

Legacy

DOUGLAS M. CHABRIES

I am honored to be with you this morning. As this sesquicentennial year draws to a close, I would like to reflect upon the legacy left by a special set of pioneers who are perhaps not well known. These pioneers, my ancestors, experienced the trials of the trek westward, converted to the Church, and left a noble heritage but left us little to understand their everyday feelings and experiences. Still, they left a great legacy, even though my first acquaintance with them occurred as I helped my parents copy the pages of pedigree charts for our family.

Mary A. Johnson wrote:

*I've always known your names
But,
You were flat people on a white page
Until
I read your stories.
Now you are more than names
And
I know that your blood flows also in
My veins.*

[Excerpt from a poem by Mary A. Johnson, quoted in Sarah Jane Cannon, "Pioneers Exemplify Faith, Courage," *Church News*, 22 July 1995, p. 5]

For each of us here today, the path to Utah is marked with special events. For some the story is recent, whereas for others those events are recorded in the memories of our families. My father, whose parents emigrated from Yugoslavia to the now-dormant logging town of Bridal Veil, Oregon, used to chide my mother for following an ancestry of her people that she hoped to trace to the Mayflower. My father's rhetoric was silenced when Mother discovered the migration of the 19-year-old Puritan Jonas Westover to a Pilgrim colony in the Massachusetts Bay area in 1647. It was the desire for freedom to worship God according to the dictates of his own mind that precipitated his departure from a Dutch port where his family had worked to reform the Church of England, in opposition to the British Crown. For well over a century the Westovers meandered the plains and hills of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont. The end of the American War of Independence opened opportunities for migration to the west at a time when heavy frost and drought forced many from New England.

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Charles Westover was born in Ohio during the fall of 1827. His father died in Ohio during the spring of 1834, but shortly before his death he described a dream in which he saw people being baptized by immersion in something that resembled a “tan vat.” This dream would later have dearer meaning for Charles. After the death of his father, young Charles lived with many different families. At times he was ill-treated, and he never seemed to really fit in.

Charles heard about the events that surrounded the rise of the LDS Church in Ohio and became prejudiced against it, even though his aunt and cousin had been baptized. Finally, two elders (Goodale and Howe) arrived and left the message of the restored gospel. Although Charles’ prejudices vanished at that time, he did not commit to baptism. He recorded:

The house was jammed full. Such a sermon as we heard that night I never heard before. That night with all my prejudices, I was converted to the truth of Mormonism. I tell you all who read this sketch that Elder [Goodale] was most powerful and that he was filled of the Holy Spirit. His words pierced you through and through. [Charles Westover, Pinto Ward Membership Records]

Charles was intrigued by what he had heard. The occasion arose for Charles to attend a conference of the Saints only 15 miles north. Again he wrote about the special feeling that attended that conference. A few months later young Charles accompanied his mother and his brother’s family to Council Bluffs on the Missouri River. From there he ferried across the river to Winter Quarters. He tried without success to find Elder Goodale. Discouraged, without money, and 1,000 miles from home, he wandered out to the graveyard, where there were buried more than 600 people from the areas where the Saints camped.

Then, though Charles had still not been baptized, Brother Erastus Snow engaged him to drive one of his wagons across the plains.

This must have been an exciting moment for a rough young man whose independence had caused him so much trouble in the past. He noted, “It was a beautiful team to drive—a yoke of large stags on the tongue, a yoke of cows and a yoke of yearling heifers on the lead” (Charles Westover, “A Short History of My Life,” family archives).

A few days later, while camped at the Elkhorn River waiting for the arrival of President Brigham Young’s company, Charles’ eye caught sight of a lovely young lady—Eliza Ann Haven. Eliza’s roots were also in Massachusetts, where she had been born on May 15, 1829. I have asked my mother to read a part of the letter Eliza wrote to her son, since my mother and Eliza knew each other and together their lives span the history of the Church from the time of the restoration of the Aaronic priesthood by John the Baptist to the present day.

The first Mormon Elders that I saw, I was eight years old, were President Brigham Young and Willard C. Richards. . . . In 1838 my father and mother joined the Church. In 1841 we left our native home for Nauvoo. Arrived there in May, traveling by canal, rail and steamboat. The first to greet us on landing were the Prophet Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. After shaking hands and bidding us welcome, Brother Joseph’s first question: had we anyplace to go. . . . Brother Joseph was a great lover of children. I never met him but I had a bow and one of his sweet smiles. Used to love to hear him preach although then I was but a child, he was always interesting.

We lived on the main street going East out of Nauvoo, less than a half mile from the temple. Seldom a week but Brother Joseph would go by, either horseback or in his family carriage with his family. He was a noble-looking man. . . .

