

Chapter 4. Colonel Thomas L. Kane: A Friend in Need

Source: http://www.saintswithouthalos.com/Reprints/swh/c04_kane.htm

16,000 Saints migrate to Utah

[31] The great migration of Latter-day Saints to the Rocky Mountains began in the spring of 1846. Under the direction of Brigham Young, sixteen thousand Saints traveled overland, while several hundred living along the Atlantic seaboard planned to sail around Cape Horn and on to Yerba Buena (now San Francisco) under the leadership of Samuel Brannan.

Jesse Little contacts government for aid

Elder Jesse C. Little, who replaced Samuel Brannan as leader of the Church in the eastern states, was directed to contact government officials in Washington, D.C., to see if they would provide any assistance for the migration.

Thomas Kane's background

On 13 May 1846 Jesse Little addressed a special conference of the Church in Philadelphia. In attendance was a twenty-four-year-old nonmember, Thomas L. Kane. Thomas was a son of John Kintzing Kane, a prominent federal judge. He had attended school in Philadelphia, England, and France. Among his teachers had been Auguste Comte, the founder of modern sociology. Upon his return to the United States, Thomas served as law clerk to his father and was admitted to the bar. He read newspaper accounts of the Mormons in Illinois, their forced flight from Nauvoo, and their trek across Iowa. Kane's humanitarian impulses were stirred, though he later confessed [32] that he also saw in "the Mormon problem" an opportunity to advance his own political career. When he read of Jesse Little's intention to address the Philadelphia conference, Thomas decided to attend.

Kane and Little prepare letters of introduction

After the morning session Thomas invited the Mormon home, where they talked for several hours. Jesse spoke of the exodus from Nauvoo, the voyage of the *Brooklyn* to California, and his hopes for obtaining assistance from the federal government. Thomas wrote a letter of introduction for him to the vice-president of the United States. In return, Jesse prepared a letter to introduce Thomas to Brigham Young.

Call on President Polk

Jesse visited the vice-president and other federal officials in Washington. Then, early in June, Thomas joined him, and together they called upon President James K. Polk and lobbied for government assistance. The Polk administration agreed to enlist a battalion of

five hundred Mormons for the campaign to take the West from Mexico. The Mormon Battalion would travel as part of the Army of the West from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to San Diego, California. Thus, the government would provide transportation for the five hundred men and a few Mormon women who would work as laundresses and cooks. Their pay in gold would help purchase provisions and equipment for the families who would come west later.

Upon completion of the negotiations, Thomas and Jesse traveled to St. Louis. Jesse went to Nauvoo and Thomas continued on, delivering secret dispatches from President Polk and the secretary of war to General Kearney at Fort Leavenworth. As soon as he received his orders, Kearney dispatched Captain James Allen to begin recruiting men for the battalion among the Mormon camps in Iowa.

Kane contracts tuberculosis, stays in Mormon settlement (later Kaneshville)

Thomas went to the temporary Mormon settlement, later named Kaneshville, and still later Council Bluffs, Iowa, on the bluffs overlooking the Missouri River. Shortly after his arrival, Thomas, never physically robust, contracted pulmonary tuberculosis and nearly died. During his long convalescence, he often strolled through the woods, visited with the Saints, and watched them prepare for the western trek.

Occasionally he was joined by Henry G. Boyle, a member of the Battalion [33] who had not yet departed. Boyle wrote that one day he and Thomas heard someone "praying in secret in the skirt of the woods, in the rear of one of our camps. It seemed to affect [Kane] deeply, and as we walked away he observed that our people were a praying people, and that was evidence enough to him that we were sincere and honest in our faith."

Battalion farewell ball

Thomas attended the farewell ball honoring those who had joined the Battalion, noting that women had donated their gold earrings to the common purse and men had sold their "useless pocket watches" to buy wagons and supplies.

Impressed by Mormons' devotion

Hardship, hunger, and death were common among the Latter-day Saint refugees, but to Thomas's amazement he also found a spirit of love and faith. The tender care he received from the Saints who nursed him back to health, and their sincerity and devotion to God made a deep impression on him. "I believe there is a crisis in

the life of every man," he later wrote his Mormon friends,

when he is called upon to decide seriously and permanently if he will die unto sin and live unto righteousness. ... Such an event, I believe ... was my visit to [the Mormon camps on the Missouri]. It was the spectacle of your noble self denial and suffering for conscience sake [that] first made a truly serious and abiding impression upon my mind, commanding me to note that there was something higher and better than the pursuit of the interest of earthly life for the spirit made after the image of Deity.

