



*"St. Louis Levee," by Thomas Easterly.
Missouri Historical Society, courtesy Millennial Press.*

“Don’t Go Aboard the *Saluda!*”: William Dunbar, LDS Emigrants, and Disaster on the Missouri

William G. Hartley

On Good Friday morning, 9 April 1852, a booming explosion shook the bluff-top city of Lexington, Missouri. Down the bluff, at 7:30 A.M., the aging sidewheeler *Saluda* nosed out from the city’s wharf into the Missouri River. Suddenly its boilers blew up, disintegrating two-thirds of the passenger-loaded vessel. Among those killed were twenty-eight Latter-day Saints, with at least that many wounded, some severely.¹ The *Saluda* explosion is considered one of the worst—possibly the worst—steamboat disasters on the Missouri River.² In LDS history, it is the only accident of consequence on the waters—oceans or rivers—that befell companies of European Saints emigrating between 1840 and 1868.³

About ten days before the catastrophe, William Dunbar, an LDS convert from Scotland, felt a strong prompting not to board the *Saluda* when it left St. Louis. He chose to ignore the warning. He made three attempts not to be on board but failed each time. Despite three chances to keep himself and his wife Helen and their two children off the ill-fated boat, they finally boarded her—way upriver at Lexington, the night before the *Saluda* explod-

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ed. Dunbar survived, badly injured, but he lost his family. Years later he wrote about his *Saluda* experience, emphasizing the high price he paid for not listening to the strong prompting he had received.⁴

Saints Needing Upriver Passage

Since 1848, St. Louis had served as the LDS Church's major transshipping point for converts heading for Kaneshville (now Council Bluffs), Iowa, to join wagon trains outfitting there to cross the plains to Utah.⁵ European Saints crossed the Atlantic on Church-chartered sailing ships to New Orleans and then reached St. Louis on Mississippi River steamboats. In addition, converts from the United States reached St. Louis either in their own wagons or, more often, on steamboats from the Ohio River.⁶

Normally, a Church emigration agent based in St. Louis helped the new arrivals and arranged passage for them up the Missouri River. However, in 1852, the agent had left, and no replacement would arrive until year's end. To help out, the Church sent Eli Kelsey and David J. Ross down from Kaneshville, who themselves would be heading for Utah Territory that year.⁷ Kelsey and Ross felt urgency to book steamboat passage for the arriving Saints. They found, however, that "because of the immense masses of drift ice in the river," boats were not going up the Missouri.⁸

While Elders Kelsey and Ross inquired at the St. Louis wharves to find a steamboat willing to head upriver, Francis T. Belt, captain and half-owner of the *Saluda*, felt mounting pressures to get his boat moving—a docked steamboat generated no income. When Kelsey and Ross said they needed boat space for about a hundred passengers, Captain Belt could not resist. Promise of profits made risks posed by river ice worth taking. When word spread that the Church agents had booked space on the *Saluda*, scores of Saints, their funds draining off daily to pay for unplanned lodging and food, signed up.



Eli Kelsey, agent who chartered the Saluda. Frank Esshom, Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah, 1913, courtesy Millennial Press.

Dunbar's Premonition

William Cameron Dunbar, born in Scotland in 1822 and baptized in December 1840, had been a stalwart Church worker for eleven years. He had served a mission in the British Isles from 1846 until his emigration aboard the *Kennebec* in early 1852. The *Kennebec's* roster lists William (age 29), wife Helen (age 29), and children Euphemia (age 4) and Franklin L. (10 months).⁹

Because William heard rumors the *Saluda* was "not one of the best boats on the river by any means," he and friend Duncan Campbell went with Elder Ross to examine the boat.¹⁰ William recalled that "on entering the hold a most horrible feeling came over us, and without knowing the cause of it, we had an impression that something awful was going to happen somehow or other." They looked at each other, looked away, and "when our eyes again met, we saw tears coursing their way down each others' cheeks!" Once off the boat, Dunbar said, "I remarked to brother Campbell that if I had not already given in my name to go with that steamer, I would not do so now; but under the circumstances we almost felt in duty bound to go, so as not to disappoint the officers of the boat, nor the Elders who had chartered her."¹¹ Church member Philip De La Mare "pleaded with him [Dunbar] not to go, but he characteristically said he had given his word to Eli B. Kelsey that he would do so, and he did."¹²



William Cameron Dunbar.
Church Archives, Church of Jesus
Christ of Latter-day Saints,
courtesy Millennial Press.

Dunbar's first chance not to be on the *Saluda* came two days later. He had purchased supplies from a local merchant who promised to deliver them to the *Saluda*. But, when departure morning came, the goods were not there. "Not wishing to go on board till my outfit had arrived," William said, "I lingered behind until finally the goods were sent down." He then hurried his wife, Helen, and his children to the docks. "When we got within a few blocks of where the *Saluda* lay, we heard her bell ringing, as a signal for starting." Hurrying with a child in his arms, William arrived just as *Saluda* crewmen threw off the gangway. "Looking back I saw my wife carrying our other child, hurrying on as fast as she could, but still some distance away." The

Saluda left without them—the Dunbars had literally missed the boat. “Although I did not understand it then,” Dunbar later observed, “I am perfectly satisfied now that some friendly unseen power was at work in my behalf, trying to prevent me from going on board with my family on that ill-fated steamer.”¹³

By contrast, Abraham O. Smoot, a Church agent arranging for items some of the European Saints would need while crossing the plains, felt similarly troubled.¹⁴ He advised against booking passage on the *Saluda*. He later recounted:

I had a very narrow escape on the occasion of the *Saluda* disaster. I had purchased the supplies for my company to make its overland journey with, except cattle, at St. Louis and had decided to go farther up the river to buy the stock, when Eli B. Kelsey came to me to consult me in regard to chartering the *Saluda* to convey an independent company of Saints up the river. I went with him to examine the boat, and on finding that it was an old hulk of a freight boat, fitted up with a single engine, I strongly advised him against having anything to do with it. He seemed to be influenced in making choice of it entirely by fact he could get it cheaper than a better one; but in my opinion it seemed folly, for in addition to the danger of accident, the length of time likely to be occupied in making the journey would more than counterbalance what might be saved in the charge of the transit. However, he decided to charter it, and then both he and the captain urged me strongly to take passage with them, offering to carry me free of cost if I would only go; but I could not feel satisfied to do so.¹⁵

The *Saluda*

The *Saluda*, 179 feet long, 26 wide, and “5 ½ feet depth of hold,” had two side paddles 20 feet in diameter with 10 feet buckets, powered by two high-pressure boilers, 30 feet in length, and two engines.¹⁶ Built in 1846, she had sunk in the fall of 1847. After being underwater for months, a salvager raised her and floated her to St. Louis for repairs. Refurbished, she still retained her same boilers.¹⁷ By contemporary riverboat standards, her six-year-old hull and older engines and boilers made her an old vessel. The average life for a Missouri riverboat was three to four years.¹⁸ Many steamboats became “packet boats,” which meant they made regularly scheduled runs up and down the river, and the *Saluda* was one such. Steamboats were either stern-wheelers or side-wheelers like the *Saluda*. Side-wheelers were faster and more maneuverable because one paddle could go in reverse while the other went forward, thereby quickly turning the vessel.

