderlust of young manhood, Harding, shortly after his return from the South, left for an extensive trip to the East, during which he spent some time among relatives at his childhood home in Palmyra, New York. While in Palmyra, he met Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, in whose home he was a guest over night. There he heard read the first four chapters of the Book of Mormon which was at that very time in the process of being published in a Palmyra

printing shop. Smith tried to prevail upon Harding to remain in Palmyra until the Book of Mormon was completed after which Harding was to go to London as a missionary for the newly created Mormon Church.

This opportunity to serve the Mormon church as a missionary which came to him in 1830, Harding very promptly rejected. It is interesting that thirty-two years later, in 1862, he should have been sent to Utah as Governor of Utah Territory. He was appointed by President Lincoln and the appointment was confirmed, without a dissenting vote, by the Senate on March 31, 1862.

Harding arrived in Salt Lake City in July, and immediately assumed his duties as Governor of the Territory. His administration was marked by sharp conflicts with Brigham Young, head of the Mormon Church and formerly Territorial Governor. Harding resigned his office in the fall of 1863, and returned to Indiana upon finding himself unable to enforce Federal law, carry out the Government's instructions, or work in harmony with Young. He shortly afterward accepted the chief-justiceship of the Territory of Colorado. After serving for about a year in this office, he returned to Indiana where he practiced law until he was stricken with blindness in 1881.

Harding's home is maintained today as a memorial to him by his grand-daughter, Mrs. P. A. Row of Osgood, Indiana, an enthusiast in the field of pioneer history. The home, situated at Milan, Indiana, is furnished as nearly as possible as it was in Harding's day and is visited each year by many who are interested in Indiana's historical landmarks.

[THE LETTER]

Executive Department Utah Territory,

Great Salt Lake City, February 3, 1863.

Sir:

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of yours of 9th inst. in answer to mine of the 15th ult. While it would have been a matter of great personal convenience to me if the desired leave of absence could have been granted, yet I am constrained to believe that the President is right in his conclusion. There have occurred many things here since the date of my letter which lead me to believe that the time has now come when every Federal officer here should be at his post and ready to cooperate in the maintenance of law and order.

I do not desire to create any unnecessary alarm, but still I deem it my duty to say to the President, that Political matters in Utah are far from being quiet. There is that peculiar element of disloyalty and religious fanaticism, which would at the first opportunity develop itself, and especially if it was believed that the Federal Government was powerless to inflict punishment.

No individual outside of this Territory, can form a true opinion the state of society here. If it could be generally known how a blasphemous pretender and imposter has wrought, by a cunning almost supernatural, on the superstitions of an ignorant, credulous, and dependent people (when the talent for mischief might readily be granted) yet the indignation would be universal.

Brigham Young has been able so to work upon his followers as to make them believe that the only rightful authority to govern is vested in his hands by the special gift of the Holy Ghost. That all other governments are mere usurpations,—that while the Constitution of the United States was given by inspiration, yet in as much as the people refused to acknowledge Joseph Smith as the true prophet of God, the nation was to be destroyed on the same principle that the Jews, as a people, and Jerusalem as the center of their power, were to be scattered and destroyed, as a punishment for their rejection and crucifixion of the Savior.

Wonderful, Sir, as these insane ravings may appear to you, and harmless from their very extravagance, yet they are not to be underrated. Every trick, ever known to the most adroit jugler and pretender, is known and exercised by him, to deceive and mislead his deluded followers. He dreams dreams, and sends for his wise men, pretended astrologers, to interpret them. He claims that he is in daily communication with God, and has revelations which the people are not yet good and faithful enough to hear,—and goodness with him consists only in strict obedience to his commands in all things, temporal and spiritual.

There can be no mistaking his ultimate object. He is aiming, if not at universal Empire on this Continent, at least in this Territory. History teaches us the dangers to be apprehended from such characters; and although we may conclude that such insanity can accomplish little, yet its dangerous tendencies are manifest.

Brigham Young today wields a revenue by no means insignificant. The salary of the President of the United States is small in comparison to that he controls under the innocent and unpretentious term of "tithings". He is procuring arms and heavy ordnance, how, and where from I am not able exactly to say. Yet, the fact remains he is at this time secretly manufacturing shells and solid shot, cartridges, and a new weapon, partly a battle ax and partly a lance, for what purpose may be readily imagined. I have been able through *secret service* to learn that his arsenal is full of new and efficient small arms equal in appearance at least to those used by the Government in her armies. Although all is kept smooth on the surface, yet it is well known that drill sergeants are daily employed to teach small squads of men the manual exercises and military tactics. If these things were done "not in a corner" it would

remove much of the suspicion that now rests upon these movements.