Brother Joseph, with the other brethren and heavy guard, rode past our house on their last ride. When word came that our Prophet and Patriarch were killed, what a gloom was over the city.

Everyone was in tears. We were a flock of sheep without a shepherd. The question was a general one: What shall we do without a Prophet?

I was then 15 years old and I felt so sad. I was to [the] meeting when Sidney Rigdon declared himself our true prophet and leader. Very few responded to the call, I am happy to say none of my father's family felt that he was. Soon after Brother Brigham came home from the East where he was on a mission. I was to [the] meeting he said he was our Prophet and Seer. When he spoke it was in Brother Joseph's voice. I gave a jump off] my seat and said, "our Prophet Joseph has come to life, we have our Prophet back!" I looked up and there stood Brother Joseph just as slim as I ever saw him when alive. For a minute I heard Br. Joseph's voice and saw his features then a mist seemed to pass from Brigham's face and go up. Then there stood Brother Brigham talking to us. Hundreds saw the same thing I did, but not all that were present. I forgot to tell you. I saw Brothers Joseph and Hyrum after they were in their coffins, the cruel bullet hole in Brother Hyrum's head. It was a sad day for the saints in Nauvoo.

After that, all seemed at peace for a short while, but our enemies found out they had not killed Mormonism by killing our Prophet. The temple was built through much persecution (dedicated) so the saints could receive their endowments. Father's family, myself included, received our endowments there. Persecution continued. Father sold his home and we left Nauvoo before the big battle. . . .

In the Spring of 1848 we left for Winter quarters, the general gathering place for the saints, then started for Salt Lake City in President Brigham Young's company, a large one. I had a very pleasant time. I was young. No cares. Father had a team of two yoke of oxen and two cows in the company so we had milk along the way. It was on the plains I first met your father. [Eliza Ann Haven Westover, letter to her son Lewis, 2 July 1916, Church Archives; copy in possession of the author]

Although the family journals do not record much of the final exodus of the Saints to the Salt Lake Valley, it was begun in the spring

with the goal to reach their destination before the winter months set in. Charles was assigned guard duty once every six or seven days. They observed hundreds of buffalo on the slope of the river going to drink. They had dancing and music, for the Nauvoo brass band was in the company. We read from the previous journey that the travel across Iowa was slowed by the heavy spring rains that made the trail a path of mud. Brigham noted that one day they only had one mud hole to contend with, but it was six miles long. It must have been similar on this trek. Charles was baptized on May 17, 1848.

Eliza and Charles were sealed for time and eternity as husband and wife in the home of apostle Erastus Snow on October 14, 1849, by President Brigham Young. Family tradition has it that they were the first couple to be married in Utah, but the late date of this sealing makes that unlikely.

Why is this legacy of our forefathers so important? I am reminded of the words of Alma:

And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved.

And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?

Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body? [Alma 5:13–15]

My heritage from my father differs from that of my mother in several respects. First, my

father was a convert to the Church. Second, his family ostracized him for his choice to accept the gospel. My paternal grandparents emigrated from Yugoslavia to this country at the beginning of this century.

I recoil at the horror of the recent events in that country. When I asked my grandmother about our ancestors, she would never distinguish Croatian from Serbian—she insisted she was Yugoslavian. My grandmother often talked to me about honesty and integrity. Only once can I remember that she talked to me about the Old Country, when she reminisced about the difficult times when food was scarce and her blonde sister had starved to death. Integrity, honor, and character were paramount in her expectations for her family.

My first given name is Douglas. As a young man I was taught by my father about love of this country, honor, and duty. He was at times a stern man, but he deeply loved his children. From his example I inferred that my name was chosen because of the distinction that General Douglas MacArthur had brought to this country. I carried that belief through most of my life. As I was preparing for this talk, however, I thought I would verify this fact with my mother. She informed me that my name was chosen to remind me of her Scottish ancestry. (She might have envisioned Douglas Fairbanks as an exemplar.) I have been proud to carry the name of my father as my middle name. Honoring the names we have been given is something I believe to be important.

The commandment “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12) caused me to want to do something of significance to honor the heritage I received. As I attended college, I sought for something I could do that would make a contribution to mankind. I would like to challenge each of you to set a goal to make a significant contribution during your life.

Each one of you is faced with the issues of choosing direction in life. You have the benefit and help of your Heavenly Father in verifying the choice of an eternal companion and a major area of study. The most important thing in life is to center upon the salvation available to each of us through the redemption of Jesus Christ.

A few years ago a young man who was an electrical engineering student at BYU came to my office. He was tense, perplexed, and struggling to find the answer to his prayer about the future. He wanted some help. He had several job offers and had made a list of the pros and cons of each. We talked about the manner in which one is able to receive an answer to prayer—that is, praying with an honest heart, believing that you will receive an answer, and having faith. We talked about studying the matter.

