The World of Joseph Fielding: Chapter 34

Help Arrives from the Salt Lake Valley

Sporadic help arrived on the plains from the Great Basin during the summer of 1848, with families and Church leaders sending what aid they could in the form of drivers, teams and wagons. Thomas Bullock recorded that on two different days in July, they received news from the Valley, including on one occasion from Porter Rockwell and Joseph W. Young, who also brought aid in the form of teamsters, oxen and supplies.[1] This aid was life-saving.

Interestingly, the saints in the valley were unable to offer this same assistance to the pioneers crossing the plains the following year due to the difficult work of preparing the land, felling trees and other hard labor required in the settlement. President Young informed the Winter Quarters pioneers in advance of their 1849 trek that they would need to be strong enough to cross on their own from Winter Quarters to Salt Lake City.[2]

At Fort Laramie, on the 21st of July, 1848, Thomas Bullock sent a letter to apostles Willard Richards and Amasa Lyman, who were about one month behind him on the plains:

> We continued our journey until yesterday when we met Orrin P. Rockwell and Quinson Scovil from the Valley with a letter from the council by which we learn that the crickets have done considerable damage to the crops; the frost has also killed many of the vines, beans, etc., but what is spared, is in two words first rate. They expect. . . and the Lord continues to bless them, to reap about 8,000 bushels of wheat. John Van Cott believes he shall gather about 60 bushels of corn to the acre. Some of the ears of wheat are from 6 to 8 inches long, the California barley and rye is great, the beans and peas (that are spared) were never better any where; and altogether the news is very cheering.[3]

Joseph Fielding remembered receiving teams from the Valley as they traveled through Wyoming, over two hundred miles past Chimney Rock. Later he wrote, "Several times the Companies received fresh Cattle from the Valley, which, in our Situation was very acceptable."[4]

Near the Sweetwater River, Mercy's husband James, responding to the desperate plea for help they had received from Mary, met the company on the plains with a team and wagon and helped drive the two families the remainder of the way to the Valley. This and similar help allowed Joel Terry and other teamsters to safely return to Winter Quarters that year.[5]

The Healing of the Oxen

It was in Wyoming where many pioneers mentioned enormous saleratus fields. This chalk-like powder was deadly to the cattle, who seemed to lick it as though it were salt, but then would suddenly die. Joseph wrote that "many fine Oxen died."[6] The pioneers quickly learned to keep the cattle away from it. However, saleratus was a well-known baking aid used by cooks before the easy purchase of baking soda. The pioneers collected as much as they could carry, knowing this would be useful in their new homes. Joseph wrote that his family gathered two bushels.

Rachel Fielding later wrote:

> I remember one time we came to what seemed a large lake of saleratus, and all the women gathered some. I helped my mother and we both filled our aprons full. It was in cakes, and mother took care of it so we were supplied with saleratus for a long time. We used it for baking soda so we were very glad to have it whenever our bread was sour, which was quite often, owing to the way in which we had to neglect it in our travels.

It was at this point where one of Mary's oxen became very ill. Young Joseph F. is the source of this well-known account:

> We moved smoothly until we reached a point about midway between the Platte and Sweetwater, when one of our best oxen laid down in the yoke as if poisoned and all supposed he would die. At this Father Lott came up, and seeing the cause of the disturbance he blustered about as if the world were about at an end. "There," said he, "I told you [that] you would have to be helped and that you would be a burden on the company."
>
> Producing a bottle of consecrated oil, Widow Smith asked her brother and James Lawson if they would please administer to the ox just as they would do to a sick person. . . .Her earnest plea was complied with. These brethren poured oil on the head of the ox and then laid their hands upon it and rebuked the power of the destroyer just as they would have done if the animal had been a human being. Immediately the ox got up and within a very few moments again pulled in the yoke as if nothing had ever happened. This was a great astonishment to the company. Before the company had proceeded very far, another of her oxen fell down as the first, but with the same treatment he also got up, and this was repeated a third time; by administration the oxen were fully healed.



This modern portrayal is of Mary Fielding Smith praying over her ill oxen.



Many years later, William A. Hyde, of the Pocatello First Ward, desired a painting which would represent the heroism and faith of Mormon women. Minerva Teichert caught the vision of this priesthood leader in her painting of Mary and Joseph F. Smith, "Not Alone."