Officers and Crew

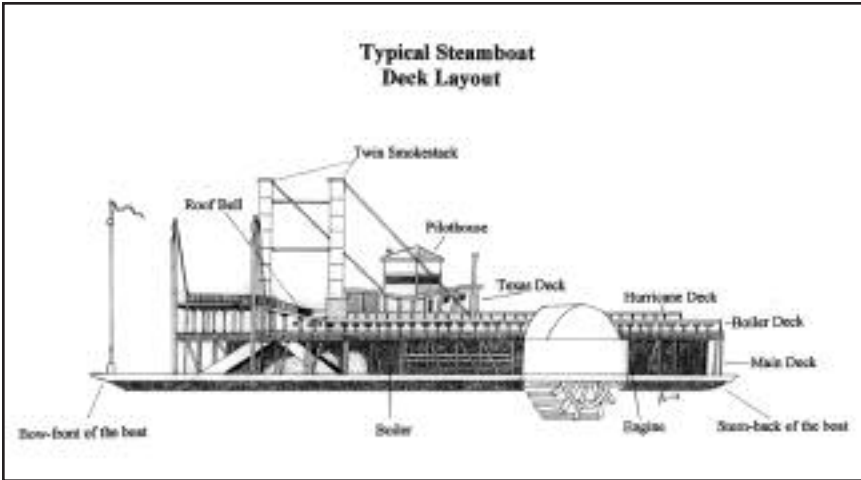
When the *Saluda* left St. Louis, she carried ten officers, a crew of about

a dozen, and between 200 and 230 passengers. Francis Belt was the captain, Charles La Barge and Louis Guerette the first and second pilots, and Josiah Clancey and John Evans the engineers.¹⁹ Captain Belt, age thirty-five, was part owner and master of the *Saluda*. He had spent his adult life on the river and was considered an "experienced boatman" who was "well known on the rivers as an able commander, and was endeared to all who knew him for his kindness and generosity."²⁰ Like Captain Belt, both of the *Saluda's* pilots were men with good river expertise. First pilot Charles La Barge grew up in the St. Louis area and had a brother, Joseph La Barge Jr., who was a well-known steamboat captain on the Missouri River.²¹ Charles gained his initial training as a pilot from this brother. The second pilot on the *Saluda* was Louis Guerette, a brother of Charles La Barge's wife.²² Pilots, it was said, were the kings of the river and were entitled to a substantial wage for their skilled services:²³ First clerk, Captain F. C. Brockman, was the boat's agent responsible for its passenger lists, ticket sales, accounting, and money. He and Peter Conrad, who was half-owner of the *Saluda* (with Captain Belt) and who kept bar during this voyage, were the only two officers who would survive the explosion.

Passengers

On river steamers, people traveled either as cabin or deck passengers. A steamer with capacity for eighty cabin passengers might carry three hundred deck passengers. Cabin passengers enjoyed the upper deck, private rooms, maid service, meals, and access to the stateroom. Those buying deck passage, half the cost of cabins, basically bought transportation and little else. They brought their own bedding, brought their meals or paid for them on board, and shared deck space with freight. "They huddled amongst filth and noise," a riverboat historian noted, "with no privacy and only minimal shelter from the elements." On some boats, deck passengers had to help load wood on board for the boiler fires.²⁴ Thomas Wrigley, who presided over the St. Louis Saints, told the *Missouri Daily Republican* that the *Saluda* started out with "a large crowd of cabin passengers," including "some outward bound Californians." In addition to the cabin travelers, the "principal portion of her deck passengers were Mormons."²⁵

A partial list of *Saluda* cabin passengers survives,²⁶ but no lists survive for the deck passengers; so it is difficult to know exactly how many were on board when the *Saluda* left St. Louis. Abraham O. Smoot, who witnessed the *Saluda* explosion, five days afterward wrote that about 115 Mormons had gone aboard in St. Louis and that about 175 total passengers were aboard at the time of the explosion.²⁷ John S. Higbee, president of the Saints on the *Kennebec*, who helped shepherd Saints up the Mississippi, stayed a few days



*Typical Steamboat Deck Layout, drawn by Kiki Melver.
Courtesy Explosion of the Steamboat "Saluda," Millennial Press.*

in St. Louis to purchase cattle for wagon trains near Kanessville. He noted on 30 March that "about 100" Mormons went on the *Saluda*.²⁸ It is safe to say that between 100 and 115 Saints boarded in St. Louis. However, about a dozen of them disembarked part way to Lexington to buy cattle.²⁹

Latter-day Saint Passengers

On March 13, the ship *Kennebec* had brought about 330 Saints to New Orleans, many of whom left the next morning for St. Louis on the steamer *Pride of the West*, arriving on 26 March.³⁰ Some of those stopped in the St. Louis area to work. Others needed more time in the city to take care of personal matters or for health reasons and then went upriver a few days after the *Saluda*. Among the *Kennebec* passengers who boarded the *Saluda* were the Dunbars. Another was young Englishman Henry Ballard, a shepherd who brought two sheepdogs with him. He was traveling with and assisting shepherd George May with his wife Mary and their seven children.³¹ Another Englishman from the *Kennebec* was John Sargent.³² A widower, he longed to reach Zion where he, a masonry contractor, hoped to help build the Salt Lake Temple. He had sold his business and home, paid in advance for two wagons and four ox teams for crossing the plains, and hired a housekeeper to help him move his four children west. Around his waist he wore a belt in which he had hidden one-tenth of his money, which would be his temple donation. During his immigration, he was assisted by a domestic named Matilda Wiseman, to whom he was apparently engaged.³³

In the group also were two sisters from Cambridge, Lois and Mary Ann Bailey.³⁴ Also on board were Jonathan Moreton, a fifty-two-year-old widower, and his brother Job Moreton and wife Ally Brown Bromwich, both in their fifties. Traveling with them was a twenty-eight-year-old widow, Emma Boys Randall.³⁵ Possibly a family headed by Selina Roberts was aboard, who had crossed the Atlantic on the *Kennebec*.³⁶

Several European converts who had arrived in St. Louis in prior years also became *Saluda* deck passengers. Among them was Alexander Gillespie who, with his wife Agnes and his brother John, had arrived in America in 1849 from Scotland. Another LDS Scottish family, likewise 1849 immigrants, were Duncan Campbell and his wife Jane, both twenty-eight, and sons Neile, about five, and James, three.³⁷ William and Rachel Evans Rowland, also 1849 immigrants, from Wales, had taken up residence in Kanesville. They and four of their children had visited with William's brother, apparently in Lexington, Kentucky, and boarded the *Saluda* to return to Kanesville.³⁸

In the company, too, were LDS converts from the United States. These included Adolphia and Rhoda Jared Young and their family. The Youngs had lived in Nauvoo and then headed west, but they had to return to their home in Tennessee to settle property problems. Finally, in 1852, they set out once again to join wagon trains heading to Utah.³⁹ The John Tillery Mitchell family, from Georgia, also went aboard.⁴⁰

As noted above, nearly half the passengers were not Latter-day Saints. Some were heading to the gold fields. Others had tickets to various ports upriver. Of the thirty-seven names listed in the *Saluda*'s partial registry of cabin passengers, fourteen were going to Independence, one to Liberty, three to Kansas City, five to Weston, six to St. Joseph, one to Iowa Point, and seven to Kanesville/Council Bluffs. At least two of those going to Kanesville were Latter-day Saints.⁴¹

Dangers Facing Steamboats

The "Big Muddy," named such for its churning currents that muddied its waters, is America's longest river and its most difficult to harness.⁴² To make that point, historian Rudolph J. Gerber half-jested that "of all the variable things in creation, the most uncertain of all are the actions of a jury, the state of a woman's mind, and the condition of the Missouri River."⁴³ No matter the craft, elaborate or Spartan, dangers were ever present on that river. The worst were snags, or submerged tree trunks or branches. Snags sank many steamboats, sending valuable cargoes into the deep and drowning hundreds of passengers and crews. One official count says that between 1819 and



*Missouri River Steamboat Route, 1850s, drawn by Kiki Melver.
Courtesy Explosion of the Steamboat "Saluda," Millennial Press.*

1897, 289 steamboats sank in the Missouri. Of those, 204 had run aground or collided with snags or rocks. Other estimates say as many as four hundred steamboats went down during those years.⁴⁴

Boats could become stranded in low water, be pounded or stopped by ice jams, collide with other boats or floating debris, catch fire, and—most frightening of all—have their boilers explode.⁴⁵ “By far the deadliest risk in steamboating was the boiler explosion,” steamboat historian Michael Gillespie observed.

In the early and middle nineteenth century, America’s major rivers served as her interstate highways—until railroad tracks replaced them. Unlike roads and steel rails, rivers were already free and already built. Men

of enterprise used rivers to make money by moving freight and passengers. During the decade of the 1850s—the “golden era” of steamboating—many steamboat owners amassed fortunes. For them, potential high profits outweighed risks of the river.⁴⁶

The *Saluda*'s Slow Upriver Passage

On 30 March 1852, the *Missouri Republican* published a list of “Steamboats Advertised to Leave This Day.” Last on its list was the *Saluda*, to leave at noon, for Kaneshville (Council Bluffs). St. Louis Conference President Higbee gave the departure date as 30 March.⁴⁷ From St. Louis, the *Saluda*'s side paddles propelled her up the Mississippi River twenty miles, where the boat turned west into the mouth of the Missouri River and began a difficult ascent up the curving, high-flowing, mud-yellowish river, amid floating ice.

