

I SEE OUR ZION
Sunday September 14, 2003
Winter Quarters Visitors' Center Theater,
Omaha, Nebraska

"I SEE OUR ZION" PLAYED THROUGH ONCE, USING RECORDED SOLO.

NATHANIEL LEAVITT Jr.

Good afternoon. I'm glad to greet you.. My name is Nathaniel Leavitt. Now, I suppose you're thinking, "Which Nathaniel?" And it's true, we've had a few Nathaniels in this family.

I'm Nathaniel, son of Nathaniel Leavitt who was the son of Jeremiah and Sarah Shannon Leavitt. My mother was Deborah Delano. I'm often known as Nathaniel Leavitt Jr.

I made the journey from Hatley, through the long months, through the hardships and trouble, and finally to our home in Utah.

My life was intertwined with all the people you've come to honor during this momentous week. Most of them had something to do with my upbringing, some, in fact, my very survival. So, I've come to help you to know their stories...to understand how things were. I want to help you see into their hearts.

"When I was seven years old, my mother died. She left six children, three older than myself and two younger. After my father married again, when I was fourteen, I first heard of the Mormons. An Elder by the name of Hazen Aldrich came into our neighborhood and brought us the Book of Mormon. He told us of the Prophet Joseph Smith—how he had found the records of the Nephites and Lamanites...and had translated the records into our language, by the gift and power of God. In short, he preached to us the fullness of the Everlasting Gospel. It was the first time we had ever heard it.

A large number of my uncles and aunts and cousins that lived in the neighborhood believed and obeyed the Gospel. Together, we decided to leave our homes in Hatley and go to find the saints.

We started on our journey, you might call it our quest, In July, 1837. For some of us finding the church was the reason we were willing to leave. For others it was the promise of new country opening up and the hope of independence and security. For me, at first, I was just eager for adventure. Little did I imagine what the adventure would be.

Our company was about 55 in number. All were uncles, aunts and cousins. Our grandmother, Sarah Shannon Leavitt, was seventy six years old. She stood the journey remarkably well..."

Let her speak her own heart:

SARAH SHANNON LEAVITT

Oh it did wrench my soul to bid goodbye to our home of so many years. We had carved it from the wilderness. It hurt my heart to leave Jeremiah's grave. I had thought that I would lie beside him there.

But I rejoiced continually that I had lived to hear the sound of the Everlasting Gospel. I gave thanks that I could live to see such a host of my children and grandchildren obey the word.

Yet all along our travels my heart turned homeward to Hatley, again and again, toward those of my children who had not come along. I pray with all my heart that we will reunite one day, from the oldest to the smallest babe.

NATHANIEL Jr.

We had not foreseen the troubles that would come. We traveled along together, through the state of Vermont and New York. When we arrived at Buffalo, my father took a notion to leave the company and cross Lake Erie on the ferry. The others went around the lake by way of Kirtland, Ohio.

Our family traveled on to Michigan to a place called Sturgess Prairie. We rented some farmland here and calculated to get a little means so we could move on west to find the Church.

Two of my uncles, John and Jeremiah, found places to work in Ohio and both their families stayed there for a time. My uncle Josiah stayed with us. We had more small children than the other families.

Our other relatives came by on their way west. Their party included our grandmother, Uncle Wier and Aunt Phoebe Leavitt, Uncle Franklin and Aunt Rebecca Chamberlain, Uncle Horace and Aunt Hannah Fish, Aunt Betsy and Uncle James Adams and all their families.. They stayed a few days with us and then traveled on to Twelve Mile Grove, Illinois. My oldest sister, Roxanna, went along with them. They were going to settle there until they could learn where the Church had located. We had heard that the Mormons had all been driven from the State of Missouri by a ruthless mob.

Not long after they left us, there came the darkest of times upon us. Father got a terrible sickness. All through the settlement people were falling to this malady. Some called it ague, some said cholera. My uncle Josiah got it too. And no matter how hard we tried to nurse them through, they died. Both of them died.

We were alone there now, miles from any of our family and friends. My stepmother was a brave woman, but she was beside herself with this blow. She could only think of her own people. Her only thought was to get back to them.