Rachel Fielding, the same age as her cousin Joseph, remembered this incident sixty-six years later:

> Once while traveling on the

> Plains, the ox we had of Aunt Smith's became sick, so sick it seemed as though it would die; but my father poured oil on it and administered to it. It lay perfectly still a few minutes then shook itself, ate a little grass and it was alright after that. So father hitched it up and we went on our way rejoicing.[7]

Joseph Fielding did not mention this incident at all in his journal. However, he wrote that after the deadly incident at the Elk Horn outfitting station, "We saw but few Indians, and they were quite friendly. I never heard of them taking any of our Cattle."

Widow Smith was not disturbed again until the company reached the Rattlesnake bend on the Sweetwater. At this place, Old Bully, one of the old oxen, laid down and died of sheer old age. He was hardly missed, however, as he had been unable to render but little service for some time.[8]

Young Martha Ann Smith, the eight-year-old daughter of Mary, later remembered that one Native American chief was fascinated with her golden hair. He offered to trade his best pony to Mary for Martha Ann's two long braids. Martha Ann's memory was that her mother held her tightly and said she would not trade her braids even for all the ponies.[9]

Martha Ann's cousin Rachel Fielding did not remember being afraid during the trek. She wrote:

> In all our worries and troubles, I was never badly frightened for I had such confidence in my parents. I always thought everything would be alright. Little children, like little chicks, run to mother for protection. Father and mother carry all the cares and all of the burdens.

Overcoming Trials and Arriving in the Valley

Joseph Fielding wrote that they traversed many rivers as they trekked through the plains. They crossed the Platte River seventeen times, following it much of the way across Nebraska and Wyoming. Joseph remembered that as they approached the Salt Lake Valley:

> We also had to ford several small rivers, viz the Green River, the Bear River and the Weber River, besides many Creeks great and Small. We found some frost in the Mornings early in September, but as we came near the Valley, the Weather became warmer, although the Snow lay on Top of the Mountains, and in the Valley there had been no frost in the middle of October.
>
> The last 40 or 50 Miles the Road is shocking bad. In short, I wonder that so little Damage was sustained. It seems a Wonder that any Wagon can stand it. One Creek we had to cross 17 times, but after all, we found our Friends well, and the whole People here seemed to rejoice, but we had about four Months on the Way. This was in some Measure owing to the bad Feed and the sickliness of our Cattle.[10]



The summit of Little Mountain leads down into Emigration Canyon.



Modern bikers enjoy the trails down Big Mountain.

Two days of travel still lay ahead of them as they reached the mountains near Salt Lake. After taking one day to descend Big Mountain, the companies camped for the night. The next day they would descend Little Mountain through Emigration Canyon and into the valley below.

Rachel wrote that the descent down Big Mountain was very difficult:

> My feet were dreadfully cut and bruised and my footsteps could be traced some distance by the blood. When we reached Big Mountain, mother and Auntie happened to be walking behind with father, and I was leading the team quietly on ahead, with my little brother Joseph, and my little sister May in the wagon. I remember the descent looked long and rather steep, but I went on down without waiting for my parents. The people at the bottom were very much alarmed and shouted, 'That child will be killed! That child will be killed!' However, we arrived at the bottom in safety. I would not think of letting go of that bridle because the children were in the wagon.[11]

Joseph F.'s older brother John turned sixteen on the day they descended Big Mountain. John drove five wagons with their wheels chained so they could not roll ahead of the oxen. His train ran into a tree, and the weight of the wagons was too great for the oxen to back them up the hill and make a detour. John laid down on his back under the lead wagon and chopped the tree so the wagons could pass over the stump.[12]

The Fielding Siblings Led Their Company into the Valley

Joseph F. remembered with clarity their view from the mountains into the valley. "It was a most delightful sight to us." The day was the 22nd of September. The company camped for the night. Young Joseph F. later spoke about the following day:

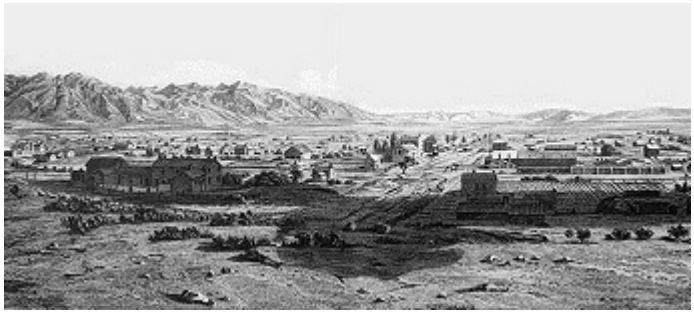
> Early next morning, the captain gave notice to the company to arise, hitch up and roll over the mountain into the valley. To our consternation, when we gathered up our cattle, the essential part of our means of transportation, for some reason, had strayed away, and were not to be found with the herd. [Joseph's older brother John] obtained a horse and rode back over the road in search of the lost cattle. The captain ordered the march to begin, and regardless of our predicament, the company started out, up the mountain. The

morning sun was then shining brightly, without a cloud appearing anywhere in the sky. . . . I sat in the front of the wagon with the teams we had in hand hitched to the wheels, while my brother was absent hunting the others. I saw the company wending its slow way up the hill, the animals struggling to pull their heavy loads. The forward teams had almost reached the summit of the hill. . . . But the last promise seemed to be now impossible; the last hope of getting into the valley before the rest of our company was vanishing, in my opinion.

. . . .All of a sudden, and in less time than I am taking to tell you, a big, dark, heavy cloud rose from the northwest, going directly southeast. In a few minutes it burst in such a terrific fury that the cattle could not face the storm, and the captain seemed forced to direct the company to unhitch the teams, turn them loose, and block the wheels to keep the wagons from running back down the hill. The cattle fled before the storm down into the entrance into Parley's canyon, from the Park [he was telling this long after the fact], into and through the brush. Luckily, the storm lasted only a short time.[13] As it ceased to rain, and the wind ceased to blow, my brother, John, drove up with our lost cattle.

We then hitched them to the wagon, and the question was asked by my uncle of Mother, 'Mary, what shall we do? Go on, or wait for the company to gather up their teams?' She said, 'Joseph. . . they have not waited for us, and I see no necessity for us to wait for them.'

So we hitched up and rolled up the mountain, leaving the company behind, and this was on the 23rd day of September, 1848. We reached the Old Fort about 10 o'clock that Saturday night. The next morning, in the Old Bowery, we had the privilege of listening to President Brigham Young and President Kimball, Erastus Snow, and some others, give some very excellent instructions. Then, on the afternoon of that Sunday, we went out and met our friends coming in, very dusty, and very foot-sore and very tired![14]



The artist Frederick Piercy sketched this view of Salt Lake City five years after Joseph Fielding's arrival, looking to the south.

Rachel recorded her memory of that eventful day:

We arrived in Salt Lake Valley September 23, 1848. I remember feeling so glad that we were in Zion, and relieved that we did not have to travel any more. I remember running up on the Temple Square and all over, so much so that my parents could scarcely keep track of me.[15]

Others in their company were equally pleased with their new home. Curtis Bolton wrote to his father, saying:

The purity of the air here is almost incredible to a person accustomed to only the impure

miasma of the great portion of the U.S. I can distinctly distinguish hills and ravines and separate trees at a distance of fifty miles, see cattle ten miles and distinguish cattle and horses seven or eight miles, and easily distinguish my cattle over two miles. Anyone not accustomed to this purity would be constantly deceived in the distances. For instance, standing above the city on the table land and looking over the city towards the Salt Lake, the towns appear about a mile off and the lake eight or ten, while the city is really five or six and the lake thirty five.

The opposite mountains bounding the valley on the west appear about five miles, and it is over twenty to the foot. This purity is most conducive to health and not withstanding the most extreme exposure to which as a people are exposed daily and nightly from the new born babe who has to be dressed in the open air and its bed an old quilt laid upon the ground, to the aged and infirm who seem already to have lived out their days, all are becoming healthier and consequently happier and more cheerful.

