

Utah Territory, including William Crosby and John H. Bankhead, but also by earlier experiences in New York. African American activist and author Austin Steward lived near Joseph Smith and Brigham Young in New York and later wrote about the murder of a Black neighbor for marrying a White woman, an incident that may have helped form Brigham Young's well-known dislike of interracial marriage.¹³

Each of the approximately one hundred enslaved people in Utah Territory came from a system of great oppression. They could not enter contracts of marriage and had no legal rights to their families. Enslavers could separate families on a whim. Enslaved women, men, and children were subject to sexual exploitation, so family life tended to be complicated. Children sometimes did not know the identities of their parents or grandparents. An enslaved woman's children became the property of her enslaver, whether the father was White or Black, free or enslaved. When an enslaver died, his or her executors sold the enslaved or divided them among heirs. Although some enslavers may have desired to keep families together, the practicalities of estate settlements and the prices of enslaved workers meant that courts and executors often separated families.

The enslaved had little ability to direct their own work. On large plantations, enslavers may have assigned household or field work or trained a worker in a vocation, but on smaller farms, like those owned by the Latter-day Saint converts who moved to Utah Territory, there would have been limited specialization.

Disobedience was punished, often severely. Many years after she was freed, Martha Flake's family remembered that her "back was marked with whelps [welts] from beating she received from the white master." Her granddaughter Bertha Stevens Udell recalled that Martha's hand was badly burned by Elizabeth Coleman Crosby in an act of retribution. The family also remembered that Oscar (Crosby) Smith fled from his enslavers and became wedged in a rail fence. "His head was through the rails and he could not get his body through as he was a large man. He was caught & beat. He went through life with his head twisted to one side."¹⁴

Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff crossed the plains in the first 1847 Latter-day Saint wagon company with three enslaved African American men sent ahead to the valley by their enslavers, and by the time Woodruff wrote to Thomas L. Kane about the local dislike of slavery, Southern converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had

already taken more than fifty enslaved people into the Great Salt Lake Valley. Over the next decade, other converts, merchants not associated with the church, officers in the US Army, and appointed federal officials would take additional enslaved people into the territory. By early 1851, the number of the enslaved in the territory was around sixty, but with the departure of Southern families for California, the number was around thirty by the end of the year and stayed between thirty and forty for the next decade, except for an additional uncounted number of enslaved servants of army officers in the territory during the Utah War or other military expeditions.

The three enslaved African American men in the first Latter-day Saint wagon company were Green Flake, Hark (Lay) Wales, and Oscar (Crosby) Smith. Nineteenth-century diarists rarely mentioned enslaved people, but when members of the first wagon company did mention the three men, it was in reference to their labor and obedience.

Two years into the settlement, an enslaved woman took refuge in Brigham Young's home. Francis McKown wrote Young and blamed her escape on an unnamed person and promised not to beat her. "She was Borne mine and I raised hur tiff and it seems as though there was one out of the family ever since she has bin away."¹⁵ The same day, Benjamin Mathews wrote to Young about a man who was attempting to liberate himself, probably Rande, enslaved by Robert M. Smith. Mathews also mentioned a "Negro Boy called Jim that came through in A[masa] Lymans Company."¹⁶ Back in Iowa, Latter-day Saint apostle Orson Hyde wrote in the *Frontier Guardian*, probably about Jim: "The counterfeiterers in Pottawatamie are . . . charging us with being accessory to the running away of a negro slave to the Salt Lake."¹⁷ Little more is known about these three attempts at self-liberation, but McKown seems to have taken the young woman back to Mississippi.

A Mississippi newspaper reported in 1850 that Utah might choose to become a slave state, since, "If the accounts of travellers are to be relied on, slavery already exists among the Mormons. . . . Quite a large number have been introduced at the Salt Lake by the southern disciples of Joe Smith."¹⁸ A New York newspaper reported the presence of about one hundred Black residents of the Great Salt Lake Valley living with their "former masters," and editorialized that the residents of the valley believe "that 'all men are created free and equal,' and they very sensibly