THE PROPHET AND THE REFORMER

The Letters of Brigham Young & Thomas L. Kane
The Prophet and the Reformer

The Letters of Brigham Young and Thomas L. Kane

Edited by
MATTHEW J. GROW
AND RONALD W. WALKER

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
For Paul and Beverly Bawden (MJG)
and Kenneth and Ingaborg Midgley (RWW)
Contents

Abbreviations Used in Notes xiii
Editorial Method/Transcription Symbols xv

Introduction 1

Letters

1. Young to Kane, August 2, 1846 15
2. Kane to Young, September 10, 1846 25
3. Kane to Young, September 22, 1846 32
4. Kane to Young, November 5, 1846 36
5. Kane to Young or Willard Richards, December 2, 1846 38
6. Young and Willard Richards to Kane, December 6, 1847 43
7. Kane to Young, December 9, 1847 51
8. Young to Kane, February 9, 1848 56
9. Kane to Young, March 14, 1848 60
10. Young to Kane, May 9, 1848 62
11. Young to Kane, October 20, 1849 64
12. Kane to Young, July 11, 1850 67
13. Kane to Young, September 24, 1850 79
14. Kane to Young, February 19, 1851 91
15. Kane to Young, February 21, 1851 107
16. Kane to Young, April 7, 1851
17. Kane to Young, April 7, 1851
18. Kane to Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards, July 29, 1851
19. Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards to Kane, September 15, 1851
20. Young to Kane, May 29, 1852
21. Kane to Young, October 17, 1852
22. Young to Kane, May 20, 1853
23. Kane to Young, July 18, 1853
24. Young to Kane, January 31, 1854
25. Kane to Young, April 28, 1854
26. Young to Kane, June 29, 1854
27. Young to Kane, October 30, 1854
28. Kane to Young, January 5, 1855
29. Kane to Young, July 10, 1855
30. Young to Kane, September 30, 1855
31. Young to Kane, April 14, 1856
32. Young to Kane, January 7, 1857
33. Young to Kane, January 31, 1857
34. Kane to Young, circa March 1857
35. Kane to Young, May 21, 1857
36. Young to Kane, June 29, 1857
37. Young to Kane, September 12, 1857
38. Kane to Young, February 17, 1858
39. Kane to Young, February 25, 1858
40. Young to Kane, February 25, 1858
41. Young to Kane, March 9, 1858 245
42. Kane to Young, ca. March 16, 1858 249
43. Young to Kane, April 17, 1858 254
44. Young to Kane, May 8, 1858 260
45. Young to Kane, May 12, 1858 263
46. Kane to Young, July 5, 1858 266
47. Kane to Young, July 18, 1858 271
48. Young to Kane, August 6, 1858 276
49. Kane to Young, August 25, 1858 283
50. Young to Kane, September 1, 1858 287
51. Young to Kane, September 10, 1858 290
52. Young to Kane, October 22, 1858 299
53. Young to Kane, October 29, 1858 306
54. Young to Kane, November 22, 1858 309
55. Young to Kane, January 14, 1859 316
56. Young to Kane, May 3, 1859 322
57. Kane to Young, July 24, 1859 330
58. Young to Kane, September 17, 1859 336
59. Young to Kane, December 15, 1859 344
60. Young to Kane, March 22, 1860 352
61. Kane to Young, April 25, 1860 356
62. Young to Kane, April 26, 1860 360
63. Kane to Young, August 15, 1860 363
64. Young to Kane, September 27, 1860 366
65. Young to Kane, September 21, 1861 369
66. Kane to Young, November 23, 1861 378
67. Young to Kane, April 29, 1864 380
68. Young to Kane, April 15, 1866 387
69. Young to Kane, November 9, 1867 389
70. Kane to Young, May 4, 1869 392
71. Kane to Young, October 13, 1869 396
72. Young to Kane, October 15, 1869 399
73. Young to Kane, October 26, 1869 402
74. Young to Kane, February 14, 1870 405
75. Kane to Young, March 20, 1870 410
76. Kane to Young, June 18, 1870 414
77. Young to Kane, August 16, 1870 417
78. Young to Kane, April 16, 1871 420
79. Young to Kane, September 27, 1871 427
80. Kane to Young, October 12, 1871 433
81. Kane to Young, November 9, 1871 436
82. Kane to Young, November 30, 1871 440
83. Young to Kane, March 5, 1872 447
84. Kane to Young, October 16, 1872 453
85. Young to Kane, October 31, 1872 456
86. Young to Kane, December 9, 1872 458
87. Kane to Young, April 2, 1873 462
88. Kane to Young, April 4, 1873 465
89. Kane to Young, April 15, 1873 469
90. Young to Kane, May 7, 1873 471
91. Young to Kane, July 31, 1873 474
92. Young to Kane, November 16, 1873 479
93. Kane to Young, December 4, 1873 482
Abbreviations Used in Notes

APS  American Philosophical Society
BYOF  Brigham Young Office Files, Church History Library
CHL  Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Kane Collection, BYU  Thomas L. and Elizabeth W. Kane Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University
Our goal is to publish a verbatim transcription of the letters exchanged between Brigham Young and Thomas L. Kane. We have used the final copy as the primary text, except where a copy of the final letter is not extant. In these cases, we have used drafts of letters. We have standardized some features of the letters, including paragraph breaks and placement of dates and places. To ensure quality, the transcription of the letters has been verified three times. Each letter is preceded by a historical introduction and accompanied by footnotes to explain historical context and any textual issues. We have left in some duplication in the introductions and notes so that the book can be read both cover-to-cover and used as a reference volume.

Transcription Symbols

The editorial method and transcription symbols employed by the Joseph Smith Papers in publishing the papers of Mormonism’s founder have served as our model. This exemplary, ongoing project represents some of the best thinking in modern editing procedures. For our purposes, we have modified and simplified some of their symbols and procedures.

[Brackets] Square brackets “enclose editorial insertions that expand, correct, or clarify the text.” A question mark is included where the information in the bracket is a conjectured editorial insertion.

[Italic] Italics within brackets are used to describe the physical state of the original letter, such as a tear or water damage.

[Illegible] An illegible word is placed in italics within brackets.
“Bracketed editorial insertions indicate the end of an originally numbered manuscript page, regardless of the location of the written page number on the manuscript page.” Page numbers are included for every page, even when the original letter lacked page numbers.

Underlined Underlining is presented in this manner.

Superscript Superscript is presented in this manner.

Canceled Strikeouts and other cancelations are presented in this manner.

<Insertion> Insertions in the text (whether interlinear or marginal) are placed within angle brackets.¹

---

¹ Quotations are taken from <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/editorialmethod>. 
The Prophet and the Reformer
On July 11, 1846, a 24-year-old, diminutive, sickly, and elite Philadelphian arrived in a refugee camp on the plains of western Iowa to visit the Mormons who had been forcibly expelled from Illinois that year. The unlikely visitor, Thomas L. Kane, had not stumbled upon the Mormon camps by chance. Two months earlier, Kane had met Jesse C. Little, an agent dispatched by Mormon leader Brigham Young to lobby for government support for the Latter-day Saints. An aspiring social reformer, Kane believed that a relationship with the Mormons would prove mutually advantageous. Sympathizing with the Mormons’ plight, he thought that a book recounting their woes would help their cause and establish his reputation as an author and humanitarian. He further dreamed that accompanying the Mormons to California, their purported destination, would open political doors for him, possibly even the governorship, once California entered the United States. As he confided to a brother, he hoped “to help the poor Mormons to my utmost, principally—but also to help myself if I see anything outstanding.” There may have been something else that prompted his visit. Kane would later claim to have been part of a “little state secret,” known only to a handful of men, perhaps a role in President James K. Polk’s schemes to expand American borders.

Six weeks prior to his arrival in the Mormon camps, Kane had drawn upon his father’s extensive political connections to assist Little in persuading Polk and his cabinet to commission a regiment of Mormon soldiers for the Mexican–American War. An army officer, who had arrived in the make-shift Mormon settlements a few days before Kane to recruit the soldiers, had

1. Thomas L. Kane to Elisha K. Kane, May 27, 1846, Thomas L. Kane Papers, APS.
2. Kane to Elizabeth Wood, May 19–21, 1852, Kane Collection, BYU.
encountered substantial opposition in convincing Mormons to enlist. Deeply suspicious of the government’s intentions, most Mormons envisioned a plot to further weaken and perhaps even destroy their community. Brigham Young, the 45-year-old forceful leader of the Mormon emigration and president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, realized that Little’s mission had succeeded and saw opportunity where most of his co-religionists sniffed a conspiracy. Kane’s confirmation of Polk’s decision to raise the Mormon troops, along with Young’s preaching, dispelled the rumors about the government’s intentions and 500 Mormons soon enlisted. Intrigued by Kane, at their first meeting Young privately discussed with him the “state of the nations” and told him “the time would come when the Saints would support the government of the U.S. or it would crumble to atoms.”

Whatever the religious skeptic Kane thought of Young’s apocalyptic rhetoric, he became deeply impressed by the Mormons’ sincerity and concerned about their long-term prospects for peaceful coexistence with the United States. Encouraged by Young, who saw him as a potential ally, Kane began to envision a permanent relationship with himself as the Mormons’ self-appointed defender to the nation. The following month, Kane’s fragile frame succumbed to the sicknesses ravaging the camps, and he credited the Mormons’ nursing with saving his life. In addition, Kane resented Protestant evangelicalism and the reformers it inspired, and he blamed evangelicals for targeting the Mormons. The pluralistic vision and emphasis on liberty of the Democratic Party also influenced Kane, an ardent Democrat, to take up the Mormons’ cause. Young recognized that Kane’s talents and political connections would prove immensely useful in defending the Mormon cause in the halls of Congress and in the pages of eastern newspapers. He cultivated a personal bond of friendship with Kane, which both cemented Kane’s decision to become the Saints’ advocate and created a collaboration between the two men.