Joseph Fielding Makes a Home In Salt Lake Where His Families Spend a Harsh Winter

Joseph Fielding wrote:

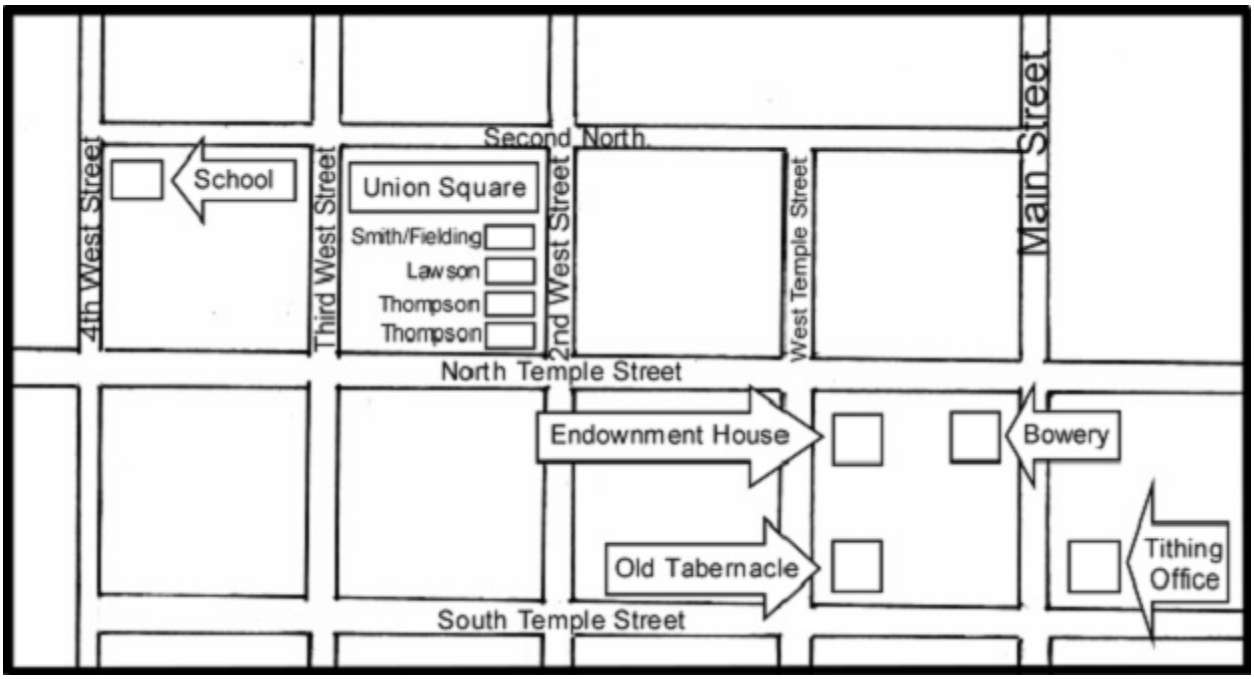
We did not find as much Grain here as we expected. They had generally planted rather late, and the Crickets had destroyed a great deal of the Corn, Wheat, etc., but still the Saints here seemed to be generally in good Spirits, believing that the Land here will produce plenty of Grain, etc., though the last Season they labored hard for a little. They believed that they would know better how to manage the land here another Year as to watering, and also by having their farming land more compact, they hoped to avoid the Crickets.

I was surprised to see the Work they had done in Ploughing, Planting and Fencing, and I thought that although we did not find the Crops of Grain as good as had been represented, yet there would be enough for all that were here. The Corn was planted rather late, or that which was planted early was cut off by the Frost. The Summer was too short, so that the Corn did not ripen. Many of the Beans also were killed before they got ripe, and much of the Buck Wheat came out very light, so that it was evident that there would be little enough for the Inhabitants, and the Price of Produce rose high.

