Wilford Woodruff and the Foss Family Record

I Made Her a Family Record

The surviving 1838 fragment and the family story that followed

A Sunday with Sarah Foss

On Sunday, September 9, 1838, Wilford Woodruff spent most of the day at the home of his sister-in-law, Sarah Foss, in Maine. Sarah was the elder sister of his wife, Phebe. Her husband, Calvin, had died three years earlier, leaving a family of young children. During the visit, Woodruff made her a record of their ancestry. [N1]

He traced five generations of Calvin's forebears and five generations of Sarah's Carter family. In his journal he recorded the work in a few words: "I made her a family Record." The surviving sheet bears Calvin's name, two ancestral lines, and Woodruff's inscription. Taken together, those details make a strong case that this is the record he described that Sunday. [N1]

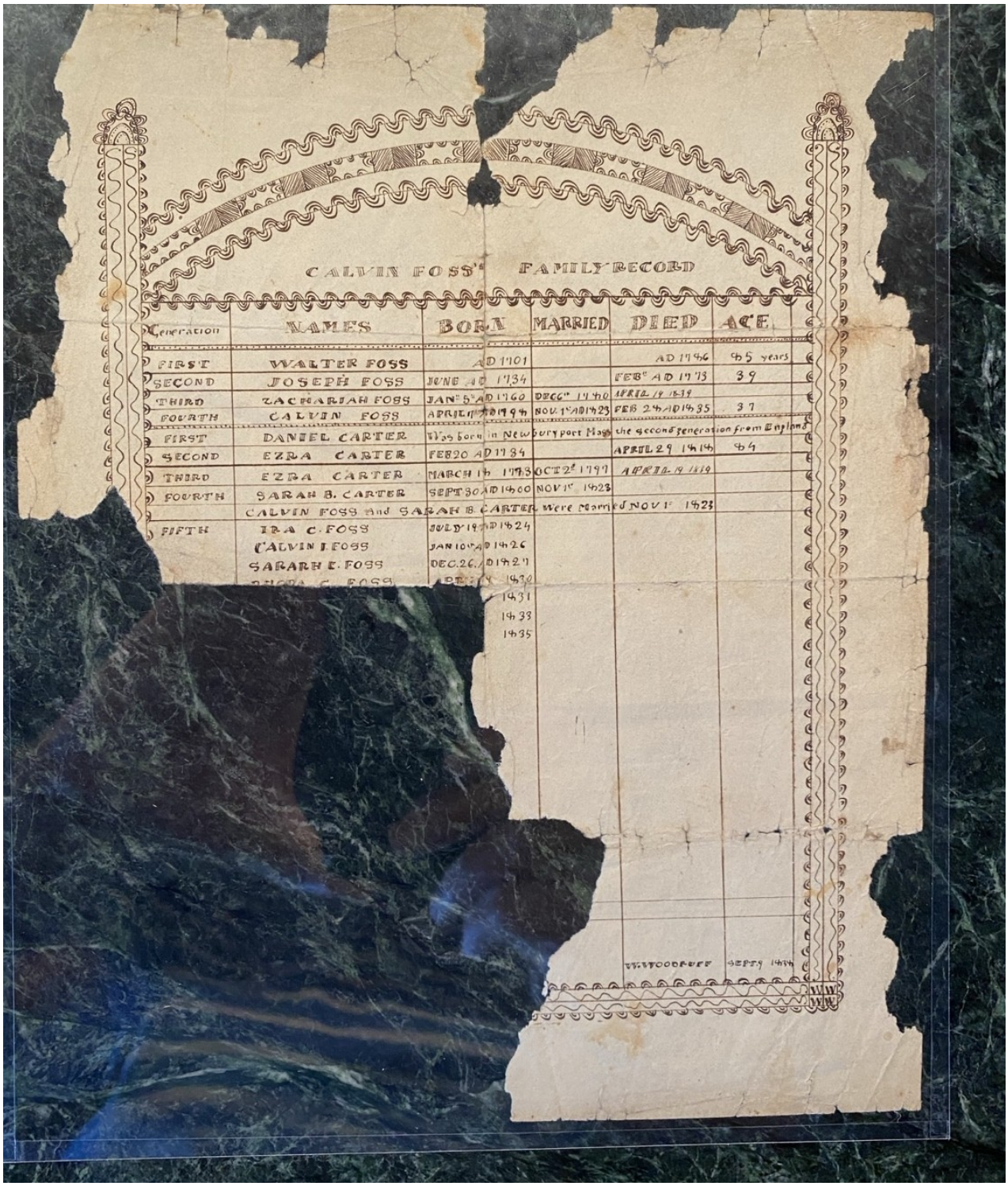
The page that follows brings that evidence into view. Its torn edges and missing lower corner are part of its history. Across the surviving paper are the names of parents and children whose lives would carry this story from Maine into the gathering of the Latter-day Saints and the communities of Utah.

Highlights

- 1838 — Woodruff records making the Foss and Carter family chart for his sister-in-law Sarah.
- 1844 — He baptizes, confirms, and blesses four Foss children in Maine.
- 1850 — Sarah and several family members gather west with the Woodruff company.
- 1857 — Sarah Elizabeth Foss marries Matthias Cowley, linking the family to a Nauvoo printer and emigrant leader.
- 1909 — Their son, Matthias Foss Cowley, publishes a major biography of Woodruff.

Narrative edition, 4 October 2026. Documentary study, extended biographies, chronology, and source notes follow the illustrated story.

The surviving family record



CALVIN FOSS'S FAMILY RECORD

Generation	NAMES	BORN	MARRIED	DIED	AGE
FIRST	WALTER FOSS	A D 1701		AD 1746	45 years
SECOND	JOSEPH FOSS	JUNE AD 1734		FEB^{y} AD 1773	39
THIRD	ZACHARIAH FOSS	JAN^{y} 5th AD 1760	DECC^{r} 1780	APRIL 19 1839	
FOURTH	CALVIN FOSS	APRIL 1st AD 1794	NOV. 1st AD 1823	FEB 24 AD 1835	37
FIRST	DANIEL CARTER	Was born in Newburyport Mass		the second generation from England	
SECOND	EZRA CARTER	FEB 20 AD 1734		APRIL 29 1814	64
THIRD	EZRA CARTER	MARCH 15 1773	OCT 2^{d} 1797	APRIL 19 1819	
FOURTH	SARAH B. CARTER	SEPT 30 AD 1800	NOV 1st 1823		
	CALVIN FOSS and SARAH B. CARTER		Were Married NOV 1st 1823		
FIFTH	IRA C. FOSS	JULY 19 AD 1824			
	CALVIN I. FOSS	JAN 10 AD 1826			
	SARAH E. FOSS	DEC. 26 AD 1827			
	[illegible] FOSS	APR [illegible] 1830			
		1831			
		1833			
		1835			

WM WOODRUFF SEPT 9 1844

Calvin Foss's Family Record. Owner-supplied photograph retained from the project file. The sheet is shown upright and in full, including its losses and protective housing.

Reading the fragment

The heading reads “CALVIN FOSS’S FAMILY RECORD.” Beneath it, the ruled columns run from Generation and Names to Born, Married, Died, and Age. The Foss ancestors occupy the upper rows, followed by the Carter ancestors and the children of Calvin and Sarah. The title and ornament make the page a family keepsake as well as a record.

The reading aid below follows the surviving rows. Brackets mark uncertain or supplied readings. Dates carried forward from the earlier transcription remain provisional where the photograph does not resolve them. Empty cells in the manuscript should not be filled with modern dates without an editorial label.

Gen.	Name	Reading preserved in the earlier study
First	WALTER FOSS	Born A.D. 1701; died A.D. 1746; age 45 years.
Second	JOSEPH FOSS	Born June 2d 1734; died Feb. [8?] A.D. 1773; age 39.
Third	ZACHARIAH FOSS	Born Jan. 5th A.D. 1760; marriage date uncertain; death read as April [17/18] 1839.
Fourth	CALVIN FOSS	Born April 7th [1798/1800]; married Nov. 1st A.D. 1823; died in February 1835; age 37. Exact day and birth year require rechecking.
First	DANIEL CARTER	“was born in Newburyport Mass the second generation from England”.
Second	EZRA CARTER	Born Feb. 20 A.D. 1734. Earlier death and age readings require rechecking against the image.
Third	EZRA CARTER	Born March [16/18] 1773; married Oct. 2d 1797. Death field uncertain.
Fourth	SARAH B. CARTER	Born Sept. 30 A.D. 1800.
Marriage	CALVIN FOSS and SARAH B. CARTER	“were married Nov. 1st 1823”.

