A Forty-Niner who became a Mormon Pioneer
From the Journal of Andrew Fjeld

While digging a mill race for Captain Sutter, a wealthy, philanthropic rancher of German extraction whose lands were situated near the present site of Sacramento City, California, the Mormon Battalion Boys found the gold which set the world on fire, Jan. 24, 1848.

Sidney Willes, who later lived in Lehi, was one of the first men to discover that the nuggets which the men picked up from the sand and gravel in which they were working was really gold.

The news of this great discovery spread like a prairie fire and the following year, 1849, witnessed the greatest gold rush that this world has ever known. It affected every state in the union and many foreign countries were represented in the hordes of men who frantically crossed the country in the mad rush for gold.

There were three routes of travel across the country from the east to the west. The Panama route was mostly by water, going overland at the Isthmus Panama. The Butterfield Route started at St. Louis, Missouri, and ran far to the south, entering California near the southeast corner. And the Central Route which followed the Platte River and reached California by way of Salt Lake City. This latter route was the most popular.

During the summer of 1849, a number of emigrant trains composed of prospectors and miners were camped in Salt Lake City. During their enforced stay while mules were shod and wagons repaired, they traded cloth and other merchandise for provisions with which to finish the journey.

Among the many hundreds of men from the east who were camped in Salt Lake City on their way to California, was a man named Black who had left his home in Pennsylvania with a most solemn promise to his weeping wife that he

would return to her in four years from that time. Should he fail to return at that time she would know that he was dead and she would be released from all obligations to him.

He with others, one Sunday evening, entered one of the rude log meeting houses in the city being attracted by the singing. He was very much impressed by the earnestness and sincerity of the several speakers. One man told the story of the founder of the faith and of a book which he had published to the world which he had translated from gold plates given to him by an angel.

All this and much more was very surprising to our friend Black, who had heard only the usual vile stories about the Mormons. After the meeting he got into conversation with the man who had spoken about the book and it was after midnight before he retired to rest with a Book of Mormon under his head borrowed from the speaker.

During the days that followed, Black was very much in a quandary and decidedly upset in his feelings. Was the book true? Was Joseph Smith really and truly a prophet or was it all a hoax and these people deluded, were questions that he could not solve.

One day he was very much startled by reading in the book a promise that anyone who would read the book and would pray to the Lord to know of its truth that the truth would be made known to them. Now the question arose if it was all true what was he going to do about it.

Black was now facing the most serious crisis of his whole life. He was on his way to California to seek for gold. Here in the midst of the desert he had found something that if it was true, was of far greater value to him than all of the gold of the west. After very much consideration he finally determined with a most solemn covenant with himself that if the Lord would reveal the truth of all this matter to him and if it really was His work, then he would change the whole course of his life and would cast his lot with this people and be one with them.

He then, in a secluded place for the first time in his life, knelt down in secret prayer. And the Lord revealed to him as he has revealed to hundreds and thousands of others who have approached him in like manner, that the Book of Mormon was true, that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of the Lord, and that this people was His people and the organization which obtained among them was truly His Church and Kingdom, established on the earth for the last time.

Black promised the Lord that as a token of his gratitude and as a covenant with the Lord that from that time on he would never cut his hair. He faithfully kept his vow and from that time to the time of his death he was known as the red-headed man with the long hair.

Black was soon baptized and when he announced to his companions that he was not going on to California they flatly refused to allow him to take anything from the train nor to pay him anything for his share of the outfit.

This treatment from his companions, however, did not upset him in the least. He felt very happy and contented and wished them success and Godspeed on their journey.

Brother Black, as we will now call him, now called on President Brigham Young and told him his life's story and of his conversion to the Gospel as taught by the Latter Day Saints. He also told the President that he was now at his service and was willing to do all in his power to help the work along.

President Young was much pleased with the attitude of his visitor and gave him his blessing and promised him that there would be much work for him to do.

Sometime later, Brother Black with others was called to settle in Southern Utah to build up the country. On the occasion of receiving their final instructions from President Young before starting south, Brother Black told the President of his promise to return to his wife. President Young advised Brother Black to go south with the company and establish a home and when the time came to fulfill the

promise to his wife he must go by all means and the Lord would prosper him on his journey and bless him with success.

So Brother Black became a prominent man in Southern Utah and when the time came to go back to his wife he set out on the journey with many peculiar thoughts and emotions.

When he arrived at his home there was a very joyous meeting with his wife and her parents but when he explained the reason for his long luxuriant locks of hair he was promptly ordered out of the house and told never to return by the enraged father. Before leaving the house he succeeded in making an appointment to meet his wife in a secluded place and in the course of a weeks time was able to convert her to the faith that he had embraced and secretly she left the home of her parents and with her husband cast her lot with the hated Mormons in the West.