She wanted us to go back with her, but I was a firm believer in Mormonism. I was fifteen, Flavilla was twelve and John was nine. I persuaded them to stay with me. I promised her that I would take care of them and that we would make our way to the Church.

Oh it was hard to say goodbye to our little sisters and our baby brother. Our stepmother was the only mother Flavilla and John could remember. It was a wrenching separation. The weeks after she had gone were pretty hard times. I worked whenever I could find someone to hire me. People were kind, but most of them didn't have much themselves. We stayed with whomever would offer us a bed, and often we stayed in different houses.

After a month of struggling to find food and shelter, I was afraid I'd made a mistake. Then our Aunt Sarah and Uncle Jeremiah Leavitt came along. Aunt Sarah took us into her arms and we knew we'd been rescued. Imagine how we rejoiced!

JEREMIAH LEAVITT II

I am Jeremiah Leavitt . My family dropped a little behind the others. We had to stop and work a while for provisions to go on. So it was a happy day when we were on our way again. We thought to go around by White Pigeon Michigan, and looked forward to a happy reunion with Nathaniel and Betsy and Josiah and the children. Instead, when we pulled into the village, we were greeted with the disheartening news that both my brothers had perished in that place. Nathaniel and Josiah had been in the prime of their strength when we parted. It seemed unbelievable that they should be gone.

Nothing could have prepared us for the bedraggled state of Nathaniel's children as we found them.. We gathered them in with us, bringing our number to eleven, and made our way onward toward Twelve Mile Grove.

The journey was long and tedious, but we were buoyed up by the anticipation of seeing mother, Sarah Shannon again, and seeing my brothers and sisters and all our kin.

What we found was another great anguish. They had bought noble farms, with rich soil that brought forth good crops, but it was a sickly place—the fever and the ague were located there.

Alas, the worst had beset them. My mother was dead. She who had blessed us with her encouragement and her faith was sleeping in the grave. Wier's oldest son, Jeremiah was dead, and Wier himself, was dying with cancer. Wier, our eldest brother, always steady and strong, now sinking away.

They were all dispirited. They had not seen a member of the Church since they left Kirtland, and they seemed to have forgotten their faith. They reached out gladly to see us and we tried to comfort and encourage them.

But we had to bring them the news of Nathaniel's death and Josiah's death. Nathaniel's daughter, Roxanna, was here at Twelve Mile Grove. She took the news hard.

ROXANNA:

Oh what a mixture of sorrow and joy!

When I saw my brother John, jump down from Uncle Jeremiah's wagon and run toward me, I was overcome with joy. I had not seen Flavilla for so many months. Nathaniel had grown so tall! But then Nathaniel gave me the awful news.

It was a terrible shock to learn that Father was gone. And Betsy and the babies gone back! It was more than my mind could absorb all at once. Oh how we held each other and rejoiced and wept all at the same time.

I had news for them too. I had a new husband, Benjamin Fletcher. Benjamin had three children, Jane and Joseph and William, and we lived alongside all my relatives, here at the Grove.

Uncle Horace and Aunt Hannah invited Nathaniel to come into their home to stay, and we took Flavilla and John to our place to be with us.

The coming of Aunt Sarah and Uncle Jeremiah and their family revived us a great deal. They encouraged to focus on our faith, despite the losses we had suffered. Some weeks after they had come, some Elders from the Church visited us. They baptized those of us who had not yet been baptized.

They stayed with us a few weeks and taught us the principles of the Gospel. We began a pattern of regular meetings and we were blessed with the gifts of the Spirit. We grew stronger and were beginning to feel at peace there.

But for me, tranquility was not to be. Just as spring was coming to the Grove, my husband fell ill. We nursed him and cared for him, as we had all the others we'd lost. But it was to no avail. Benjamin died April 21, 1840. We buried him beside the other three we had lost at the Grove.

We had been married just two years. He was 29. I was 22 and now responsible for six children.

Oh I was thankful for my uncles! They did all they could to care for me and the children. My uncles, Jeremiah Leavitt, Horace Fish, James Adams, Franklin Chamberlain and their families were our strength and our support. Aunt Phoebe Leavitt, Uncle Wier's widow, was a comfort to me, for she knew my heart from her own experience.