Young and Kane were a study in contrast. Born in 1801 in Vermont, Young and his progenitors had been nourished in the Puritan soil of New England since the middle 1600s. While the Young family had traditions of well-born ancestors, its members had fallen on hard times. At the age of six, Brigham’s father, John Young, was placed in a foster home where he did menial tasks along with black boys and white orphans. To get away, John enlisted for military service in the American Revolution.

---

3. Willard Richards, journal, July 13, 1846, CHL.
4. Fanny Young Murray to Phineas H. Young, January 1, 1845, CHL.
Brigham Young recalled his father’s great hopes. “My father was a poor, honest-hard-working man,” he said, “and his mind seemingly stretched from east to west, from north to south; and to the day of death he wanted to command worlds.” The family moved often, but nothing seemed to change their hardscrabble living. Young remembered that his father’s discipline was as harsh as the surroundings. “A word and a blow,” he said, “but the blow came first.” His mother, Abigail “Nabby” Howe was softer; she died when Brigham was 14, worn out by the family’s restless moving, 11 pregnancies, and a lingering illness that was given the name of consumption—almost certainly tuberculosis. Nabby had “always been a child of sorrow,” recalled a family member. She may have had bouts of depression.

As a child, Young tried to help his family get by, which meant that there was not much time for school. He claimed only 11 days of school-house learning and, like many frontier children, his main curriculum was the Bible and perhaps a few other books like John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. “When I meet ladies and gentlemen of high rank,” he would later say, “they must not expect from me the same formal ceremony and etiquette that are observed among the great in the courts of kings.”

When Brigham was 16, John Young placed the boy into an apprenticeship to learn carpentry and joinery. The arrangement ended when John made another of his moves. By now the family was living in the Finger Lake district in upstate New York, at the time considered to be a “dense wilderness” and a part of the “Far West.” After his father’s remarriage, Brigham left the household to make his own way. For the next 18 years, he worked as a common laborer and then as an artisan. He dug wells, painted houses, made pails and furniture, and did odd jobs. He helped build some of the locks and boats for

---

5. Brigham Young, Remarks, January 5, 1860, *Journal of Discourses Delivered by President Brigham Young, His Two Counsellors, The Twelve Apostles, and Others*, Reported by G. D Watt and J. F. Long (Liverpool: George Q. Cannon, 1862), 9:104. Also see Brigham Young, remarks, February 19, 1865, George D. Watt Papers, CHL, shorthand transcribed by LaJean Purcell Carruth.


10. Lorenzo D. Young, in James Amasa Little, Research Materials (1890–1893), CHL.
the Erie Canal—anything to make a living—and gained a reputation for hard work and skill.11

He was also known as a seeker of proper religion. At first he avoided baptism into any of the denominations of upstate New York’s spiritual hothouse; he claimed that he was confused by their various arguments. However, at the age of 23, he joined the Primitive Methodists, without much expectation but hoping to live “a better life.”12 About the same time, he married 18-year-old Miriam Works. Shortly after, Brigham and Miriam moved to Mendon, New York, leaving behind a smattering of small debts that Young would not fully repay until years later.13 The decision to move to Mendon likely had to do with Miriam’s failing health. Other members of the extended Young family had moved to Mendon, and perhaps Brigham hoped that they might help with her care as well as the raising of the couple’s daughter. A second daughter was born shortly after the Youngs arrived at Mendon.

In Mendon, Young established a carpentry shop on rented land.14 The family lived upstairs, which allowed Brigham to watch Miriam, who was in the last stages of “consumption”—the same dreaded tuberculosis that had killed Brigham’s mother. Brigham did the household chores—baking the bread, churning the butter, milking the cow, and preparing the meals—as Miriam watched from her rocking chair.15 Young may have inherited his mother’s depression, or perhaps it was just because of his difficult life. He recalled of these times, “Everything had a dreary aspect.”16 “I hated the world, and the things of the world, and the poor miserable devils that were governing it,” he said.17


13. Thomas Ives Richardson, journal, March 11, 1904, CHL.


17. Young, remarks, August 24, 1867, General Church Minutes, CHL.
He found relief in a new religion. For several years he had been hearing rumors about Joseph Smith and his claims about having received some gold plates.\textsuperscript{18} Then, during late spring or early summer 1830, soon after Smith formally organized a new church, a missionary left a copy or two of the Book of Mormon with members of the extended Young family. The missionary explained that Smith had translated the contents of the gold plates into a new book of scripture. Although Young read the book and was impressed, he hesitated. “Hold on,” he remembered thinking, “Wait a little while.”\textsuperscript{19}

A year and a half later, another set of missionaries came through the village. They preached “religious wild fire,” speaking in tongues and saying that Christ’s Second Coming would soon take place.\textsuperscript{20} Phineas Young, Brigham’s brother, was convinced that there was “something” to the missionaries’ message. Several months later in the winter of 1832, Phineas Young, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball—Brigham’s closest friend—hitched up a team to a sleigh to visit a Mormon congregation in Bradford County, Pennsylvania. After this visit, Young found himself increasingly excited by the religion and was soon baptized.\textsuperscript{21} Eventually, 35 members of the Young family were baptized, including Brigham’s father and step-mother, 4 brothers, and 5 sisters.\textsuperscript{22}

Young took to the preaching circuit, his depression now lifted and forgotten. He and Phineas baptized 45 converts in Canada, and Brigham then raised a dozen small congregations in upstate New York and elsewhere—all within several months of his conversion.\textsuperscript{21} Later in 1832 he and Kimball went to Kirtland, Ohio, for their first encounter with Joseph Smith. The meeting began an 11-year relationship that deepened as Smith began to appreciate Young’s commitment and ability. In 1835, Young became one of the church’s Twelve Apostles and eventually became this group’s president. From this position, Young led the evacuation of the Saints from Missouri during the winter of 1838–1839 when opponents imprisoned Smith. Two years later, in 1840,


\textsuperscript{19} Young, remarks, August 8, 1852, \textit{Journal of Discourses}, 3:91.

\textsuperscript{20} Heber C. Kimball, statement, Heber C. Kimball Papers, CHL.

\textsuperscript{21} Phineas Howe Young, diary and autobiography, BYU.

\textsuperscript{22} Young, remarks, March 15, 1857, Salt Lake City, \textit{Journal of Discourses}, 4:281. See also Heber C. Kimball, undated remarks, General Church Minutes, CHL.

Young headed up a major mission to England that led to the conversion of thousands. Increasingly Smith’s close confidant and right-hand man, Young became the leader of the church after Smith was killed in 1844.

In deep contrast to Young, Kane was born, in his own words, “with the gold spoon in my mouth, to station and influence and respectability.”\(^{24}\) The scion of a powerful Philadelphia political family, Kane was the son of a federal judge and political strategist, John K. Kane, who moved in the highest circles of the national Democratic Party. John Kane, though among the nouveau riche in Philadelphia, participated in the city’s most exclusive scientific, literary, and cultural circles. John’s wife, strong-willed Jane Duval Leiper, came from a prominent political family and was reputed to be “one of the most beautiful women of her day.”\(^{25}\) John and Jane had seven children; their first two sons, Elisha and Thomas would one day become nationally prominent, with Elisha gaining international renown as an Arctic explorer. The brothers were exceptionally close.

After a semester at Dickinson College in 1839 and two lengthy voyages to Europe in the early 1840s, Kane embarked upon a career as a lawyer and judicial clerk for his father and as a freelance social reformer. Influenced by the transatlantic flowering of romanticism and his deep roots in the antebellum Democratic Party, Kane sought to defend various downtrodden groups and to preserve their liberty. As such, he agitated for antislavery (even helping fugitive slaves escape from the south as his father gained a reputation as a judge especially sympathetic to the Slave Power), the abolition of the death penalty, peace, and women’s rights.\(^{26}\)

Kane’s personal religious journey inspired elements of his reforming vision and made him sympathetic to religious groups outside of the mainstream. Through the 1840s and 1850s, he meandered through atheism, a vague sense of God’s Providence, and an attachment to the positivism and “Religion of Humanity” of French philosopher Auguste Comte, whom Kane

\(^{24}\) Kane to Young, September 24, 1850.

\(^{25}\) William Elder, Biography of Elisha Kent Kane (Philadelphia: Childs and Peterson, 1858), 18.

had met during his time in Europe. In 1853, he married his 16-year-old second
cousin Elizabeth Dennistoun Wood. In the late 1850s and early 1860s, per-
haps spurred by his devout wife, Kane converted to Christianity, though he
always denounced denominationalism and remained suspicious of evangeli-
cal Protestants.

After they met at the Mormon refugee camps in 1846, Kane and Young
struck up a friendship that lasted 31 years and exerted a profound influence on
the history of the Latter-day Saints and the American west. Until his death in
1877, Young guided the religious, economic, and political life of the Mormon
community, whose settlements spread throughout the west and provoked a
political, legal, and even military confrontation with the American nation. For
those three decades, Young relied on Kane, 21 years his junior, as his most
trusted adviser outside of the Latter-day Saint community. As a result, Kane
became the most important non-Mormon in the history of the Latter-day
Saints. At the same time, Young deeply influenced Kane’s life.

Kane viewed his involvement with the Latter-day Saints through the
prism of social reform, as he sought to protect the Mormons’ liberties from
the restrictions of the federal government and the meddling of Protestant
evangelical reformers. In Young, Kane found a similar sincerity, leadership
abilities, and willingness to suffer societal censure for his belief in his own
mission. Kane thought that both he and Young fit the description of Ralph
Waldo Emerson, an acquaintance of Kane, as romantic heroes who listened to
their own inner judgment rather than conventional norms and “advance[d] to
[their] own music.”