Printed on the back of some passenger tickets for Missouri steamers was a list of a score of port cities and towns between St. Louis and Council Bluffs (Kaneshville) and their distances from St. Louis. The route included St. Charles (45 miles), Jefferson City (174), Brunswick (292), Lexington (372), Liberty (427), Kansas (City) (457), Weston (504), St Joseph (566), and Kaneshville/Council Bluffs (783).⁴⁸ The trip to Kaneshville normally required ten days, depending on river conditions and the steamboat's performance.

At Brunswick, sixty miles down river from Lexington, Elder Kelsey, George May and son James, and about ten others disembarked to buy cattle and herd them overland to Kaneshville. Possibly other *Saluda* passengers left the boat there or at other stops the *Saluda* made as she moved upriver.⁴⁹

Docking at Lexington

On 4 April, a Sunday, the *Saluda* reached Lexington, 370 miles from St. Louis, but she lacked sufficient power to push around the Lexington Bend, a hazardous, left-bending horseshoe. “Whipping around the point of this bend,” one historian noted, “the current created a treacherous ‘cross-over’ from the north bank to the south bank along the Lexington bluff. This was the Lexington Bend, a well known hazard to river men of the day.”⁵⁰ Captain Belt jockeyed the *Saluda* from bank to bank, probing the current and dodging ice chunks. Finally, defeated, he maneuvered the *Saluda* to the north shore, opposite Lexington. The next day he moved her across the river, but not before ice chunks broke parts of the paddle wheels. She moored at the Lexington's upper landing for repairs, remaining there Wednesday and Thursday, 7 and 8 April. An unspecified number of passengers, already behind schedule and being close to their destinations at Independence,



*“Bird’s Eye View of the City of Lexington,” 1869, Henry Beville. The Lexington Bend is just beyond the right edge of the picture.
Library of Congress, courtesy Millennial Press.*

Liberty, or Kansas City, disembarked at Lexington. Lexington then was Missouri’s third largest city, with 1,679 residents, St. Louis being the largest with 34,410 and Hannibal second with 1,789.⁵¹

The Dunbars’ Second and Third Misses

Meanwhile, back in St. Louis, the Dunbars urgently wanted to catch up with and join their Scottish friends and other Saints on the *Saluda*. Two days after the *Saluda* left, they were able to board another, better steamboat.⁵² However, William Dunbar made the captain promise to transfer his family to the *Saluda* if, upriver, an opportunity opened. Because the *Saluda*’s passage had been slow, “we soon caught up with her,” William said, “but at that point where we did so, the river was so full of ice, and the boats so far apart” that no transfer could be made. The two steamboats passed and repassed each other several times but did not stop near each other. So, for a second time, the Dunbars were kept off the ill-fated *Saluda*.⁵³

Their boat successfully rounded the Lexington Bend and was close to St. Joseph, Missouri, when ice damage forced it to stop. Upset, the captain “cooly invited” the passengers off the vessel. They were “dumped off on the east side of the river,” Dunbar said. But he refused to leave the boat and, instead, “insisted that the captain should redeem his promise and put me and

my family on board the *Saluda*." Reluctantly, the captain consented—ending the Dunbars' third opportunity to avoid being on the *Saluda*. The captain drifted his damaged vessel down river, probably heading back to St. Louis for repairs, and stopped at Lexington near the docked *Saluda*. There the Dunbars transferred, finally—and unfortunately—to the *Saluda*, on the day before the disaster.⁵⁴

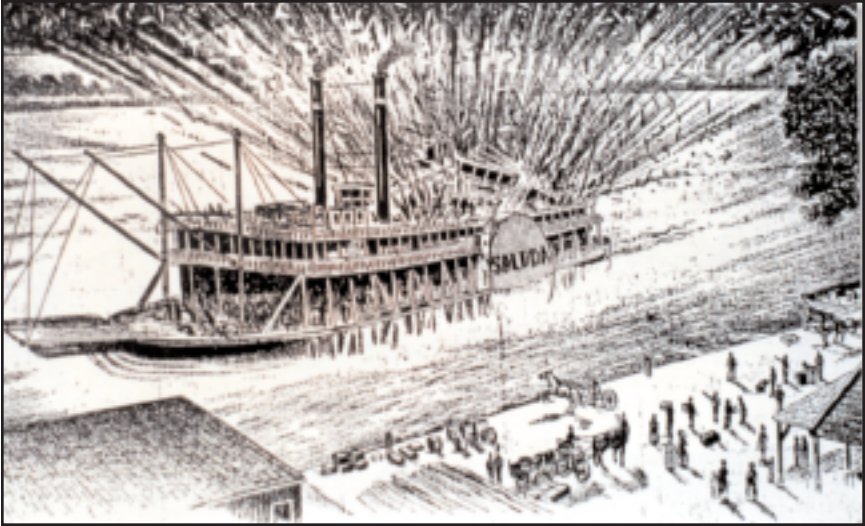
Once aboard, William said, "we found that her hold was already crowded with passengers," and the lower or boiler deck was crowded with passengers and huge piles of luggage and equipment. So, being new passengers, they "were given the privilege to sleep on the upper deck, in front of the cabin door." The Dunbars and others made their beds on the outdoor flooring, above the boilers. To protect deck passengers from the April winds and cold, crewmen put up heavy canvas tarpaulins, creating partial tents or protective curtains.⁵⁵

That Thursday evening, the steamer *Isabel*, coming from St. Louis, docked at Lexington. On board were Abraham O. Smoot, who had stayed off the *Saluda*, and other Saints heading for Kanesville. Captain William B. Miller tied up at the wharf two hundred yards or more down current from the *Saluda*, at the lower landing, which meant passengers aboard the *Isabel* were in a good eyewitness position for the explosion next morning.⁵⁶

The Explosion

Captain Belt, upset by the costly five-day delay at Lexington, and with the paddle wheels repaired and ice no longer running in the river,⁵⁷ announced he would try to push past the bend Friday morning. Knowing this, some Lexington residents went to town's edge atop the bluff to watch the boat's attempt to round the bend. That morning, Good Friday, William Dunbar "arose quite early" to prepare breakfast with his friends David Ross and Duncan Campbell. He told Helen, "who together with our two children was just in the act of getting out of bed, that I would be back for breakfast in a few minutes. This was the last I ever said to my wife and children while they were alive." After "hanging kettles on the stove to boil water," he said, he and Ross and Campbell "stepped outside of the space encircled by the tar canvass." The trio stood on the deck and watched eight or ten hands on the port-side rail below taking in the lines cast off by a man on shore.⁵⁸ Because George May and son James had disembarked at Brunswick, Henry Ballard had charge of helping the May family. He went ashore early and brought back some provisions for them. He sat down on a box and started to eat breakfast.⁵⁹ Harry Brown, from Ohio, had wife Rhoda and four children with him. Two daughters were still in bed. Harry was holding their youngster and

standing over the provision box, getting the lad something to eat. Many *Saluda* passengers were still asleep in their beds. Abraham Smoot, also up early, had gone ashore from the *Isabel*, visited the *Saluda*, and walked back toward the *Isabel*.⁶⁰



*Drawing of the explosion of Saluda by Buck Martin, 1964.
Kansas City Star, courtesy Millennial Press.*

Pilots Charles La Barge and Louis Guerette were in the pilot house at the wheel. Mate William Hemler and eight or ten of the hands, some of them blacks, were on the larboard afterguard starting to push the *Saluda* out into the river, using long poles. A Lexington butcher stood opposite the men with the poles, obeying the mate's order to untie the line holding the *Saluda* to the levee. Mr. Taubman, a miller, was standing on the wharf, having just been paid for flour sold to the *Saluda*. Captain Belt was conversing with Mr. Blackburn, the second clerk, between the chimneys on the hurricane roof. Captain Belt's hand was on the bell.⁶¹ He ordered his engineers to fill the boilers to maximum pressure. With lines cast off, the *Saluda* slipped bow first from the wharf. Captain Belt rang the boat's big black bell to signal full speed ahead. Folklore says he shouted to the *Isabel*'s captain: "I will round the point this morning or blow this boat to hell!"⁶² With maximum heat and full steam pressure, the boiler walls seared red hot. Before the paddle wheels had made three revolutions—about thirty feet from shore—the boilers blew up. Apparently, the engineers carelessly let the boilers get dry and red hot so that when the engine started and the pumps forced the cold water in, the boilers burst.⁶³

"The noise of the explosion resembled the sharp report of thunder, and the houses of the city were shaken as if by the heavings of an earthquake," witnesses said. Houses rattled and windows shook.⁶⁴ Watching from the bluff top, George W. Gaunt saw the pilot house, with pilots La Barge and Guette in it, blow higher than he was and then fall into the river and sink. Standing near the *Isabel*, Abraham Smoot witnessed the explosion and saw bodies and boat fragments shoot into the air. Parts of the two tall chimneys, the hurricane deck, cabin section, and boilers flew in every direction. One man on shore was killed instantly by a piece of flying timber. Part of a boiler crashed through a cottonwood log warehouse on the levee and demolished it. Iron and timber parts fell in showers as far as four hundred yards away.⁶⁵ The steamer's heavy, cast-iron bell, three feet in diameter, and the *Saluda*'s six-hundred-pound safe, with Captain Belt's yellow dog leashed to it, flew high up the side of the bluffs. The dog was killed, and the safe was blown open. Captain Belt, who had been perched on the *Saluda*'s hurricane roof, was blown halfway up a steep embankment and killed. Several people were rocketed into the middle of the frigid river. Others were shot "a considerable distance" up the bluff. Fortunately, Smoot noted later, most Mormons were on the deck and back toward the stern, where they fared better than those



*Fred Woods and the original Saluda bell, in front of the First Christian Church in Savannah, Missouri, 2001.
Photo by William G. Hartley.*

below deck or on the forepart of the boat.