The elders had told us that the Saints were gathering again. This time on the banks of the Mississippi River. They said a new city was emerging, where a temple would be built! We prepared to join them. By November that year we were ready to leave.

PLAY A VERSE OF “I SEE OUR ZION.” (Not including the chorus.)

NATHANIEL Jr.

We headed for Nauvoo, again without some of our kin. Uncle John and Aunt Lucy had not caught up with us and were still farming in Ohio. Uncle Franklin Chamberlain was settled, with a good farm and he and Aunt Rebecca were going to stay.

We had a cluster of cousins, all around my age. I was 17, and my cousins, Charles, Jeremiah and Weir Leavitt were 15, 17, and 15. We were almost grown and could be good help. Uncle John’s Josiah, and Uncle Franklin’s Oliver made six of us boys the same age, but Josiah and Oliver were back with their families.

We had a bundle of girl cousins too: Lydia Leavitt, Sally Adams, Sally Ann Chamberlain, Charlotte Leavitt, Julia Fish and were close in age and sociability. We had such a congenial society of cousins that Sally Ann Chamberlain couldn’t stand to be parted from all of us. So we prevailed upon Aunt Rebecca and Uncle Franklin, and they allowed that she could come along to Nauvoo with us.

We had a journey of almost 240 miles. I traveled with Aunt Hannah and Uncle Horace Fish. With three girls and a new baby boy, they were glad for my help.

I’ll never forget the day we arrived in Nauvoo. We stopped at the east side of the city. I went directly down the street to look at the town. I was very anxious to see the Prophet Joseph Smith. The town had been built up rapidly. The houses were small and cheaply built, but very neat and clean.

Everyone seemed to be busy at work. After walking three or four blocks, I came across a number of persons gathered around a buggy in which sat two men, one of which was talking to the crowd. After a little, I heard someone call him Brother Joseph. I then knew that was the Prophet. I had long before supposed that a Prophet would look different than other men. But, I saw that he was exactly like other men, only considerably above average in size. He was better looking and more noble than any man I had ever seen before.

I said to myself, “This is a man of God, and a true Prophet.” I have never doubted from that day to this. A little further down the street, I saw a neat little building with a sign over the door. “Hyrum Smith, Patriarch.” I went directly to the door and rapped for admittance. Brother Hyrum came to the door, took me by the hand and led me in, saying at the same time, “I suppose you have come for a blessing.” I told him that was exactly what I had come for. He led me to a chair by a table where his scribe was writing.

He had never seen me before, nor I him. But, he laid his hands on my head and asked me only one question: "What is your given name?" I told him it was Nathaniel. He then said, "Brother Nathaniel, I lay my hands upon your head in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and give you a Fathers Blessings. For behold, your father is dead and your mother also sleepeth." By this time I knew that he was a prophet, as well as his brother, Joseph, for he had no means of knowing anything about me or my father or mother. Only that he knew by the Spirit that he was in possession of.

The following Sunday, I went to a meeting in the bowery, as they had no meeting house built yet. The Prophet Joseph preached to us. About one hour before the close of the meeting, he called on young men who had no families to volunteer to work on the Temple for one month. They were just commencing to build the Nauvoo Temple.

I was the first one to volunteer. Quite a number followed and gave in their names. I labored one month, without losing a day, most of the time driving a team and hauling rock from the stone quarry to the Temple block. My cousin George Leavitt worked in the Quarry, getting out the granite blocks for the building.

BETSY LEAVITT ADAMS

Oh the men did work hard on the Temple! But so did the women. The women knitted gloves and socks and sewed trousers and coats. We cooked and carried food and water to the men. I'm Betsy Leavitt Adams. I worked hard and like everyone, I was propelled by the promise of our Temple.

It was a time of great vitality. The Saints were working with a will and everyone was busy. When people weren't working on the Temple, they were building and planting and painting on their own homes. The city was taking shape as if by magic.

It was a dynamic time in our families too, with many changes taking place. There had been so many deaths and many times our Leavitt girls married widowed fathers and inherited children to care for.