After a long discussion he concluded that he should accept the job offer with AT&T Bell Labs. His supervisor would be a bishop, and he saw a bright future. He was still tense but left saying that he was going home to call AT&T. The next day I saw him coming down the hallway. The spring was back in his step, the tension was gone, and a broad smile graced his lips. He called to me from down the hall, “Brother Chabries, I did what you said. I went home and called Hewlett Packard and accepted their job.”

He had never brought up Hewlett Packard, but this was the answer to his prayer. I thought to myself that he had only superb choices, but once he made his decision the Lord confirmed his selection. For each of you, making the choice of something significant you can do with your life may produce a similar experience.

As I continued to wonder how I might repay my heritage, I had the chance to observe several modern-day pioneers, three of them Nobel Prize winners in physics. One of these prize winners abandoned the things that had won him acclaim and started a dubious campaign on social issues. Another switched from

the field that had netted him the Nobel Prize into the area of neural networks, seeking to find ways to capitalize on this emerging new field. The third used his talent and ability to provide a superb course in introductory physics for undergraduates. He wrote a series of texts to cover the material. The nature of this man's classes was such that upon leaving school on the West Coast, I arrived on the East Coast to find that there was a weeklong showing of his lectures. I was most impressed with the service of the latter prize winner, but as I reviewed the work and contributions of all three, I felt that there was something missing.

Then I recalled people I had met just a few years previously in the mission field. One was James C. Christensen, who is a member of the Visual Arts Department at BYU. At the age of 20 I had observed his musical performance talents in the mission field and was certain that he would use them to bless many people. I bought one of his earliest works. Unfortunately for me, my investment was a recording, and I later came to find that his talent as a performing artist was second to his imaginative art. He stayed close to his Heavenly Father. Another missionary hero was Noel B. Reynolds. He chose to make a lifelong study of the Book of Mormon his contribution. He has served as a bishop and a stake president and is the president of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies. Then I reflected on Elder Gene R. Cook. You are all aware of the example of his life and service as a General Authority of the Church.

As I pondered on these things, I sought to find something I might do to make this stay in mortality a little more pleasant for my fellowman and yet keep focused on the primary reason for being on this earth. As I finished my education and accepted a civilian research position with the United States Navy, I decided to use my recently acquired knowledge of sound to assist in restoring hearing for the

hearing-impaired. Along the way I had some interesting experiences.

The navy had experienced difficulties with the safety of newly installed equipment on its systems. These difficulties had at times threatened their lives. You may recall that the air force has had similar problems of late with some of their aircraft. The navy pondered what additional safety precautions were necessary and concluded that there was a simple solution. The civilian designers and manufacturers of the new systems would be required to test them. This is similar to the old approach used by ancient kings who employed tasters to shield them against the possibility of poison in their food. I was elected for this honor by my group to test a new computer system designed to enhance the capability of sonar to respond to underwater sounds.

I took the equipment and flew to the East Coast to board a ship known as a destroyer escort. It was named the USS *Connole*. On each ship was a plaque that gave the traditions and heroism of those who had contributed to its name—in other words, the heritage for the current crew. Names are important, even on U.S. Navy ships. As I boarded, I was asked to give my name, social security number, and next of kin. I was somewhat sobered by the last question. This was not an experience I looked forward to, but my colleagues and I proceeded to install the computers, hoping to improve the sonar system's sensitivity.

Our ship left port and joined a task force of several ships and submarines, and we got underway. After the first day I arose and went out on deck. Everything was calm. I had never observed such a smooth ocean surface before. I felt fine, with no trace of seasickness. As the day wore on, though, the sea became more troubled, the waves increasing in height to nearly five feet. When the ship hit the waves head-on, there was little undulation of the ship and I could keep my seasickness under control. But as more waves began to hit from the side,

the ship tossed to and fro. (In life we tend to believe it is easier to confront problems head-on, but it often occurs that problems come from directions we least expect.) I went to my room and lay in bed, bracing myself between the wall and the side rails on the bed.

Then I noticed that the ship seemed to calm down even though the sea remained rough. I was informed that the ship had just actuated some small stabilizers that protruded from the hull to lessen the roll of the ship. Similarly, as we navigate through life, the gospel of Jesus Christ provides just such stability in our lives. Without it we find ourselves spiritually seasick.

I then observed another phenomena. The propeller and shaft of the ship were made of different metals than the hull. This creates a voltaic effect, giving rise to electrical currents that corrode the hull and shaft. To counteract this corrosion an opposing voltage is applied to the hull to cancel this current. So, too, do we need constant protection available through prayer to prevent spiritual erosion. Prayer keeps us intact spiritually.

