

Episode 1

Legacy

WINTER QUARTERS

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NATHAN WRIGHT: One of the most remarkable aspects of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is its unique history. Throughout the world great stories from faithful church members have only added to that history. This program shares some of these incredible stories of faith, perseverance, hope, and inspiration. You're listening to Legacy. I'm your host Nathan Wright.

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NATHAN WRIGHT: For Latter-day Saints today, the small cemetery on a bluff near what is today Omaha, Nebraska, stands as a symbol of forced exile from Nauvoo, a harrowing journey of suffering and sacrifice for thousands. The principal settlement, Winter Quarters, is remembered mainly for the death that stalked the camp, yet it was also a place of refuge and a nearly ideal setting to prepare for the rest of the pioneers' journey to the West. Jenny Lund is the manager of Church historic sites in the Church History Department. She has a Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Utah, and a Master's degree in American History from Brigham Young University. She has worked for the Church History Department for 23 years, during which time she's often been assigned to work on historic site projects. She served as the educator on the team that created the Mormon Trail Center at historic Winter Quarters and has published an article in BYU Studies on Winter Quarters in the year 2000. We welcome you, Jenny Lund, to our studio.

JENNY LUND: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Now, there is a quote that you have used in that paper that we have talked about that would probably be a good jumping off point for this discussion; and that pioneer in Winter Quarters wrote, "Pleasing to the eyes of an exile," and to me that says so much about what Winter Quarters is. Why don't you elaborate a little?

JENNY LUND: Well, I think that quote is perhaps a little surprising to some Latter-day Saints who see Winter Quarters only as a place of death and tragedy. However, there's another part to the Winter Quarters' story and that is the fact that this was really an ideal place to plant a temporary settlement and then to stage a major migration to the West. And so I think that Mary Haskken Parker Richards, who was a young 22 year old girl, her husband was away

on a mission in England, and she kept a marvelous diary, as well as, wrote wonderful letters to her husband from Winter Quarters and I think she gives us that other sense of what Winter Quarters was. She says, "Pleasing to the eyes of an exile." She saw it as a really beautiful, kind-of ideal spot.

NATHAN WRIGHT: I think that quote also tells us so much in the fact that these people are in flask, they're in the wilderness and the fact that they have this place, which may be temporary but is also rather nice, says that it's pleasing even though they are sort of in the wilderness. Why do you think the Church has such a sort-of narrow view of what Winter Quarters was? I mean, to me we have this C.C.A. Christensen picture that shows the cabins along the river and that's really the only image I can think of having grown up in the Church of what Winter Quarters is or was. Why do you think that is for the Church?

JENNY LUND: Well, we were there for such a short time, just two years, before moving on, and I think really the main reason we tend to have a view of Winter Quarters, is this side of tragedy, is because what remains is the cemetery on the hill above the community, and there's no doubt that that tragedy struck many families. So people as families remember that a great-grandmother or a great-grandfather died there or they buried their children there. In the 1930s, Avard Fairbanks, who was a Utah-born sculpture of some note, was traveling through Winter Quarters or through that area of Omaha, and he stopped at that little cemetery and ran into another Latter-day Saint who happened to be visiting there, and they started talking about that forlorn cemetery on the hill and said we really ought to do something to memorialize the pioneers who died here. Fairbanks, himself, his grandparents had lost a baby and buried it there at Winter Quarters. He began working on a memorial and he eventually convinced Heber J. Grant to help fund that memorial and to lease the cemetery there. Since the 1930s, the main symbolic image of Winter Quarters has really been the cemetery and that beautiful monument created by Avard Fairbanks and known as *tragedy* at Winter Quarters.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Also on that memorial is a list of all the known pioneers who died there. Is that true?

JENNY LUND: That is true. There was a sexton cemetery record book and it actually covers people who have dies in other cemeteries as well.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Memorialized on a plaque in the Winter Quarters cemetery visitors can see the long list of names of those who perished and most often I think we equate those names with as sturdy pioneer stereotypes. The reality though, as I understand it, was quite different.

