

Journey to join the Saints

May-October, 1846

In 1836 Phineas Cook and his son-in-law Salmon Hall had gone to Michigan to buy prairie land. The Cook farm was about two miles from what became the center of the village of Richland. In 1837 Phineas W. Cook came with his brother Daniel, and the following year his mother Irene came with his sisters from Connecticut.

“The modern village of Richland is located nine miles northeast of the city of Kalamazoo at the intersection of M-89 and 32nd Street, near the center of the area known as Gull Prairie. In the early nineteenth century Gull Prairie was a large 4,400 acre open area, surrounded by southern Michigan's fabled ‘oak openings,’ that boasted some of the best farmland in the area.”¹

Winter, 1845: the call for Saints to gather at Vancouver’s Island

Phineas W. and Ann Eliza and his sister Eliza and her husband Salmon Hall were baptized into the LDS Church in 1845, and were soon called to gather to Zion. But where Zion would be was a major question almost until the moment Brigham Young came upon the Salt Lake Valley.



PWC Journal: “during the winter of 1845 I was finishing off a house which was an addition to the main house until the month of December when an Elder by the name of Edward Wilard was sent to me to tell me the time had come for all the Saints to gather for the church was going to move to Vancovers Island or someplace in the far west(.) it was not known yet whare, but we ware required to do as Abraham did to go to a land that should yet be shown to us.”

40-50 miles wide and 250 miles long, Vancouver Island was once considered as the possible location for Zion on the American Continent

¹ “Richland,” <http://www.kpl.gov/local-history/towns/richland.aspx>

Vancouver Island in British Columbia as a possible location for Zion

“In the November 1, 1845, issue of the *Times and Seasons* President Brigham Young published a letter inviting the Saints throughout the world to gather to Nauvoo in preparation for the westward migration to an as yet undesignated spot. A postscript to the letter adds: “There are said to be many good locations for settlement on the Pacific, especially Vancouver’s Island near the mouth of the Columbia.” Rumors were widespread in Illinois that year that the persecuted Mormons “had chosen Vancouver Island as their future home, the metropolis to be situated at Nootka.”

“The Saints in England liked the idea of an American Zion under the British flag, and the November 28, 1846, issue of the *Millennial Star* carried a petition to Queen Victoria and the members of the British Parliament for a grant of land and financial assistance to transport 20,000 British settlers to ‘Vancouver’s Island.’ But the petition was apparently never directly acted upon, and in January 1849 a royal charter turned Vancouver Island over to the Hudson Bay Company, thus determining that any colonization on the island would be under the auspices of that company.”²

This subject was discussed in a letter on 31 December 1847 from Richard Grant to Sir George Simpson, governor-in-chief of Rupert's Land and of all the territories in British Columbia. The letter shows the church had already made an effort to gain access to Vancouver Island:

“Two of their elders, leading characters, Messrs [Parley P.] Pratt and [John] Taylor (the latter an Englishman), both visited England last year to make application to the British Government regarding the settling of Vancouver's Island. So far as they gave me to understand (rather a private matter) their mission met with encouragement from such as were spoken to on the subject, and it is supposed settlers will come out.”³

“When the Pioneer Company left Winter Quarters, early in April, 1847, it is plain that they had no definite objective point. Brigham Young, whenever he was asked, would reply evasively, “That the Lord would direct” or “They would know the place when they got there.” There is conclusive evidence to show that so far as they had any point, that was California. But where California was, how far towards the east it extended, or how they were to get there, they did not know. Before they left Nauvoo, Elder Jesse Little had been sent east with instructions. “If our government shall offer any facilities for emigrating to the western coast, embrace those facilities...Bancroft⁴ says: “There is no evidence that Brigham Young knew anything about Salt Lake until he met Bridger sixty miles west of South Pass.”⁵

² Herbert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah*, San Francisco, 1889, p. 238, reprinted in Robert J. McCue, “The Saints on Vancouver’s Island,” *The Ensign*, April 1976.

³ Richard Grant to Sir George Simpson, governor-in-chief of Rupert's Land and of all the territories in British Columbia, 31 December 1847, in “Sir George Simpson Correspondence Inward, D5,” reel 3M79, D5/20, F. 713-715, HBCA/PAM. Reprinted in Richard Bennett and Arran Jewsbury, “The Lion and the Emperor: The Mormons, The Hudsons Bay Company, and Vancouver Island, 1846-1858.” <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/bcstudies/article/viewFile/1547/1590>.