As the cruise continued, I went to the sonar shack to talk with the operators. I was anxious that the test of our new system go well. I found the sonar crew relaxed and talking about the upcoming meal and about returning home after the cruise. There was no stress. Spirits were high.

Nevertheless, it was not unusual for Russian trawlers and occasionally Russian submarines to silently appear during tests of new systems. Whenever there was a task force of several ships present, this likelihood increased. But we were at peace, and there was no threat. Further, the task force was moving at moderate speed. Between the noise of the waves and the sound of the ship thrashing through the water, it would be difficult for a surface ship to hear an enemy submarine anyway. The sonar men took advantage of the calm situation, knowing that not much was expected of them.

Suddenly there was a loud alert on the ship's public address system. It was the

captain. He announced, "Attention, all hands! The sonar shack has just detected a Russian submarine. I have contacted the commander and requested permission to break from the task force and head in pursuit of the submarine. Permission has been granted. Man your stations!"

The mood in the sonar shack changed immediately. Had the captain misunderstood that we did not have any contact, or did he have a hunch that there must be an enemy submarine nearby? The sonar crew snapped into operation. Suddenly they began to look intently at the sonar displays they had previously only glanced at. This was the real test for the newly sensitized sonar system. Then, after a few moments, one of the sonar men called out, "I have a contact." The ship set out in pursuit, joined by other members of the task force, several transmitting loud bursts of sound at the enemy submarine. Sound blast after sound blast was transmitted to cloak our own submarines' sound signatures and chase off the enemy submarine. Again, comparing this situation to life, we are often called upon without warning to answer unexpected challenges. Being prepared in advance is the surest guarantee that we will be successful.

Having completed the testing of the sonar equipment in a fashion more adventurous than I had planned, I asked if there was some way to leave the ship and get home early. Not only were the waves of the sea continuing to worsen, but also a hurricane was forecast. The lieutenant commander assigned to watch out for me informed me that a helicopter was coming, and I could go home on it. We were about 200 miles out at sea, however, and this was near its maximum operating range.

As the helicopter arrived and hovered over the rear deck, the ship turned into the wind, cutting off the breeze to it. The helicopter dipped, then caught the deck, and crashed. That day I found that, just as in life, we often look for the easy way out, but we may have to

stay the course. The trip home was rough, and when the ship finally arrived home in Norfolk, Virginia, I was relieved to be back on solid ground.

Time after time since this voyage, as I have struggled through life's trials, I have been greatly comforted by the knowledge that Jesus Christ is our Savior—the enabler of our post-mortal existence and the great stabilizing force in our lives when we are hit by life's vagaries. Prayer provides the daily protection to help us remain spiritually intact and maintain our course, our direction made certain.

Setting a goal to accomplish something significant for our fellowman provides a legacy for future generations. It adds spice to this mortal existence. It allows us to dot our mortal path with beautiful flowers and sweet fragrances. It becomes a way to repay the heritage we have received and provide a legacy for future generations. I hope that my own efforts and those of my colleagues will reach fruition in a few months in the form of a computer so miniaturized that it will fit deeply within the ear canal and that it will benefit the hard-of-hearing. In this effort the knowledge, support, and assistance of many others along the way has been essential. But whether this project is successful or not, the journey has been exciting.

Finally, I would like to share with you one last example of a modern pioneer. David C. Evans was born in 1924. It was when he had briefly slipped out of Sunday School that he learned of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He served his country in the United States Army on the European front. He became a respected educator and joined the faculty at the Univer-

sity of California at Berkeley and later at the University of Utah. His students have become modern leaders in the computer industry, including Alan Ashton of WordPerfect, Edwin Catmul of Pixar, Nolan Bushnell of Atari, John Warnock of Adobe, and James Clark of Silicon Graphics and Netscape. Several others also credit him with the vision that launched them on the route to technical success.

Each of you can imagine the intense effort that is required to establish international leadership in the computer industry, where product capabilities change by factors of two at least every 18 months. David C. Evans made legendary contributions to mankind. During this period he served as branch president, counselor in two bishoprics, and counselor in a stake presidency. But the service that endears him to me as a hero is his service as a Scoutmaster for 27 years. Each of you would do well to note that you, too, can make a significant difference—but your eternal focus must be maintained.

I am grateful for the legacy left by our pioneer forefathers. I am grateful to my family and especially to my Uncle Paul Westover, who provided me with the extended history of our family that I was able to use today. I am grateful for the blessings of freedom, which freedom is necessary to achieve exaltation. I am grateful for modern examples of those who leave a modern legacy for each of us to enjoy. I extend to each of you a challenge to honor your heritage and to leave a legacy for the future. Do not set your sights too low. May the Lord bless you in this endeavor is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.