

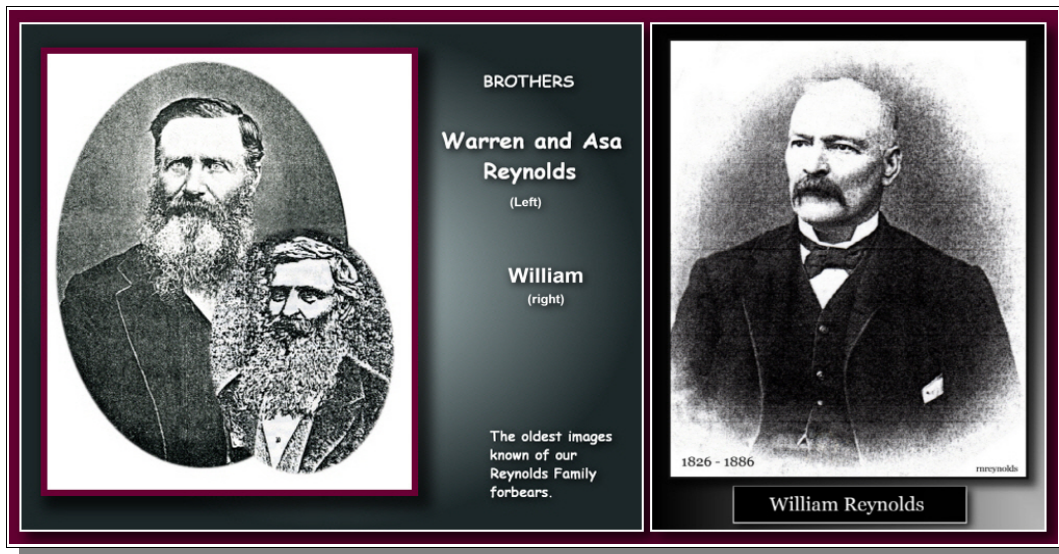
1846 -- The Consequential Year

The year 1846 began with the happy occasion of Warren and Edna's marriage in the winter month of January; but the entire family was headed for what would become a very tough and difficult year. The elder brother, Levi H. was struggling with his Saline milling business to support his wife and three children but also now had the added burden of his three youngest siblings, William, Betsy Maria and Charles. Amanda and Samuel Chapel now had six children. They had stopped for a while in Oakland County but had gone on to forge out a new home at Grand Blanc in Genesee County where for several years they resided in a log shanty with board roof. Esther's marriage to George Whitehouse had ended in divorce and Asa was still at Rose struggling to make ends meet with his pregnant wife and three young daughters. His wife, Sarah Maria Lurvey's pregnancy ended on April 20, 1846 with an unnamed stillborn infant and Sarah died from complications five days later.

Thus was the state of Warren's family in early 1846 when he and his new bride, together with his younger brother William, the Hosea Merrell family, and several convert families, left their Michigan homes and traveled to Nauvoo to join the Mormon exodus to the west. They arrived in Nauvoo on February 13, 1846 with a group of 70 families of saints from Michigan led by Elder Serrine.¹

Subtle indicators imply the relationship between Warren and his brothers Levi H. and Asa was somewhat strained when he left Michigan. They include the fact that Warren was living with Mr. Gage rather than with one of his brothers; that younger brother William left Levi's trade and employment when he traveled with Warren on his venture west; that both older brothers lived and died as active Masons; that there was no mention of Levi H. or his family in Warren's two 1853-54 letters; and that it took Warren seven years to answer Asa's letter that prompted his reply; whereas we learn that there were several communications that passed between Warren and other family members during the interim. If there were feelings they most likely related to Warren's conversion to Mormonism. "Few realize what it involved to become a Mormon in those early days!

1 Norton Jacob Autobiography, BYU, p.29 - p.30 Friday, February 13th (1846). Brother M. Serrine arrived from Michigan having had good success in his mission. About seventy families are on their way to this place (Nauvoo) fully fitted and prepared to go on West as soon as they arrive. Saturday morning I went with Brother Serrine to visit Brother Brigham Young and get council from him concerning our future operations. He was stopping at his brother Joseph Young's, having sent his baggage wagons across the river the night before. He appeared to be in good spirits and was well pleased with what Brother Serrine had done and told him to organize his company and keep them together and start as soon as possible across the country to Council Bluffs with their teams.



Home, friends, occupation, popularity, all that makes life pleasant, were gone. Almost over night they were strangers to their own kindred." Also to consider is the saga of William leaving Michigan with Warren, the younger brother's role in the Mormon Battalion and his later life after he returned to Michigan to live among his Masonic brothers.

The obituary for Edna states they were baptized in the Mississippi River by Elder Serrine upon their arrival in Nauvoo, but no source records exist. Church ordinance data in FamilySearch give Edna's baptism and confirmation date as March 1846 and only Warren's confirmation date as 1 March, 1846. The source of these data is not provided so we are left to accept them at face value, which is probably all that really matters.