⁴ This is undoubtedly Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah, 1540-1886*, Chapter 10, p. 253 in which he explains the early indecision of the brethren about their destination, even after they had left for the west in 1847.

⁵ Hiram F. White, “The Mormon Road,” p. 247, <http://files.lib.byu.edu/mormonmigration/articles/MormonRoad.pdf>

May – October, 1846: Journey to join the Saints

1st Day: Gull Corners, Michigan

Gull Corners was at the intersection of Indian trails through the grassland and oak forest of Gull Prairie. It became the center of the town of Richland.

PWC Journal: “(Salmon) Hall went with us as far as Gull Corners about two miles... This was the 4 day of May 1846 we traveled 9 or 10 miles and put up at a brother Tyril.”

“The new township was named Richland, reflecting the fertile soil of Gull Prairie. The Indians, who had traversed the area long before the white settlers arrived, had established well-known trails across Gull Prairie. It was only natural to establish commercial development at the intersection of two of those trails. In 1833, a "diagonal road" was built from Bronson (now Kalamazoo) to Gull Prairie, ending just a short distance west of that intersection. Today Richland's only traffic light identifies the place where the present-day village had its beginnings.

“A hotel was built on the northeast corner in 1833, and two years later, a store opened on the southwest corner. Soon other businesses were established and in 1837, a church was built along the village square. The four corners became known as Gull Corners or Richland Center.”⁶



The Cooks started at Gull Corners in the center of Richland (upper right corner of map), traveled approximately Route 43 to Kalamazoo where they stayed the night with Brother Tyril, and then went straight down the Indiana Road (Now approximately Route 131). The second night they stayed at Pigeon Prairie (near the town of White Pigeon), and crossed the border into Indiana the third day. It was 180 miles from Richland to the border of Illinois.

⁶ Ed Schaadt, “Creating the Village of Richland,” <http://www.villageofrichland.org/historyoverview.asp>

2nd Day: Pigeon Prairie, Michigan

PWC Journal: *“The 2d night we camped near pigeon prairie.”*

“Sharing Michigan's border with Indiana, St. Joseph County is bisected by the St. Joseph River...Many of the pioneers that came to St. Joseph were responding to reports about the area's rich prairies. Stretching for miles, southwestern Michigan's prairies provided unbroken plains where a pioneer could use his plow and turn up fertile soil without having his progress deterred by the difficulties of stone and stump. According to the 1838 Michigan Gazetteer, St. Joseph's prairies were "not exceeded for their fertility, by any in this or any other State." Once these claims reached the east, settlers headed west to homestead St. Joseph.⁷

4th Day: Destination changed from Nauvoo

PWC Journal: *“I asked them which way they ware traveling they said they ware going to Van buren Co. Iowa I then asked them if they ware not mormans they answered by asking me the same question I told them we was and we ware going with the church(.) they then said that they ware also mormans and ware on the same erand and we would travel on together(.) they then told us their names Levi Savage and wife and 3 sons... and Benjamine Waldren and wife.”*

The Fox River, northern Illinois

PWC Journal: *“We had much trouble in crossing fox river(.) the water was high and ran vary swift so that we had to hang on to the bow of the yoke to keep from being washed down stream by the currant and we had to put all our oxen onto one waggon to keep them from being washed down stream for they reached nearly accross the stream and having the heavy teams*