During the Fall many were busily employed in making Adobies, and in getting Timber to build on their City Lots, and some few got their Houses built, but fewer of them got the Roofs on, for the Winter came on and caught them in all Stages of building. I could not make Adobies on account of a sore Finger which troubled me a long time, but I got Logs from the Canyon, gave one fourth for sawing, and so got up the Walls of my House, but could not get Boards sawed for the Roof, so I spread the Tent over the House, and so passed the Winter. The Tent I had borrowed for a Week or two, but we were compelled to keep it at least 4 Months, the Ground being covered with Snow about 12 Weeks. This length of Winter was very unexpected, and took us by Surprise and unprepared, and in fact it has been a time of much Suffering to the Saints in the Valley.[16]

Joseph Fielding and Mary Fielding Smith Acquire Farms in Mill Creek

Soon after President Young's arrival in the valley on the first day of fall, 1848, he organized the distribution of city properties to the pioneers. Later distributions of property farther from the city center occurred as more pioneers arrived.[17]

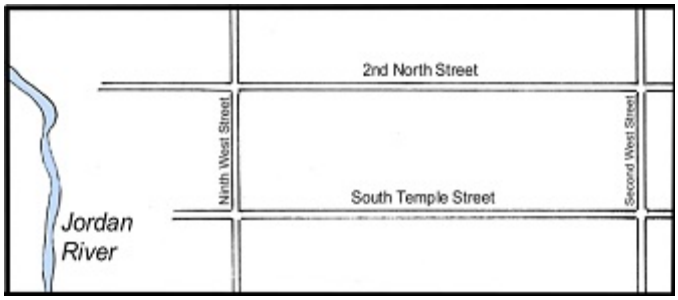


Joseph Fielding and his sister Mary Fielding Smith shared a lot in the 16th Ward in Salt Lake City. They both had farms in the Millcreek area but kept homes in the city. James Lawson lived next door. Mercy Fielding Thompson, James's wife for about 10 years, lived on the adjacent property. William McMillan Thompson, adopted by Mercy Fielding Thompson, originally owned the fourth lot, but this was later acquired by Mercy's daughter Mary Jane.

Joseph Fielding, and his sisters Mary and Mercy, James Lawson and William McMillan Thompson[18] were each given property located along the west side of Second West, between North Temple and First North. Today this property is included in the ball field of the campus of West High School. Joseph's and Mary's lots were side by side. James Lawson received a lot next to theirs. Mercy's lot was next to his, with an address of 103 North Second West. Except for a short time when she pioneered in Iron County, Mercy lived here for the rest of her life.[19] The fourth lot belonged to William McMillan Thompson but was later acquired by Mary Jane Thompson Taylor, the daughter of Mercy.[20] Mary Smith's property would later be the site of her son Joseph F.'s home for forty years, even as he served as president of the Church.[21]

The properties dedicated to the three Fielding siblings were included in the Sixteenth Ward. This ward originally included twelve city blocks between Ninth West and Second West, and Second North and South Temple. However, in 1856, the lowlands of the Jordan River, between Ninth West and the Jordan River, were filled in and settled, making a total of twenty-seven ten-acre blocks within the ward boundaries.[22]

Other ward members included Apostle Heber C. Kimball. Daniel Spencer, who had led the company Mercy Fielding Thompson had traveled in the previous year, also settled in this area, as would Almon Babbitt, who wouldn't arrive in the Valley for two more years. Patty Sessions was another member of this ward.[23] John Snider, Joseph's early missionary associate in England in 1837, would live in the neighboring 17th Ward.[24]



By 1856, the 16th Ward boundaries extended to the Jordan River as the Jordan River lowlands were made suitable for homes.

Over nine hundred of the pioneers requested additional farming land outside the city proper and the distribution of these plots of land was held later in the fall of 1848.[25] Mary Fielding Smith and Joseph Fielding were able to acquire property six miles south, in Mill Creek. Histories of Mary Fielding Smith depict her as a faithful, struggling widow. However, Mary was not alone as she cared for her two children and the children of Hyrum and Jerusha Smith. She had help and support from the long-time friends of Hyrum, including Mother Grinnells, George Mills and others who had essentially been part of his family as far back as Kirtland.[26] These individuals and the Fielding siblings worked together in a cooperative arrangement for the benefit of all. Family members of Joseph Fielding, and even Joseph Fielding himself, recorded that his family relied on Mary for assistance. The reverse was also true, with a descendant later writing that "Grandfather Fielding cared for [Mary] just the same as his own family."[27]

The winter of 1848-1849 was severe, with much more snow than the previous winter. Rachel later remembered their living situation:

> For a while we lived with my Aunt Mercy R. Thompson who came to the Valley the year before us, then my father obtained a piece of land in South Mill Creek. There was no house on the farm so we lived in our two wagons. Auntie had one and mother the other. This was in the Fall, and father went to the Canyon for logs and our old horse dragged all the logs home. Then my father notched them together and soon we had the walls for a one room house. Someone let us have some straw and this was our floor, and then father stretched the tent over the top for a roof and we had a living room, the wagons still being our bedrooms. Father plastered all the cracks between the logs forming the walls, with mud, making the room warm and comfortable.[28]

The Smith and Fielding families grew crops on their farms, but they traveled back and forth, often daily, between the city property and the farm.