While Kane remained committed to assisting Young and the Mormons
from 1846 until his death in 1883, his family had difficulty understanding his
devotion to the Saints. His father strongly opposed his initial involvement with
the Mormons and worried that his defense of the Saints blocked Thomas’s
opportunities for political and business success. As he told Thomas’s brother
Elisha, his influence “is among minorities, and always will be.”28 His wife
Elizabeth often resented the time Thomas spent defending the Mormons,
though her views softened after accompanying him to Utah in 1872–1873.

27. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Heroism,” in The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays,
On Kane’s acquaintance with Emerson, see Emerson to Lidia Emerson, January 9, 1854,
in Ralph L. Rusk, ed., The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: Columbia University

28. John K. Kane to Elisha K. Kane, March 7, 1854, John K. Kane Papers, Historical Society
of Pennsylvania.
Even then, however, she could not fully accept his friendship with Young. She recognized Young’s leadership abilities, perceptively noting that his power among the Saints rested among his “constant intercourse with his people” rather than tyrannical actions. Nevertheless, she blamed Young for leading the Mormons into plural marriage, confiding to a nephew after Thomas’s death, “Vulgarly speaking I couldn’t abide him! I used to be reminded by him of a great sandy cat with his yellow-gray eyes. He was just as kind and hospitable to me as he could be, but I loathed him.” Her husband, however, prized his relationship with Young.

Kane and Young were in many ways an odd pair: the pragmatic prophet and the quixotic reformer, the millenarian who spoke in tongues with the skeptic of organized religion, the Yankee from humble origins and the aristocratic Pennsylvanian. The correspondence between Kane and Young shows these differences in their writing styles. Kane’s sentences can be learned, polished, and sometimes written in a complex manner. In contrast, Young’s style is more direct and pulsates with energy.

For all of their differences, several factors united Kane and Young. Both dreamed expansively, devoted much of their energies to colonizing efforts, and saw their own roles as historic. Both blamed the Mormons’ woes on Protestant evangelicals and joined forces to battle what they saw as religious persecution. Both felt they had a stubborn independence from society’s traditions and corruptions. Both were visionaries who saw themselves as workers on behalf of the downtrodden. In 1846, when Kane began his friendship with Young, he saw himself as a disinterested humanitarian taking on the cause of the Saints. His relationship with the Mormons became much more than this; unlike the objects of his other reforms (which included slaves, prisoners, and the poor), Kane could not keep an emotional distance from the Mormons.

Young needed Kane as well, valuing his political advice, connections, and image-making talents. As a result, he continually tried to pull Kane closer to the Saints, offering him political offices and money, encouraging his conversion, and cultivating relationships between Kane and his own sons. Kane repeatedly refused the economic and political enticements, arguing that they would tarnish his reputation as an independent reformer and weaken his ability to assist the Saints. Their friendship proved emotionally satisfying and


30. Elizabeth W. Kane to Francis Fisher Kane, February 15, 1904, Francis Fisher Kane Papers, APS.
mutually advantageous. Kane’s wife Elizabeth perceptively wrote that both Kane and Young “had great magnetic power” and “each influenced the other strongly.” Kane called Young “an eccentric great man” and Young praised Kane as a heroic iconoclast who waged “the battle of life, for the right, against all opposing powers, rising above the afflictions and reverses which beset your pathway, and stand[ing] forth to the world, the champion of truth, liberty and honour.”

Besides Kane’s visit to the Mormon camps in 1846, he and Young met personally only during two other periods of time: during the spring of 1858, as Kane negotiated an end to the Utah War, and during the winter of 1872–1873, when he traveled to Utah to meet with Young and recover his health. Their lack of personal contact is a boon for historians. During their relationship, Kane and Young exchanged a remarkable set of detailed and candid letters, 99 of which are reproduced in this volume. “I have also to thank you for your kind hearted letters,” Kane once wrote, “always so fresh and racy and spirited in composition.” The correspondence between Kane and Young waxed and waned with events and personal circumstances.

Young very rarely wrote letters in his own hand, though he routinely dictated letters to various scribes. Some of Young’s first letters to Kane were written or shaped by Willard Richards, Young’s second counselor in the church’s First Presidency who sometimes served as Young’s scribe. By contrast, Kane generally wrote his own letters, though his wife Elizabeth sometimes served as his scribe. Kane and Young often sent their letters by trusted couriers, often Young’s sons or other Mormon missionaries and leaders, to ensure that their contents remained confidential. Kane and Young carefully preserved the vast bulk of their correspondence, which is now primarily at the Church History Library of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University, but is also found at Yale University, Stanford University, and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Their correspondence gives tremendous insight into Mormon history and the development of the American west. Few figures exerted as profound an

31. Elizabeth W. Kane to Francis Fisher Kane, February 15, 1904.
32. Kane to James Buchanan, [ca. March 15, 1858], Kane Collection, BYU; Young to Kane, 22 November 1858.
33. Kane to Young, September 24, 1850.
34. The Brigham Young collections at the Church History Library contain well over 15,000 incoming and outgoing letters from Young. There has only been one prior book of Young’s letters, Dean Jessee, Letters of Brigham Young to his Sons (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974).
influence on nineteenth-century American history, particularly in the west, as Brigham Young. Extremely controversial in his own day, he remains a compelling historical actor of perennial interest. For many, both in his day and in ours, Young is a symbol of polygamy, religious fanaticism, and misguided theocratic ambitions. Others see him as an American genius who successfully led the Saints’ exodus to Utah and established the Mormon West. Yet others view Young as an inspired prophet. Indeed, Young remains an enigmatic figure, with his personal character and political and religious ambitions shrouded by both the vagaries of time and the controversies surrounding his life. His correspondence with Kane—plotting strategy, commenting on the major issues of the day, revealing his personal judgments—offers crucial insights into Young’s personal life and views as well as his actions as a political and religious leader. Understanding his relationship with Kane and their rich correspondence is indispensable to a correct assessment of Young’s character and actions.

Moreover, the correspondence between Kane and Young reveals the strategies of the Latter-day Saints in relating to American culture and government during these crucial decades when controversy over the “Mormon Question” was a major political, cultural, and legal issue. The Kane–Young letters demonstrate both the campaigns against the Mormons as well as the shifting tactics taken by the Saints in response. Kane’s position as the Saints’ unofficial lobbyist and image-maker on the East Coast additionally demonstrates how debates over Mormonism intersected with other national controversies over the development of the west, popular sovereignty, American Indians, government of the territories, and the sectional crisis. Indeed, with its focus on national concerns and the Saints’ relationship with the federal government, the Kane–Young correspondence illustrates that the “Mormon Question” was a major national issue which can be fully understood only within the context of these other national political debates of the mid-nineteenth century.

The correspondence between Kane and Young gives insight into most of the major controversies surrounding the Latter-day Saints between the late 1840s and the late 1870s. Following the return of Kane from the Mormon camps and the beginning of the Latter-day Saint exodus to Utah in 1847, Kane and Young initially collaborated to alter the nation’s perceptions of the Mormons and to obtain political autonomy within the American system. Kane hoped to transform the national image of the Latter-day Saints, with Young’s support and advice, by embarking upon a multi-year campaign which appealed to culturally powerful narratives of religious liberty, persecution, and suffering. Most Americans saw Mormons as fraudulent fanatics who posed a grave danger to mainstream religion and American republicanism. Kane,
however, depicted Mormons as a persecuted religious minority forced from their homes, a narrative that resonated with the cherished American story of persecuted Pilgrims coming to the New World. In his public relations campaign, Kane placed anonymous articles in major newspapers and wrote two influential pamphlets which used the symbol of suffering Saints, of Mormons dying on the American plains from hunger and sickness, to argue that they could peacefully coexist with other Americans.

For a time, Kane’s narrative succeeded in capturing the attention of America’s opinion-makers and rousing substantial sympathy for the Saints. Both Young and Kane believed that Mormon security required self-government and they seized this moment to attempt to secure political autonomy through the political doctrine of local decision-making as a U.S. territory (“popular sovereignty”) or the ultimate goal of statehood. Mormon leaders did not seem anxious to set up an independent religious kingdom in the Great Basin as some historians have suggested. In fact, their political experience was in many ways like that of other western territories: westerners wanted to make their own decisions about their respective settlements.

When Washington, D.C., took no action on giving Utah territorial status, Young and Kane pushed for a Mormon state of Deseret, which stretched across much of the west. Despite Young’s efforts and Kane’s lobbying, their attempt fell victim to the Compromise of 1850. Nevertheless, aided by Kane’s public relations forays, they secured a partial victory when Young was appointed as governor of the new Utah Territory. At the same time, several outsiders were appointed to Utah territorial posts; following a short stay in Utah, this first group of non-Mormon territorial officials fled the state in 1851, carrying east tales of Mormon polygamy and disloyalty.\(^\text{35}\)

Kane’s attempts to quash these charges led Mormon leaders to finally reveal to him the existence of polygamy. Wounded that he had been involved in the Saints’ deception, Kane compared the revelation in his diary to the discovery of a “wife’s infidelity.”\(^\text{36}\) Though he and Young privately debated the merits of polygamy, Kane quickly returned to defending the Mormons and advised the Mormons to publicly acknowledge plural marriage. When they did so in August 1852, public sympathy for the Saints, the possibility of Utah

---


36. Kane, journal, December 27–28, 1851, BYU.
statehood, and the credibility of Kane’s narrative of the suffering Saints for most Americans evaporated. Though Young continued as governor, most other territorial positions were filled by outsiders, virtually guaranteeing continued disputes.