Lydia married Brother William Snow. He was one of the men who taught us of the Gospel while we still lived in Canada. He had lost his wife, and so Lydia became a mother for his little girl. In the next three years they had two children of their own. Sariah Hannah and Levi William Snow.

Roxanna married John Huntsman, a widower with four children, who lived nearby. Added to the Fletcher children and her sister Flavilla, theirs was a busy household. Their own first child was born in 1843. Roxanna named her Salena, for her sister, still back in Hatley.

Wire's daughter, Charlotte, married Simon Baker, who also was widowed and had 8 children. Brother William Snow performed their ceremony while they were crossing the Mississippi, so when they docked they were already married.

The young people were choosing their companions we had family weddings galore! Jeremiah and Sarah Sturtevant's Jeremiah married Eliza Harrover. William Snow performed their wedding ceremony too. Julia Fish married Edward Washington Thompson. Sarah Fish married John Calvin Lazelle Smith. Louisa Leavitt married William Ellis Jones. Young Nathaniel Leavitt married Amanda Wilson.

But despite the joy of the marriages and births, there were sorrows too. Almost the worst of our sadness came when Sally Ann Chamberlain took sick with the fever and died. She was nineteen and beloved of all the cousins. How we mourned the loss of this beautiful child.

Our troubles were mounting. The Charter of our beautiful Nauvoo was rescinded and persecutions raged. It began to be acknowledged among us that we would soon be driven out. Committees were formed and work began in preparation.

The Temple was completed to a stage where we could go to receive our endowments, and night and day we worked so that all could have their blessings before the dreaded day of departure was thrust upon us.

Brother William Snow was one of the first with whom the Prophet Joseph Smith shared the doctrine of Plural Marriage. Our Sally and Lydia Leavitt Snow were not only first cousins, but they had always been dear friends. So she was a natural choice for Brother Snow, when he was called to practice the principle. Sally Adams and William Snow were married in January of 1846, during the height of our troubles with the mobs.

JOSEPH FISH

Hello, my name is Joseph Fish. I am the son of Horace and Hannah Leavitt Fish. My mother was the youngest daughter of Jeremiah and Sarah Shannon Leavitt. I was four months old when my parents left Twelve Mile Grove for Nauvoo. I spent the first six years of my life in the city of the Saints. I was four years old on the day the Prophet Joseph Smith was murdered in Carthage Jail. Our place was on the road to Carthage and I still remember the troops and squads of men, who passed solemnly by. I remember the sorrow that was everywhere.

We were like the majority of others, poor. It was here in Nauvoo that I learned about persecution and feeling the bitter hand of the oppressor, which drove the widow and the fatherless, as well as the husband and father into the wilderness to perish.

These persecutions were gloried in by the mob. To shoot a Mormon was indeed a distinction, coveted by the persecutors of the Saints.

As early as 1842, the Prophet Joseph Smith had prophesied that the Saints would be driven to the Rocky Mountains. And now the time had arrived when that prophesy was to be fulfilled and become a reality.

The city of Nauvoo now presented an exciting scene. Many of the Saints from around the city had been driven in, and hurried preparations were being made. Many were making tents and wagon covers out of cloth, bought with anything they happened to have. Companies were organized to build wagons, green timber was prepared for spokes and felloes.

I went about with my father gathering provisions that we would need for the journey. It was impossible to get any wheat, so we parched a quantity of corn and ground it into meal. But our corn meal got damp and soon spoiled.

My father made a wagon in which to haul our few effects. There was but very little iron in it, except for the tires. Before we left the city my father took us to take a farewell view of the Temple. We all went through it, looking at each room. Franklin D. Richards conducted our family through the building. He carried my youngest sister, Anna Maria in his arms. The scene that impressed me most, and the memory still lingers with me, was the baptismal font, which was supported by twelve oxen—three facing the four cardinal points of the compass.

My father didn't have a team, but loaded what few effects he had into the wagon he had made. He hired a team to haul it down to the river where it was loaded onto a flat boat. My father was one of those who had not been able to dispose of his property, so our outfit was very meager. As we slowly left Illinois shore, my sister Anna Marie and I looked back and there we saw our favorite dog, "Prince" too old to attempt to swim the river. He had been our companion from my earliest recollections, and to leave him thus brought bitter tears.