That this man intends to strike if the opportunity shall present itself favorably is certain. As I informed the President in a previous communication, never, since I came here, have I heard one word of loyalty towards the government of the United States, and to find a *traitor at heart* you have, with fewest exceptions, *only to find a Mormon*.

That there is a growing disposition on the part of the masses to throw off their chains I think I may safely assert. But they are distrustful, timid, and fearful that after all, they will be abandoned by the Federal troops, to feel the power of the Priesthood, when there will be no hope for protection. It would seem unwise and unjust to attempt to prosecute the poor deluded victim of this strange and fatal delusion for violators of law, when the head and front of the offenders is suffered to go with impunity.

There is no doubt but that Brigham Young is almost every week adding to his harem the unprotected and demented victims of his villany. He admits that he has his quarters full, and that his wives' names are scarcely remembered by him, which are scattered throughout the settlements, yet when he sees a pretty face, some young girl just blooming into womanhood, he informs her, or generally her parents, that in order to make her salvation sure in this, and the world to come, he feels it to be his duty to have her *sealed unto him*. This sealing is not the forerunner of a mere Platonic relationship but generally develops itself in a young heir of the "*Lion of the House of Jacob*."

My Dear Sir, this is not a fiction; this is only an imperfect picture of the condition of things here on American soil, and in the midst of the nineteenth century.

The question remains to be answered, is there any remedy for these violations of law? Is the Federal Government to be defied with impunity? If these violations of law are not to be noticed, then it was unfortunate for me that the act against Polygamy was passed by Congress. My oath compels me to see that the laws are faithfully administered. How can this be if the government is powerless, or refuses to furnish the means whereby this duty can be performed?

I hope that you will forgive me for the seeming egotism, which I may indulge in, when I assure you that for a time every art and appliance was made use of to win me over to the interest and schemes of this man. If he could have been convinced that I could be *used* for the promotion of his personal ambition he would *seemingly* at least have been my friend, and his followers taught to pay marked homage to me, but when he discovered that this was impossible, he commenced his work of slander and defamation, and through his supple ministers and tools sent to every settlement in the Territory reports the most false and scandalous, for no other purpose than to make my stay here so unpleasant that I would voluntarily resign my office and leave for the States. But in this he has not succeeded so well as he expected. And he has found out that, between us two, his chances for leaving are quite as good as mine.

Yet I am certain that if it was not for the presence of Col. Con-

ner's command it would be unsafe, if not impossible, for me to remain if it was believed that I would not at last yield from the force of surrounding circumstances, and consent, in the language here, "to receive my salary and let Brigham Young play Governor". I trust that it is not necessary for me to assure the President that "I shall never consent to eat that sort of bread."

I desire to call your attention to some facts which transpired at the late session of the Territorial Legislature. On the 10th of December I delivered my first message. I wish that it were in my power to enclose you a copy of the same in print but cannot for the reasons which will appear. Immediately after the delivery of the message one thousand copies were ordered printed. The Secretary of the Council, Mr. Ferguson, came into the room of Judge Kinney where I happened to be in company with several of the Federal officers who heard what I now state from Mr. Ferguson. He informed me of the action of the Legislature in the matter of printing the message, and said that he was instructed to deliver that document with accompanying papers to the printer. He started off toward the printing office, and did actually deliver the document. But from that day to the present my message, at least the copy in his possession, has never been heard from. The public printer denies that the message was ever received at the office, and to cap the climax, Ferguson himself denies that he ever delivered it! And this, too when a dozen persons saw him start from Judge Kinney's room with the document in his hands, and heard what he said.

I can further show by my private secretary and Marshall Gibbs that they met Ferguson on the stairs coming out of the printing office, and that they saw the message lying on the desk of the editor of the *Deseret News*, who is the public printer in this Territory.

And still further, the foreman of the establishment informed the two witnesses at the same time that the governor's message had just been received, and that they would be busy until it was printed.

Now in this connection hear me further. I am reliably informed, and have not a doubt of its truth, that Brigham Young sent immediately and took possession of the message and ordered that it should be suppressed if not destroyed. But still there was some difficulty to be overcome, for it would appear from the *Journal* that the Legislature had ordered 1,000 copies printed. But this difficulty was not much for a Legislature under the absolute control of Brigham Young. The *Journal*, too, was suppressed, and neither in the *Journals* themselves, nor in the newspaper here, (and there is but one, and that is under the control of the same power) has it ever appeared that such a document had been delivered to the Legislative Assembly, or that the governor ever appeared before that body for such a purpose.

I had taken the precaution to keep a copy, and but for this the document would never have found its way to the light.