The authorial inscription at the foot of the chart is read as “W. Woodruff” and “Sept. 9th 1838.” The final year is faint and stylized. The date is supported by the journal entry identifying the subject and recipient. [N1]

A dating question remains within the chart itself: if the apparent 1839 death entry is read correctly, that information postdates the 1838 creation. It could be a later addition or an incorrect reading. The date of the original record does not, by itself, establish that every entry was written on the same day.

This is a structured reading aid, not a claim that every damaged character has been deciphered. The earlier provisional readings and their disagreements with later records remain in the documentary study.

The children beneath the ancestral lines

Ira C. Foss, Calvin I. Foss, and Sarah E. Foss are legible in the surviving children’s section; the next row is partly lost, and the lower names are missing with the paper. Family research supplies the complete household. The table therefore distinguishes the reconstructed family from a literal transcription of surviving ink. [N2]

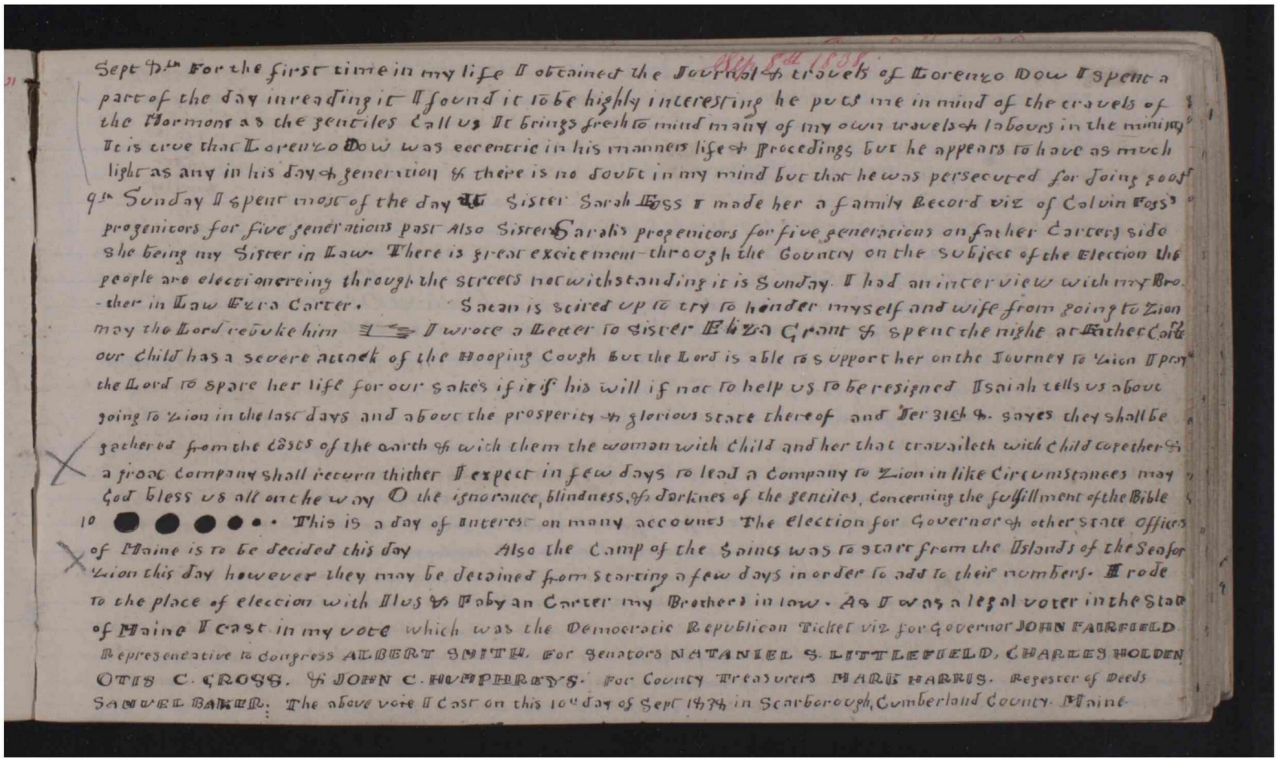
Child	Birth date	Age in Sept 1838	Later direction
Ira Carter Foss	19 July 1824	14	The eldest child; later associated with Maine and Tryphena Seavey.
Calvin Ichabod Foss	10 January 1826	12	A son whose later journey led toward California.
Sarah Elizabeth Foss	26 December 1827	10	Later wife of Matthias Cowley and mother of Matthias Foss Cowley.
Rhoda Harriet Foss	19 April 1830	8	Later married Willard Richards and, after his death, Franklin D. Richards.
Phebe Carter Foss	2 November 1831	6	Later married David Sessions and made her home in Utah.
Ezra Carter Foss	30 June 1833	5	Later married Emily M. Cheney and lived in the Davis County area.
Olive Carter Foss	12 April 1835	3	The youngest child; later married Franklin Benjamin Woolley.

These ages help restore the scale of Sarah’s responsibility. Her eldest was fourteen when Woodruff made the chart; the youngest was three. Olive’s birth followed Calvin’s death, so the family record joined the memory of a father to a child who had never known him. [N2]

For Sarah Elizabeth, the sheet preserved a place in the family while she was still a ten-year-old girl. Her adult life, and the work of her son, would eventually give that small entry an unexpected connection to Woodruff’s own biography.

Birth dates and later relationships follow the expanded project study and its cited family and institutional sources. Ages are calculated for 9 September 1838. The complete names are editorial identifications.

Woodruff records the visit



Sept 8th For the first time in my life I obtained the Journal & travels of Lorenzo Dow I spent a part of the day in reading it I found it to be highly interesting he puts me in mind of the travels of the Mormons as the gentiles Call us It brings fresh to mind many of my own travels & labours in the ministry It is true that Lorenzo Dow was eccentric in his manners life & proceedings but he appears to have as much light as any in his day & generation & there is no doubt in my mind but that he was persecuted for doing good

9th Sunday I spent most of the day at Sister Sarah Foss I made her a family Record viz of Calvin Foss's progenitors for five generations past Also Sister Sarah's progenitors for five generations on father Carters side she being my Sister in Law There is great excitement through the Country on the Subject of the Election the people are electioneering through the streets notwithstanding it is Sunday I had an interview with my Brother in Law Ezra Carter. Satan is stired up to try to hinder myself and wife from going to Zion may the Lord rebuke him I wrote a Letter to Sister Eliza Grant & spent the night at Father Cobb's our Child has a severe attack of the Hooping Cough but the Lord is able to support her on the Journey to Zion I pray the Lord to spare her life for our sakes if it is his will if not to help us to be resigned Isaiah tells us about going to Zion in the last days and about the prosperity & glorious state thereof and Jer 31ch 8. says they shall be gathered from the coasts of the earth & with them the woman with Child and her that travaileth with Child together a great Company shall return thither I expect in few days to lead a Company to Zion in like Circumstances may God bless us all on the way O the ignorance, blindness, & darkness of the gentiles, Concerning the fulfillment of the Bible

10 This is a day of interest on many accounts The election for Governor & other State Offices of Maine is to be decided this day Also the Camp of the Saints was to start from the Islands of the Sea for Zion this day however they may be detained from starting a few days in order to add to their numbers. I rode to the place of election with Brother Fabyan Carter my Brother in law. As I was a legal voter in the State of Maine I cast in my vote which was the Democratic Republican Ticket viz for Governor JOHN FAIRFIELD Representative to Congress ALBERT SMITH. For Senators NATANIEL S. LITTLEFIELD, CHARLES HOLDEN OTIS C. GROSS. & JOHN C. HUMPHREYS. For County Treasurer MARK HARRIS. Register of Deeds SAMUEL BAKER. The above vote I Cast on this 10th day of Sept 1838 in Scarborough, Cumberland County Maine

Woodruff's journal, 8–10 September 1838, digital page 59. The 9 September entry records the family chart. Blank scan margin omitted from the display. Church History Library, MS 1352, through the Wilford Woodruff Papers. [N1]

The passage identifying the record

"9th Sunday I spent most of the day at Sister Sarah Foss. I made her a family Record viz of Calvin Foss's progenitors for five generations past Also Sister Sarah's progenitors for five generations on father Carters side she being my Sister in Law."