Two-thirds of the *Saluda's* superstructure disappeared in a cloud of smoke, flame, splinters, and dust. All of the boat's structure above the boilers and forward of the paddle wheels had disintegrated, and the remainder—the ladies' quarters aft—became a shambles. The *Saluda's* ruins drifted downstream toward a levee. Ten minutes after the explosion, her bow rested on shore, her lower forward deck above water and the lower deck at the stern sunken several feet below the surface.⁶⁶

A man who reached the wharf five minutes after the explosion wrote a lengthy account of the disaster, published in the *Liberty Tribune* on 18 April. He found that “scores of human beings were blown into the river, and against the bluff and houses” and that “several of those who were thrown into the river were but little hurt, and with lusty sinews they buffeted the current and floating ice and swam ashore.” The *Saluda* lay at the wharf “a miserable wreck in the act of sinking.” He saw that “mangled remains of human beings were scattered over the wharf and on the bluff; and human blood . . . mingled with the water of the Missouri river.” Lying beneath the “mass of ruins” were “men, women and children; some of whom were yet alive. Their groans, and shrieks and sobs, and the plaintive wailing of helpless babes carried grief and desolation” to rescuers. He saw “one pretty child, some two years old . . . disinterred from the mass of ruins, unhurt. It stopped its plaintive cry and smiled when its mother hugged it to her breast.” He later learned that the woman had lost three of her four children. Rescuers pulled a three-year-old from the wreckage “very slightly injured,” who called for its mother, who was dead.⁶⁷

A few days later, the *Lexington Express* tried to recapture for readers what the scene was like immediately after the explosion: “Twenty-six mangled corpses collected together, and as many more with limbs broken, and torn off, and bodies badly scalded—wives and mother frantic at the loss of husbands and children—husbands and bereaved orphans engaged in searching among the dead and dying for wives and parents—are scenes which we can neither behold nor describe; yet, such a scene was presented to the citizens of Lexington.”⁶⁸

Three Dunbars Killed

William Dunbar said he “witnessed just two revolutions of the paddle wheels, when I remember nothing more till I found myself lying on the bank of the river within three yards of the water's edge, with my clothes drenching wet, and my head all covered with blood. I felt as if I was just waking up from a deep sleep.” He believed “that I was blown in to the river by the

explosion, and subsequently pulled out by some rescuing party, who then left me, thinking I was dead, but I have never been told by any one how it really happened."⁶⁹

After Dunbar regained consciousness, he saw on the ground nearby the mangled form of a child. "Recognizing its clothing I soon made the startling discovery that it was my own dear baby boy, whom I, a short time before, had seen in its mother's arms." Dunbar tried to get up and go over to where the dead child lay but was unable to do so. He "noticed a sharp pain in my back, as my spine had been severely hurt by being thrown so violently into the river." (He suffered from back pain for decades afterwards.) Two men carried him to a nearby warehouse or store, which became a makeshift hospital. "I arrived at this place just in time to see my wife, who was lying on the floor, breathe her last. She had been cast on shore by the explosion, and carried to the store in a dying condition." But what of his daughter, Euphemia? "My other child, a little girl about five years old, was lying in the same room, among the dead, her body so mangled that I could scarcely recognize her, and in fact so hard was it to identify her, that a lady survivor also claimed her as her child. I have on several occasions since reasoned on the possibility of my being mistaken in identifying the body as that of my child, and wondered if it could be possible that my little girl was among those who fell into the hands of the special committee appointed by the citizens of Lexington to take care of the orphan children."⁷⁰

Other LDS Passengers

Dunbar's two friends who were standing by him had been thrown into the air. Elder Ross landed in the middle of the river and drifted downstream where someone fished him out with a pole. He survived. Duncan Campbell was not so fortunate; his dead body was picked up quite a ways downstream.⁷¹ John Sargent

was killed, and one of his sons was never seen again. John's body was found on the riverbank, robbed of clothing, and his belt containing his temple money was missing. His fiancé, Matilda Wiseman, survived. While Jonathan Moreton and Emma Randall escaped uninjured, Job and Ally Moreton were



*Matilda Wiseman, whose fiancé John Sargent was killed in the explosion.
Photograph of Gene Hutchings,
courtesy Millennial Press.*

blown into the river and never found.⁷² Shepherd Henry Ballard was “thrown about two rods and knocked unconscious for nearly half an hour.” Despite head injuries, he struggled to the *Saluda* to look for his possessions. His two sheepdogs were gone. Duncan Campbell, his wife, and two children were killed. One son survived, Duncan Kelsey Campbell, and he was adopted by a Lexington family (see below). In the John Tillery Mitchell family, three of the four children died: Preston (age two), William (age four), and Joseph (age six). John, the father, lost his legs because of the accident and died shortly afterwards, probably in Council Bluffs.

William Rowland and one of his children were blown overboard and never seen again. His wife Rachel was in bed with two more of the children “when a piece of the deck fell on them and killed both children at once and broke Rachel’s leg in two places. She had a very narrow escape.”⁷³

Compassion for the Victims

Some survivors swam ashore. In small boats, rescuers from shore and from the *Isabel* searched the wreckage and patrolled the river. Local men found and moved the wounded and dying into makeshift hospitals. “Such shrieking and moaning I never heard before,” eyewitness Thomas Coleman said.⁷⁴ Dead bodies were retrieved and then covered. To aid the *Saluda* survivors, Captain Miller charitably offered free passage upriver on the *Isabel* for any wishing to go. Many accepted, and three hours after the fatal explosion, the *Isabel* headed upriver. *Isabel* passenger Abraham O. Smoot stayed behind at Lexington to aid the injured Saints.⁷⁵

Lexington responded to the tragedy with Christian charity. Unsure how to react, townspeople decided to create four committees to (1) care for the sick, (2) bury the dead, (3) raise money to aid the victims, and (4) find homes for the orphans. The city and its citizens donated \$1,000 to pay for burials, medical bills, and relief. Lexington women nursed the injured and laid out the dead. The city donated ground for a burial plot. Twenty-one bodies were buried in Christ Church parish cemetery. Townspeople gave some survivors money and clothes to help them on their way. For weeks in some cases, Lexington families cared for injured Saints.⁷⁶

Rescuers, but also looters, salvaged baggage and freight. Most of the baggage belonging to the emigrants was destroyed, but some of the merchandise on board, packed in tight barrels, and some iron ware were saved. James May, who had left the *Saluda* earlier, learned that “all the little we had was lost.” His sister Elizabeth “saw what was going on, that is, every lady was saving something and every[thing] they could lay hands on, and she did the same. Twenty saucers was as much as they lost, which was not much.”⁷⁷ Henry

Ballard lost "one box of clothing entirely and one box in the hold of the vessel amidst mud and water, which was taken out after, and got a few of the things, but mostly spoiled."⁷⁸ Scotchman John Gillespie lost his clothing and tools.⁷⁹ Adolphia and Rhoda Young lost "much property."⁸⁰ Most of the baggage belonging to the Saints was destroyed. A small parcel of books intended for the Utah Library were lost, but, fortunately, they were fully insured.⁸¹