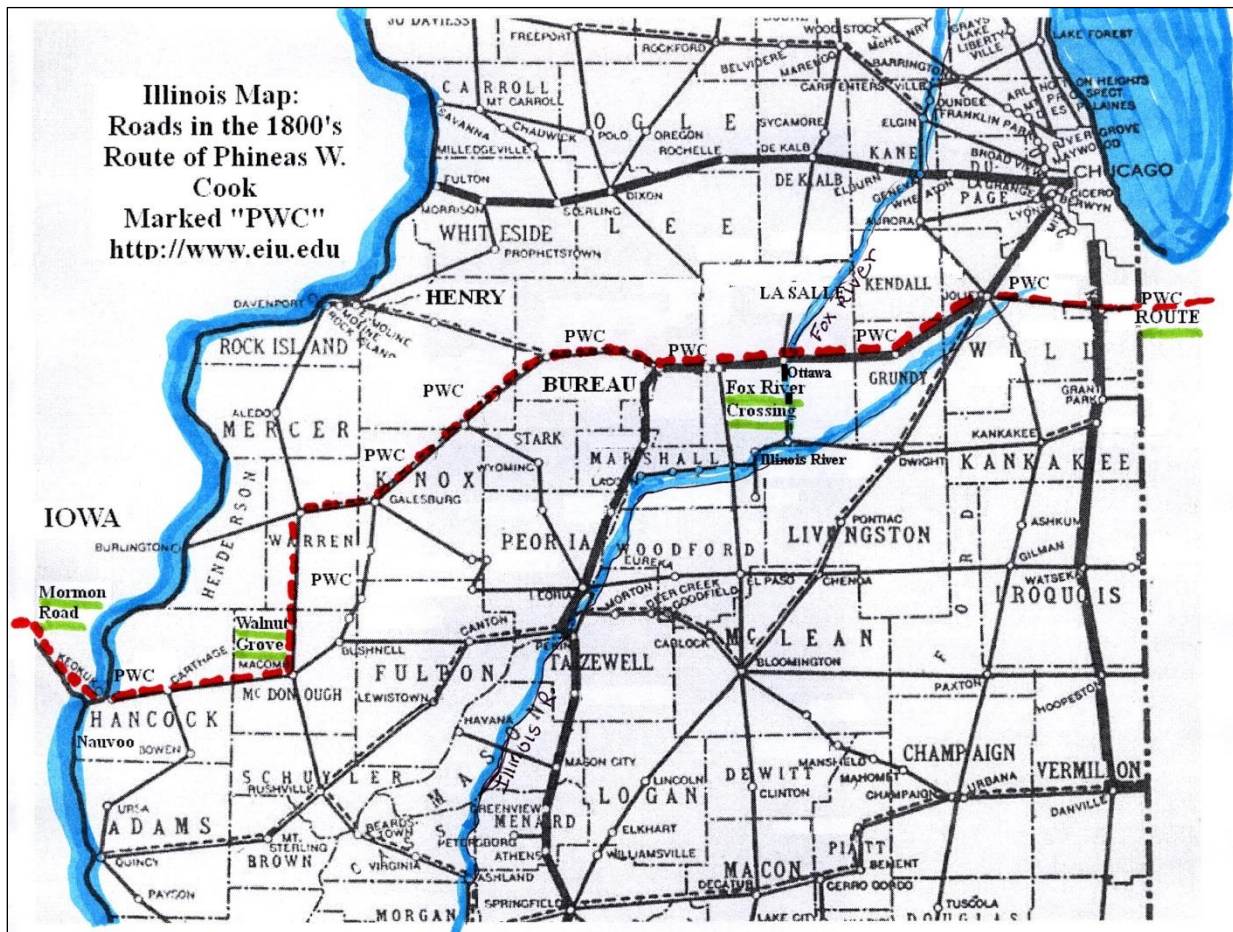


No bridges in 1846 on the Fox River in northern Illinois, (Courtesy Ghena Almostafa)

⁷ The History of St. Joseph County, Michigan, http://www.swmidirectory.org/History_of_St_Joseph_County.html

ahead they would get through the deepest and pull the rest through with the load, but we got over all safe(.) I waded the stream 9 times but it done me no harm that I know of(.) I generally took the lead in all the hard and dangerous places for the Lord was with me and this always encouraged me and give me strength..."

The Fox River arises in a swamp ten miles west of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and flows southward about 200 miles until it joins the Illinois River at Ottawa, LaSalle County, sixty miles south and west of Chicago.



The group of Mormon travelers entered Illinois and went westward, across Fox River; then south and west along the Illinois River toward Hancock County and the Mississippi River.

Walnut Grove, Illinois

PWC Journal: *“We traveld on as far as Walnut Grove in Ilinois before we stopt except over night(.) here we camped for 6 days. While we ware at this place we were visited by Wm Smith and many other Apostates(.) they said everything in their power to turn us back but we had enough of the spirit of the gospel to overcome their arguments and they would turn and leave us after pronouncing all maner of bad luck to us.”*



Traveling south from North-central Illinois, the Cooks reached Walnut Grove; then turned and went about 25 miles to the Mississippi River ferry. Crossing the river into Iowa they came to "The Mormon Road" across the southern edge of Iowa.

Des Moines River

The Des Moines River flows through central Iowa, beginning in southern Minnesota and flowing southeast to the Mississippi River in the southeast corner of Iowa. The Cooks probably went west from Indiana; then turned south, following the Illinois River. They passed Walnut Grove, then north of Nauvoo. They crossed the Mississippi River at the ferry; then the Des Moines River as they joined the Nauvoo Road through Iowa. Because the river often floods, it was treacherous to cross, especially after so much rain in May.