The passage is reproduced here with the names restored from the linked transcript and the existing project transcription; line wrapping is reset. The manuscript image remains the authority for spelling, insertions, and deleted words. [N1]

The young record keeper



Wilford Woodruff, painted in London by Filippo Pistrucci, completed 20 January 1841. This likeness was made a little over two years after the family record. Courtesy of the Church History Museum through the Wilford Woodruff Papers. [I1]

Woodruff was thirty-one in September 1838. He and Phebe had married the previous year, and their first child, Sarah Emma, was still an infant. His journal places the family record amid the ordinary demands and larger anxieties of a household preparing to move. In the days before the visit he packed goods for the journey to Zion. On the day he made the record, he worried about his daughter’s illness. [N1]

Beyond the household, election activity stirred the streets. Woodruff noticed campaigning even on Sunday. Within the same entry, he turned from ancestry to politics, from family conversation to his hopes for the journey. Those concerns belong together: the man who preserved family names was also a husband, a father, a missionary, and a traveler who did not know how safely his family would reach its destination.

Sarah’s connection to the Woodruffs was practical as well as genealogical. The earlier research records visits, letters, help with transportation, and Sarah’s assistance around the birth of their first child. The page grew out of an active family relationship. [N2]

Sarah Foss and the family she raised



Sarah Brackett Carter Foss, identified in the Foss family picture compilation. Photograph date and photographer are not supplied there. [I3]

Sarah had married Calvin Foss in 1823. By 1835 she was a widow, with six children and another soon to be born. When Woodruff visited in 1838, her task was already larger than preserving a husband’s name. She was bringing up the children whose births he entered beneath the ancestral lines. [N2]

Ten years later, Woodruff left a judgment of her work as a mother. He praised the children’s education and accomplishments. That observation gives Sarah a presence beyond a list of dates. She had sustained a household through widowhood and raised children whom their uncle regarded with respect. [N3]

The children did not all follow one path. Ira remained connected to Maine. Calvin Ichabod prepared to travel to California. Others joined the gathering to Utah. A family history becomes more understandable when those differences remain visible: the same childhood home could send its children in different directions.

The photograph on the next page allows the reader to meet several of those children as adults. Its family identifications connect faces with names whose beginnings are recorded on the fragment.

Faces behind the names



Sarah Foss with five of her children. Seated, left to right: Ezra Carter Foss, Sarah Brackett Carter Foss, Rhoda Foss Richards, and Olive Foss Woolley. Standing: Sarah Elizabeth Foss Cowley and Phebe Foss Sessions. Identifications follow the family compilation; the photograph is undated there. [I3]

The portrait brings two generations together. Sarah sits between members of the household she raised after Calvin’s death. Ira and Calvin Ichabod, the two eldest sons, are not included in this photograph.

Woodruff’s relationship with these children continued long after he wrote their names. On October 31, 1844, he recorded baptizing and confirming Olive, Ezra, Rhoda, and Phebe, and giving them blessings. When sickness troubled the household in November, he recorded that too. The family record and the journal can therefore be read together: one fixes the relationships, while the other follows the people through time. [N4]

The words of the individual 1844 blessings have not been recovered in the research. What survives is Woodruff’s account of the event. The distinction matters because the diary tells us what he did without supplying everything he said.

Phebe and the Carter connection



Wilford and Phebe Woodruff, their daughters Phoebe and Susan, and Phebe’s father Ezra Carter. Daguerreotype by Marsena Cannon, Boston, 16 May 1849. Church History Library, PH 9679, through the Wilford Woodruff Papers. [I2]

Phebe makes the connection between Woodruff and the Foss family easy to follow. Phebe and Sarah Foss were sisters, daughters of Ezra Carter and Sarah Fabyan. Wilford was therefore Sarah’s brother-in-law, and the Foss children were his nieces and nephews by marriage. [N2]

The 1849 photograph places Wilford, Phebe, their daughters, and Ezra Carter within one frame. Ezra also belongs to the ancestral line on the fragment. The picture was taken eleven years after the record was made; it illustrates the family relationship rather than the gathering at Sarah’s home in 1838.

A home in Nauvoo



Wilford and Phebe Woodruff's house in Nauvoo, Illinois. Historic photograph reproduced by the Ensign Peak Foundation with credit to the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Photograph date is not specified in that reproduction. [I4]

As Woodruff's ministry carried him between the eastern United States, Britain, and the gathering places of the Saints, providing a home for Phebe and the children remained a concern. In Nauvoo he undertook the building of a brick house. He wrote in 1843 that he wanted his family to have a comfortable place during his absence. [N5]

The house makes that wish tangible. Work proceeded between his missions, and the family's opportunity to enjoy the completed home was brief. The Ensign Peak Foundation's account places its completion in 1845 and its sale in April 1846, as Woodruff prepared to leave Nauvoo. [N5]

This was a later chapter in the Woodruffs' life. The family record had been made in Maine in 1838. The house belongs here because it shows another expression of Woodruff's concern for family during years when missionary service and migration repeatedly separated him from home.

Nauvoo also enters the story through the man Sarah Elizabeth Foss would later marry. Matthias Cowley worked in the city's printing establishment. His experiences in Warsaw and Nauvoo would bring the Foss family's descendants into another strand of the history surrounding Joseph Smith and the westward exodus. [N6]

The journey west

In 1850, Sarah and several members of the family joined the gathering to Utah in the company led by Woodruff. The old relationship now carried practical responsibilities on the trail. The man who had drawn the household’s ancestors on paper became a leader in the journey that brought members of that household to a new home. The company was organized on June 16 and reached the Salt Lake Valley on October 14. [N7]

Sarah Elizabeth was twenty-two. The Church History Biographical Database records her baptism on July 10, 1850. Family recollection places it in the Platte River and identifies Woodruff as the officiator. The date and company membership are supported by the institutional record; the river setting is preserved as family testimony. [N7]

After their arrival, the families continued to gather in one another’s homes. On December 20, 1850, Patriarch John Smith gave blessings at Woodruff’s house to members of the extended family, including Sarah Foss and her family. Woodruff hosted the meeting; John Smith was the patriarch who gave the blessings. [N8]

New households in Utah

The children’s marriages carried the Foss name into several pioneer families. Rhoda married Willard Richards and later Franklin D. Richards. Phebe married David Sessions. Olive married Franklin Benjamin Woolley. Ezra married Emily M. Cheney. Their stories explain why a small Maine family record reaches into so many Utah households. [N2]

Sarah Elizabeth’s marriage deserves a closer look because it leads to the most unexpected turn in this report. Her husband was Matthias Cowley, a convert from the Isle of Man who had crossed the Atlantic, worked in printing offices, served a British mission, and led emigrants to Utah. [N6]

Sarah Elizabeth and Matthias Cowley



Sarah Elizabeth Foss Cowley, identified in the Foss family compilation. A child on the 1838 record, she later became the mother of Matthias Foss Cowley. [I3]

Matthias Cowley was fourteen during the crisis surrounding Joseph and Hyrum Smith’s deaths. His later account placed him with his parents in Warsaw, where he remembered threats against his father and hostility toward himself. These episodes survive as retrospective testimony. They are most useful when told as the experiences he remembered, with that source clearly identified. [N6]

In Nauvoo he found work in the office that produced the Times and Seasons and Nauvoo Neighbor. The research identifies work in the bindery, giving him a practical part in the production of the printed record of the Saints. Later employment connected him with the Frontier Guardian and Deseret News. [N6]

After a mission to Britain, he led the Westmoreland emigrant company across the Atlantic in 1857 and captained a wagon company to Utah. Within about a month of reaching the valley, he married Sarah Elizabeth on October 17, 1857. Woodruff’s journal and the associated records connect him with the marriage and sealing. How the couple first met remains unknown. [N6]

Matthias drowned in the Jordan River in June 1864, leaving Sarah with young children. The sources differ between June 4 and June 5. Her later marriage or sealing connection with Jesse Williams Fox belongs about 1871; the fuller discussion of the conflicting database entries is retained in the research section. [N6]

The family remembers its record keeper

Woodruff’s association with Sarah Foss lasted into old age. He visited her in the Bountiful area in 1889 and spoke at her funeral in March 1894. The relationship that can be seen in the 1838 sheet continued for more than half a century. [N9]

In the intervening years, his records also described temple ordinances involving Calvin and Sarah. The 1881 entry belongs to the nineteenth-century practice called the law of adoption, under which adults could be joined by religious sealings to Church leaders. It should be explained in its own historical setting. Nothing in the 1838 journal entry establishes that the family chart was originally made as a temple worksheet. [N10]

The most fitting closing connection came through Sarah Elizabeth’s son, Matthias Foss Cowley. His middle name carried his mother’s family name. In 1909 he published Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors as Recorded in His Daily Journals. The girl whose name Woodruff had written into a family chart became the mother of the man who would draw on his journals to tell his life. [N11]

No evidence found in the project shows that Cowley used this particular fragment while preparing the biography. The connection is personal and documentary: the family whose history Woodruff helped preserve later produced one of the writers who preserved his.