Though the family met hard challenges in 1846, and some were of historic proportion, we have in Warren's own words an epitome of what it was like then:

"I have had sum harde times since I left you... have had sum harder times and sum good but I hav no reson to complane for the God that I serve & worship the God of Abriham Isiek & Jacob has precieeved & led me carefully to these peacefule valleys of the mountains whare thare is rest at least for a season . I was left in Nauvoo with but one horse and wagon & had my wagon robed at farmington and I was turned out - as the huskers would say to eat root little pig or die but I have had plenty to eat & to ware & I am out of the reache of mobers & mobicrats & devlish men who seak to destroy the kingdom of God and take the preasthood from the earth (June 1853 Letter from Warren F. Reynolds to Asa Reynolds, original spelling preserved)."

Do Or Die In Iowa

Warren's experience of having his wagon stolen at Farmington, Iowa after leaving Nauvoo was a precursor of things to come in the months ahead. As we have seen, there were not a lot of positive things working for him and his new bride back in Michigan at the time he left, but still -- he now found himself looking at a situation where he must "eat root little pig or die." His new found faith was being put to the test in a way he never imagined.

To appreciate the significance of this time in Warren's history requires a perspective of what was happening in the area of Nauvoo. After the Nauvoo Charter was repealed, mob rule took over and members of the church left their homes in droves. Toward the end of February, 1846 the weather was so cold the Mississippi River froze over and two thousand saints fled the city crossing the river on the ice. Some said the freezing of the river was a miracle. Some said it was a miracle the Saints didn't freeze. Church history records the exodus of 7,000 individuals from Nauvoo between March and May of that year. By the end of September only a few hundred Saints remained when the "Battle of Nauvoo" drove the remaining faithful from their homes (information from LDS history websites).

For Warren and Edna and her family to arrive in Nauvoo at this time and be baptized was a test of faith that required a special kind of witness and conviction. An article in the Times and Seasons said it all:

"To see such a large body of men, women and children, compelled by the inefficiency of the law, and potency of mobocracy, to leave a great city in the month of February, for the sake of the enjoyment of pure religion, fills the soul with astonishment, and gives the world a sample of fidelity and faith, brilliant as the sun, and forcible as a tempest, and as enduring as eternity. May God continue the spirit of fleeing from false freedom, and false dignity, till every Saint is removed to where he 'can sit under his own vine and fig tree' without having any to molest or make afraid. Let us go, let us go."²

Early in 1846 the "Camp of Israel" departed Nauvoo in a vanguard effort to pave the way for hundreds of families with woman and children to follow later. The first wagon crossed the Mississippi on ice on February 14, 1846. Their mission was to move onto the prairie in Indian country, build cabins, plant crops, study their options and assemble the

² February," Times and Seasons, 1 Feb. 1846.

resources needed to relocate somewhere in the Rocky Mountains. The fleeing Saints experienced considerable pain and suffering, but miracles were recorded and later, books would be written and films made of their experiences.³

Upon leaving Nauvoo, Brigham Young addressed a letter to U.S. President James K. Polk, giving notice of the Latter-day Saints' farewell:

*"We would esteem a territorial government of our own as one of the richest boons of earth, and while we appreciate the Constitution of the United States as the most precious among the nations, we feel that we had rather retreat to the deserts, islands or mountain caves than consent to be ruled by governors and judges whose hands are drenched in the blood of innocence and virtue, who delight in injustice and oppression."*⁴

Warren and Edna and their family members were present on the plains of Iowa by virtue of their faith and a strong desire for a better life "out of the reach of mobbers and mobocrats and devilish men who seek to destroy the kingdom of God ." Whether they expected to end up in some far off western valley in the mountains of the west when they left Michigan is not known. Regardless, their new adventure was evolving into something that would "test their metal -- each and every family member."⁵

Impoverished But Not Broken

Robbed of their earthly possessions and left to root like pigs seems like an exaggeration when in reality it probably was very close to the truth. There is nothing of evidence to lead us to believe that Warren, 17 year old Edna, William, or the Hosea Merrell family had much more than the "clothes on their backs" to sustain them during this winter exodus ordeal of 1846. We wonder now if they were among those who

3 Nelson, pp. 121-202.

4 B.H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church, 3:89-90.

5 An LDS pioneer website describes the ordeal of 1846: "Of the entire trek to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, it was the first 300 miles across Iowa that most tried the stamina and courage of the Latter-day Saint pioneers. Mere weeks into the journey—through sleet, blizzard, and mud—it became apparent to Brigham Young that his people would never reach the Rocky Mountains in the time or in the manner that most had hoped for. So throughout the spring of 1846, thousands of refugees trudged across the windswept Iowa prairies, preparing the way for those yet to come: building bridges, erecting cabins, planting and fencing crops. By mid-June, nearly 12,000 Saints were scattered across Iowa."

were so anxious to leave Nauvoo they did so without sufficient provisions and were poorly equipped for the trek. Had it been different we expect they would have made good time across Iowa in reaching the designated gathering spot of Council Bluffs, almost 300 miles west of Nauvoo by late April. But they didn't make good time. The lead wagon train stopped far short of the Missouri River, in fact only half way, to build a temporary way station called Garden Grove on April 24, 1846.