Elder Kelsey, who had helped charter the *Saluda* for the Saints and then disembarked at Brunswick to buy and herd cattle to Kanessville, heard about the explosion while he was at Gallatin, in Daviess County, sixty miles north of Lexington. He rushed to the scene of disaster, arriving on Sunday, 11 April. He located and visited with the wounded, giving them aid and comfort, along with Elder Smoot.⁸² To express appreciation to those who treated the victims with kindness and humanity, Elders Kelsey, Smoot, Dunbar, and David J. Ross "united in a card of thanks to the citizens for their generous and noble conduct."⁸³

Casualty Count

Telegraph dispatches spread news about the disaster. It became page one news in Missouri and nationally. Many newspapers reprinted the excited articles published by the *Lexington Express*. Casualty counts compiled then, and since, vary greatly. Because many survivors left quickly on the *Isabel*, no complete accounting is possible. Elder Kelsey made the best list he could of the Saints who had been killed and wounded, but he reported that an exact tally was impossible because of the *Isabel's* departure.⁸⁴ On 14 April, Abraham O. Smoot, who had assisted the wounded, wrote to LDS Church President Brigham Young and reported that "the nearest Estimate that can be made of the entire loss of life is about 75 souls out of 175 passengers. The capt. & pretty much all the Crew was lost & her entire Cargo of freight"⁸⁵ Colonel Holmes of Sullivan, Wisconsin, a passenger on the *Saluda*, estimated that about a hundred were lost—three or four cabin passengers, twenty-eight on the boiler deck, and twenty to thirty on the main deck.⁸⁶ Based on these statements, the safest statement is that about ninety and a hundred were killed or lost, out of 175 people on board, including the officers and crew.⁸⁷

Among the approximately eighty Saints aboard (including the just-arrived Dunbars), twenty-five are known to have been killed and three missing and presumed dead:

Lois Locke Bailey
Mary Ann Bailey

Duncan Campbell, wife Jane, children James and Neile
 Helen Dunbar and children Euphemia and Franklin
 Emma (Mrs. Owen) Harry
 John Tillery Mitchell's children: Preston, Josephine, William
 William Rowland and four children: Rachel, David, William, Sarah
 John Sargent, and son Joseph (who was never found)
 Sister Whitaker (probably Joan Whitaker)
 George Whitehead, wife Catherine, children George and Isabel
 Mary Gledhill Whitehead (mother of George Whitehead)
 Job and Ally Moreton (bodies never found)

Several more were injured, some slightly, like William Dunbar and Henry Ballard, but others severely. The list of Saints severely wounded includes:

Ira Brown	Teeth knocked out, right leg broken (amputated later)
Owen Harry	"Dangerously wounded"
Agnes Gillespie	Face and neck badly scalded
Sarah McKeachie	Spine dangerously injured
John Tillery Mitchell	Left thigh amputated, died soon afterwards
Mary Rowland	Scalding burns on her shoulders, scarred for life
Rachel Evans Rowland	Leg broken
Louisa Sargent	Legs badly scalded
Isaac Bullock	Badly wounded

Lexington families adopted four children who were orphaned by the explosion. Two were from LDS families—Duncan Kelsey Campbell and Ellen Sargent.

Overland to Utah

In the three-decade history of the overland wagon trails, 1852 was by far the busiest emigration year. Gold-rush and Mormon traffic that year set records.⁸⁸ With the multitudes heading to the West that year, steamboat traffic up the Missouri River during the weeks after the *Saluda's* demise was extremely heavy, too. Spread because of such crowds, cholera stalked the river regions that year. In 1852, no less than ninety-nine Saints died of cholera in the Mormon wagon trains or encampments, several of the casualties being *Saluda* survivors.⁸⁹

Elder Eli Kelsey, three months after the *Saluda* disaster, led a wagon company west comprised of about a hundred passengers, including six of his family and fourteen *Saluda* passengers: Henry Ballard, Agnes and Alexander Gillespie, six members of the May family, Matilda Wiseman, Emma Randall, and three Sargent children (Louisa, Sarah Ann, and John).⁹⁰ In Utah, Kelsey, by 1870, had disaffected from Mormonism.⁹¹

Abraham O. Smoot, after tending to *Saluda* victims for a couple of weeks and buying livestock for the wagon companies, returned to St. Louis. From there he went upriver to Atchison, Kansas Territory. There, he became captain of a wagon train. Before the group could depart, cholera infested their camp, too. "There were over forty cases, and of these some fifteen proved fatal," he reported. Others "were healed instantaneously through the prayer of faith when the Elders laid their hands upon them." During the first part of the journey, Smoot himself caught the cholera, which prostrated him.



Henry Ballard lost two sheep dogs in the explosion. Frank Esshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah*, 1913, courtesy Millennial Press.

Through the faith and prayers of his company, he said, he recovered, albeit seventy-five pounds lighter.⁹²

Some *Saluda* survivors who contracted cholera were not so fortunate. By mid-June, the May family, which had some members on the *Saluda* and others going overland, reunited safely and joyfully at Council Bluffs about the middle of June. But their jubilee was short-lived. Before they could head out for Utah, cholera struck the family, killing the father, George, and the eldest and youngest daughters. Then, when the rest started for the Missouri River ferry, one of the sons died. Soon, the mother died, too. "Now there were 4 of us orphan children," reported James May, who went west in Eli Kelsey's wagon company.⁹³

Henry Ballard, the May family's friend, was engaged to the Mays' daughter Elizabeth. But she died of cholera during their journey west; so instead of marrying her, he had the sad task of burying her.⁹⁴ "I also took the same disease but through the blessings of the Lord it passed off with no very bad effect upon me," Henry said. He drove a flock of sheep to Utah, in connection with the Kelsey wagon train. He served as an LDS bishop in Logan, Utah, from 1861 to 1900. His son, Melvin J. Ballard, became an LDS Church Apostle, as did his great-grandson M. Russell Ballard.⁹⁵

Adolphia and Rhoda Byrne Young and their family stayed in Lexington for six weeks while their damaged belongings were repaired. After Adolphia bought oxen, cows, a wagon, and a tent, the family traveled from Lexington in comparative comfort to Council Bluffs. They joined Captain John Tidwell's company. Heading west, Adolphia died on 5 July, and his oldest son Sammie died three days later, both of cholera. The rest of the family arrived



Sarah Brown Woodruff, eighteen-year-old who was knocked unconscious by the explosion and who in 1853 became the wife of Apostle Wilford Woodruff. International Society Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, courtesy Millennial Press.

in Utah in mid-September.⁹⁶

The Harry and Rhoda Brown family survived the explosion, except for the severely injured father, Harry, who died three weeks later. The other Browns reached Council Bluffs and set out for Utah on 14 July. Son Ira's leg, badly broken in the explosion, became infected, forcing the family to stop at Fort Laramie, where his leg was amputated. Daughter Sarah continued on to Utah in the Henry Miller Company while the family waited a year for Ira to heal. In 1853, Sarah married LDS Church Apostle Wilford Woodruff. She became the mother of eight children, and Elder Woodruff became the Church's president in 1889.⁹⁷ Four Sargent children survived, as did their housekeeper, Matilda Wiseman. A kind family took in the other four children and offered to pay their ways back to England, but they did not want to

go. Ellen (age twelve) opted to stay with a family in Lexington and was adopted by them. Louisa (age ten), was badly scalded on her legs. She and her sister, Sarah Ann (age fifteen), and brother, John Jr. (age eighteen), headed for Utah in the Eli B. Kelsey company. One day while walking beside the wagon, Louisa's injured leg gave way, and she fell beneath the wagon. Before the driver could stop, the wheel was on her head. Her life was spared, but her jaw bone was so broken that she never again opened her mouth wider than half an inch. Louisa and Sarah Ann both married and settled in Weber County, Utah. John Jr. went on to California.

Agnes Cook Gillespie, who stayed in Lexington "a long time" to recover from being scalded, went with husband Alexander to Council Bluffs, joined the Kelsey Company, and reached Utah.⁹⁸ (Additional passenger experiences are included in Hartley and Woods, *Explosion of the Steamboat Saluda*.)