That is why the surviving sheet rewards a close look. Its first purpose was to record a family’s past. Following its names forward brings us into the lives of the widow who received it, the children she raised, and the relatives who remained part of Woodruff’s world for decades.

How the remaining report is arranged

The following pages retain the detailed manuscript study and extended biographies, including the full Cowley research, chronology, source bibliography, and unresolved archival questions. The narrative above provides a path through that material; the reference sections preserve the evidence behind it.

Documentary study and extended biographies

The detailed research below preserves the findings of the expanded study of 3 September 2026. Tables have been rebuilt for legibility, and damaged or reconstructed manuscript readings are identified as such. The dated research status at the end describes that earlier investigation.

Executive finding and day-specific provenance

The surviving manuscript is almost certainly the physical “family Record” that Wilford Woodruff stated he made for his sister-in-law Sarah Brackett Carter Foss on Sunday, 9 September 1838. The identification rests on a rare convergence of title, subject, structure, recipient, date, and authorship. Woodruff’s diary says he recorded five generations of Calvin Foss’s ancestry and five generations of Sarah’s Carter ancestry. The fragment bears the title “Calvin Foss’s Family Record,” contains precisely those two lines, and is signed and dated “W. Woodruff Sept. 9th 1838.”

The sheet is therefore more than an early Mormon-associated family record. It is a surviving artifact explicitly documented at the moment of its creation in one of the most important diaries in nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint history. Its later significance is amplified by Woodruff’s continuing relationship with the Foss household: he baptized, confirmed, and blessed four of the children named on the chart; praised Sarah’s parenting; helped gather members of the family west; hosted their patriarchal blessings; administered to Sarah in sickness; performed or supervised temple work joining the Carter, Foss, and Woodruff lines; visited Sarah in old age; and spoke at her funeral in 1894.

Principal conclusions

- The artifact’s date is 1838, not 1834. Its inclusion of Calvin Foss’s 1835 death already requires a post-1835 creation, while Woodruff’s entry for 9 September 1838 describes the sheet in unmistakable terms.
- Sarah Brackett Carter Foss was the elder sister of Woodruff’s first wife, Phebe Whittemore Carter Woodruff. Sarah was therefore Woodruff’s sister-in-law; her children were his nieces and nephews by marriage.
- On 31 October 1844 Woodruff recorded baptizing, confirming, and blessing four Foss children- Olive, Ezra, Rhoda, and Phebe-all four members of Sarah’s household.
- In 1850 Sarah and several children crossed the plains in the Wilford Woodruff Company, turning the family relationship represented on the paper into part of Woodruff’s own gathering company.
- On 2 March 1881, in the St. George Temple, Woodruff recorded second-anointing and sealing work for Calvin and Sarah Foss. Sarah was sealed to her father, Ezra Carter, and Calvin was ritually “adopted” to Wilford Woodruff under the nineteenth-century law of adoption.
- The 1838 record and 1881 ordinance record should be interpreted together but not conflated: the first is genealogical documentation; the second reflects a now-discontinued temple kinship practice.

The artifact

Physical and documentary description

The object is a large, hand-ruled genealogical chart on paper, now incomplete and heavily fragmented. An elaborate pen-and-ink border encloses columns headed “Generation,” “Names,” “Born,” “Married,” “Died,” and “Age.” Two arched ornamental bands span the upper register. The central title reads “CALVIN FOSS’S FAMILY RECORD.” The lower-left quadrant and substantial portions of the margins have been lost, yet the genealogically decisive upper and central portions survive.

The reverse appears to contain mostly show-through or transfer from the recto rather than a second independent record. High-resolution raking-light, transmitted-light, and multispectral photography may recover faint strokes, but the present photographs do not justify reading additional reverse text.

The authorial inscription

At the foot of the ruled field appears “W. Woodruff” followed by “Sept. 9th 1838.” The damaged and stylized final numeral can resemble a 4 at first glance. The chart’s inclusion of Calvin Foss’s 1835 death and Woodruff’s exact diary entry establish 1838 as the intended year.

Why the diary identification is compelling

Journal evidence	Manuscript comparison
Made a family record for Sister Sarah Foss	Chart names Calvin Foss, Sarah B. Carter, and their children
Five generations of Calvin Foss’s ancestry	Foss line arranged by numbered generations
Five generations of Sarah’s Carter ancestry	A parallel Carter line
Sarah identified as his sister-in-law	Sarah was the sister of Phebe Carter Woodruff
Journal entry dated 9 September 1838	Sheet signed W. Woodruff and read as dated 9 September 1838

The diary entry that documents the chart

Wilford Woodruff journal, entry for 9 September 1838, digital page 59 in Journal (January 1, 1838–December 31, 1839), MS 1352, Church History Library; image and transcript through the Wilford Woodruff Papers. The previous project citation used vol. 1, p. 284; the current digital locator is used here.

Journal excerpt

9th Sunday I spent most of the day at Sister Sarah Foss. I made her a family Record viz of Calvin Foss’s progenitors for five generations past Also Sister Sarah’s progenitors for five generations on father Carters side she being my Sister in Law. There is great excitement through the Country on the subject of the Election. The people are electionereing through the streets notwithstanding it is Sunday. I had an interview with my Brother in Law Ezra Carter. Satan is stired up to try to hinder myself and wife from going to Zion. May the Lord rebuke him.

Source: Wilford Woodruff journal, 9 September 1838, MS 1352, Church History Library; Wilford Woodruff Papers, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/qXp. The excerpt retains the project reading; original line wrapping is not reproduced.

Historical setting

Woodruff made the chart only one month after learning that he had been appointed to fill a vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He and Phebe were preparing to leave Maine and gather with the Saints in Missouri. Their infant Sarah Emma had whooping cough, and the same diary page records Woodruff’s anxiety for her survival during the journey. The genealogical task was therefore performed amid missionary labor, family illness, political excitement, and preparations for migration.

The juxtaposition is revealing. Even before genealogy became institutionally central to his public ministry, Woodruff already treated names, generations, family memory, and migration as matters worthy of deliberate preservation.

Family relationship to Wilford Woodruff

Sarah Brackett Carter (1800-1894) and Phebe Whittemore Carter (1807-1885) were daughters of Ezra Carter Jr. and Sarah Fabyan Carter. Phebe married Wilford Woodruff in 1837. Sarah had married Calvin Foss in 1823 and was widowed in 1835. The chart was thus made for Phebe’s widowed elder sister.

Person	Relationship	Significance
Sarah Brackett Carter Foss	Phebe’s sister; Wilford’s sister-in-law	Recipient of the chart; convert and Utah pioneer
Calvin Foss	Husband of Wilford’s sister-in-law	Early convert; died in 1835; later memorial and temple connections
Foss children	Nieces and nephews by marriage	Several baptized by Woodruff and gathered west
Ezra Carter Jr.	Woodruff’s father-in-law	Carter patriarch in the chart; baptized by Woodruff in 1849
Phebe Carter Woodruff	Woodruff’s wife	Sister of Sarah and the link between the households

A personal as well as genealogical bond

Sarah Foss was not a remote collateral relative. Woodruff repeatedly stayed in her home, exchanged letters with her, obtained transportation and supplies for her, cared about her children’s health and education, and later visited her Utah household. Sarah also assisted the Woodruffs at the birth of their first child in 1838. The chart arose within a functioning family network, not as an abstract antiquarian exercise.

Reconstructed Foss household

The reconstructed household comprises seven children. Some names survive on the sheet; others are supplied from family records because the lower-left part of the manuscript is lost. Spellings and exact dates should remain tied to their sources rather than silently harmonized.