PWC Journal: *“When we got to the DesMoin (Des Moines) river we had another hard time to get accross. it was about 50 rods wide and the curant swift we had to cut blocks and rais our waggon beds up 6 or 8 inches to keep them out of the water, this river I also waded 9 times the next day I had the ague...”*



The Des Moines River is wide and often floods in the early summer. (Courtesy Iowa State University)



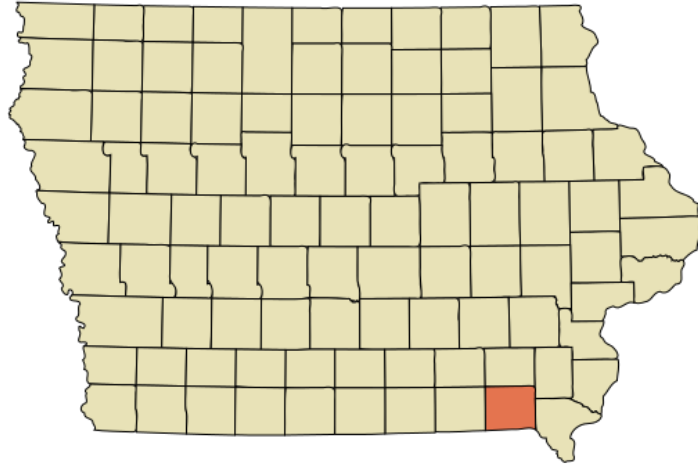
The Des Moines River. A bridge in the distance provides an easier crossing than in 1846 (Sasquatch Chronicles)

Keosauqua, Iowa

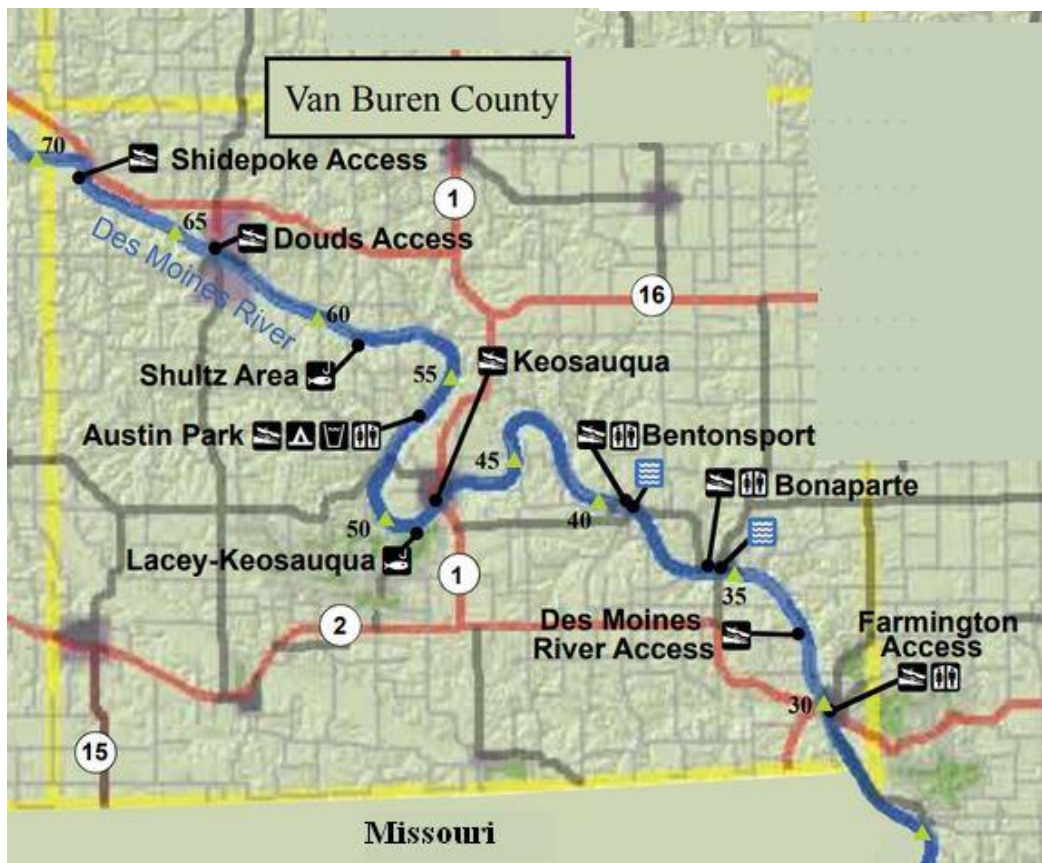
PWC Journal: "A man by the name of Mexon with his family was with us all the way to Keosauqua Iowa Ter. on the Desmoin (Des Moines) river..."

