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## The Ship "Brooklyn"

Author(s): Andrew Jenson

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**Abstract:** A historical essay on the ship "Brooklyn" and its voyage to California.

## THE SHIP "BROOKLYN."

In November, 1845, Orson Pratt, who presided over the branches of the Church in the Eastern and Middle States, issued his farewell message to the Saints in those parts, prior to taking his departure for Nauvoo to join the Saints in their removal westward. It had been decided that the *Messenger*, a paper published in New York in the interest of the Church, by Samuel Brannan, should suspend publication, and that the editor should charter a vessel and take his press and fixtures, as also a company of Saints from the Eastern branches, by way of Cape Horn, to California, as the distance to travel from that point to their probable destination in the Rocky Mountains, it was thought, would not be so great, and the trip would be attended with much less expense. At the same time those who had sufficient means to buy for themselves teams and outfit were advised to make their way to Nauvoo, to join the Saints there and journey westward.

In compliance with these instructions Samuel Brannan chartered the ship *Brooklyn*, Captain Richardson, and small companies of Saints from the New York and Massachusetts branches of the Church began to gather in New York City, awaiting the date of departure from the United States to California. Upon arriving at New York they were directed to a certain boarding house where friends were already waiting. "One by one," writes Augusta Joyce Crocheron, one of the passengers who made the voyage in the *Brooklyn*, "the tardy emigrants arrived; the full number was entered, the luggage was transferred to the ship and they left the bustling thoroughfares of the great city and crowded into the stuffy little staterooms for the long journey 'around the Horn' in the old, almost worn out sailing vessel, the ship *Brooklyn*. \* \* \*

"The *Brooklyn* had seen many a rough sea, and weathered many a

terrible storm. She was one of the old time build, and was made more for work than beauty or speed. She had done her duty well, and borne her burdens without complaint. But she was old and showed unmistakable signs of weakness and decay. Her owners couldn't part with her, not because she was attractive, but there was money to be made out of her, and if by her weakness and age she might go to the bottom with her list of passengers full, yet even the last charter or payment of passage would be better than laying her up, as useless, no matter how many souls were sent to the deeps until the sea should give up its dead. Her roster was well officered, and she was well manned, but the hull was rickety, and she was chartered because she could be had cheap."

The *Brooklyn* set sail from New York Feb. 4, 1846, the same day as the actual exodus from Nauvoo, Ill., began (see page 835), with about two hundred and thirty souls on board, mostly Saints, and considerable freight, some of which was for the Sandwich Islands. The passengers started on their voyage joyfully. They took farming implements, blacksmiths, carpenters, and wheelwrights' tools, fixtures for two grist mills, saw-mill irons, a printing press, type, paper and such other things as would be needed in establishing a colony in a distant land. Sister Crocheron writes:

"The day on which we embarked was rainy, cold and gloomy. Upon the wharf lingered friends, sorrowful in the hour of parting; strangers, cynical and curious, wondering and half pitying, looked upon the old emigrant ship, having their own thoughts of this strange venture upon a long and perilous voyage, to an almost unknown country. \* \* \*

"There were two gentlemen on board, traveling for pleasure, neither of whom were Mormons. \* \* \* As for the pleasure of the trip, we met disappointment, for we once long lay becalmed in the tropics, and at another time we were

'hatched below' during a terrific storm. Women and children were at night lashed to their berths, for in no other way could they keep in. Furniture rolled back and forth endangering limb and life. The waves swept the deck and even reached the staterooms. A passenger relates that their only light was from two lamps hung outside in the hall and these were dim and wavering from the movements of the vessel. Children's voices crying in the darkness, mother's voices soothing or scolding, men's voices rising above the others, all mingled with the distressing groans and cries of the sick for help, and, above all, the roaring of the wind and howling of the tempest made a scene and feeling indescribable.

"The effect and feeling at such times were so wretched that with some of us the certainty of death would not have roused us to an effort to save life in our own behalf. And yet even there amid such scenes a few were cheerful and sought to comfort others, and those never for a moment lost belief that they would reach their journey's end. Upon one occasion, during a dreadful storm, the good old captain came down with grave countenance. The passengers gathered around him to catch his words amid the confusion of the scene. He said: 'My friends, there is a time in every man's life when it is fitting that he should prepare to die. That time has come to us, and unless God interposes, we shall all go to the bottom; I have done all in my power, but this is the worst gale I have known since I was master of a ship.' One woman, full of confidence and zeal, answered him: 'Captain Richardson, we left for California and we shall get there.' Another looked with a calm smile on her face and said: 'Captain, I have no more fear than though we were on the solid land.' The captain gazed upon them in mute surprise and left them. As he went upstairs he exclaimed, 'These people have a faith that I have not,' and added to a gentleman, 'They are either fools and fear nothing, or they know more than I do.'

"That storm passed away; and we encountered another off Cape Horn, in which one of the sailors was washed overboard. It was also during a storm that Mrs. Laura Goodwin was descending a stairway when she was thrown heavily forward, which caused premature confinement and death to ensue.