Negotiates treaty with Indians

Patriarchal Blessing

During the summer of 1846 Thomas helped to secure the consent of the Pottawatomie Indians for the Saints to occupy part of their lands. Then, though he was not a member of the Church, he requested Church Patriarch John Smith to give him a blessing on 7 September 1846. It assured him that,

the Lord is well pleased with your exertions. He has given His angels charge over you to guard you in times of danger, to help you in time of trouble, and to defend you from your enemies. Not a hair of your head will fall by the hand of an enemy. For you are called to do a

great work on the earth and you
shall be blessed in all your
undertakings. Your name shall be
had in honorable remembrance
among the Saints to all generations.

The Saints' "second in an affair of honor

Deeply moved, Thomas committed himself to be a sincere [34] friend of the Latter-day Saints, their "second in an affair of honor," as he put it. For the remainder of his life Thomas Kane was identified with the "vindication and defense" of the Latter-day Saints. Returning to Philadelphia, he stopped off in Nauvoo to witness with his own eyes the sad consequences of the anti-Mormon agitation there. When he reached Washington, D.C., he reported what he had seen to President Polk. Then he traveled throughout the eastern cities trying to correct popular misconceptions about the Latter-day Saints.

Anti-Mormon sentiment in Nauvoo

Lobbies Washington for Mormons

In the years that followed, he often wrote the president of the United States about "the Mormon situation," lobbied cabinet officers and members of Congress, talked to influential newspaper editors, and regularly sent advice and encouragement to Church leaders in the Great Basin.

Presses for state of Deseret

He suggested the formation of the state of Deseret and sought congressional approval for its recognition. Campaigning for recognition of Deseret as a state, he addressed the Historical Society of Pennsylvania on the subject of the Mormons. His stirring address was published as an eighty-four-page pamphlet and sent to the president, cabinet members, senators, congressmen, editors, and other prominent men in Washington.

Wolfskin robe, seal rings

Even though a territorial government was established instead of a state, the Saints were immensely grateful for Thomas's help. They sent him a specially made wolfskin sleigh robe and some of the gold which the Mormon Battalion members brought back from California. Thomas had the gold made into seal rings for Horace Greeley and others who assisted in the vindication of the Mormons, and one ring each for Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards. He gave the sleigh robe to his brother Elisha

Declines offer of territorial delegate

Kane when he left to search for Sir John Franklin, lost in the Arctic ice. The robe, Thomas wrote to Brigham Young, "may be only the more honored by being the first missionary of Mormonism to the North Pole."

The Saints so appreciated their eastern advocate that they offered to elect him their delegate to Congress, but he declined, [35] saying he could do no more for the people as an independent agent.

Utah War

Thomas Kane's most important service to the Latter-day Saints occurred during the so-called Utah War. President James Buchanan had received reports from three federal officials who had served in Utah that the Mormons were in a state of rebellion. They charged that federal court records had been destroyed, that Mormons openly interfered with the mail service, and that government officials were fearful for their lives. Without any investigation, Buchanan ordered 2,500 troops to Utah to install a new governor and other territorial officials, by force if necessary. No official notice was sent to Governor Brigham Young or to the residents of Utah Territory.

Troops dispatched

News arrives July 24

The Utah Expedition left Fort Leavenworth in the summer of 1857. A number of Saints en route to the Salt Lake Valley observed the troops, infiltrated their companies, and learned that they were headed for Utah "to scalp old Brigham," "massacre Mormon leaders," and "drive the hated Mormons from their homes." Realizing the danger, the Mormons drove their horses as hard as they could and arrived in the Valley on the afternoon of 24 July 1857. Brigham Young and the Saints were in nearby Big Cottonwood Canyon celebrating the tenth anniversary of their entrance into the valley.

Mormons prepare for war

Remembering their experiences in Missouri and Illinois, Brigham Young and his associates considered the troops to be a federal militia on its way to exterminate the Mormons. The Saints hurriedly armed, dispatched an army to eastern Utah, and prepared for the worst. Mormon raiders slowed the movement of the federal troops by burning their supply wagons and capturing their cattle and horses. The Mormon tactics were so effective that Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston, who commanded the troops, ordered his expedition to "hole up" at Fort Bridger in southwestern Wyoming for the winter of 1857-1858.

Kane intercedes

Meanwhile, Thomas Kane began to intercede on

behalf of the Saints. He wrote or talked to his many newspaper friends, contacted political acquaintances, and wrote President [36] Buchanan, recounting the harsh treatment the Mormons had received from the government since the time of the Missouri persecutions.

It seemed that only the intervention of a person respected by both sides could avoid bloodshed. When Thomas Kane offered his services as a mediator, Buchanan thanked him for his willingness to abandon the comforts of friends, family, and home, and go to Utah at his own expense. The president wrote Thomas that he had his confidence but no official status, and was "recommended to the favorable regard of all the officers of the United States whom he would meet as he traveled."

Leaves for Utah

In January Thomas left New York on a steamer. He appropriated the name of his black servant and traveled as Dr. A. Osborne, botanist with the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. They disembarked at Panama, crossed the isthmus, sailed up the California coast, and hurried on to the Mormon community of San Bernardino. There they were assisted by two Mormon families who arranged transportation and provisions for "Dr. Osborne" and his servant.