Keosauqua, Iowa is next to the southeast corner of Iowa, where the Des Moines River reaches its easternmost flow and angles off across Lee County to its confluence with the Mississippi River. It is where their friends the Mexons continued on the Mormon Trail while Phineas and his family joined Edward M. Webb.

The word Keosauqua derives from the



Keosauqua in Iowa is where Phineas began traveling the "Mormon Road." It became a well-known road from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters.

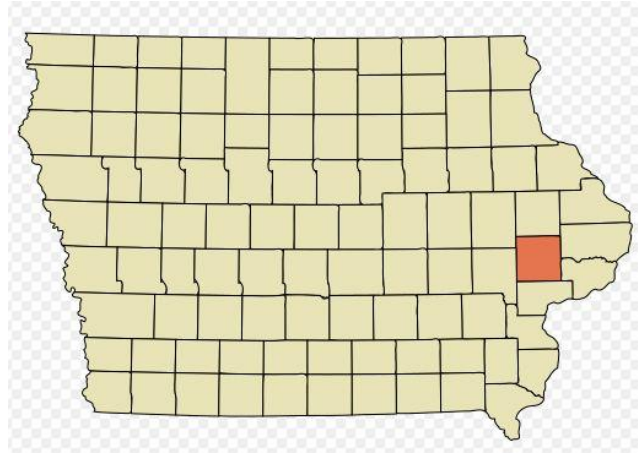


Native American name for the Des Moines River: "Ke-o-saw-qua", which literally translates as "Bend in the River."

The Des Moines River turns southward as it continues through Lee County and meets the Mississippi River. Keosauqua marked the beginning of "The Mormon Road" through Iowa.

Mechanicsville, Iowa

The State of Iowa, formerly part of surrounding territories, was originally part of what was considered the American western frontier. In the 1830's land along the Mississippi River was slowly settled, and Mechanicsville, part of Cedar County, was inhabited and organized by 1855. The county itself was not recognized until 1838, and the few settlers living there for the next years considered themselves pioneers. Obviously, the man for whom Phineas and Edward built a barn in 1846 was one of the earliest settlers.



Cedar County, Iowa where the town of Mechanicsville was established in the 1850's.

Mormon Road from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters

PWC Journal: “(We) came to the Mormon road from Nauvoo to winter quarters, it was about nine o'clock at night when we got to a camping place(.) in the morning we found ourselves in company of many of the brethren but all strangers to me but one(.) that was Edward M. Webb the man who baptized us. he wanted me to stop and help him build a barn which he had taken by the job to build which I did. We got our pay in wheat We had 27 bushels each for our pay. The place was called Mechanicsville.”