JENNY LUND: Well, that is true. Winter Quarters had an unusually high death rate. It is actually very similar to the death rate from the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia in the 1700s. Which means that at Winter Quarters people died at epidemic proportions. However, they were dying of multiple causes. The largest percentage of deaths were actually children under the age of two. Forty-six percent of all recorded deaths at Winter Quarters were children under the age of two. Some of them, of course, died of childhood diseases, but most were really suffering from the malnutrition caused by this forced exile from Nauvoo, and particularly that malnutrition which affected nursing mothers – and then

affected children. And, then there was disease that infected the camps. In the late there were two waves of disease that seemed to take their toll and the first wave was in the late summer and early fall and that was probably malaria or some other mosquito-borne parasite that caused a fever. They, the pioneers themselves, called it the fever or the “ague” and it would be a cycle of fever and chills and illness and that caused a number of death. And, then in the winter time what seemed to emerge was what they called *black leg* and that would be a malnutrition disease, probably scurvy, in which the skin (the limbs) turn black and they become very painful and it's essentially a vitamin deficiency.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So, just imposed in my mind are the images we have of this quote from the diary with the death and the disease and the cemetery, and I've heard you mention that there are really two stories with Winter Quarters. Talk about that a little bit.

JENNY LUND: There are two stories, and Mary Richards is not the only one to talk about Winter Quarters in very positive terms. When you look at the diaries (and when I was doing research for this Mormon Trail Center project that I worked on) I went through more than 300 diaries, journals, reminiscences, and letter – primary sources from people who were eye witnesses and who were there. So what do they have to say? When they talk about the place, they talk in very positive terms. They call it a beautiful site, a comfortable situation, an ideal location, grand. One letter writer called it quite romantic. It was really just a great location. I think there are a number of reasons for that, but really the primary one is this is really fertile farm land. Today, this is still America's bread basket. This soil is very rich, the crops grow extremely well, it's easy to plant. So, it was really an ideal location for them to settle temporarily and to get crops planted, and they were close to major towns in Missouri so they could go across the river, and down the river a bit, and be able to trade, or men could go down there to work, and many men did, so they could get additional money, and it was apart from the people who had been a threat to them in Illinois. And, they were really apart from the people who had been a threat to them in Missouri. They had some fears about people in Missouri, but they soon learned that those were unwarranted; nobody was going to come after them. So, it was really a good location where they had some security, have some refuge, and they were able to get organized and get ready for this trip West. And, those townsmen Missouri were major outfitting posts for Western migration, so they had the supplies that the Latter-day Saints needed.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So, when I think about the C.C.A. Christensen painting, it seems like the cabins, or whatever, are sort-of haphazardly laid out, but in listening to your lecture from the Church office building, you mentioned that they had some pretty good plans to follow as they laid out Winter Quarters. Tell me about that.

JENNY LUND: Well, Winter Quarters itself was really a very orderly city, and it followed – let me just step a little broader for a minute and give you a perspective – Winter Quarters is one of many temporary waste stations on the Western side of Iowa and the Eastern side of Nebraska. Winter Quarters is the main one in Nebraska with just a couple other small ones. But, in Western Iowa, there are more than 90 temporary waste stations. Of all of those settlements, more than 90 settlements, Winter Quarters is the only one that is really

laid out and platted like a Mormon settlement. And, they were following Joseph Smith's plan for the city of Zion. That concept of the ideal, religious community with the religious blocks in the center, and then homes around it, and then on the outskirts, farmland. That is exactly what Winter Quarters looked like. It is also the plat of the city of Zion was also laid out to match the cardinal points of the compass. Much like Salt Lake City or other Utah towns today. Well, Winter Quarters was laid out much like that. It's a little bit skewed because the bluff doesn't quite run true North and South, but it's very close to that. Joseph's plan for the ideal city of Zion was exactly one mile square. Well, Winter Quarters is on a half scale of that. So, it's one mile long and then a half mile wide because that's where it fits, it's just nestled in to a little bit of table land, tucked up against a bluff. So, they didn't have room to expand further.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So, were any of these other numerous settlements, LDS immigrant settlements, significant. I think of Kingsville, Iowa, only because I guess they built a tabernacle there. Why is that one different?