The Kane–Young relationship also provides a key for interpreting one of the most important events of the 1850s. In his first month in office in 1857, President James Buchanan faced reports of a Mormon rebellion against federal authority in Utah. In response, Buchanan decided to remove Young as governor and send his replacement, Alfred Cumming of Georgia, with a military escort, which became the largest military expedition between the Mexican–American War and the Civil War. The possibility of armed conflict between the Mormons and the nation increased as the Saints vowed to resist what they viewed as an unconstitutional attempt to trample their rights, impose outside officials, and potentially destroy their community. The episode, which has largely been overshadowed in historical accounts by the sectional conflict and the Civil War, was a major military, political, legal, and cultural confrontation which threatened to turn the debate over the “Mormon Question” into a shooting war. The timely intervention of Kane and his collaboration with Young proved crucial in working out a compromise between the government and the Mormons.

Kane persuaded Buchanan to allow him to travel to Utah in a semi-official capacity to mediate the conflict. Kane sailed from New York City through Panama and on to California, before traveling overland to Utah. Meeting with Young and other Mormon leaders in Salt Lake City, Kane urged the Saints to conciliate the army. He then traveled through deep snows to the army’s winter camp, at Camp Scott in present-day Wyoming. Once there, Kane sent letters via Mormon couriers to Young, recounting the opposition to his plan of conciliation by military leaders and his success in convincing a willing Cumming to travel without the army to Salt Lake City. After Kane and Cumming arrived in Salt Lake City, Young and Kane brokered a peace with Cumming, and, by extension, between the Mormons and the nation. During the next two years, Kane worked behind-the-scenes with Young’s encouragement to influence the press and federal officials to preserve his view of the proper resolution to the conflict, which rested on an alliance between Cumming and Young. Although fiercely opposed by many federal officials and army officers in Utah, the efforts of Kane and Young kept the Utah War peace in place until the Civil War, ensuring that the resolution of the “Mormon Question” would be transferred from the battlefield to the realm of politics and law.
During the 1860s, both the nation and Kane turned their attention away from Mormonism and toward the sectional conflict. As the nation remounted its crusade against Mormonism in the 1870s and 1880s, Kane and Young again plotted strategy to thwart the nation’s legal and political campaign against the Saints. As the national campaign against Mormonism accelerated, Young and Kane worked to obtain Utah statehood and to block anti-polygamy legislation in Congress. In 1871, Young and Kane exchanged a flurry of letters discussing legal and political strategy when Young was placed under house arrest for “lascivious cohabitation”—Young’s celebrated plural marriage. Along with his wife, Kane traveled to Utah during the winter of 1872–1873, a visit that led his wife Elizabeth, long suspicious of the Saints, to defend Mormon women in one of the best travel accounts of early Utah history, Twelve Mormon Homes. The final years before Young’s death in 1877 were an unwinding. After Kane encouraged Young to disentangle himself economically from the church (with Kane as his lawyer in writing his will), the two men discussed plans for Mormon colonization of Mexico, Mormon education, Indian rights and policy, and communitarian practices.

By the late 1870s, the status of the Latter-day Saints had been transformed in significant ways from the refugee camps of 1846. Most obviously, under Young’s leadership, Mormon settlements had spread over much of the west. Mormonism, which many observers had predicted to be on the brink of extinction in 1846, had continued to expand. Thousands of Mormon converts, both from the United States and Europe, migrated annually to Utah and the surrounding regions.

The question of the relationship between the Latter-day Saints and the nation, however, had not been settled. From one perspective, the efforts of Young and Kane had failed: Utah was still a territory, Mormons were still the nation’s most reviled religious group, and controversy over Mormonism’s polygamy and theocratic ambitions remained a leading national issue. Nevertheless, the collaboration between Young and Kane had ensured that the resolution to the “Mormon Question” would entail a series of political, legal, and religious compromises, rather than a military confrontation. Significantly, their three decades of joint effort had protected the Latter-day Saint community, allowed the Mormons to practice their conception of religious liberty in nineteenth-century America, and delayed the compromises between the Mormons and the nation (which occurred in the 1890s as the Saints renounced polygamy and church participation in politics) until the Latter-day Saint community had become firmly established in the west.
Acknowledgments

In the years that we have worked on this project, we have garnered many debts. Able research assistants—Amanda Borneman, Russell Stevenson, Brian Whitney, and Brett Dowdle—have helped to find the letters, transcribe them, verify the transcriptions, and have performed research and drafted annotation. Financial and institutional support and encouragement have been provided by Harris and Amanda Simmons, the University of Southern Indiana, and the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We thank Reid L. Neilson and Richard E. Turley Jr. for their encouragement and reading of the manuscript. Archivists at the Church History Library and at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections have graciously helped find relevant material. We are particularly indebted to David Whittaker, who as an archivist at BYU oversaw the acquisition of the magnificent Kane collection, its organization, and the writing of its terrific register. Finally, we are grateful to our wives, Alyssa and Nelani, for their support, encouragement, and patience during this multi-year endeavor.
Young to Kane, August 2, 1846

On the day the U.S. government declared war on Mexico—May 13, 1846—Thomas L. Kane attended a meeting of the Mormons in Philadelphia. With the war beginning and the Mormon trek in progress, he saw a chance for idealism and ambition. Perhaps he could help the Mormons while beginning a military or political career in California, the rumored stopping place of the Saints. During the weeks that followed, Kane became acquainted with Mormon leaders in the east, most importantly Jesse C. Little, with whom he began to work closely. Kane and Little were soon lobbying for the Mormons in Washington, D.C. Kane had the advantage of the connections of his powerful father, federal district judge John K. Kane, which gave him access to Democratic Party chieftain Amos Kendall; cabinet secretaries James Buchanan (State), William L. Marcy (War), and George Bancroft (Navy); Vice President George M. Dallas; and President James K. Polk.1

These consultations led to the approval of a Mormon battalion for Mexican War service. Polk and other government officials gave Kane a letter of recommendation and several dispatches. Polk wrote that the young man bore “information of importance” and instructed U.S. officers to assist him.2 Kane later returned his government dispatches to Washington, and they have never resurfaced.3

1. Jesse C. Little, journal, July 6, 1846, cited in Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Journal History), CHL; Kane to Elisha K. Kane, May 29, 1846, APS; Grow, Liberty to the Downtrodden, 47.
2. James K. Polk to Kane, June 11, 1846, Kane Collection, BYU.
In early June, Kane and Little left Philadelphia for the Mormon camps in Iowa to inform the Saints about the battalion. After traveling to Pittsburgh via the railroad, the men traveled down the Ohio River to Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis. They then separated, with Little traveling the Mississippi River to Nauvoo, stopping at the old Mormon headquarters before taking the Mormon trail across Iowa. Kane took the Missouri River to Fort Leavenworth in present-day eastern Kansas. After outfitting there, Kane planned to go north and meet Little and the Mormon vanguard in western Iowa.

Kane had come west hoping to secure a field command in the war, but, when he arrived at Fort Leavenworth, Colonel Stephen W. Kearny, commander of the Army of the West, offered him nothing. Moreover, Kearny told Kane that he had already ordered Captain James Allen to muster the Mormon troops. Kane had hoped to do this himself and gain the favor of Brigham Young and other church leaders. Furthermore, Kearny told Kane that the Mormons had been delayed in Iowa and would not reach California in 1846; at the time, Kane and almost everybody else assumed that the Mormon exodus would terminate in California. As an alternative to commanding troops, Kane had hoped to get to California with the Saints and use their votes to get in on the ground floor of California’s politics, perhaps as governor or U.S. senator. Along the way, he might write a book that would gain him fame and money.

Swallowing hard on his disappointment, Kane continued on to the Mormon camps. His first effort was a disaster. Traveling alone along the Missouri River toward Iowa, he encountered searing summer heat, heavy rains, and what he called “physical nostalgia” brought on by the “staring silence of the prairie.” He had gone less than a third of the way when his horse pulled up lame, and he turned back to Leavenworth. Another misfortune took place several days later, when a thief stole his wallet, which contained about $100. “Adieu, book, honour, money—everything I hoped,” he wrote home. For a day or two, Kane thought he would give up all his western ambitions and return to Philadelphia “the same worthless invalid I have been—but in debt.”

4. John K. Kane to Elisha K. Kane, July 6, 1846, Elisha K. Kane Papers, APS.
5. Grow, Liberty to the Downtrodden, 56–58.
7. Kane to Robert Patrick Kane, July 2, 1846, Thomas L. Kane Papers, APS; Kane, journal, July 2, 1846, Thomas L. Kane Papers, Stanford University.
8. Kane to John K. Kane, June 29, 1846, APS.
Kane soon regained his balance. While his “selfish” dream of becoming “the man of the Western West” was now gone, he wrote his father that he could still be useful by helping enroll the Mormon troops, and perhaps by easing the Mormons’ anger over how they had been treated and strengthening their loyalty. Rumors were circulating that the Saints were secretly negotiating with the British over a possible British–Mormon colony on Vancouver’s Island in Canada, which might muddle American claims to the Pacific Northwest. Kane’s inventory of his remaining possibilities brought him to a hopeful conclusion: “My main objects prosper,” he wrote home; only “my subordinate and selfish ones . . . are thwarted.”

Once again Kane left Fort Leavenworth for Iowa, but this time he took a steamboat up the Missouri River, landing near Council Bluffs, not far from where the Saints’ forward wagons were getting ready to cross the river. Kane could see cattle by the thousands—the Mormons’ last sizable asset. He also saw the rising smoke of a thousand camp fires and the immigrants’ white canvas tents set against the morning sky (for Kane’s sketch of one of the camps a few weeks later, see Figure 1.1). Kane made his way to “Council Point,” near the steamboat landing, where Indian trader Peter Sarpy kept a trading post and rooms-for-hire. There Kane met 22-year-old Mormon Henry G. Boyle, who remembered Kane arriving on July 7. Reflecting the Saints’ mistrust for outsiders, Boyle thought Kane might be a government official “spying out our liberties.” But Kane had a letter of introduction from Little, which he buttressed with his constant assurances. “I soon found that his sympathies and good feelings were all in our favor,” said Boyle.