William Dunbar after the *Saluda*

And what of William Dunbar? At Lexington, his back injury mended enough for him to continue west that year. He served as the French Mission president in 1854–55.⁹⁹ He



William Cameron Dunbar lost his wife and two children in the explosion. Church Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, courtesy Millennial Press.

wrote in 1854 that "I feel the effects of my accident on the *Saluda*; I got my back hurt at that time, and now a very few miles walk tires me, and keeps me in continual suffering."¹⁰⁰ He remarried and fathered thirteen more children.¹⁰¹ He named one daughter Helen Euphemia, no doubt in honor of his wife and daughter lost on the *Saluda*. He was an active Church worker for the rest of his life. In 1870, he helped found the pro-Church *Salt Lake Herald* newspaper. On 4 January 1874, he gave a talk to young people in his Twentieth Ward, which was considered so outstanding that it was published in the *Journal of Discourses*.¹⁰² He died in 1905, and one of his obituaries said that he was well known in Salt Lake City for his talents as a singer, bagpipe player, and comedian and that he was "ever true to the faith he embraced as a young man."¹⁰³ Church President Joseph F. Smith spoke at his funeral, lauding

his constant uprightness. "He was on deck all the time," he said of Dunbar's steadfastness; "He was never overboard for a minute after embarking on the Gospel craft."¹⁰⁴

Steamboat Safety Reforms

Riverboat explosions in early 1852, including the *Saluda*, prompted the federal government to enact laws in August of 1852 to set new rules for operating and inspecting riverboats.¹⁰⁵ Because of the *Saluda* disaster and the cholera in 1852, the Church's emigration avoided the Missouri River the following year by outfitting in Keokuk, two hundred miles north of St. Louis.¹⁰⁶ Then, beginning in 1855, rather than sailing from Liverpool to New Orleans, LDS immigrants sailed to New York and other eastern cities. Leaders decided travel would be safer by railroad travel from East Coast ports to Iowa City or to Quincy, Illinois.¹⁰⁷

Assessing Blame

Captain Belt's infamous remarks about rounding the bend or blowing the boat to hell, supposedly made to Captain Miller of the *Isabel*, are so deeply imbedded in the *Saluda* story that blame for the disaster will forever wrap around him. Josiah Clancey, the second engineer, was blown ashore. He lived long enough to admit that he was the cause of the explosion—that he had no water in the boilers and consequently no steam but that he acted in obedience to Captain Belt's orders.¹⁰⁸ Another story claimed that Clancey "in a fit of pique at some severe remarks made by the Captain about not having stemmed the current . . . shut the water from the boilers, determined at all risks, to have a quantity of steam that would force the boat through."¹⁰⁹ Until better evidence materializes, Captain Belt and engineer Clancey bear shared blame for the explosion.

Because the *Saluda* disaster was the only steamboat catastrophe Mormons experienced in their four decades of transporting thousands of their people on America's rivers, the two leaders who chose that boat have been criticized for making that choice. Blame, however, is difficult to determine fairly. If Eli Kelsey had been in tune with the Holy Spirit, one argument goes, he would not have booked LDS passengers on the *Saluda*. In 1898, as President of the Church, Wilford Woodruff related how he felt prompted in 1850, when leading a company of emigrants, not to go aboard a particular steamer:

After spending two years and a half in New England and Canada, getting the Saints out, I started back with the last lot, about a hundred from Boston. We landed in Pittsburgh at dusk. We were anxious not to stay there, but to go on to St. Louis. I saw a steamer making steam ready to go out. I went to the captain and asked him how many passengers he had. "Three hundred and fifty." "Could you take another hundred?" "Yes." I was just about to tell him we wanted to go aboard when that Spirit said

to me, "Don't go aboard that steamer, you nor your company." All right said I. I had learned something of that still, small voice. I did not go aboard that steamer, but waited till the next morning. In thirty minutes after that steamer left, it took fire. It had ropes instead of wheel chains, and they could not go ashore. It was a dark night, and not a soul was saved.¹¹⁰

President Woodruff, who married *Saluda* survivor Sarah Brown in 1853, had his 1850 experience in mind when he assigned blame for the *Saluda* disaster in one of his most reflective diary entries: "In all the travels & Emigrations of the Saints for the last 40 years the preserving Care of our Heavenly Father has been over us & we as a people have been preserved. . . . The destruction of the *Saluda* is the only Case where the saints have met with disaster in their Emigration, and if Eli B. Kelsey who was the leader of the Company had had the spirit of God & his office upon him he never would have gone on board of that Boat or taken the Saints on board of it."¹¹¹

No matter who caused the explosion or who booked the Saints on the *Saluda*, what is clear is how fortunate it was that the *Saluda* blew up not out in the river somewhere but at Lexington, Missouri, a community of good people who were able to rescue, nurse, comfort, care for, and assist the victims.



Saluda Memorial Park in Lexington, Missouri.
Photo by Brant and Michelle Neer.

Saluda Memorials at Lexington

On 19 September 1991, descendants of Latter-day Saint John Sargent, who was killed in the *Saluda* accident, dedicated a monument in Lexington's Machpelah Cemetery to honor all who died on the *Saluda*. Blair P. Pack, a third-great-grandson of John Sargent, dedicated the monument. Then, in April 2002, as part of Lexington's commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the disaster, the city, LDS Church members, and the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation established a small memorial park, with plaques and a bell, similar to the *Saluda's* bell, in a wooden tower.¹¹²

Notes

1. Prior to William G. Hartley and Fred E. Woods, *Explosion of the Steamboat Saluda: A Story of Disaster and Compassion Involving Mormon Emigrants and the Town of Lexington, Missouri, in 1852* (Riverton, Utah: Millennial Press, 2002), the best histories of the disaster, both of them brief and using limited sources were Andrew Jenson, "Church Emigration," *The Contributor* 13, no. 9 (July 1892): 408-14, and Dan Spies, "The Story of the *Saluda*," unpublished paper from the University of Missouri Arts and Science Papers, 1908-65, no. 3406, University of Missouri at Columbia. Geri Berbert, "Disaster on the Missouri," *Ensign* 11, no. 9 (September 1981): 26-30, contains several factual errors, particularly regarding the casualty count, and fails to utilize rich source material about the *Saluda* found in Utah repositories. The figure of twenty-eight Saints killed is two higher than what we presented in *Explosion of the Steamboat Saluda* because subsequently I have found information about two more victims.

2. Lifetime river man Philip E. Chappell made that assessment in "A History of the Missouri River," paper delivered before the Kansas State Historical Society, 6 December 1904, published in *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society* 9 (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1905-6), 288, 310.

3. The shipwreck of the *Julia Ann* in the Pacific in 1855 is the only serious wreck involving an LDS company at sea. Sailing from Australia, the ship, pounded by a storm, crashed into a coral reef. LDS casualties included two women and three children. See John Devitry-Smith, "The Wreck of the *Julia Ann*," *BYU Studies* 29, no. 2 (spring 1989): 5-29. Also, in 1864, the steamer *Ada Hancock* exploded off of San Pedro, California, killing Elders Hiram Kimball and Thomas Atkinson, who were on their way to do missionary work in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). See Journal History of the Church, 1 May 1863, LDS Church Archives, Family and Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as Journal History).

4. Dunbar's personal account, which is used generously in this article, is in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 410-14.

5. Stanley B. Kimball, "The Saints and St. Louis, 1831-1857: An Oasis of Tolerance and Security," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 4 (summer 1973): 489-519.

6. An excellent study of LDS maritime history, including river steamboat travels, is Conway B. Sonne, *Saints on the Seas: A Maritime History of Mormon Migration, 1830-1890* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983).

7. Eli Brazee Kelsey was born 27 October 1819, in Portsmouth, Ohio. He was baptized on 18 June 1843. In Nauvoo, he was a school teacher, and he married polygamously. He

lost two children at Winter Quarters. A missionary to England, he helped publish the *Millennial Star* and presided over the Scottish Mission. In December 1850, he returned to America aboard the *James Pennell*. See Frank Elwood Esshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Utah Pioneer Book Publishing Company, 1913), 983.

David Ross converted to Mormonism in 1842, immigrated to America in 1846, farmed in the St. Joseph, Missouri, and Council Bluffs, Iowa, areas, and in 1851 carried out an assignment as a Church emigration agent to help people find transportation from St. Louis to Council Bluffs. In 1852, he came to St. Louis to assist once again, working with Eli Kelsey. See Dean L. McLeod, "James Ross: The Experiences of a Scottish Immigrant to America," *Family Heritage* 1, no. 6 (December 1978): 178–79, 182–83.

8. The statement about immense masses of drift ice is William Dunbar's, in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 411.

9. Passenger list for ship *Kennebec* on FamilySearch, *Mormon Immigration Index*, CD (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000).

10. Duncan Campbell immigrated on the *Zetland* in 1849. His family then included himself (b. 1824), wife Jane (b. 1824), and sons Neile (b. 1849) and James (b. 1849).