JENNY LUND: Kingsville just seemed to grow up as people moved in wagons and then they'd find a good spot for a cabin, and they'd built a cabin, so it was really kind of a haphazard settlement along a creek and Kingsville. Kingsville grew up to be one of the other very large Latter-day Saint temporary settlement and then it continued as an important outfitting station and was renamed Council Bluffs a few years later. But, you drive in down town, old town Council Bluffs today; you can 'til see that kind of haphazard road layout. It's still there with the same way it was originally. So, what makes Winter Quarters different? Well, they get across the river together in one group, so we don't have people trying to build cabins on their own. We have church leaders in that group, including Brigham Young, who's President of the Quorum of the Twelve, and has a real devotion to fulfilling Joseph's vision for the way communities should be settled. And, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richardson, other members of the Quorum of the Twelve intent to make their homes in what becomes Winter Quarters. And, so they essentially establish this town as the Church headquarters. And, Brigham Young, in writing a letter (I can't remember who the letter's to), but in writing a letter from Winter Quarters, he said we have the town all laid out in order, just as we do everything. And, so that kind of gives you a sense at what they're thinking when they layout this Winter Quarters community.

NATHAN WRIGHT: In your lecture that I quite enjoyed, as I was listening to it, you mentioned that you learned a couple of rules or lessons about historical fact finding. Can you tell us what instances brought about those conditions?

JENNY LUND: Well, there's always things you learn from historical research and sometimes you learn the things you should have known when you started and I learned a couple of those along the way. There is a plat map of Winter Quarters drawn by Thomas Bullock, who was Willard Richards's clerk, and it's a wonderful little map and very accurate as far as the block layout and the roads and the compass point direction – that's all on that map. And, then I was looking at Willard Richards's diary describing Winter Quarters and he gives the survey notes in his diary for when they first laid it out. And so, I'm following those

survey notes and I couldn't get them to match the map, and if I hadn't been trying to make a model of Winter Quarters for the Trail Center, I probably never would have gone through this exercise and would have never noticed the discrepancy, but they just didn't match. And so I took the numbers home because I thought, you know, I just don't know much about surveying, and my husband had surveyed when we was in college, so I took them home and said, "Am I reading this wrong," and he looked at the survey notes and said, "No, the notes do not match this map." So, he said you have to go back to the sources. So, I went back to the original sources again and looked at all of them and I found something that previous historians had missed, and that is the fact that this company was camped at a little site they were calling Cutler's Park and intending to develop there. But, they had more people than you could really fit there; it was a piece of land that was disputed between the Oto and the Omaha Indians because this is all in Indian Territory that we're talking about at the time. And, so there was that dispute going; it was on a piece of land that was really subject to high winds, which was turning out to be a problem, so they were looking for another place to settle and as I looked at the diaries, it became clear that on September 11th they had walked North of Cutler's Park and that is where they platted this settlement where the main streets that actually ran East and West. And, then about a week later, on September 18th, this group of Church leaders were taken to this piece of table land near the river and were shown this kind of ideal site there. And, on September 19th, they go to the table land and start surveying again. And, so in the past people looking at those instances have just conflated them into one settlement, but it actually ended up being two, where they first gone North of Cutler's Park, established a settlement and established a cemetery there, and started building cabins and then they abandoned that and they moved to this piece of table land near the river. So, from that, you learn that you really have to be very careful with your sources and following the chronology day by day to make sure that you've got it write and to not rely on the secondary sources. And, what I did at that point, many of the things that I looked at were not adding up. They were not all agreeing, so I went back to my database of information that pulled form lots of places including secondary sources and I removed all the secondary sources and when I did that, all the primary sources were consistent with each other because those were the eye witnesses; those were the people who experienced it and they knew the town inside and out and so they were all consistent.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So, you mention that this was Indian Territory once they crossed the Missouri River they left the Iowa territory and were now in the Indian lands. How did that work?