After spending several days at Sarpy’s trading post, Kane bought a riding outfit and, along with Boyle, started out for the Mormons’ main camp about a dozen miles away. On their journey they met Apostle Orson Pratt, who escorted them the final few miles. Mormon policeman Hosea Stout, who was at headquarters when Kane arrived, described Kane as “uncommonly small and feminine.” Indeed, by Kane’s own reckoning, he weighed only 93 ½

---

12. Kane to William Leiper, ca. July 1846, APS.
Yet, despite his fragility and youth, within twenty minutes Kane was in a serious meeting with leading Mormon officials, which went on for three and a half hours.

Brigham Young was not at headquarters. Nine days earlier he had received Kearney’s emissary, Captain Allen, and heard the government’s offer to muster troops. Young had immediately agreed. The camps were full of hunger and disease, and he desperately needed money to buy supplies for the Mormon exodus. At the same time, a battalion of soldiers could help prove the loyalty of his people to a doubting American public. Young soon headed east to recruit soldiers from the strung-out camps and did not return to headquarters until July 12, the day after Kane arrived. The first meeting of the two men probably

---


14. Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 20–23, 1846, APS.
took place on the day Young got back, and they were clearly interacting by the following day.\textsuperscript{15} Kane said little about Young at first. One of his first memories of Young was seeing him driving his own ox team and carrying a sick child in his arms.\textsuperscript{16} Young already knew a great deal about Kane: while acting as a “recruiting sergeant” in the eastern camps he had talked with Jesse Little, fresh from Nauvoo, who told him about Kane and his lobbying in Washington.

Young rode out on the prairie where Kane was apparently camping. It rained heavily that morning and Young and Kane huddled in Apostle Wilford Woodruff’s carriage, either for shelter or privacy. The two spoke about “the state of the nations,” including the Mormons’ deep affection for the U.S. Constitution. In addition, Young spoke of the uncertain times that lay ahead. “The time would come,” Young told Kane, “when the Saints would support the government of the U.S. or it would crumble to atoms.”\textsuperscript{17}

A few hours later, Young preached to the assembled Saints on the immediate need for troops: “If there are not young men enough, we will take the old men,” Young exaggerated, “and if there are not enough [men], we will take the women.” After Young and the other Mormon preachers ended their exhorting, Kane rose and briefly endorsed “all that the men of the camp had said.” His poor health kept him from doing more.\textsuperscript{18} During the recruiting, a patriotic American flag flew from the top of a treemast.\textsuperscript{19}

Kane had left Philadelphia wanting to like the Saints, and everything he saw confirmed his hopes. The camp itself had “perfect order & good behavior.” He praised their leaders to his parents as “a body of highly worthy men and they give me their most unbroken & childlike confidence.” Kane was pleased that he had been welcomed so heartily into the councils, as though he were one of them: “I honestly believe that they would not disobey my advice in any important matter unless it touched their creed.”\textsuperscript{20}

He similarly liked the rank-and-file Latter-day Saints, who treated him with friendly, simple-hearted grace. Kane learned not to accept their invitations to eat with them because they gave him their best; later, he’d find his hostess eating a dry crust of bread, “out of preference,” they would tell him.\textsuperscript{21} One

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Horace Whitney, journal, July 12, 1846, CHL.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Kane, \textit{Mormons}, 87.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Willard Richards, journal, July 13, 1846.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Journal History, July 13, 1846.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Kane, \textit{Mormons}, 29.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 20–23, 1846, APS.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 20–23, 1846.
\end{itemize}
evening, Kane and Boyle strayed from a campsite and overheard a man praying in a nearby thicket. The event left a deep impression: “I am satisfied; your people are solemnly and terribly in earnest,” he told Boyle after hearing the prayer. To his family, he wrote, “For the sake of what we call impartiality, we always like to find each party in the wrong and I have tried hard to do so. . . . But the damnedest Pilate in the world could not help saying I find no fault in this people. . . . I love [them] more & more . . . and am determined to befriend them.” He thought he may have found “the mission of my life.”

Kane’s first project in the camps was to help muster the troops. According to Kane, he had arrived just in time. Colonel Allen was “fidgeting and discouraged,” and on the verge of forsaking the enrollment because of Mormon delays in furnishing the troops. Going from one Mormon camp to another with such leading elders as Orson and Parley Pratt, George A. Smith, and John Taylor, Kane assured the Saints of the government’s goodwill. In letters home, he dramatically described his efforts, stating that he had put steel into the spine of the Mormon elders and together they raised the troops. He called the work a “personal triumph.”

The reality was more modest. Before Kane arrived, Young had already decided upon the battalion but hoped to raise the troops from the rear or eastern camps. Yet Kane’s work spurred some recruiting success and the Mormons succeeded in raising the required troops. The presence of the eager young man flaunting his semi-official credentials was a sensation. He delivered one mustering speech still mounted on his horse and with five hundred Saints milling around. Horace K. Whitney wrote in his journal, “This young man [Kane] appears to be an instrument in the hands of the Lord to bring about our salvation at the present time.”

In Kane’s mind, his Mormon work was just beginning. Polk needed assurances about the Mormons, and the Mormons needed more help from the federal government. Kane laid out his program in a lengthy letter to his father. First, the Mormons were willing to build a string of federal “blockhouses” or forts as they went west and hoped the government would pay them for their work. Specifically, a fort would be necessary at Grand Island, the long

---

23. Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 20–23, 1846; Kane, Mormons, 27.
24. Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 20–23, 1846, APS; also Kane to James K. Polk, July 21, 1846, Kane Collection, BYU.
25. Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 20–23, 1846.
26. Horace K. Whitney, journal, July 12, 1846, CHL.
island between the Wood and North Platte Rivers in Nebraska Territory where church leaders hoped to establish a “winter quarters” for their migration. Second, the Saints hoped to secure U.S. mail contracts, which would give them much-needed money.27

The third item was potentially more challenging. The Saints had left Nauvoo in February hoping to complete their journey to the far west in a single season, but the trek across Iowa had been grueling and left the movement far behind schedule. While Young held out hope that a small party might still reach the Great Basin in 1846, he understood that the main camps would need to winter along the trail. The most forward western groups might reach Grand Island or even Fort Laramie in present-day Wyoming, but many were unlikely to get farther than the bogged-down bivouacs of Iowa. The delay meant camping on Pottawatomie lands already sold to the U.S. government. Unless Washington gave its sanction, this would violate federal Indian policy.

During the first week of July the Mormons parleyed with eight American Indian leaders in the yard of Peter Sarpy’s log trading house. In the preceding weeks, the Pottawatomie had given the Mormons “sincere, almost delicate” hospitality, and their leaders agreed to let the Mormons stop on their lands and “make cultivation and improvement.” In part, the Indians hoped the outsiders might help to protect their northern flank from marauding Sioux. Both Allen and federal Indian subagent Robert B. Mitchell signed the agreement, certifying that the Indians had given their mark of approval. They later gave Kane affidavits that blessed the agreement.28

Federal officials in Washington still had to accept it, which was Judge John Kane’s crucial assignment. “You must make up your mind to aid me,” his son pled. Thomas wanted his father to look over his letter to Polk, smooth out any awkward phrases, and forward a final copy to the White House, along with the Allen and Mitchell affidavits and an appeal from Judge Kane himself. Then Thomas wanted his father to visit Polk. If the president gave his approval, Thomas told his father to get it in writing.29 John Kane wrote Polk and a few days later lobbied him in Washington. To speed the approval process, John Kane gave Polk a possible draft memo that might be signed and issued to

27. Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 20–23, 1846.
28. Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 20–23, 1846, and “Statement of Indian Subagents,” in Thomas L. Kane to William Medill, January 20 [?], 1847, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Letters Received 1846–1872, Department of the Interior, microfilm copy at Utah State Historical Society; Kane, Mormons, 56–57.
29. Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 20–23, 1846.
the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. By October, Polk’s approval was filtering through the channels of the nation’s Indian bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{30}

Kane wanted his family to keep one part of his agenda private. He was planning a public relations campaign to vindicate the Mormons: “If public opinion be not revolutionized before the Sacramento Country fills up with settlers, the miserable dramas of [the] Missouri and Illinois [persecutions] will be acted over again,” he warned. Only this time if the church met a new persecution, the Pacific Ocean would hem them in like the Red Sea had blocked Moses and the hosts of Israel. Who would help Mormons gain a latter-day deliverance? “If God spares my life,” he explained, “I will save them.”\textsuperscript{31}

In a letter to his older brother Elisha, Thomas suggested that all the circumstances of his life seemed to be coming together. Judge Kane had offered Thomas the post of clerk in his court. His new salary would possibly allow Thomas and Elisha to share an office and during off-hours work on their separate books—Elisha was thinking of a study on natural history.\textsuperscript{32} To get started on his book, Thomas went down to the wagon of Willard Richards, the church’s historian and Young’s counselor, to look over some Mormon historical records.\textsuperscript{33} Horace Whitney recorded the rumor that Kane intended to remain with the Mormons to “sketch our history,” which then could be presented to Polk.\textsuperscript{34}

Thomas then took a jaunt away from the camps into eastern Nebraska. He had grown tired of the “rascally hybrid Indian population” that hung around the Pottawatomie agency and, worse, the growing disease. Five of the fifteen men quartered there were ill, and the sickly season was just beginning. Kane hired a Canadian to serve as his manservant and guide and set out for Grand Island. It was his first servant since leaving Philadelphia and was a welcome return to his usual privilege.\textsuperscript{35} Kane’s trip was probably intended to get him acquainted with the pioneer trail as well as Grand Island with its potential as a Mormon way station and possible federal “blockhouse.” As likely, Kane

\textsuperscript{30} John K. Kane to Polk, August 18 and 29, 1846, Kane Collection, BYU and John K. Kane to Polk, August 29, 1846, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Letters Received 1846–1872.