Child	Born	Later family connection
Ira Carter Foss	19 July 1824	The eldest child; later associated with Maine and Tryphena Seavey.
Calvin Ichabod Foss	10 January 1826	A son whose later journey led toward California.
Sarah Elizabeth Foss	26 December 1827	Later wife of Matthias Cowley and mother of Matthias Foss Cowley.
Rhoda Harriet Foss	19 April 1830	Later married Willard Richards and, after his death, Franklin D. Richards.
Phebe Carter Foss	2 November 1831	Later married David Sessions and made her home in Utah.
Ezra Carter Foss	30 June 1833	Later married Emily M. Cheney and lived in the Davis County area.
Olive Carter Foss	12 April 1835	The youngest child; later married Franklin Benjamin Woolley.

Baptisms confirmations and blessings by Woodruff

31 October 1844

During an eastern mission, Woodruff returned to the Foss household in Scarborough. His diary records that in the evening he “baptized & confirmed 4 four members of Sister Foss family & also blessed them,” naming Olive, Ezra, Rhoda, and Phebe. These four are all children entered on the 1838 chart.

The wording supports three distinct acts: baptism, confirmation, and an additional blessing. The entry does not preserve the words of those blessings, and no separate blessing texts have yet been located. The report should therefore affirm that Woodruff blessed the children while avoiding invented content or treating the blessings as patriarchal blessings.

Patriarchal blessings on 20 December 1850

After the family reached Utah, Patriarch John Smith met at Woodruff’s house. Woodruff recorded that his father Aphek Woodruff received a patriarchal blessing and that “Sister Sarah B. Foss and her family received their Blessings at the same time.” John Smith-not Wilford Woodruff-was the officiating patriarch. Phebe Woodruff was also blessed that day. The texts may survive in the Church’s patriarchal-blessing registers, but access and privacy rules may govern consultation.

Administration during illness 9 November 1872

Woodruff recorded that Sarah Foss was quite sick and that he “administered to her.” In nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint usage, this ordinarily denotes a healing administration by laying on of hands. The entry supplies another direct spiritual-ministry link between Woodruff and the chart’s recipient.

Journal chronology of the Foss relationship

Date	Journal evidence	Importance
3 Sept. 1838	Spent the day at Sarah Foss’s home.	Places him in the household before the chart.
9 Sept. 1838	Made the five-generation family record.	Contemporary account of its creation.
16 Sept. 1838	Spent the night at Sarah’s after travel to Buxton.	Continuing family hospitality.
26 Sept. 1838	Obtained and delivered a two-horse wagon for Sarah.	Material assistance.
18 Feb. 1841	Received a package including a Carter–Foss family letter.	Transatlantic correspondence.
31 Oct. 1844	Baptized, confirmed, and blessed Olive, Ezra, Rhoda, and Phebe.	Ministry to four children of the household.
3–16 Nov. 1844	Recorded serious illness, especially Sarah Elizabeth’s, and recovery.	Concern for the family.
10 Sept. 1848	Praised Sarah’s children and their upbringing.	His assessment of her parenting.
12–13 Sept. 1848	Traveled with Foss and Carter relatives to a reunion.	Continued family contact.
1849–1850	Corresponded and planned gathering.	Preparations for migration.
16 June–14 Oct. 1850	Family members traveled in the Woodruff company.	Pioneer company connection.
20 Dec. 1850	John Smith gave family blessings at Woodruff’s house.	Religious and family gathering in Utah.

Date	Journal evidence	Importance
9 Nov. 1872	Administered to the sick Sarah Foss.	Personal ministry.
2 March 1881	Recorded temple ordinances for Calvin and Sarah.	Later religious kinship.
25 Aug. 1889	Visited Sarah and family in East Bountiful.	Relationship in old age.
8 March 1894	Attended and spoke at Sarah’s funeral.	His final tribute.

Migration and later marriage connections

The Wilford Woodruff Company of 1850

Sarah Elizabeth Foss is explicitly recorded as a member of the Wilford Woodruff Company, organized 16 June 1850 and arriving in the Salt Lake Valley on 14 October. Other members of the extended Carter-Foss household traveled within the same gathering movement. Woodruff’s role was therefore not limited to spiritual persuasion: he was company captain for the migration that brought branches of his wife’s family into Utah.

The Richards connection

Rhoda Harriet Foss became a plural wife of Apostle Willard Richards and, following his death, of Apostle Franklin Dewey Richards. Through Franklin D. Richards she became mother of Ezra Foss Richards. This connected the Foss family to one of the most prominent apostolic and Church Historian families of territorial Utah. Ezra Foss Richards later served a mission and maintained correspondence with Woodruff, including a letter dated 25 March 1898.

The Sessions connection

Phebe Carter Foss married David Sessions in Salt Lake City on 30 December 1852. Their large family rooted the Foss line in the Bountiful and Davis County community. Woodruff continued to visit this branch; his 1889 entry places Phebe and David Sessions with the aged Sarah Foss.

The Woolley connection

Olive Carter Foss married Franklin Benjamin Woolley, a member of the extensive Woolley family of Utah. Their nine children carried the Carter-Foss descent into another influential pioneer network. Olive died in 1877, before the 1881 St. George ordinances for her parents.

The Cowley and Fox connection

The expanded research corrects the earlier provisional reading. Sarah Elizabeth Foss married Matthias Cowley (1829-1864) on 17 October 1857. The official Church History Biographical Database independently gives that marriage date, and Wilford Woodruff's journal for the same evening records that he married and sealed a couple at the altar at about 7:30 p.m.; Woodruff Papers metadata and family sources identify the pair as Matthias and Sarah. Sarah was widowed in 1864. The Wilford Woodruff Papers profile for Sarah places her later sealing or marriage connection with surveyor Jesse Williams Fox about 1871. A modern database also displays Fox under the 1857 date, but that duplicate date is inconsistent with the securely documented Cowley marriage and with Sarah's later widowhood. The 1857 Fox date should therefore be treated as a database conflation rather than the chronology of Sarah's life.

Temple adoption and sealing

On 2 March 1881 Woodruff was officiating in the St. George Temple. He recorded giving second anointings for Calvin and Sarah B. Foss, sealing Sarah to her father Ezra Carter, and having Calvin Foss “adopted to Wilford Woodruff.” He then observed that the Woodruff, Thompson, Hart, and Carter families appeared in the record as adopted to him.

“Sarah B Foss was sealed to her Father Ezra Carter and her husband Calvin Foss was adopted to Wilford Woodruff.”

Meaning of adoption

This was not civil adoption and did not erase Calvin’s biological Foss ancestry. Under the nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint “law of adoption,” adults could be sealed in priesthood kinship chains to prominent Church leaders. The practice preceded the Church’s later emphasis on sealing children to their biological parents across verified ancestral lines. Woodruff’s 1894 teachings and subsequent temple policies helped redirect ordinance work toward genealogical parent-child relationships.

The fragment is therefore historically suggestive. In 1838 Woodruff linked Foss and Carter generations on paper. In 1881 he participated in ordinances that linked the same household into a larger ritual kinship order. The chart was not necessarily prepared for temple work-its early date argues against making that claim-but it documents habits of family preservation that became central to Woodruff’s later temple legacy.

Biographical notes on Calvin and Sarah Foss

Calvin Foss

Calvin Foss was born in Scarborough, Maine. The modern Woodruff Papers biographical profile gives 7 April 1800, while the family chart appears to give a date consistent with 1798 and an age of thirty-seven at death. He first married Lavina Trafton in 1822 and, after being widowed, married Sarah Carter in 1823. He joined the Latter-day Saint movement about 1834 and died in February 1835.

Woodruff later wrote a memorial composition titled “Written on the Death of Calvin Foss,” describing him as a member of the Church of Latter Day Saints. The existence of both the memorial and the family chart shows that Calvin’s early death made a lasting impression within Woodruff’s Carter-family circle.

Sarah Brackett Carter Foss

Born 30 September 1800, Sarah was the daughter of Ezra Carter Jr. and Sarah Fabyan. Widowed with seven young children, including an infant born shortly after Calvin’s death, she maintained her household, participated in the Church, and eventually gathered to Utah. Woodruff’s 1848 judgment is notable: “Sister Foss has brought up her children well And they possess not ownly education but true accomplishments.”

By 1889 Woodruff still described her affectionately as “Sister Sarah Foss” and traveled to East Bountiful to visit her. She was then in her late eighties. When she died in March 1894, the First Presidency attended her funeral and Woodruff spoke. The relationship documented by the chart thus extended from her early widowhood through nearly six decades.