JENNY LUND: Well, technically it was illegal to settle, for whites to settle, in Indian Territory. However, when Captain Allen of the...excuse me, Colonel Allen, of the Mormon Battalion, when he was dispatched to the Mormon camps in order to negotiate for this group of Mormon soldiers who would then be used in the Mexican-American war, he was given authority by President Polk to negotiate whatever terms he deemed appropriate. So, when he met with Brigham Young and other church leaders, some of the Latter-day Saint companies had already started to cross the river so they were already on Indian Territory, but intending just to move through it. But, in their negotiations, he agreed that the Mormons would be able to have a temporary settlement in that Indian Territory. The Indian agent, the local Indian agent, did not, was not informed about that and he was not very happy

about it. Neither was the director of the Indian Affairs, superintendent of the Indian Affairs, when he found out about it. And so eventually in 1848, when the main groups of Latter-day Saints had left Winter Quarters, they were forced to abandon that completely and then whoever was left in Winter Quarters moved back across the river onto the Iowa side. And that land was left again for the Indians; so it was just a two-year settlement period. They had this agreement from the Federal Government then, negotiated by Colonel Allen, but then they also had to get the agreements from the Indian tribes. And, so they had a number of meetings with both the Omaha and the Oto Indians and discussions about settling on their territory. And, they finally...one of the reasons which they did move North or where they wanted to move away from Cutler's Park was that little piece of property there was kind of disputed territory between two tribes. And so, what they ended up doing was moving to the table land which the Omaha had firmly claimed as theirs. So, as you see letters that are written from Winter Quarters they always say, Winter Quarters - Omaha Nation, and that's how their mail got delivered back to them.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Very Interesting. With a settlement this large, almost 5,000 people there, over this two year period, one would think there is got to be some remnant, something left. Tell us about what really happened.

JENNY LUND: Well, there are two little remnants. There's not much left. There is a cemetery on the hill where the graves of many Latter-day Saints are. There's only one headstone remaining from that early time period. There is also some timbers from a mill in Winter Quarters that were reused in a mill built in, later called Florence, in the 1850s, and that old Florence mill, even though it's been moved a couple times and remodeled dramatically, those original timbers are still inside the Florence mill, which is now an art gallery and people can visit it today. So, what happened? Well, this was a temporary settlement so the structures here were all log and fences, log and sod, buildings and fences. After the Mormons left, there are probably a couple things that happened. One, Indians were able to use any of those structures they saw fit. They probably didn't use them, live in them, but we know they came and harvested leftover crops and perhaps used the buildings for some purposes. And then, Wood Hawks traveled up and down the Missouri river to get the wood for the steam boats which were all fired by wood and they used enormous amounts of wood and so people who were called "Wood Hawks" would go up and down the river looking for wood. They purchased it. They would cut it if they had to, but most often they stole it if they could. And, people had to be very careful about protecting their property or they'd wake up one morning and all their fences were gone. And so, probably a lot of Winter Quarters' wood was taken to supply the steam boats along the river. And then, in 1850, a prairie fire swept through the area. We happen to know this because there was an immigrant company on their way to either Oregon or California who were camped nearby and one of the company numbers reported it in his diary, saying he saw the old Mormon town burn and it was just scoured with this prairie fire that swept through the area. And so that essentially took most the remnants of what was originally there.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So, we have the cemetery; there's also a visitor's center, not to mention the temple in

Winter Quarters or Florence or Omaha, however you want to say it. Tell us about the current day situation, what the Church has and what people could see if they go there?

JENNY LUND: Well, that memorial that I mentioned earlier by Avarad Fairbanks in the Winter Quarters cemetery drew many visitors over the years. And, as time passed and people become more and more interested about following the trail and visiting sites that ancestors had once lived, the cemetery got more and more visitors to it. And so, eventually there was a small home purchased nearby where visitors could meet with missionaries who would tell them about the experience there, and as that visitation just grew and grew and the approach of the sesquicentennial of the Mormon trail celebrations in 1996 and 1997 the First Presidency decided the time had come to build a more substantial visitor center there that would really tell the story of the entire Mormon immigration through that area. And in fact, it tells the whole Mormon immigration story. And so, I was assigned to work on that project and we built a large visitor center that does just that. And it was opened and dedicated in 1997 by President Hinckley. And so, you can go to the visitor's center today and see exhibits that tell you about leaving Nauvoo, the decisions to leave Nauvoo, and what the journey crossing Iowa was like. There are artifacts on exhibit that made that journey. There's a replica cabin furnished much like we think the cabins in Winter Quarters would be. We've got a model of Winter Quarters and many other exhibits that tell that story, Winter Quarters story, and then also some other exhibits that tell that broader immigration story about coming by ship from Europe and by wagon and by handcart to the Salt Lake Valley.