11. Dunbar account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 411.

12. Philip De La Mare's remarks at William Dunbar's funeral in *Journal History*, 11 June 1905, 4.

13. Dunbar account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 411.

14. Regarding Smoot's role in 1852 in assisting Perpetual Emigrating Fund passengers, see Frederick Hawkins Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (Liverpool: Franklin D. Richards, 1855), 30.

15. "Early Experiences of A. O. Smoot," in *Early Scenes in Church History: Eighth Book of the Faith-Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), 27. This same account by Smoot is included in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 413–14, and hereafter is cited from Jenson.

16. "The *Saluda*," *St. Louis Weekly Reveille* (St. Louis, Missouri), 8 June 1846, 884.

17. *The Missouri Statesman* (Columbia, Missouri), 25 February 1848; W. J. MacDonald, "The Missouri River and Its Victims: Third Article," *Missouri Historical Review* 21, no. 4 (July 1927): 593.

18. James Neal Primm, *Lion in the Valley*, St. Louis, Missouri (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1981), 163.

19. A list of the ten officers at the time of the explosion is included in the *Missouri Republican* (St. Louis, Missouri), 10 April 1852.

20. "Died," *Missouri Republican*, 12 April 1852, 2, obituary for Captain Belt.

21. Hiram Martin Chittenden, *History of the Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River: Life and Adventures of Joseph La Barge* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Ross & Haines, 1962), 13.

22. Chittenden, *History of the Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River*, 124.

23. The mariners' wages were gauged by the labor, risk, and earnings from the river business. "Captains received from \$250 to \$300 per month, clerks from \$125 to \$250, mates from \$100 to \$250, engineers about the same as mates. Of course these wages included board." Chappell points out that "it was the pilot . . . who divided the profits with the owner, and sometimes received the larger share. He was the autocrat of the boat and absolutely controlled her navigation." See Philip E. Chappell, *A History of the Missouri River* (Kansas City: Bryant & Douglas, 1911), 83.

24. Michael Gillespie, *Wild River, Wooden Boats: True Stories of Steamboating and the Missouri River* (Stoddard, Wisconsin: Heritage Press, 2000), 25–26

25. "Another Terrible Steamboat Explosion," *Missouri Republican*, 10 April 1852, 2.

Thomas Wrigley, born in England in 1816, was baptized a Latter-day Saint in 1842, after which he immigrated to Nauvoo. He was ordained a Seventy in 1849, and in 1851–1852 he presided over the St. Louis Conference. See Thomas Wrigley, “Autobiography,” in *Our Pioneer Heritage* 5 (1962), 494–98.

26. A list of cabin passengers was published in “The Explosion of the *Saluda*,” *Missouri Republican*, 17 April 1852, article reprinted from the *Lexington Express Extra* (Lexington, Missouri), 13 April 1852.

27. Abraham O. Smoot to Brigham Young, 14 April 1852, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Church Archives.

28. John Sommers Higbee, *Reminiscences and Diaries*, 30 March 1852, LDS Church Archives.

29. After reviewing contemporary records, Andrew Jenson accepted and used Abraham Smoot’s figures. See Jenson, “Church Emigration,” 414.

30. George Henry Abbot Harris, *Journals*, 1:71–72, LDS Church Archives.

31. Henry Ballard and the May family were from Berkshire, England. Ballard’s parents, William and Hannah Russell Ballard, sailed a month after the *Kennebec* on the *Ellen Maria* and reached New Orleans four days before the *Saluda* blew up. They went west that year—but not in the same wagon company as Henry, who was assisting the May family. See Douglas O. Crookston, *Henry Ballard: The Story of a Courageous Pioneer, 1832–1908* (n.p.: Douglas O. Crookston, 1994), which book quotes generously from Henry Ballard’s journal. See also Henry Ballard Journal, typescript, LDS Church Archives.

32. The *Kennebec*’s passenger list shows John Sargent, 37, builder; John Sargent 17; Sarah Ann Sargent 16; Ellen 12; Louisa 10; and Joseph 7 (pp. 9–10). See *Journal History*, 10 January 1852, 9–10.

33. Beth Hutchings Callister, “The Story of Matilda Wiseman Hutchings,” unpublished memoirs, copy in possession of Fred E. Woods, courtesy of Gene Hutchings.

34. On the *Kennebec*’s passenger list are Lois Locke Bailey, age 34, and Mary Ann Bailey, 31. *Journal History*, 10 January 1852, 10.

35. I received this new information, which is not in *Explosion of the Steamship Saluda*, in the summer of 2002 from Ed Cooper, a Moreton descendant living in Salt Lake City.

36. The *Kennebec*’s passenger list shows Selina Roberts, 32, William, 11, John, 8, Edward, 6, Ephraim, 4, and Joseph, 2. Apparently, four of the sons died because of the *Saluda* explosion, and one son, John, survived, but that information needs corroborating. Ruth M. White to William G. Hartley, 1 May 2002.

37. Passenger List, *Zetland*, 1849, *Mormon Immigration Index*.

38. “Mary Roland James Riddle,” in Chauncey Cazier and Bertha Allred Riddle, *Isaac Riddle and His Family* (Provo, Utah: Chauncey Riddle, 1990), 37–38.

39. Lettie Y. Swapp, “Biography of Rhoda Byrne Jared Young,” 1928, 5, typescript, copy in author’s possession.

40. John Tillery Mitchell was married to Rebecca Huff. They were living in Chickasaw, Mississippi, and had four small children when they converted to Mormonism. Hattie E. Walton Heninger, comp., *A Brief Historical and Genealogical Account of the Walton Family* (Salt Lake City: Hattie E. Walton, 1971), 56, copy in LDS Family History Library in Salt Lake City.

41. “The Explosion of the *Saluda*,” *Missouri Republican*, 17 April 1852, article reprinted from the *Lexington Express Extra*, 13 April 1852. The *Saluda*’s cabin passengers included a “Miss Whitaker” and a “Miss Randall,” who probably were Latter-day Saints. The ship *Kennebec* passenger list includes an Emma Randall, age 24, and a Joan Whittaker, also 24, both from London. See *Mormon Immigration Index*. Emma Randall went west in 1852 in the Eli Kelsey wagon train. A “Sister Whitaker” was killed in the *Saluda* explo-

sion. Cabin passenger Joseph Fabyan Carter, heading for Kanesville, was the older brother of Wilford Woodruff's wife, Phoebe Whittemore Carter. Apparently, he was not a Latter-day Saint. Ezra T. Benson letter from Kanesville, 20 April 1852, in *Journal History* entry for that date.

42. Gillespie notes that 1861 U.S. Army topographical engineers estimated the length of the Missouri River at 2,824 miles, which would make it the longest river in North America. Gillespie, *Wild River, Wooden Boats*, 37. Chappell puts the length of the river at 2,574 miles. Chappell, "A History of the Missouri River," 237.

43. Rudolph J. Gerber, "Old Woman River," *Missouri Historical Review* 55, no. 4 (July 1962): 328.

44. Gillespie, *Wild River, Wooden Boats*, 85. This appears to be a conservative estimate. Gerber asserts that between 1819–80, at least 450 steamboats worth a value of \$10 million sank in the Missouri River. Gerber, "Old Woman River," 339. Chappell points out that three-fourths of the steamboat wrecks on the Missouri in the nineteenth century took place between Kansas City and the mouth of the river; therefore, he refers to this segment of the Missouri as a "marine grave-yard." Chappell, *A History of the Missouri River*, 89.

45. For a detailed discussion of the causes of steamboat accidents, see Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economical and Technological History* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 271–304.

46. Chappell, *A History of the Missouri River*, 80.

47. Higbee, *Reminiscences and Diaries*, 30 March 1852.

48. Towns and distances as listed on the back of a passenger ticket for the steamboat *Sam Gaty*, photocopy in author's possession.

49. *Northern Missouri Republican*, 10 April 1852; James May Autobiography, LDS Church Archives, photocopy of holograph, 10.

50. Dan H. Spies, "The Story of the *Saluda*," 2.

51. Roger Slusher, "Lexington: A Brief History," typescript, excerpt in author's possession, 1; "Few recall 'Under the Hill,'" *Lexington Advertiser-News* (Lexington, Missouri), 7 July 1972.

52. The name of this steamboat is unknown.

53. Dunbar account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 411.

54. Dunbar account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 411.

55. Dunbar account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 411–12.

56. The *Liberty Weekly Tribune* (Liberty, Missouri), 16 April 1852, 1. The *Isabel* was built in St. Louis in 1850 and weighed 326 tons. She usually plied the route between St. Louis and New Orleans. See Frederick Way Jr. comp., *Way's Packet Directory 1848–1994* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), 226.