Chapter 34 Endnotes Pages 510-517:

1.There is no question that help was expected even from the start of their journey. While still at the Elk Horn outfitting station, Brother Bullock wrote, “Pres. Young told me last night that part of my load must be cached up till the teams came from the mountains.” In a July 10th letter to his brother, Thomas wrote that John Y. Green, Isaac Burnham, Joseph W. Young and Rufus Allen arrived in the camp. In a later letter to Elders Richards and Lyman, behind them on the plains, he tells them that Orin P. Rockwell and Quinson Scovil had arrived with mail from the valley.

2.Journal History, 3 March 1849, image 85. “The subject of sending teams back to assist the immigrants was discussed, and it was decided that a letter of instruction be written to the authorities of the Church in Pottawattamie County, Iowa, informing them of the circumstances of the Saints in the Valley, and the almost impossibility of their sending back any assistance. Pres. Young appointed Parley P. Pratt and Daniel H. Wells to write such a letter of instruction and general information.” A letter fitting this description appears to have been written the same day by George A. Smith and Ezra T. Benson. It is found in Journal History, images 86-88. A second letter written March 5th, images 91-94, and written by Daniel H. Wells, spells out the reasons that no aid could be sent. Brother Wells mentions the need to use the cattle in preparing the fields for grain to feed the large number of pioneers that season, plus hauling lumber from the mountains for structures, including homes, outbuildings and fences.

3.Thomas Bullock, Overland Trail Database.

4.Joseph Fielding Diary, page 149.

5.Biography of Joel Terry, found in a biography on his page in Family Tree, KWNR-Z9V. “In 1848 he left his family, to go with Heber C. Kimball’s Co., to assist Hyrum Smith’s widow to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. He drove their outfit as far as the fifth crossing of Sweetwater, there they were met with assistance from the Valley, and the family was taken on in, while Joel returned with others to Winter Quarters to their families.” Also, “Mothers in Israel,” a biography of Mary Fielding Smith published in the March 1916 issue of the Relief Society magazine, states, “At the last crossing of the Sweetwater, Widow Smith was met by James Lawson, with a span of horses and a wagon, from the Valley. This enabled her to unload one wagon, and send it, with the best team, back to Winter Quarters to assist another family the next season. Elder Joel Terry returned with the team.”

6.Joseph Fielding Diary, page 149.

7.Sketch of the Life of Rachel Fielding Burton, 1914. This story touched many lives. In his biography of his great-grandmother, Brother Corbitt provides the account of William A. Hyde of the Pocatello First Ward who desired a painting which would, “at one glance” show “the heroism and faith of Mormon women.” Daughter of Britain, Pages 274-277.

8.Life of Joseph F. Smith, pages 150-151. Young Joseph added that four of Father Lott’s animals died at this place, likely from eating the saleratus. Joseph F. said that Father Lott accused Mary of poisoning his animals. Joseph said, “My temper was beyond boiling, it was white hot.” He went on to say that he “resolved revenge for this and the many other insults and abuses he had heaped upon my mother, and perhaps could have carried out my resolutions had not death come timely to my relief and taken him away, while I was yet a child.” Father Lott died in 1850, beloved by his family, and apparently still a friend to Joseph Fielding, as they served together in the Territorial Legislature.

9.Martha Ann, Daughter of Hyrum and Mary Fielding Smith, by Ruth Mae Barney Harris, 2002, page 71.

10.Joseph Fielding Diary, page 149.

11.Sketch of the Life of Rachel Fielding Burton, 1914.

12.A Biographical Sketch of the Life of the Patriarch John Smith.