Transcription and discrepancies

The following preserves the earlier study’s provisional readings. Brackets mark uncertainty or editorial supply. The new reading aid near the front distinguishes surviving text from reconstructed family information. The photograph should be consulted before treating uncertain dates as a definitive transcript.

Visible Foss line

- FIRST - WALTER FOSS - born A.D. 1701 - died A.D. 1746 - age 45 years
- SECOND - JOSEPH FOSS - born June 2d 1734 - died Feb. [8?] A.D. 1773 - age 39
- THIRD - ZACHARIAH FOSS - born Jan. 5th A.D. 1760 - married Dec. [6/11?] 1781 - died April [17/18] 1839
- FOURTH - CALVIN FOSS - born April 7th [1798/1800] - married Nov. 1st A.D. 1823 - died Feb. 28th A.D. 1835 - age 37

Visible Carter line

- FIRST — DANIEL CARTER — “was born in Newburyport Mass the second generation from England”.
- SECOND - EZRA CARTER - born Feb. 20 A.D. 1734 - died April 29 [1815] - age [81]
- THIRD - EZRA CARTER - born March [16/18] 1773 - married Oct. 2d 1797 - death field uncertain or misaligned
- FOURTH - SARAH B. CARTER - born Sept. 30 A.D. 1800
- CALVIN FOSS and SARAH B. CARTER were married Nov. 1st 1823

Children reconstructed from the fragment and family sources

Ira C. Foss, 19 July 1824; Calvin I. Foss, 10 January 1826; Sarah E. Foss, 26 December 1827; Rhoda [Harriet] Foss, 19 April 1830; Phebe C. Foss, 2 November 1831; Ezra C. Foss, 30 June 1833; and Olive C. Foss, 12 April 1835. The lower names are reconstructed where the original paper is missing.

Material discrepancies worth preserving

The chart’s dates sometimes differ from later compiled profiles. Walter Foss’s dates, Calvin’s birth year and exact death date, the marriage date, and the third-generation Ezra Carter death field require special scrutiny. These differences may reflect Woodruff’s sources, family oral memory, copying mistakes, later database harmonization, or simple paleographic ambiguity. They increase the chart’s research value because it preserves what Sarah’s household understood in 1838. The apparent 1839 death date is later than the stated creation date. If that reading is correct, a later addition must be considered; all entries cannot automatically be assigned to September 1838.

Sources: Owner-supplied artifact photograph; Wilford Woodruff Journal, 9 Sept. 1838, 31 Oct. 1844, 20 Dec. 1850, 2 Mar. 1881, 25 Aug. 1889, and 8 Mar. 1894; Wilford Woodruff Papers; Church History Biographical Database; Church Historian's Press. The imported Part I text has been corrected where the expanded Cowley/Fox research superseded the earlier provisional interpretation.

Sarah Elizabeth Foss before marriage

Sarah Elizabeth Foss was born 26 December 1827 at Scarborough, Maine, the third child of Calvin Foss and Sarah Brackett Carter Foss. Her name therefore appears not as a later genealogical addition but as one of the living children Woodruff was recording when he made the 1838 chart. Through her mother she was a niece of Phebe Whittemore Carter Woodruff and thus a niece by marriage of Wilford Woodruff. That relationship was not merely nominal. Woodruff visited the Foss household repeatedly, assisted the family materially, participated in the religious lives of the children, and later captained the 1850 company in which Sarah Elizabeth traveled west.

The Church History Biographical Database places Sarah Elizabeth in the Wilford Woodruff Company of 1850 and records her baptism on 10 July 1850. Family tradition preserved in the Foss materials says Woodruff baptized her in the Platte River while the company was crossing the plains. The precise river setting is better treated as family recollection unless the underlying daybook entry is located, but the database independently supports both the 1850 migration and the baptism date. She therefore entered Utah as a young adult whose family relationship to Woodruff had already been reinforced by migration and religious participation.

The Foss household's position in Utah also matters for interpreting her later marriage. Sarah's sisters and siblings became tied to several prominent pioneer families. Rhoda Harriet Foss married Willard Richards and later Franklin D. Richards; Phebe Carter Foss married David Sessions; Olive Carter Foss married Franklin Benjamin Woolley. Sarah Elizabeth's eventual marriages to Matthias Cowley and later Jesse Williams Fox placed her in yet another set of religious, printing, missionary, and territorial-surveying networks. The 1838 chart consequently became the root document for a family that reached deep into the institutional life of territorial Utah.

Nothing found remotely identifies Sarah's occupation immediately before the 1857 marriage or preserves letters describing a courtship. That silence becomes important later because Matthias Cowley returned to the Salt Lake Valley only about a month before their wedding. The absence of a courtship narrative means that any claim that Woodruff introduced the couple, or that they had been promised before Matthias's mission, must remain an inference rather than a fact.

Sources: Church History Biographical Database, Sarah Elizabeth Foss; Wilford Woodruff Papers, Sarah Elizabeth Foss and Sarah Brackett Carter Foss profiles; Wilford Woodruff Company records; Foss family compilation used as a secondary family source.

Matthias Cowley 1829-1864

Isle of Man origins conversion and emigration

Matthias Cowley was born 2 December 1829 at Braddan on the Isle of Man, son of James Cowley and Isabelle Ann Cain. The official Church History Biographical Database gives those parents and records his baptism on 17 July 1843 by Henry Cuorden, when Matthias was thirteen. The Isle of Man context is significant because the Cowley family entered the Latter-day Saint movement during a period of energetic British missionary work. Later family narratives remember schoolroom ridicule after his parents embraced Mormonism, but also portray Matthias as academically capable and persistent.

A later published extraction from Cowley's journal or reminiscence, reproduced in the Isle of Man Manx Notebook under the title 'The First Matthias Cowley,' describes the family's decision to gather with the Saints in America. According to that account, assistance from a fellow believer helped finance the journey. The family traveled through Liverpool, crossed the Atlantic on the City of Boston, reached New Orleans, traveled up the Mississippi through St. Louis, and continued to Nauvoo. The narrative is later in publication form, but the Church History Biographical Database independently cites 'Matthias Cowley reminiscences, 1856, page 7,' showing that at least part of the underlying autobiographical record was written only about twelve years after the Nauvoo events.

The family narrative says James Cowley refused attractive work in St. Louis because his purpose in emigrating was to join Joseph Smith and the Saints. At Nauvoo, James and Matthias encountered disaffected former members who attempted to turn the newly arrived immigrants against Joseph Smith. James insisted on meeting Smith himself. Matthias later remembered that he and his father were satisfied after the interview and regarded Joseph as what a prophet ought to be. The episode is valuable less as independent evidence about Joseph Smith's character than as evidence of the Cowleys' own conversion identity and the strength of their commitment immediately after immigration.

Employment became the practical problem. James could not find suitable work in Nauvoo and was directed to Warsaw, roughly twenty-two miles down the Mississippi. Father and son found work in a brickyard, and the family moved there. The later account says James and Matthias worked for about six months. This chronology placed the teenage convert and his parents in one of the most hostile anti-Mormon communities in Hancock County just as the crisis of 1844 reached its climax.

That Warsaw residence is one reason Matthias's biography deserves a place of unusual prominence in the present family-record study. Sarah Elizabeth Foss did not marry merely another Utah settler. She married a man whose adolescence had already intersected directly with Joseph Smith's Nauvoo,

Warsaw anti-Mormonism, the martyrdom crisis, the Nauvoo printing office, the Seventies organization, and the Nauvoo Temple.

Sources: Church History Biographical Database, Matthias Cowley; Church History Biographical Database source citation to Matthias Cowley reminiscences, 1856; Manx Notebook transcription, "The First Matthias Cowley," taken from Matthew Cowley: Man of Faith.

Warsaw in 1844 and recollections of the martyrdom

The Cowley account of Warsaw is among the most dramatic surviving personal narratives connected with Matthias. As hostility intensified, the men of Warsaw were pressured to take up arms against the Latter-day Saints. The later transcription says James Cowley was taken to an office, offered a musket, and ordered to join the anti-Mormon effort. He refused to fight members of his own faith. Young Matthias followed the armed men who removed his father and remembered gestures suggesting that some intended violence against James. James was ultimately ordered out of Warsaw and escorted several miles from town at bayonet point, while his wife and son remained behind.