57. Jenson, "Church Emigration," 409.

58. Dunbar account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 412.

59. Ballard account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 413.

60. Smoot account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 414.

61. Robert O. and Linda S. Day, "The Steamboat *Saluda* Disaster: An Overview," April 1992, 3, typescript in author's possession.

62. Walter Williams, ed., *A History of Northwest Missouri*, 3 vols. (Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1915), 1:159. Famous steamboat captain Joseph LaBarge, whose brother was killed on the *Saluda*, wrote a *History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River* (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1903). In it he wrote that Captain Belt "declared with an oath that he would round the bend or blow the boat to pieces." Quoted in *Journal History*, 9 April 1852, 9.

63. Jenson, "Church Emigration," 409.
64. "Awful Calamity: Explosion of the Steamer Saluda—130 Lives Lost!" *Liberty Tribune*, 16 April 1852, 1.
65. "The Explosion of the Saluda," *Missouri Republican*, 17 April 1852, article reprinted from the *Lexington Express Extra*, 13 April 1852.
66. Jenson, "Church Emigration," 409.
67. "Awful Calamity: Explosion of the Steamer Saluda—130 Lives Lost!" 1.
68. "Explosion of the Saluda," *Missouri Republican*, 17 April 1852, reprinted from the *Lexington Express*, 13 April 1852.
69. Dunbar account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 412.
70. Dunbar account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 412.
71. Dunbar account in Jenson, "Church Emigration," 412.
72. Information provided the author by Ed Cooper, a Moreton descendant.
73. History of the Life of David D. Bowen, typescript, LDS Church Archives, 24. Bowen was a friend of William Rowland. He was in an LDS company of nine wagons, going from St. Louis up the west side of the Missouri River, which reached Lexington "a few days" after the disaster. Apparently, he visited with Rachel Rowland, who was recovering from her injuries.
74. Thomas Coleman to Dear Father, April 14, 1852, photocopy of holograph, Coleman-Hayster Letters, 1840–1900, University of Missouri, Columbia, Ellis Library, Western Historical Manuscript Collection.
75. Jenson, "Church Emigration," 414.
76. Minutes of the town meeting where the four committees were organized were published in "the Explosion of the Saluda," *Missouri Republican*, 17 April 1842, a reprint from the *Lexington Express Extra*, 13 April 1852.
77. James May Autobiography, LDS Church Archives, 11.
78. James May Autobiography, LDS Church Archives, 11.
79. John Gillespie Autobiography, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 19:416–17.
80. "Rhoda Byrne Jared Young," in Eleanor McAllister Hall, comp., *The Book of Jared* (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1963), 34.
81. John M. Bernhisel to Brigham Young, 8 June 1852, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Church Archives.
82. Jenson, "Church Emigration," 410.
83. Jenson, "Church Emigration," 409.
84. Jenson, "Church Emigration," 410.
85. Abraham O. Smoot to Brigham Young, 14 April 1852, LDS Church Archives. The letter is published in its entirety in "Terrible Accident—Explosion of the Steamer Saluda—Seventy-Five Lives Lost!" *Deseret News* 2, no.15 (29 May 1852): 3. Although death estimates vary, this seems to be the most accurate, as Smoot not only was known for his veracity but also was an eyewitness of the victims and was acting officially on behalf of the Church in Lexington to deal with these tragic circumstances. For more information on his life, see Loretta D. Nixon and L. Douglas Smoot, *Abraham Owen Smoot: A Testament of His Life* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1994).
86. *St. Joseph Gazette* (St. Joseph, Missouri), 14 April 1852.
87. Fred Woods and I provide a lengthy analysis of the casualty facts in Appendix A. See Hartley and Woods, *Explosion of the Steamboat Saluda*, 63–72. Appendix B contains a carefully researched list of those who were on board, with columns indicating which were LDS, which were killed, and which were wounded. Hartley and Woods, *Explosion of the Steamboat Saluda*, 73–78. Since that compilation, I have added two names to the list of Latter-day Saints missing—Job and Ally Moreton.

88. In 1852, immigration to Oregon and California was 60,000, where in previous years it had been 25,450, 50,000, and 4,700. Immigration to Utah, which often was about 4,000 a year, was 10,000 in 1852. See chart in John Unruh Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Immigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840–1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 120.

89. Melvin L. Bashore to William G. Hartley, 21 February 2002. Bashore is a reference librarian at the LDS Church Historical Department in Salt Lake City, Utah. See also Roger P. Blair, "'The Doctor Gets some Practice': Cholera and Medicine on the Overland Trails," *Journal of the West* 36, no. 1 (January 1997): 54–66.

90. A passenger list for the Kelsey wagon train is in *Journal History*, 31 December 1852, Supplement, 120–22.

91. Eli Kelsey lived in Tooele, Utah, served as an elders quorum president and president of the 43rd Quorum of Seventy, and became a Tooele County prosecutor in 1868. By 1870, he was affiliating with the Godbeites, businessmen who opposed LDS Church economic policies. He was excommunicated but continued living as a polygamist. A farmer, merchant, real-estate developer and owner, and developer of mines in Bingham Canyon, he died on 30 March 1885 in Salt Lake City. See Esshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah*, 983.

92. Smoot, in *Early Scenes in Church History*, 28.

93. James May Autobiography, 9–13, LDS Church Archives.

94. FamilySearch (2003) lists Henry Ballard as having married Elizabeth, one of the May daughters, but Ballard's writings about his *Saluda* experience give no indication he and Elizabeth were married. Likewise, the *Kennebec's* passenger lists show Elizabeth in the May family and no one with Henry Ballard. Crookston states that Henry planned to marry her in Utah. Crookston, *Henry Ballard*, 13.

95. Henry Ballard, Journal, 1–4, "Henry Ballard," in Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History, 1901–1936), 1:419.

96. Ethel Duke Johnson, "Martha Young Duke," in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 20 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1958–1977), 6:184–85.

97. Sylvia Moses Handley, "Sarah Brown Woodruff," in Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 10:235–36; John L. Hart, "Restored Cabin a Remnant of Faith," *Church News* 63, no. 22 (29 May 1993): 6.

98. John Gillespie Autobiography in Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 19:416–17.

99. Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4:335.

100. William C. Dunbar, account of his labors in England, *Journal History*, 26 September 1854.

101. The LDS Church's Ancestral File, posted on the *FamilySearch* website July 2003, indicates William Dunbar married Hannah Hales (b. 1831) on 29 October 1852, and they had twelve children. That same file shows that he also married Hannah's sister, Harriet Hales (b. 1823), on a date not recorded, by whom he had one child.

102. *Journal of Discourses*, 17:15–23.

103. *Journal History*, 8 June 1905, 5.

104. *Journal History*, 11 June 1905, 5.

105. The Steamboat Act of 1852 required the installation of proper gauges and safety devices on steam boilers and a licensing system for steam engines and river pilots. However, little was done to enforce the new regulations until 1871. Ron Larson, *Upper Mississippi River History: Fact-Fiction-Legend* (Winona, Minnesota: Steamboat Press, 1994).

106. The fall 2003 issue of *Mormon Historical Studies* will contain several articles dealing with 1853 LDS emigration and the Keokuk outfittings.

107. This change was stimulated by a letter dated 2 August 1854 in which Brigham Young instructed Elder Franklin D. Richards, a Latter-day Saint emigration agent at Liverpool, to no longer use New Orleans because of the threat of river disease. See "Foreign Correspondence," *Millennial Star* 16, no. 43 (28 October 1854): 684.

108. *Missouri Statesman*, 16 April 1852.

109. "The Late Captain Belt and the Explosion of the *Saluda*," *Liberty Tribune*, 23 April 1852.

110. Wilford Woodruff, in Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1898), 30. See also Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–1984), 3:544–47, for the dates of 9 April 1850 to 1 May 1850.

111. Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 7:57.

112. "Town memorializing 1852 steamboat disaster," *Church News* 72, no. 11 (16 March 2002): 14. A month or so after the *Saluda* disaster, a minister of the Savannah, Missouri, Christian Church, Elder Prince L. Hudgens, saw the *Saluda's* bell for sale in a junk yard. He bought it for his church. *Savannah Sentinel* (Savannah, Missouri), 22 May 1852. Currently, the bell is mounted in front of the Savannah church that is the second replacement of Hudgen's building he was using in 1852.