\textsuperscript{31} Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 20–23, 1846.

\textsuperscript{32} Kane to Elisha K. Kane, July 22, 1846, APS.

\textsuperscript{33} Journal History, July 25, 1846.

\textsuperscript{34} Horace K. Whitney, journal, July 28, 1846, CHL.

\textsuperscript{35} Kane to John K. Kane and Jane D. Kane, July 24, 1846; Kane, Mormons, 27.
wanted to see the region’s famous buffalo herds. He left for Grand Island on July 27.36

By that time, the Mormons were pushing some of their wagons and cattle across the Missouri River, now half its former size when the Rocky Mountain summer runoff had swept by. The immigrants had made a cut through the steep eastern bank of the river, which gave them access to a ferry that operated almost nonstop during daylight hours.37 For several days, Young held out hope that wagons might still be able to reach Grand Island and a small party travel to the Rocky Mountains that year. However, the battalion had taken manpower and momentum, and many Saints still had not left Nauvoo. After a day or two debating with advisers, Young was ready to pull up the migration. Kane, who had also urged Young go into winter quarters, was one of the first to be told.

Source

Young to Kane, August 2, 1846, box 15, fd 1, Kane Collection, BYU.38

Letter

Head Quarters, Camp of Israel
Omaha Nation.39 Aug. 2d 1846.

Col. Kane
Dear Sir,

The Council40 improve the earliest moment, to in presenting their complements and informing you that we have concluded to winter near the Mo. River, some 15 or 30 miles north of this, to secure the rush and

37. Kane, Mormons, 43.
38. The back of the letter contains the following information: “Col Kane/Elk horn/Omaha/pr M Holqure [Molquire?],” who was possibly a frontiersman going to Grand Island.
39. Young and church leaders were camping near the headquarters of the Omaha Indians, whose main camp lay near present-day Omaha, Nebraska. Bennett, Mormons at the Missouri, 68–69.
40. Probably the “High Council of a ‘Traveling Stake of Zion,’ ” which was organized on July 21, 1846. The duties of its members were to not “let any pass over the river unless they could be in time to go to Grand Island and cut hay, to watch over the church, establish schools for the winter, etc.” George D. Smith, ed., An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), July 21, 1846, 286.
pea vine for our flocks,⁴¹ Our business will detain in this vicinity till it will be impolitic to attempt to reach the Mountains or Island this fall.

We have just seen a messenger from Ft Leavenworth, & the Mormon Battallion, who were 30 miles this side the Ft on Tuesday last, in good health & spirits, and all parties well pleased.

Col Little left Below on Friday eve for home.⁴²

The Camp will commence a removal in a day or Two,—

Most Respectfully
For the Council
Brigham Young Prst [President]

Willard Richards Clerk

P. S. We shall be happy to have you visit our Camp. I trust, that omitting your contemplated journey, your time will not be crowded,—

W.R.

⁴¹ Mormon leaders had not yet chosen the exact spot for their “winter quarters,” but wished to be close to nutritious river rushes and pea vines to feed their cattle. Kane described the latter as having a black and hard seed, which field mice gathered and cached and which were also eaten by local Indians. Kane, Mormons, 61.

⁴² On July 28, members of the Twelve Apostles blessed Jesse Little prior to his return to his eastern church duties. They directed him to receive any land the federal government would give them or to agree to build any structures on the overland trail commissioned to them. See Manuscript History of Brigham Young, vol. 2, 11–12, CHL.
Kane to Young, September 10, 1846

When Kane rejoined the Mormons, he found that their new headquarters lay on the Petit Papillon (or “Little Butterfly”) River, about ten miles north of the Omaha villages, in Nebraska Territory. Instead of the helter-skelter traveling camps of Iowa, wagons and tents were now double-parked in a series of neat squares. At the center of each square was an open space for breeze. Well-ordered “streets,” which the Mormons had covered with arbors, divided the squares and allowed easy access. Although the Petit Papillon camp had only a brief career in the Mormon migration, it would be Kane’s home for the next month and would remain for him an example of the Mormons’ high regard for order.¹ Several days after Kane’s arrival, the Mormons named the place “Cutler’s Park.”

On August 7, Kane was invited to a meeting of church leaders in Heber C. Kimball’s tent. Young’s terse letter to Kane on August 2 spoke of going to the “mountains.” During the meeting, Kane wanted to know “the intentions of the brethren” as to their final destination.² Young told him that the Saints would settle in the semi-desert Great Basin or Bear River Valley, though San Francisco or Vancouver’s Island might be established as distant outposts. Even though Kane was surprised, the Great Basin had been Young’s goal before the first wagons left Nauvoo. Since then, he had publicly talked about going to the Basin, most recently to the mustered troops of the battalion.³ Perhaps

¹ Kane, Mormons, 35.
² John D. Lee, diary, August 7, 1846, CHL.
³ Elden J. Watson, Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1846–1847 (Salt Lake City: Elder J. Watson, 1971), 241.
Kane had not been present or had misunderstood. In addition, Mormon leaders had been intentionally ambiguous about their proposed destination with outsiders.

The decision raised other questions for Kane. By not settling in California, Young was avoiding the future state’s politicians. Kane wanted to know if Young meant the same for the Great Basin and if he intended to pursue a U.S. territorial government. Young’s response indicated that the Mormons wanted self-government within the American system. For Young, the issue was local control. “Mob governors” and “mob law” had burned the Saints’ houses, killed his people, and oppressed “us all the day long.” He vowed never to submit to such misrule again. But American ideals and responsible American officers were another thing. “We intend raising the American Flag & sustain the government of the United States,” he told Kane.4

Kane had his own surprising news, which he had withheld when he was so anxious to get the battalion formed. He announced that former Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs, who had issued an order directing the Mormons to leave Missouri in 1838 or face “extermination,” was angling to become California’s territorial governor if the United States won its war with Mexico. The prospect of the Saints’ old archenemy having an important position in the west was deeply disturbing. Boggs might work against Mormon interests in California, whose state boundaries were very much up in the air but might include the Great Basin. More troubling was the precedent that Washington might appoint officers hostile to Mormon interests. Before the meeting ended, Kane promised to try to secure for the Mormons an “independent” territorial government, free from California intrigues. He suggested that the Mormons draw up a series of respectful resolutions to be sent to Polk. Kane also agreed to work to get the Saints federal contracts for carrying the mail and for building forts along the trail. Once these items of business were settled, Young expressed to Kane his warm personal regard and began preaching Mormonism. During the animated discussion, Kane repeatedly reached out to grasp Young’s hand, along with the hands of other Mormon leaders, “as an expression of gratitude.”5

Willard Richards, who drafted much of Young’s early correspondence, immediately began a letter to Polk. It diplomatically thanked Polk for the battalion, which had rekindled Mormon faith in their public officials. Now the Saints hoped for more favors. They hoped to gain presidential approval for

---

4. John D. Lee, diary, August 7, 1846, CHL; Journal History, August 7, 1846.
5. John D. Lee, diary, August 7, 1846, CHL; Journal History, August 7, 1846.
a territorial government in the West—but only if it protected the rights of the people, the letter stated. If asked to submit to officers who delighted in “injustice and oppression, and whose greatest glory . . . [was] to promote the misery of their fellows, for their own aggrandizement, or lustful gratification,” the Mormon people would retreat and seek self-government elsewhere. The letter ended with an appeal to allow the Mormons to stay on “Indian lands”—and not just on Pottawatomie lands. By crossing the Missouri River, the Saints were now on the range of the Omaha.6

As the letter was being composed, Kane became gravely ill. Mormon records gave a day-by-day vigil. On August 8, Young and Richards took Kane for a carriage ride “for the benefit of his health.” On August 9, Kane was “very sick” but “more comfortable.” Kane left camp for the prairie, apparently in the hope for better air. The next day, August 10, Kane was moved back into camp and to the tent of Jedediah Grant and John Greene. At midnight a courier was dispatched to Fort Leavenworth for a doctor, who should not “wait for tired horses or broken carriages” but come “post haste.” On August 11, the patient was more comfortable but still with a “little fever.” On August 12, Kane suffered a relapse, had his head shaved, requested the purgative Dover’s Powder, and was bathed. Two days later, on August 14, Kane was at the point of death. On August 15, Kane improved. And on August 17, Dr. Edes arrived from Leavenworth, but the crisis had already passed.7

“The fever prevailed to such an extent that hardly any escaped it,” Kane later remembered. He estimated that the incidence of disease in some Mormon camps in 1846 was one in three people.8 His account, drawn from an 1850 lecture and pamphlet, was part of his effort to create a sympathetic picture for the Saints and may have been overdrawn. But the careful study by one scholar put the Mormon death rate in the region at one in ten in 1846–1847.9 The local people called the place “Misery Bottom” for a good reason.10 Kane likely suffered from a malarial fever common to the Missouri lowlands, exacerbated by his previous nervous and physical complaints.