Garden Grove, Iowa - Then and Now

Development of Garden Grove began at once. Shortly after arriving Brigham Young put 359 able bodied men to work building the site.⁶ Orson Pratt stated that work commenced on 27 April:

"This morning the horn sounded for all the men to assemble themselves together to be organized for labour. One hundred men were appointed for cutting trees, splitting rails, and making fence; forty eight to cutting logs, for the building of log houses; several were appointed to build a bridge, a number more for the digging of wells, some to make the wood for our ploughs; several more to watch our flocks and keep them from straying; while others were sent several days' journey into the Missouri settlements to exchange horses, feather beds, and other property, for cows, provisions, etc., and finally the whole camp were to be occupied about something. During this

6 Leland H. Gentry, "The Mormon Way Stations: Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah," *BYU Studies*, Fall 1981, Vol. 21, 445-61.

*council for organization we were well drenched in rain."*⁷

Among those who stopped at Garden Grove were Warren, William, Edna, and the Hosea Merrell family. Except for William, they settled in, helping and enduring there for several months while the main body of the pioneer company rolled on.⁸ In many ways theirs is a poignant story of our Mormon forebears who faced trials and succeeded against almost all odds!

A summary of life at Garden Grove, Iowa that includes reference to Warren F. Reynolds was written about George Carson and Ann Hough, "A Chronology of Their Lives, by Jay Nielson." A digital copy is available online at FamilySearch.

April 6, 1848: At a special meeting held in the morning at the river commemorating the organization of the Church, nine persons were baptized, including the son of William Huff Carson, John Alma. Later in the evening, the camp met together to decide who among them should be sent on ahead to the Salt Lake Valley as pioneers for the camp. Nathaniel Beach and Warren F. Reynolds volunteered. The camp agreed to provide them with clothing, provisions, tools, two pairs of steers, a cow and two plows. In return the pioneers covenanted to plough, make fences, put in crops, build houses, and make such improvements as they could in preparation for the later arrival of the rest of the camp. The presidency went through the camp to raise money to outfit the two men. William Huff Carson gave \$5.00 and John Carson donated 80¢.

April 11, 1848: A formal contract was drawn between the camp and the two pioneers.

The above excerpt typifies Nielson's "Chronology" in his work; here with specific reference to our Warren F. Reynolds.

After discussing what became of Warren's brother William we will return to Warren and his family at Garden Grove in a later chapter.

7 Orson Pratt, as quoted in Leland H. Gentry, page 449.

8 Karla Gunzenhauser, "The Settlement at Garden Grove, Iowa," Nauvoo Journal, Fall 1994, Vol. 6, No. 2, 66-96. Supporting documents of their presence include an 1847 membership or census list (with priesthood ordinations).

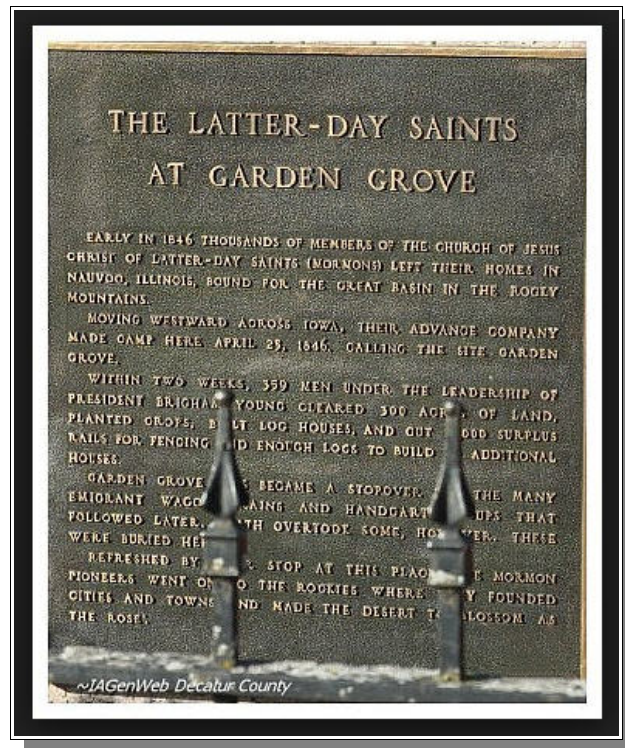


Image from a historic plaque placed at Garden Grove

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