13.Joseph F. Smith was unknowingly describing the weather phenomenon currently called a microburst. These quick, powerful storms are not uncommon in Utah.

14.Life of Joseph F. Smith, pages 153-155. In "Boyhood Recollections of President Joseph F. Smith," page 68, a biographer reported, "It was fortunate that Brother James Lawson [who had been in the valley for a year] was with them, for he knew the road, and if necessary could pilot them down the canyon in the night."

15.Sketch of the Life of Rachel Fielding Burton, 1914.

16.Joseph Fielding Diary, page 161.

17.Great Basin Kingdom, An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints 1830-1900, by Leonard J. Arrington, Salt Lake City: 1958, page 51.

18.Family History of Charles Edward Knell includes an early map of the block of which shows William Thompson owning the property which was later purchased by Mary Jane and her husband.

19.From a biography of Mercy Rachel Fielding Thompson Smith, obtained from the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, no author named.

20.Book of Remembrance, Sixteenth Ward, Riverside Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: First Century History of the Ward and its Auxiliary Organizations with Portraits of All Officers in Chronological Order and Their Biographies As Far As Available; Also Many Groups and Miscellaneous Pictures of Interest, Published 1945, Ward Map.

21. Joseph F. Smith was easily found on every existing census during his lifetime except the 1860 census, when he served as a missionary in England. His father Hyrum was enumerated in the 1840 census and at that time Joseph F. was counted, not named.

22.Sixteenth Ward Book of Remembrance, page 10. "In the beginning, only one (the middle) channel ran through the Sixteenth Ward. On May 15, 1904, owing to the large amount of territory covered by the railroads, the blocks from 2nd to 4th West Streets (six blocks) were taken from the Sixteenth Ward and added to the Fourteenth Ward and Seventeenth Ward, and all blocks west of 8th West Street were added to the Twenty-ninth Ward. Then in 1917, all that part of the Sixteenth Ward lying west of 7th West was organized as the Thirty-fourth Ward."

23.Sixteenth Ward Book of Remembrance.

24.1860 Federal Census. John Snider, age sixty, was enumerated in the 17th Ward with his second wife Sylvia and two sons, Erastus and Martin. His first wife Mary had died not long after he entered the Valley.

25.Great Basin Kingdom, pages 51-52.

26.Susa Young Gates, in her 1916 biography of Mary Fielding Smith titled "Mothers in Israel," which was published in a 1916 issue of the Relief Society Magazine, described the members of Mary Smith's family, likely using Joseph F. Smith's words, "At the death of the Patriarch, June 27th, 1844, the care of the family fell upon his widow, Mary Smith. Besides the children there were two old ladies named respectively, Hannah Grinnels, who had been in the family many years, and Margaret Brysen. There was also a younger one, named Jane Wilson, who was troubled with fits and otherwise afflicted, and was, therefore, very dependent, and an old man, named George Mills, who had also been in the family eleven years, and was almost entirely blind and very crabbed. These and others, some of whom had been taken care of by the Patriarch out of charity, were members of the family and remained with them until after

they arrived in the valley. ‘Old George,’ as he was sometimes called, had been a soldier in the British army, had never learned to read or write, and often acted upon impulse more than from the promptings of reason, which made it difficult, sometimes, to get along with him, but because he had been in the family so long — through the troubles of Missouri and Illinois — and had lost his eyesight from the effects of brain fever and inflammation, caused by taking cold while in the woods getting out timbers for the temple at Nauvoo, Widow Smith bore patiently all his peculiarities up to the time of her death. Besides those I have mentioned. Mercy R. Thompson, sister to Widow Smith, and her daughter, and Elder James Lawson were also members of the family.” George Mills is not described very favorably here, but the memory originally comes from a very young Joseph F. Smith. The fact that George Mills traveled with Brigham Young to the Great Basin in the vanguard company of 1847 speaks very highly of this man.

27.Paper of the Lives of James McKnight and Mary Ann Fielding McKnight, Mother and Father of Awilda McKnight Kunkel,
http://www.baxgen.com/webtrees/mediafirewall.php?mid=M128&ged=Baxgen.com.ged&cb=3714edb7, page 2.

28.Sketch of the Life of Rachel Fielding Burton, 1914.