When Father was able to return to sell our property, it only brought a small amount. He said there were eleven ball holes through the door of our house. The mob had pillaged every house and shot into most of them.

LYDIA LEAVITT SNOW

It was as though hell's fury was unleashed on us. There were heavy, cold winds and driving rain that night, and our only shelter was a wagon box. As the storm raged, so did the mobsters.. They shouted and shot at us, as we trudged through the mud to the river's edge, boarding any kind of boat going across. I held my baby close to me. My husband, William Snow, carried our little girl. Our belongings, so hastily bundled, were soaked. The mob gave us no time for orderly packing. We had only the food we could carry in our bundles.

My babe whimpered. He was chilled and I could do nothing to keep him warm.

We huddled together, through the night, without a dry thread. Little Levi William, my cherished child, died in the night, from exposure to the terrible cold. We buried our baby alongside the grave of Grandfather Snow, on the west bank of the Mississippi River. We laid him in a crude coffin, resting on poles in the bottom of the grave.

We had to leave him there and move on.

SARAH STURTEVANT LEAVITT

When all things were prepared we started on our journey. We had but one yoke of oxen on our wagon with about a ton of loading, so it was but very little we could ride. We had to wade the sloughs and climb the hills.

It was remarkable that our oxen never got stuck in a slough. They seemed to know when they came to a mud hole, just what they had to do. They would push with such speed that the wagon had no time to settle down in the mud.

This was the last journey that my husband ever accompanied me

At last we got to Mt. Pisgah. There were a few of the Brethren stopped there and put in a crop and built houses, expecting to winter there. We had not brought enough provisions to last until harvest and when my husband had built a house and put in a crop, he started back to Bonaparte, Iowa for provisions. Our son, Jeremiah had stopped there with his wife and their new baby. He wanted to bring them along and obtain flour for bread.

I had such a feeling about his leaving as I never had before. I went to him just before he started and told him that it seemed to me that I could not let him go. "Why" he said, "what do you mean? You know I must get breadstuff. I thought you were a woman of fortitude."

When Jeremiah was gone about two weeks I was taken sick with chills and fever, confined to bed. Our neighbors were all very kind, and helped us all they could. They continued until there were all taken sick, insomuch that there were none well enough to take care of the sick.

I was the first one to take sick there and three hundred took sick and died after I was, and I was spared alive. The Bishop visited me and told me if I needed anything to call on him and I should have it. I soon heard that he was dead. I was very sick and Mary lay at the point of death. We had watchers every night until her fever broke.

But the time was come to look for my husband. With the great anxiety we watched and looked day and night, until at last there came a man, just before daylight with a letter, containing the news of his death.

It would be impossible for anyone to imagine my feelings. I had thought all things would be alright when he came and it never entered my heart that he could die. When the news came that he was dead, my feelings were too intense to weep. My situation rushed upon my mind with such force that all I could do was cry to the Lord to sustain me under such untold trials. Blessed be the name of Jesus, he did sustain and preserved my life.

Wier and Lemuel had gone to Council Bluffs and got news of their father's death and my sickness, so Lemuel came with a team and a box of medicine which would stop the ague. Jeremiah came with the team my husband had taken to Bonaparte and brought Dudley with him.

A few days later we all started for Council Point. When we arrived there we found my husband's sister, Betsy Adams, and our Lydia, with her husband, William Snow. Both Lydia and Betsy were very sick. After a long and severe sickness, both of them died.

We had much to pass through in this place. If I should write all that transpired at Council Point, it would be more than I could do. But our whole study was to prepare to go to the valley. It was a great undertaking, as I had but two boys, the oldest Dudley was seventeen and my three little girls. Lemuel had gone in a former company. But through energy and faith and the blessings of God we got a good fit-out; two yoke of oxen and four cows hitched to one wagon.

Wier begged me to wait until he could go with me. I thought we should go as soon as we were ready. I little thought that if I left him behind I should never see him again in this life, but so it was. We started on our journey and got safe to the valley, but I never saw Wier again. He died in August, the same month his father died. His father died 4th of August, 1846. Wier in 1847.