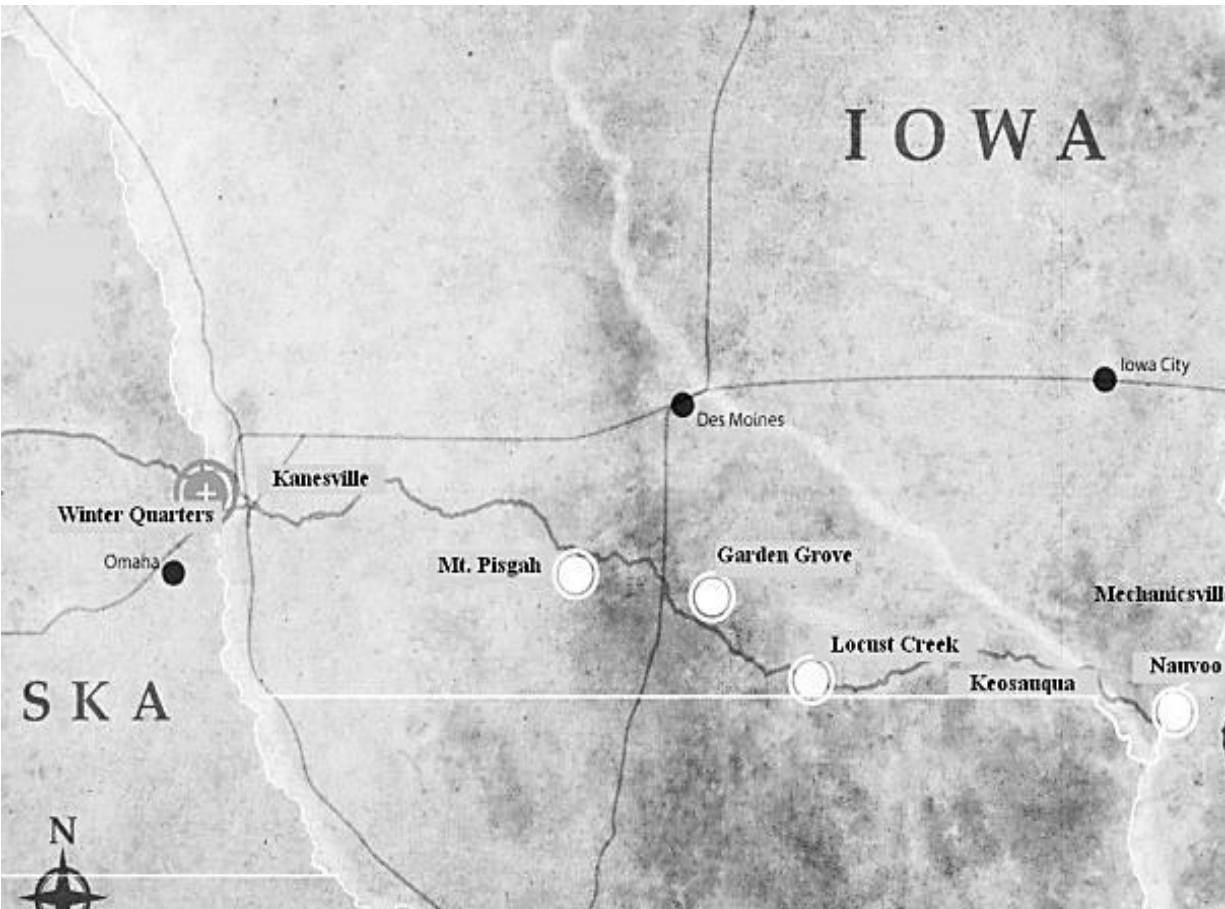
The Cooks came across Iowa at a time when there were no roads, no surveys, no towns in the western half of the state. We know the trek of those pioneers who left Nauvoo in February of 1846 was indescribably difficult, with almost constant rain, snow, mud and sickness. Yet in spite of their hardships, these pioneers blazed a trail through Iowa which became a well-established road for everyone who followed. Even after a few months when Phineas traveled on it, the trail had become known as “The Mormon Road.” Still later the state of Iowa mapped that road.⁸

“The Western half of the state (Iowa) at that time had no settlements. For nearly the entire distance the (Mormons) made the road and bridged the streams. And while it was soon abandoned because it did not follow section lines, yet it was noted upon the surveys, which soon after took place. They also established at Garden Grove, Mount Pisgah, and Kaneshville (now Council Bluffs), camps where crops were raised and resting places built for the weary emigrants who should follow. A ferry was made across the Missouri River, at a point nearly opposite Point aux Poules, where they gained a favorable crossing by making a deep cut for the road through the steep right bank. And flat-bottom scows were built. They then passed up the river to a point

⁸ “The Iowa Journal of Politics and History,” January, 1914, as cited in Hiram F. White, “The Mormon Road,” p. 245, <http://files.lib.byu.edu/mormonmigration/articles/MormonRoad.pdf>.

six miles north of the city of Omaha, where they set a stake and built dwellings for the winter. This place, which they called Winter Quarters, is now called Florence.”⁹

Passing through all the towns established by the pioneers a few short months earlier, Phineas, in company with Edward M. Webb and others, was able to cross the Missouri River in time for their baby to be born October 9, 1846.



The Mormon Road from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters was uncharted before the pioneers in 1846 blazed a trail which became a thoroughfare (history.lds.org)

Phineas doesn't say where, but along this trail, as they were camping, he met Parley P. Pratt, who was returning East to go on a mission. To Phineas it was a memorable event.

PWC Journal: *“P. P. Pratt came to our camp in Iowa on his way to England.”*

⁹ Hiram F. White, “The Mormon Road,” p. 246, <http://files.lib.byu.edu/mormonmigration/articles/MormonRoad.pdf>