"In longitude 77° W. and latitude 33° S. we sighted the famous Island of Juan Fernandez. The memory of the place will never fade from our minds. \* \* \* As we approached, being yet a great distance

away, the island looked like a mass of immensely high rocks covered with moss; which moss, on nearer scrutiny, turned out to be heavy forests covering lofty peaks. The latter were half buried in masses of cloud, and were now visible, now invisible, as the fickle air-current disturbed the cumuli which yet in shifting forms continued to hang about the mountain tops. The little harbor \* \* \* faces the east, and is in the form of a half-moon or horse-shoe. In coming towards it, but still some miles away, a row of regular apertures became visible in the face of a cliff at right angles to the line of our approach. They looked so like a battery, that one had to pause for a moment and reflect how unsuitable their real if not apparent size must be as embrasures for guns. In point of fact, these holes were the entrances of caverns or chambers in the rocks, in which, as we were assured, the Chilian government formerly imprisoned convicts. The stone is soft and porous, and the felons, for whom the island was a sort of Botany Bay, were employed in gangs at enlarging the subterranean spaces which nature had originally formed.

"At Juan Fernandez we went ashore to bury Mrs. Goodwin. Although the occasion was so sorrowful, the presence of the six little children sobbing in their uncontrollable grief and the father in his loneliness trying to comfort them, still, such was our weariness of the voyage that the sight of and tread upon *terra firma* once more was such a relief from the ship life that we gratefully realized and enjoyed it. The passengers bathed and washed their clothing in the fresh water, gathered fruit and potatoes, caught fish, some eels, great spotted creatures that looked so much like snakes that some members of the company could not eat them when cooked. We rambled about the island, visited the caves, one of which was pointed out to us as the veritable 'Robinson Crusoe's' cave, and it was my good fortune to take a sound nap there one pleasant afternoon. \* \* \*

"Many mementoes and souvenirs were gathered, and after strewing our dead sister's grave anew with parting tokens of love, regret and remembrance, we departed from the island, bearing away a serene though shaded picture of our brief sojourn. \* \* \*

"The children! How they did gnaw away on poor bread and fat pieces of boiled salt pork! At first there was a sad waste of provisions and the sharks soon followed the ship for the food thrown overboard. One very daring young man used to take a curious kind of pleasure in lowering himself



over the deck down to where he would be barely out of their reach, as an aggravating temptation to them. Evidently he did not share the nervous apprehensions of his wife, nor the superstitions entertained by the sailors. After we reached the Sandwich Islands he practiced the same feat at the almost extinct volcano, and narrowly escaped suffocation.

"The drinking water grew thick and ropy with slime, so that it had to be strained between the teeth, and the taste was dreadful. One pint a day was the allowance to each person to carry to his stateroom. \* \*

"Still worse grew the condition of the ship as the journey lengthened. Rats abounded in the vessel; cockroaches and smaller vermin infested the provisions, until eternal vigilance was the price imposed upon every mouthful. It was not strange that sickness and discontent prevailed.

"During the voyage a contract was drawn and signed by the company, covenanting to give the proceeds of their labors for the next three years into a common fund from which all were to draw their living, as a limited communism was contemplated to be put into operation for convenience and protection. Some months afterwards a number of the signers 'backed out,' others faithfully keeping their promise through adversity and prosperity. \* \* \*

"July 31, 1846, we passed the 'Golden Gate.' The day opened not with a glorious sunshine to us, for a fog hovered over the harbor of Yerba Buena, and a mist like a winter's robe hung all around, hiding from our eager eyes the few objects that were made weird and enigmatical in the nearness of the firm and solid ground, where we expected that soon willing labor would begin, homes be erected, fields cultivated, and peace and safety spread over us their wings of protection. \* \* \*

"As we gazed through the misty walls we perceived dimly some familiar shapes looming up—sloops, whalers, ships of war, and waving from their masts as well as from the barracks the well-known and glorious flag of our country.

"A boom—and its echo filled the air; it was a salute from the cannon of the fort, ordered by the U. S. commander. The *Brooklyn* responded, and all hearts felt more cheerful and secure. Look! in the dim distance a dark body gliding on the water to-

wards us while the familiar strokes of the oars brought it swiftly and steadily to our ship's side. It was a sturdy row boat, that seemed a familiar friend. In a few moments uniformed men trod the deck; we knew they were friends—Americans, not Mexicans. In our sweet native tongue the officer in command, with head uncovered, earnestly and confidentially said in a loud tone: 'Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor to inform you that you are in the United States of America.' Three hearty cheers were given in reply from faint and weary lips, but rising from hearts strong, brave, hopeful and loyal still.

"They crowded upon the deck, women and children, questioning husbands and fathers, and studied the picture before them—they would never see it just the same again—as the foggy curtains furled towards the azure ceiling. How it imprinted itself upon their minds! A long, sandy beach strewn with hides and skeletons of slaughtered cattle, a few scrubby oaks, farther back low sand hills rising behind each other as a background to a few old shanties that leaned away from the wind, an old adobe barracks, a few donkeys plodding dejectedly along beneath towering bundles of wood, a few loungers stretched lazily upon the beach as though nothing could astonish them; and between the picture and the emigrants still loomed up here and there, at the first sight more distinctly, the black vessels—whaling ships and sloops of war,—that was all, and that was Yerba Buena, now San Francisco, the landing place for the pilgrims of faith.

"Soon came the order for unloading, and all was activity, all being glad to stand once more on solid ground. A few tents were erected, and these were soon filled. Into the old barracks 16 families were crowded, their apartments being divided by quilts, or other accommodating partitions. The cooking was to be done out of doors. The orders were passed around that all must stay within certain limits; the war with Mexico was virtually ended, but the vindictive enemy lurked ever near, ready to wreak vengeance upon the unwary.

"With hearty good will, trying to make the best of everything, the new colony, carried and landed safely by the old ship *Brooklyn* from New York, began life and spread its influence, habits of industry and adornment of homes around them."

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