NATHAN WRIGHT: I happen to be there in 1997 for the commemoration of the leaving to go to Salt Lake. It was a very interesting thing, very emotional. I remember standing in the visitor center and they have a section there with a big, beautiful picture window overlooking the cemetery. Can you tell us what that is really about, why they chose to do that?

JENNY LUND: Well, we designed that space particularly because we wanted to make sure we had a strong connection with the cemetery across the street, and so that picture window and that room, which we call the memorial room, is a place where people can see the cemetery and connect with it and be reminded of those sacrifices that people made when they were pioneering, moving from one part of the country to another and the challenges that they faced there. And we want to do it in a dignified and respectful way and one which would help them feel the significance of that story. And also, so that no matter what the weather was they could still have that experience from the visitor center.

NATHAN WRIGHT: So, how is the visitor center and the cemetery in this location, and also Mormon trail sites throughout Iowa and across the country, how is that viewed by non-members – members of other faiths?

JENNY LUND: You know, we have a really kind of unique situation in Iowa Nebraska because we have a lot of people who are just enthusiastic about the Mormon trail story. And, many people who are not Latter-day Saints, who are interested, there is an Iowa Mormon Trails Association. It's been in existence about 20 years now and most of the members are not Latter-day Saints, but they love the story, they are interested in protecting the sites and

marking the sites and they have just done a marvelous, marvelous job with that. Nebraska has a similar Mormon Trails Association and some significant interest there, as well as, interest in all trails that pass through their area. So, there's some wonderful interpretive centers on lots of historic markers. So, if you want to take a trip, if you want to do the kind of Mormon trail pilgrimage, you can get guide books and follow those trails exactly, going from marker to marker and seeing different stories told along the way. It's really a wonderful experience if you're a history buff.

NATHAN WRIGHT: As every Latter-day Saint should be. [laugh] So, you and Jan Fletcher are listed online in the bibliography of *The Mormons in Nebraska* for your 56-page publication, *Illness, Death and Burial at Winter Quarters*, some material records and journal and diary excerpts. Those two elements seem to describe well the two vastly different stories of Winter Quarters that we talked about. From your research and experience what do you feel every Latter-day Saint needs to know and take from the Winter Quarters' story?

JENNY LUND: I think every Latter-day Saint really needs to know that there are two stories there. One is the story of, with which people are already familiar, but it is the story, it's a real story of tragic proportions, particularly for individuals. Theodore Turley at Winter Quarters within 10 months lost seven members of his family, including two wives, four children, and one granddaughter. That is a story of tragic proportions. That's a story of people doing what they're called upon for their faith and unfortunately suffering significantly along the way. However, there's also this other story at Winter Quarters. If you read the diaries of Mary Richards, you see dancing parties, and singing school, and meetings, and hard work and cooperative enterprises, people working together. There's a wonderful little quote from one Latter-day Saint in Winter Quarters where he describes the businesses. You could shop in stores, you could go to the meat market, you could go to the chair factory, there were blacksmith shops, there was a basket factory, there was a grist mill. There was all this industry going on in this little temporary settlement. It's no surprise to me that looking at Winter Quarters, and when it was complete there were probably around 700 cabins and all this industry going on, it's no surprise to me that the Indian agent and superintendent of Indian Affairs were very concerned, because this did not look like a temporary settlement. It looked like people were going to stay a long time. And, the speed at which it went up, because this town went up in about six weeks, between six and nine weeks, we had this entire functioning town in the middle of nowhere on the edge of the Missouri river. And so, I think those are the two stories. One is this story that we all know [BACKGROUND MUSIC STARTS] of sacrifice and tragedy, but also this story of cooperation, hard work, and amazing accomplishment.

NATHAN WRIGHT: Thank you. We've been talking with Jenny Lund, the Manager of Church Historic Sites in the Church History Department.

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