Kane had asked for a doctor from Fort Leavenworth partly to provide an outside witness that the Saints were not responsible for his illness. “I find that

---

6. Young to James K. Polk, August 9, 1846, BYOF.
9. Bennett, Mormons at the Missouri, 131–41; Thomas L. Kane to John K. Kane and Jane Leiper Kane, July 24, 1846, APS; Kane, Mormons, 50.
10. Kane, Mormons, 48.
there prevails towards . . . [Kane] the warmest and most cordial benevolence of feeling,” Dr. Edes wrote in response to Kane’s request for a formal statement (Kane thought the document was about all he got for the $200 bill that “this extortioner” had given him). Kane’s letters to his family attributed his recovery to his nursing: “I owe my life to the devoted kindness of those here—devoted if ever kindness was such.” This care was another binding tie between Kane and the Saints.11

As his strength began to return, Kane made plans to return to Philadelphia. The day before his departure, he made an unusual request. He had heard about the Saints’ “patriarchal blessings” and he wanted to receive one. Mormons believed these blessings, usually given only to church members, could give insight into an individual’s future, and Kane was very uncertain about his own. Apostle Wilford Woodruff took him to Patriarch John Smith’s tent and wrote Smith’s words.12 Kane was promised life, protection, and success; a distinguished posterity; and even a fullness of Latter-day Saint priesthood power, perhaps a hint of a future conversion. His name would be held in “honorable remembrance among the Saints to all generations.” The promises came with a condition: Kane must live an exemplary life and “seek the good of the Lord’s people.”13 Kane put enough credence in the blessing to speak fondly of it in later years and to inquire whether it remained in force.14

When Kane left Cutler’s Park, Young gave him a letter of recommendation to Mormon leaders at Nauvoo, Illinois, that described him as a “soldier, a gentleman, [and] philanthropist, whose acquaintance had been very pleasant.” He further wrote, “We trust an endless friendship exists between us.”15 Kane also carried another letter from Young to Polk, probably written at Kane’s urging. The Mormons realized that by camping on Omaha lands they were violating the 1834 Indian Intercourse Act, which made it illegal for whites to settle on Indian lands. Americans often did not pay much attention to this law, and government officers hurried to buy Indian land titles ahead of the rush of expansion. But the Mormons were anxious for the government’s good

11. “Certificate written by Dr. Edes,” in Journal History, August 19, 1846; Thomas L. Kane to John K. Kane and Jane Leiper Kane, August 19, 1846, APS.
13. Kane, patriarchal blessing, September 7, 1846, CHL. There are several versions of Kane’s blessing, with small variations.
14. Kane to Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards, February 19, 1851.
15. Young to Almon Babbitt, Joseph Heywood, and John Fullmer, September 7, 1846, BYOF.
opinion. Young’s letter explained that the Omahas had recently given the Saints permission to camp on their lands and that the Saints and the Indians hoped to help each other. It further sought permission from Polk for the Mormons to teach and trade with the Omahas, as well as sojourn on their land.  

Kane’s plan was to take the Mormon road across Iowa and see Nauvoo. When he got to the Missouri River, however, he learned that two letters addressed to him had been sent to Cutler’s Park, and Mormon scout Orrin Porter Rockwell, one of his traveling companions, went to get them. For a day or two, Kane pushed on into Iowa, thinking that Rockwell would catch up with him. But a major relapse in his health forced Kane to return to Point aux Poules—Trader’s Point—where he heard local Indian subagent Robert B. Mitchell pour out warnings and complaints about the Mormon camps in Iowa. These had come upriver from Mitchell’s superior, Major Thomas H. Harvey, Superintendent of the Upper Missouri Agency, located in St. Louis. Mitchell requested Kane to “communicate” with Young about Harvey’s warning, presumably either by returning to Cutler’s Park, about fifteen miles to the northwest, or by writing a detailed letter. Kane “declined the office” because of his health, opting instead to write this shorter letter.

Source

Kane to Young, September 10, 1846, box 40, fd 9, BYOF. There are two rough drafts of this letter in the Kane Collection, BYU.

Dear Sir,

Mr. Sub Agent Mitchell has requested me to communicate to you orders he has received from Major Harvey Supt. of Ind. Affs. at St Louis

---

16. Young to James K. Polk, September 7, 1846, draft, BYOF. Kane also carried with him an old Indian head from a mound near Cutler’s Park. He wanted one of his science friends in Philadelphia, “versed in the science” of craniology to take a look at it. Horace K. Whitney, journal, August 5–6, 1846, CHL.

17. These unidentified letters had been secured in St. Louis by Indian trader Peter Sarpy, who brought them up the Missouri River and then sent them to Cutler’s Park. Journal History, September 9, 1846.

18. The back of the letter contained the address: “General Young/Cutler’s Park/Favors of Mr. Rockwell/Sept 10-1846/T. L. Kane.”

19. Mitchell’s first dispatches to Thomas Harvey about the Mormons were favorable. At the end of June, he reported that Young was complying with the law by holding the Saints “aloof from the Indians” and not trading with them. While the Saints had been “badly treated” by their fellow Americans, they nevertheless “declare their intention to bear the American Flag to whatever country they may cast their Lot.” Robert B. Mitchell, Council Bluff Sub Agency, to Thomas H. Harvey, June 29, 1846, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Letters Received 1846–1872.
to enjoin your people to be careful not to commit any “waste” of timber upon the lands of the Pottawatomies during your passage through their country; as they have no right to give you the permission you have received from them, the Treaty being already ratified by which they have conveyed said lands to the United States; and, he says, your passage through the country should occupy no longer time than is altogether necessary.20

I have just informed him that I think it would be more in order for him to write to you, in person; and, at the same time offering him the services of Mr Rockwell to convey to you his message, have declined the office, which my present weak & low state makes exceeding difficult to me. Yet I must not, in spite of my wavering hand, abstain from saying in comment upon his notification to you, which you may not understand, that it need not give you uneasiness. The Pottawatomies it is true have no right to convey to you their timber &c., title to it being already fully vested in the U.S.; but there is no reason, in my opinion, wherefor your people should not be justified ex post facto, so to speak, by Government in using all that is necessary for their perfect comfort & convenience. My papers will be arranged in a day or two, I trust, in such a manner as to represent themselves, in case my present drawback [p. 2] continues to be of moment, and thus, whether I reach Washington in safety or not, I feel justified in saying to you to stop where befits you, and cut all needful wood and to continue in your present course unchanged. The letter The letter from Major H. and that from Mr Medill (Head of Bureau Washington)21 <upon which it is

20. Harvey was relaying orders given to him by the Office of Indian Affairs in Washington, which said that the Mormons “should . . . be distinctly informed that they cannot be permitted to make any permanent location there, or any longer stay than is actually necessary, and that it is expected that they will abstain from all interference with the Indians and move onwards as soon as possible.” The Office of Indian Affairs wanted nothing to jeopardize the removal of the Pottawatomies to Kansas Territory nor the orderly transfer of land to the newly created state of Iowa. The U.S.-Pottawatomie treaty had been negotiated in 1846, and proclaimed six weeks later: William Medill to Thomas H. Harvey, July 27, 1846, Letters sent by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824–1882, microfilm copy at Utah State Historical Society; see also Medill to Harvey, August 22, 1846, Letters sent by the Office of Indian Affairs. See Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, compiled by Charles J. Kappler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 557–560.

21. William Medill (1802–1865) was elected in 1838 to the U.S. Congress and served two terms. Polk appointed Medill to the Office of Indian Affairs shortly after the start of his administration. See Stephen Rockwell, Indian Affairs and the Administrative State in the Nineteenth-Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 256–258.
founded,> which have been shown me,\(^{22}\) are, it is true, quite in rule, but matters shall all be arranged believe me as is proper in a few weeks, and you will hear as little of your using timber as of the “necessity” that your passage through the country should occupy any shorter time than such as suits you best.

Farewell;—I am constrained to be brief—very much against my will. Dr. Richards will understand why this stands as my only answer to his kind letter\(^{23}\)—I did not credit myself with force to write so much when I began—Farewell—Say to my friends for me that which I would say, and yourself and your own, remember me as

Yours sincerely

Thomas L. Kane

General Young.

Point a Poules Sept. 10(!) 11, 1846

---

22. Kane had seen one of the letters Medill sent Harvey. Medill would follow these two letters with a third. See Medill to Harvey, September 2, 1846, Letters of the Office of Indian Affairs; Bennett, Mormons at the Missouri, 104–105.

23. Willard Richards had written a personal letter to Kane, which Rockwell delivered along with the two letters misdirected to Kane via Cutler’s Park. Richards to Kane, September 9, 1846, Willard Richards Papers, CHL.
Prostrated with illness, Kane gave up on going overland and instead took a steamer owned by the American Fur Company downriver toward St. Louis, planning on a second river boat to get him to Nauvoo. Traveling with him on the first leg of the trip was Indian subagent Robert B. Mitchell, which gave Kane a chance to request another affidavit favorable to the Mormons. “So far as I know, the general conduct of the Mormon people has continued irreproachable,” the statement went. It was written in Kane’s handwriting, with Mitchell’s signature at the bottom.\(^1\) Kane was uncertain whether he would reach Nauvoo. Before saying good-bye to the traveling companions at Traders’ Point, he told one of them he could have his horse if Kane “failed” to arrive at the old Mormon headquarters.\(^2\)

Within two weeks, Kane was at Keokuk, Iowa, at the great river’s rapids and only a few miles short of Nauvoo. He hired a carriage to get him through Iowa’s Half-Breed Tract, a sanctuary for human flotsam—“coiners, horse thieves and other outlaws,” Kane said. Finally, he saw the city rising on a rolling bluff at a bend of the river. Kane had gone to Nauvoo hoping for a few literary scenes but instead found high drama. A week before he arrived, a mob had forced out the last Mormon citizens, many of whom had been too aged, poor, sick, or pregnant to go west sooner. Nearly four years later, he described Nauvoo in a lecture before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and then in an influential pamphlet. “The town lay as in a dream,” he wrote, “under some deadening spell of loneliness, from which I almost feared to wake it. For plainly it had not slept long. There was no grass growing up in the paved

---

1. Robert B. Mitchell, statement, September 19, 1846, Kane Collection, BYU.
2. Horace K. Whitney, journal, September 11, 1846, CHL.
ways. Rains had not entirely washed away the prints of dusty footsteps.”

Kane wrote Brigham Young a letter from Nauvoo, or more likely from the Mormon camps just across the river. During his trip to Nauvoo, Kane received two letters from his father describing his success in lobbying the Polk administration. The letters contained two enclosures—letters written by William Medill, head of the federal Office of Indian Affairs, which stated that the Latter-day Saints would be allowed to camp temporarily upon Pottawatomie lands in western Iowa. Kane wanted Young to see the material firsthand and sent them with his own brief epistle.