Meets with Brigham Young

Kane arrived in Salt Lake City on 25 February 1858 and immediately conferred with Church leaders. Brigham Young's journal describes the meetings as follows:

Young / Kane relationship

Colonel Kane ... tried to point out a policy for me to pursue. But I told him I should not turn to the right or to the left, or pursue any course except as God dictated. ... When he found that I would be informed only as the Spirit of the Lord led me, he was at first discouraged. Then he said, I could dictate, he would execute. I told him that as he had been inspired to come here, he should go to the Army and do as the Spirit of the Lord led him, and all should be right. He did so and all was right

Young: the Lord will not let you die

When the conversation turned to Kane's health, President Young said, "The Lord has sent you here, friend Thomas, and He will not let you die, No, you cannot die until your work is done. Your name will live with the Saints in all eternity. You have done a

Persuades Governor Cumming that Mormons were not in rebellion

great work, and you will do a greater work still." About ten days after his arrival in Salt Lake City, Thomas started for the army camps in Wyoming, accompanied by a Mormon escort. As he neared the camps, he dismissed the [37] escort and rode on alone. He arrived exhausted, and the soldiers had to take him from his horse. He insisted on transacting his business with the newly appointed governor, Alfred Cumming. Thomas argued earnestly and persuaded Governor Cumming that he would be recognized as governor by the Saints, that the court records had not been burned, that the Mormons were not in a state of rebellion, and that the army should not be allowed to remain in the Salt Lake Valley.

Army negotiations

Negotiations with the army leaders were not so pleasant. One officer shot at Thomas, missing him narrowly. Colonel Johnston dispatched an orderly to invite Thomas to dinner, but instead, the orderly arrested him. Fortunately, the affair blew over quickly, when Thomas was informed that Johnston had not ordered the arrest.

April meeting of Kane, Cumming, Young

In April Thomas and Governor Cumming left the army camp to meet with Brigham Young in Salt Lake City. The new governor quickly recognized that the charges against the Mormons were not true and that he would indeed be recognized as governor. After his "final and decisive" interview with Alfred Cumming on April 24 a gratified Thomas Kane wrote in his diary, "I am and know myself to be happy."

Returns to Washington, arranges "pardon"

His mission accomplished, Thomas returned to Washington and reported to President Buchanan, who arranged to have the Mormons "pardoned" and to have the army stationed no closer than forty miles from Salt Lake City. It was a great personal triumph for Thomas; he had accomplished everything he had desired. In his next annual message to Congress, Buchanan paid special tribute to Kane:

Buchanan praises Kane

I cannot refrain from mentioning ... the valuable services of Colonel Thomas L. Kane, who from motives of pure benevolence, and without any official character or pecuniary compensation, visited Utah during the last inclement winter for the purpose of contributing to the pacification of the territory.

Wilford Woodruff's tribute

The tribute from the Latter-day Saints was even more glowing: "You were an instrument in the hands of God," wrote Wilford Woodruff, "and you were

Post-Civil War career a

inspired by Him to turn away ... the edge of the sword, saving the effusion of much blood, and performing what the combined wisdom of the [38] nation could not accomplish, changing the whole face of affairs, with effects which will remain forever.” After distinguishing himself in the Civil War, Major General Thomas Kane took his family to begin developing land in McKean County, Pennsylvania. He opened roads, built railroads, and in a few years became financially independent. A succession of Mormon missionaries and envoys visited him regularly and were treated as "family."

Visits Utah 1872–1873, prepares Brigham Young's will

At the invitation of Brigham Young, Thomas brought his family to Utah for the winter of 1872–73. When he returned to Philadelphia, Thomas prepared a will for Brigham Young and drafted other documents to found the Brigham Young College in Logan, the Brigham Young Academy, and the Young University (later absorbed into the University of Utah) in Salt Lake City.

Returns to Utah when Young dies

When Brigham Young died in 1877, General Kane characteristically dropped everything and hurried to Salt Lake City to express his sorrow and to assure himself that the Mormon cause would continue to prosper. After meeting with President John Taylor and members of the Twelve, he observed "The Lord has made ample provision for the preservation of that cause which lies near to my heart."

Death in 1883

On 26 December 1883, at the age of sixty-one, Thomas Kane died of pneumonia at his Philadelphia home. A letter from his wife to George Q. Cannon describes his last moments:

"Your friend suffered intensely until a few hours of his release, his mind was wandering from the outset of the attack. Yet in the intervals of consciousness he was fully persuaded of the approach of death, and made efforts to give us counsel and bid us farewell. In one of these lucid moments he said: 'My mind is too heavy, but do send the sweetest message you can make up to my Mormon friends—to *all my dear Mormon friends*.' Nothing I could make up," she wrote, "could be sweeter to you than this evidence that you were in his last thoughts."