James made his way back to Nauvoo and, according to the reminiscence, reported the danger to Joseph Smith. The account remembers Joseph reassuring him that his family would be protected. James then associated with the Nauvoo Legion during the final crisis. Because these details come through Matthias's retrospective narrative, they should not be treated as a stenographic record of Joseph Smith's words. Their historical value lies in recording how a participant remembered the sequence, the danger, and his father's loyalty only about a dozen years later in the cited 1856 reminiscence tradition.

The most consequential episode occurred on 27 June 1844. Matthias and his mother were still in Warsaw when news of Joseph and Hyrum Smith's deaths reached town. The later account says Matthias heard cheering and saw men throwing their hats in the air. He entered the crowd, heard a speaker announce the killings, and was recognized as a Mormon boy. The speaker ordered him away, after which local boys chased him, throwing sticks, stones, and refuse. The description provides an unusual Latter-day Saint recollection of the public reaction in Warsaw on the night of the murders.

The same narrative preserves another episode from the period: while Matthias went to the Mississippi River for water, men allegedly encouraged a drunken man to throw him into the river. The man seized the boy at the bank but ultimately released him. The account also says attempts were made that night to set the Cowley home on fire. These details are difficult to corroborate independently at incident level, so the report preserves them explicitly as Cowley's autobiographical recollection rather than as facts proved by separate contemporary witnesses.

Soon afterward arrangements were made for mother and son to leave Warsaw. Their route took them through Carthage. Matthias later remembered running to the jail and entering far enough to see the doorway of the room associated with the murders of Joseph and Hyrum. He said the sight remained impressed on his memory. Even with the normal cautions required for reminiscence, the chronology is credible: a Mormon teenager who had just experienced Warsaw's reaction to the killings was passing through Carthage within days and had a powerful reason to see the jail for himself.

The source history deserves emphasis. The openly accessible Manx Notebook text is not the original 1844 diary page; it is an extraction from a later biography, Matthew Cowley: Man of Faith, which in turn drew on Matthias's journal or reminiscences. Yet the official Church History Biographical Database cites a separate 'Matthias Cowley reminiscences, 1856' manuscript. That citation moves the core recollection much closer to the events than a twentieth-century family story alone. The best final wording is therefore: early retrospective autobiographical testimony, apparently written in part by 1856, transmitted through later published family history.

No second independent Warsaw resident has been found online who describes Matthias himself in the June 1844 crowd. The report therefore does not use the recollection as proof of the precise behavior of every person in Warsaw. It is instead evidence for Matthias's remembered experience as a fourteen-

year-old Mormon resident of the town, and it is one of the most historically significant first-person strands in his biography.

Sources: Matthias Cowley reminiscence tradition as transmitted in "The First Matthias Cowley"; Church History Biographical Database citation to Matthias Cowley reminiscences, 1856, p. 7. Episodes are explicitly treated as retrospective testimony.

Nauvoo printing Seventy ordination patriarchal blessing and temple endowment

After the Cowleys returned to Nauvoo, Matthias entered the city's printing world. His reminiscence says he soon obtained work in the office producing the Times and Seasons and Nauvoo Neighbor under John Taylor. Independent evidence strengthens that claim. The Joseph Smith Papers directory of printers identifies Matthias among men believed to have worked in the Nauvoo printing office by spring 1845. A BYU Religious Studies Center bibliographical study is even more specific: it states that Matthias 'worked in the Times and Seasons bindery.' Taken together, these sources support a start probably in the latter half of 1844 and definite employment by 1845, though no payroll record found online gives his first day.

The bindery designation is useful. Nineteenth-century newspaper and job-printing establishments were workshops in which composition, presswork, folding, stitching, binding, paper handling, distribution, and miscellaneous labor could overlap. The surviving evidence proves his association with the office and specifically the bindery, but does not establish that he wrote editorials or held editorial authority. The final biography should therefore describe him as a printing-office or bindery worker, not an editor of the Times and Seasons.

Matthias's religious standing developed alongside his trade. His later autobiographical account gives 7 September 1845 as the date he was ordained a Seventy in the Nauvoo Seventies Hall. The Church History Biographical Database later identifies him as a Seventy when called to Britain and Church Historian's Press associates him with the Thirtieth Quorum of Seventy. Early Seventies records are therefore a major manuscript source for confirming the exact 1845 ordination entry and quorum placement.

Several months before the Seventy ordination, Matthias received a patriarchal blessing from John Smith, uncle of Joseph Smith and Patriarch to the Church. Publicly accessible excerpts date the blessing to 26 March 1845. The excerpts promise future priesthood strength, prophetic and revelatory gifts, spiritual manifestations, and participation in the gathering and building of Zion. Every open transcription located in this project presents only an excerpt, not the entire blessing. The report therefore summarizes the surviving public wording and identifies the original blessing register as an archival target rather than fabricating the missing text.

Cowley's Nauvoo Temple history can now be stated much more strongly than in the first report. His own reminiscence says that he helped with the effort to complete the temple and that he received his endowment there. An independent early-LDS database cites the Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register, page 246, for Matthias. A separate name index derived from the register assigns him an endowment date of 31 January 1846. Because the original page image was not openly inspected during this project, the exact date is best described as strongly supported by a register-derived index rather than personally verified from the manuscript image. His reception of the Nauvoo endowment itself is strongly established by the convergence of his recollection and the register citation.

The sequence is striking. Between summer 1844 and early 1846, a teenage immigrant who had just left hostile Warsaw became part of John Taylor's printing establishment, received a patriarchal blessing, was ordained a Seventy, assisted in the temple-building milieu, and received the Nauvoo Temple endowment. Those experiences created the institutional foundation for his later missionary and emigrant leadership.

Sources: Joseph Smith Papers, Council of Fifty printer-directory note; BYU Religious Studies Center, Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, vol. 3; EarlyLDS citation to Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register p. 246; Nauvoo Temple Endowment Name Index; public excerpt of John Smith patriarchal blessing, 26 Mar. 1845.

Exodus-era printing Frontier Guardian and Deseret News

After the Latter-day Saints left Illinois, Matthias continued in the printing trade. Church Historian's Press states that he worked for the Frontier Guardian in Kanesville, Iowa, the newspaper associated with Apostle Orson Hyde and the large Latter-day Saint population around Council Bluffs. BYU's Descriptive Bibliography independently repeats that he was employed at the Frontier Guardian. These mutually reinforcing sources make the Kanesville employment secure even though a detailed office payroll has not been found remotely.

The exact nature of his Frontier Guardian work remains open. No accessible masthead or signed article identifies Matthias as an editor, and the sources consistently say that he worked for or was employed at the paper. Because his Nauvoo experience was in the Times and Seasons bindery, it is reasonable to infer that he brought practical printing-shop skills to Kanesville. But the report does not assign him a particular combination of typesetting, presswork, binding, or job printing without direct documentation.

In 1852 Matthias crossed the plains in the Henry W. Miller Company. The official Church History Biographical Database dates his participation from 8 July to 10 September 1852. In Salt Lake City he found employment at the Deseret News, extending a remarkable occupational chain from the Nauvoo press to the Kanesville press and then to the principal Latter-day Saint newspaper in Utah.

His place among Utah printers is documented in an unusually tangible way. Invitations for the January 1853 annual festival of the printers of Deseret name Matthias Cowley on the committee of arrangements. BYU's bibliographical study interprets the event as evidence of the developing Typographic Association, an early printers' guild. Matthias was therefore not merely someone who had once worked in a print shop; he was socially integrated into the professional printing community of territorial Salt Lake City immediately before his mission call.

Some later biographical sketches place Matthias briefly in the Missouri Republican office in St. Louis during the exodus years. That detail was not independently documented online to the same standard as the Times and Seasons, Frontier Guardian, and Deseret News employment. It may well be correct, but the final evidentiary hierarchy treats it as secondary until a contemporary employment reference is found.

Printing is not an incidental footnote to his life. It created relationships with John Taylor, Orson Hyde, the Deseret News staff, and men who were central to Church communication. It also placed Matthias in a culture of record making that forms an unexpected parallel with the 1838 Woodruff family chart at the center of this study.

Sources: Church Historian's Press, Matthias Cowley profile; BYU Religious Studies Center, Descriptive Bibliography, item 776 and associated biographical note.

British Mission 1853-1857

The official Church History Biographical Database records Matthias's British Mission from 16 October 1853 to 25 April 1857. He was single when he entered the field, resided in Great Salt Lake City when called, and held the priesthood office of Seventy. The British Mission manuscript history is cited as an underlying source. This four-year assignment returned the Isle of Man convert to the British Isles as an experienced printer and Utah emigrant.