SALLY ADAMS SNOW

I am Sally Adams Snow. The time in Iowa seemed the hardest of all. We had so much sickness. Death was ever-present. My mother, Betsy Leavitt Adams died, and my dearest friend, Lydia Leavitt Snow. William and I watched over them and did everything we could, to no avail. It was January, and the bitterest of cold. When Lydia knew she was going, she told me how grateful she was that she could leave William and Abigail and Sariah Hannah in my care. We wept together and I promised I would care for them. Oh how I wished we had had the tiny body of Levi William to place in her arms as we buried her there. But he laid in his little grave on the bank of the Mississippi.

There were so many others. Jeremiah's daughter Louisa had married William Ellis Jones. They had adopted little Isora Louisa, at the request of her dying mother. They cherished the child, but she died that awful year, as well. They adopted Martha Angelica when her parents both died. Louisa and William were poor, like the rest of us, and when William had news of work back in Missouri, they took little Martha and traveled back there. Then we had word that Louisa herself had died in Missouri.

Flavilla and Orrin Day Farlin had a little girl, they named her Orliwa. She was only nineteen months old, when she took the sickness and died. Flavilla and Orrin shared their substance and their sorrow with Roxanna, Flavilla's sister. Roxanna's 2nd husband, John Huntsman, had died before they reached Council Bluffs.

So many of our loved ones we left buried there at the Bluffs, when finally we could move on toward the Salt Lake Valley.

LUCY ROWELL LEAVITT

Perhaps you have wondered about the John Leavitt family. Perhaps you have pondered how lonely our struggles must have been. My name is Lucy Rowell. I'm John's wife. When we came away from Hatley with the others, we had seven children. Josiah was 15 and Sarah was one. The other ranged in between. We intended to stay abreast with all the families, but our journey did not run so steadily on. Three children were born to us along our way. We sometimes stopped to earn some savings, or to let our children attend school. We lived for a time in Ohio, where our Cinderilla died at age 14. We mourned our child, and gave thanks when another little girl was born to us within a year.

When we moved further westward to Cambria, Michigan it seemed a promising place. There the Mormon elders reached us and we all accepted their preaching and were baptized. Our tenth child was born there, Thomas John Leavitt. But little Thomas lived only five months.

Our children began to marry. Five of them married in six years. They formed homes of their own and their children began to be born.

Then John died. We had always believed that we would come to Zion together, to be with all our kin. So it seemed the end of hope when John was gone at 54. We buried him beside little Thomas.

Orilla's baby, little Horace Brown died. Lucinda's Barney Alfred Brown died. We had five graves there now.

I took the girls, Sarah, Phoebe and Flavilla and went to stay for a time with Rebecca and Franklin. They were kind and welcoming. But I could not forget my longing to go to Zion.

And so, with my children, we took up once more the long journey west. The thought of meeting our family again gave us courage. The thought of Zion sustained our faith.

NATHANIEL LEAVITT Jr.

I will finish Aunt Lucy's story for her. You see she didn't quite get to see Zion. Lucy Rowell Leavitt died near the Platte River, 23 July, 1858. They buried her in a wagon box, and built a fire over the grave to discourage marauding animals from disturbing the peace of the place. Her children carried on, they reached the valley and were instrumental in the settlement and in building up Zion.

Music under here: START WITH CHORUS: OH CAN YOU SEE THE PLACE I'M SEEING..... Reader wait for a few lines. Come in and read over music when it feels right.

Now I suppose our visit is over for now. I commend to you this truth: The people whom you will memorialize in the coming days are worthy of the respect you pay them.

They saw their Zion if only in their vision. They gave their hearts to it...they gave their lives. They left the legacy for us to build upon.

COME COME YE SAINTS: CONGREGATION.

SOURCES

Personal Journals of: Nathaniel Leavitt, Jr., Sarah Sturtevant Leavitt, and George Leavitt
History of John Leavitt, by Joyce Brown Willis
History of Joseph Fish
History of William Snow by Wanda Snow Peterson.
From Hatley to Home, by Wm. P Leavitt