Members of the Legislature, as I have since been informed, laughed at the smartness of Brigham, and in their language said "he had got the governor" for there was only "one copy and that was safe". A copy of my message, however, was sent to California where it has been ex-

tensively printed and circulated. Also a copy was sent to the N. Y. Tribune where I see it was published in the daily of the 7th inst. I hope and trust that you and the President have already done me the honor of examining it for yourselves. The only reason why this extraordinary course was pursued by the leader of these people was to make it difficult, if not impossible, for the people themselves ever to examine the message. They discovered that there were facts stated and deductions drawn which must not come to the knowledge of the masses of their deluded following. And in answer to the inquiry as to why the message did not appear as usual, the stereotyped reply is always given that it was "so indecent and insulting to the people, that it was not fit to be seen."

While I confess that it is hard to bear up under these misrepresentations and have the people "believe a lie that they may be damned," yet I make the best of it, knowing that so transparent a puzzle cannot long save the guilty from the scorn which they deserve. Nevertheless these things show the animus of that Power here which commands the people in what ever it shall determine.

I hope that I may be pardoned if I ask your attention a moment longer. On the 14th day of January, two days before the adjournment of the Legislature, an act was sent me for my approval changing the County seal of Washington County, and stating the time for holding the District Court of the U. S. for the transaction of Territorial business on the 3d Monday in May.

I at once approved the act, and instead of sending it, as is customary, to the office of the Secretary, inadvertently sent it back to the Legislature. A day or so previous the judges of the U. S. for this Territory were assigned to their several districts and although it was well understood that Hon. Charles B. Waite, one of the associate justices had a wife and three children here, and of all the judges could the least afford to take the 2d District so far off, it being about 350 miles distant, yet the mere reason that he could be annoyed and put to this unnecessary hardship, and notwithstanding it had been previously arranged by him and Hon. T. J. Drake, the other associate justice, that the latter would take upon himself the said District, yet the Legislature wholly disregarded his wishes and the mutual understanding between the said judges and sent him to this isolated part of the Territory where there are no conveniences of travel to and from the same, or a place where his family can be made comfortable.

It should be borne in mind that Judge Drake is a single gentleman and could raise no such objections, and he had expected to go to this District.

The Legislature, discovering that the 3d Monday in May which was the time fixed in the act just passed for holding the Court for Territorial business was at a time when Judge Waite could attend to his term of Court for U. S. business and also give him time to come back and attend the Supreme Court in this city, passed another act, fixing the time of holding his Court the 3d Monday in October, making two terms of the Supreme Court, and so fixing the time that in no event

could Judge Waite attend to his duties, without making two trips instead of one of 350 miles each way, thereby imposing upon him a most unnecessary burden and hardship. No matter whether he removed his family from this City to the wild and savage County where he has been assigned, yet he must still make the two trips instead of one, as would be the case if the law stood as it then was.

I saw at once the injustice and malice which characterized the second act, which was presented for my approval. As a matter of course I did not, and would not, approve the act.

Now mark the sequel. As soon as it was understood that I would not approve the second act, the act which I had approved fixing the time of holding the Court on the 3d Monday in May (and which time met the wishes of the judge) was changed by the Legislature after my approval by erasing the word "May" and inserting the word "October", thereby accomplishing by forgery what they could not otherwise obtain. The act, so forged and altered, was immediately sent to the Secretary's office and there hurriedly recorded.

The next morning, it being the 16th and the last day of the Session, I went to the office of the Secretary and accidentally took up the Act and at once discovered the forgery. It was plain to be seen when examined closely. I arrester further mischief by ordering the record to be made to read as the act read when it was approved, and with my own hand I corrected the act, and noted on its margin the fact that such forgery had been detected, and the bill made to read as it did when I approved of the same.

I thought it my duty to call the attention of the Speaker to the fact of such forgery and asked him to institute such an inquiry into the matter as such an outrage demanded. I am informed that the only notice taken of my communication was to charge the governor with the forgery, when I can prove by Judge Waite himself and four other most respectable witnesses that the word "May" and not "October" was written in the body of the act at the time that I approved the same. And I still have in my possession the act which I would not approve fixing the time of holding the Court on the 3d Monday of October!

I have thought it best to ask your attention to these facts even at the risk of wearying your patience. I can form but one opinion in the premise; there is not a member of this Territorial Legislature that would hesitate to do, or to state, under his solemn oath, anything that he was commanded to do by Brigham Young. I make no exceptions. And in coming to this conclusion I am only expressing the opinions entertained by every Federal officer here, unless it may be one under the same malign influence.

If the President has any advice to offer in the passing I should be

most glad to receive it, and to act upon the suggestions which he may make.

I have the honor to remain.

Your obedient Servant,
Ste. S. Harding,
Gov.

Hon.

Wm. H. Seward
Secretary of State