Source

Kane to Young, September 22, 1846, box 40, fd 9, item 2, BYOF.

Letter

Nauvoo (!) Illinois.
September 22d. 1846

My dear friend,

As my mind is confused by the effect of over exercise this hot day upon my disease shattered frame, I forward to you in original or copy, all the enclosures which I have received from my Father, that they may tell their own story better than I am able to do it for them. I do not, you may believe, deny myself the pleasure of writing to you at length without reluctance; but the pain I have at present in my head is really so acute that you must take my honest wish to do so, for the deed itself. With regard to the clauses which for convenience I have hurriedly marked

5. The morning before crossing the Mississippi River to visit Nauvoo, Kane met with Mormon Newel K. Whitney, and it is likely that Kane composed his letter to Young at this time, as his letter contains no information about Nauvoo itself. Newel K. Whitney to Young, September 22, 1846, BYOF.
6. On the back of the letter, Kane addressed it to “General Young” at “Camp at Cutlers Park Upper Missouri.”
7. Kane enclosed several letters with this letter. First, he enclosed John K. Kane to Thomas L. Kane, August 18, 1846. In this letter, written by his father from Philadelphia in response
with asterisks in the communication of Medill to Major Harvey of St. Louis,8 I need only observe, that the first shows that Captain Allens Report, which fully narrated your objects and intentions alluded to, has in all probability never been despatched to Washington,9 inasmuch as the date of Medill’s letter to my Father is as late as September 3d.;10 and that the second and third suggest it to me to remind you that I have with me, in case of personal accident, documents in the nature of vouchers &c. not only from Mitchell the Sub-Agent in question, who is pledged to me personally,11 but from all having influence or authority [p. 2] in the upper Missouri Country, which are every way satisfactory to us in their nature. You see, therefore, that you need apprehend no more from any instructions to Harvey or Mitchell such as those which I fear alarmed to Thomas’s letter of July 23, John informed Thomas that he had “lost no time in making the appeal to the President for the permission to remain.” Furthermore, within the week, John promised to see President Polk in person “and take care that the thing is done.”

Second, Thomas enclosed a letter from William Medill, Office of Indian Affairs, to John K. Kane, September 3, 1846. John Kane had written Polk on August 29 seeking permission for the Mormons to “winter in the country recently purchased from the Pottowattomie Indians, near Council Bluffs, where they now are.” Medill communicated to John regarding Polk’s decision “to give the permission in the form and upon the conditions contained in a letter to Major [Thomas] Harvey.” He enclosed a copy of the letter to Harvey (dated September 2, 1846) and asked John to send it to his son Thomas.

Third, Thomas enclosed two copies of Medill’s September 2, 1846 letter to Harvey, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis; Kane added some asterisks to this letter to emphasize certain phrases (see succeeding footnotes). This letter confirmed Medill’s previous letters to Harvey that the Mormons would be permitted to camp temporarily upon the Pottawattomie lands.

8. William Medill to Thomas H. Harvey, September 2, 1846, Letters of the Office of Indian Affairs, copy made by Thomas L. Kane in CHL. Kane first marked with an asterisk Medill’s statement that the Mormons’ “object and intention” in asking to temporarily remain on the Pottawatamie lands had not been “very satisfactory set forth.”

9. James Allen, the initial commanding officer of the Mormon Battalion, died on August 23, 1846. Young respected him as a “kind, gentlemanly officer” with a “fatherly deportment.” See Young to Samuel Gully (quartermaster of the Mormon Battalion), August 27, 1846, BYOF.

10. William Medill to John K. Kane, September 3, 1846, Letters of the Office of Indian Affairs. The Mormons preserved a copy of this letter in Brigham Young Manuscript History, November 11, 1846, CHL.

11. Kane marked two other clauses with asterisks in Medill’s letter to Harvey, September 2, 1846. The first instructed Harvey that he needed to be “satisfied” that the Mormons intended to leave the Pottawattamie lands in the spring. The second referred to Harvey’s duty to “instruct the Sub-Agent” to allow the Mormons to remain on the land temporarily. Kane referred in part to the written document that Robert B. Mitchell signed, September 19, 1846, Kane Collection, BYU, as well as the personal assurances that Mitchell has given to Kane that he would work on the Mormons’ behalf.
you a little at the time of my departure. I am getting to believe more and more every day as my strength returns that I am spared by God for the labour of doing you justice; but, if I am deceived, comfort yourself and your people, with the knowledge that my sickness in your midst has touched the chords of noble feeling in a brave heart;¹² and that, even if I do not succeed in getting home in person to secure to you your rights—my papers are now so arranged that my Father will find it little more labour to do you service than

Yours sincerely
Thomas L. Kane

You can return me my Father’s two letters—which I value—by mail from Ft. Leavenworth, at your leisure. They show him as he is and as you may know him from them—yet I feel loth to part with them entirely.

General Brigham Young

¹². In his letter to Thomas on August 18, 1846, John Kane congratulated his son on his involvement with the Mormons: “I am sincerely happy at the prospect there is of your doing good to the sufferers for conscience’ sake. You say right, that you have not lived in vain, if you can guard one individual from outrage or one heart from anxiety.” John K. Kane to Thomas L. Kane, August 18, 1846, BYOF.
Kane to Young, November 5, 1846

FROM NAUVOO, KANE took the Great Lakes to upper New York, every mile a trial, as old and recent maladies threatened, both physical and mental. At Albany, he prepared for a “final exit” and wrote his father that he must take on the Mormon cause as his final request. A younger brother, Pat, rushed to the city to take him home on a “couch.” For several weeks he was unable to move, “still less [to] think or act.”1 Judge Kane’s diagnosis was less dire, especially after a month and a half. “Tom, back from his California Mormon pilgrimage, after sundry mortal sicknesses, has been home for six weeks with a constitution apparently altered, and certainly more flesh & more equanimity of spirit than he has had since boyhood,” he told Thomas’s older brother Elisha.2

Thomas, his strength returning, wrote Elisha, “You have heard that I had a queer mild journey this summer West of the Missouri—so queer that I cannot risk writing about it now.” He continued, “I suffered much from pain as well as hardship but I did much goodness as to set more store upon this year than any of my life. I am at work now in the same matter with hope of success—not personal for I am not personally involved in it—but success for my proteges whose condition is most forlorn.”3

Kane’s campaign was the same as it had been during his trip west: helping the Mormons by political lobbying and by public relations. By November, he visited Washington to lobby for permission for the Mormons to camp on

1. Thomas L. Kane to Willard Richards, October 26, 1846, Willard Richards Papers, CHL; Orson Spencer to Young, November 26, 1846, BYOF. Pat wrote of his trip to retrieve Thomas that he traveled “15 hours, under the impression, that he was dead and having made preparations to bring on the body. Pleasant trip?” Robert Patterson Kane to Elisha K. Kane, December 17, [1846], Elisha K. Kane Papers, APS.
2. John K. Kane to Elisha K. Kane, November 11, 1846, Elisha K. Kane Papers, APS.
3. Thomas L. Kane to Elisha K. Kane, November 12, 1846, APS.
Omaha lands, in addition to the permission they had already received to stay on Pottawatomie lands; he had solid success to report, which he dashed off in a short memo to Young as he prepared to return to Philadelphia.

Source

Kane to Young and others, November 5, 1846, box 40, fd 9, BYOF.

Letter

Washington, (Dec) Nov. 5, ’46

My dear friends,

After a heavy week’s work in good earnest, I am at last able to return home. The instructions to Major Harvey with regard to your residing on Pottawatomie lands, will be made to include also your present case with regard to the Omahas: besides, instructions from the Indian Department will generally look to your interest, relation had to the tribes by whom you are surrounded. This, I think I may say is fixed, and will not be changed. – I must follow my trunk which I have already sent to the Baltimore R. R. Depôt, but I will write to you at length from Philadelphia.

A happy winter to you all in your present homes!

Faithfully yours

Thomas L. Kane
Prest. Brigham Young and my friends with him.

4. On the accompanying envelope, Kane addressed the letter to “President Brigham Young and others. Camp of Israel”; the return address read, “Locust St. Phil <Washington> Nov. 5, 1846 T. L. Kane”.

5. Thomas H. Harvey, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis.
Kane left only a few details about his week-long lobbying in Washington, D.C., which he referred to in his November 5 letter to Young. Before he went to Washington, he believed his work would not be as difficult as his father’s earlier effort. Once the precedent of the Mormon camps in Indian territory had been established, Kane could draw upon it.\(^1\) However, he left Washington unsettled: there were contrary winds stirring, he knew, and if Kane’s later memories were right, they went as high as President Polk. During his November lobbying or in a later visit to the White House, Kane found Polk uncertain about his Mormon policy. His ear appeared tuned to the advice of Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who was talking about sending a “dragoonade” to force the Mormons from their camps. During one heated interview, Kane accused Polk of “deceit”—Polk was privately telling his Indian agents to let the Mormons alone, but the western congressional delegations were hearing a different story. Nor would Polk approve the Mormons’ request to serve as U.S. Indian agents during their travel west.\(^2\)

Kane understood that the Mormon case would be decided by public opinion. During the last months of 1846, as detailed in the following letter,

---

1. Thomas L. Kane to Willard Richards, October 26, 1846, CHL.
2. Orson Spencer to Young, November 26, 1846, BYOF; Kane to Young, July 11, 1850. Kane claimed to have prepared a memorandum detailing the Polk administration’s maneuvers and promised the Mormons a copy in case of his death. Also see Kenney, Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, entries for November 25–26, 1849, 3: 513–515. For further detail on Benton’s anti-Mormonism, as described by Mormon leader Jedediah Grant, see J. V. Long, Report of the First General Festival of the Renowned Mormon Battalion (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Office, 1855). 9–11.