A particularly valuable source survives for the end of this mission: the Matthias Cowley diary for January-May 1857, cataloged by the Church History Library as MS 8886 and listed among its digitized collections. Saints by Sea incorporates portions of this diary into its account of the Westmoreland voyage. The diary shows Cowley handling correspondence, meeting other missionaries, reading, teaching, coping with illness, and preparing for the complicated work of returning a large body of converts to America.

The mission years also strengthen the chronology of his marriage. Matthias was officially single when called and remained abroad until the spring of 1857. No evidence was found for a prior marriage. Consequently, when he returned to Utah in September 1857 after leading emigrants across the ocean

and plains, he was a twenty-seven-year-old unmarried Seventy with substantial leadership experience. His marriage to Sarah Elizabeth Foss followed almost immediately.

The missionary record also helps explain why Church leaders could entrust him with a large emigrant company. By 1857 he combined linguistic familiarity with British converts, knowledge of the United States and Utah trail, priesthood office, printing-office discipline, and several years of missionary administration. His appointment as president of the Westmoreland company was therefore a culmination of experience rather than an isolated honor.

Sources: Church History Biographical Database, Matthias Cowley; Church History Library, Recently Digitized Collections, July 2022, identifying Matthias Cowley diary, Jan.-May 1857, MS 8886.

President of the Westmoreland emigrant company

On 25 April 1857 the ship Westmoreland departed Liverpool for Philadelphia with a predominantly Scandinavian Latter-day Saint company under Matthias Cowley's presidency. BYU's Saints by Sea database currently lists 548 passenger entries and twelve separate accounts of the voyage, while some contemporary summaries use a figure of 544 Saints. The small variation appears to arise from counting conventions and list reconstruction; it does not alter the scale of the responsibility. Cowley was twenty-seven years old and responsible for a community of more than five hundred emigrants.

The company was organized with a clear hierarchy. Cowley appointed Henry Lunt and Olof or Ola N. Liljenquist as counselors and divided the passengers into four wards with subordinate leaders. The company journal and Cowley's own June 1 report show that the organization extended into daily life: prayer, sleep and rising schedules, cooking, sanitation, guard arrangements, and behavior aboard ship. The vessel functioned not merely as transportation but as a temporary religious community.

Education formed part of that organization. Because so many passengers were Scandinavian and would need English in the United States, Cowley organized English instruction aboard the ship and at times taught directly. Music, singing, dancing, and other recreation were also encouraged under controlled conditions. These details are especially revealing because they demonstrate leadership that combined discipline with practical preparation for immigrant life.

Cowley also handled substantial financial responsibility. His June 1, 1857 letter after arrival reports the collection and management of thousands of dollars to arrange the emigrants' onward rail journey toward Iowa City. The same correspondence discusses fares and refunds. Whatever minor numerical variations survive in later accounts, the central fact is clear: he was trusted with pooled transportation funds for hundreds of converts at a moment when a mistake could strand families far from their destination.

The voyage included the full range of human events found in nineteenth-century emigrant travel. Cowley and the company journal recorded illnesses, deaths and burials at sea, marriages, and the birth of a child associated in family memory with the name of the ship and captain. These events made the president's role pastoral as well as administrative. He was responsible for worship, morale, health discipline, and the ceremonial life of a community undergoing migration.

A historically striking moment came as the ship approached the United States. Cowley learned from eastern newspapers of the murder of Apostle Parley P. Pratt in Arkansas. His June 1 letter conveys the emotional shock. The parallel with his youth is difficult to miss: in Warsaw in 1844 he had learned of the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith amid public celebration; in 1857, while leading emigrants home from Europe, he learned of Pratt's violent death. Both events entered his religious memory through the news culture of the day.

The Westmoreland reached Philadelphia on 31 May 1857. The emigrants then moved west by rail. Saints by Sea and individual narratives trace their progress toward Iowa City, where the large body divided into handcart and wagon groups. Cowley's ocean leadership therefore transitioned directly into overland command rather than ending at the port.

Sources: BYU Saints by Sea, Westmoreland voyage 25 Apr.-31 May 1857; Matthias Cowley letter, 1 June 1857; Journal of Matthias Cowley Emigrating Company; passenger and voyage-account index.

Captain of the 1857 overland company

The Matthias Cowley Company was formally organized at Iowa City on 15 June 1857. The official Church History Biographical Database gives an arrival window in Salt Lake City of 13-15 September. Its database currently identifies seventy participants by name, but that is a reconstructed participant count rather than a claim that only seventy people traveled with Cowley. A commonly cited historical reconstruction estimates about 198 emigrants and 31 wagons. The report retains both figures and explains their different meanings.

The company was composed largely of recent Scandinavian immigrants, many of whom had little or no experience handling American ox teams. This made Cowley's leadership a practical apprenticeship in frontier travel. Emigrant reminiscences describe men learning to yoke and drive cattle while already on the trail, illness among travelers, encounters with buffalo, and losses of draft animals to alkali. Such details explain why a wagon captain's duties involved constant decisions about pace, livestock, water, camping ground, and safety.

Anna Christina Jensen McRae's reminiscence provides a particularly vivid picture of Cowley in command. She remembered the captain riding ahead on horseback to locate suitable camping places with grass and water. She also recalled midday rests and, on some days, long distances. On the descent of Big Mountain near the end of the journey, wet conditions made the road dangerously slippery. Men used ropes to help restrain wagons, and one wagon overturned into a gully with children inside. Her account says no one was seriously injured. The story places Cowley within the day-to-day hazards of the final mountain approach rather than merely at the head of a roster.

Isaac Sorensen's journal adds another perspective. He remembered the emigrants gradually becoming competent with oxen, personal illness with chills and fever, buffalo, and cattle lost after exposure to alkali. These individual narratives are important because they reveal the company as an evolving community of inexperienced European converts adapting to plains travel under pressure.

A contemporary letter from Samuel W. Richards and Briant Stringam to Brigham Young, dated 18 August 1857, encountered Cowley and other emigrant companies near the upper crossing of the Platte. Their report described Cowley's people as traveling in comparatively good condition and the teams as doing well. This outside observation is a useful check on later reminiscence and shows that, at least at that stage, the company was progressing successfully.

The political setting was extraordinary. Federal troops and supply trains were moving west in the confrontation that became the Utah War. O. N. Liljenquist later remembered emigrant and federal movements on opposite sides of the Platte during part of the journey. Cowley was therefore leading nearly two hundred recent converts toward Utah at the same moment that territorial leaders were preparing for possible military conflict with the United States government.

Arrival came between 13 and 15 September 1857. The emigrants had crossed the Atlantic, transferred through eastern rail systems, assembled at Iowa City, learned the management of ox teams, crossed the plains, and entered the mountains under the shadow of the Utah War. For Matthias personally, the arrival began another unusually compressed chapter: within roughly one month he married Sarah Elizabeth Foss.

Sources: Church History Biographical Database, Matthias Cowley Company; Anna Christina Jensen McRae reminiscences; Isaac Sorensen journal; S. W. Richards and Briant Stringam letter to Brigham Young, 18 Aug. 1857; O. N. Liljenquist autobiography.

Marriage to Sarah Elizabeth Foss and the unresolved courtship question

The marriage date is secure. The Church History Biographical Database records Matthias Cowley marrying Sarah Elizabeth Foss on 17 October 1857. The Wilford Woodruff Papers profile for Sarah gives

the same date. Woodruff's journal for that evening records that he 'married & sealed' a couple at the altar at about half past seven. Although automated entity display in the online transcript suppresses the names in the text view, the date, associated person metadata, and independent marriage records identify Matthias and Sarah as the couple.

The chronology is remarkable. Cowley's company reached Salt Lake City between 13 and 15 September. The wedding occurred 17 October, leaving only about thirty-two to thirty-four days between his arrival and marriage. If Matthias and Sarah first became acquainted after the company entered the valley, the courtship was exceptionally rapid. If they had known one another before his departure for Britain in 1853, the wedding may instead represent the resumption of a prior acquaintance. No remotely accessible letter, diary entry, engagement notice, or family reminiscence located in this project settles the question.

Wilford Woodruff is an obvious potential intermediary. Sarah was his niece by marriage; Matthias was a returned missionary, Seventy, printer, and company captain moving in the same leadership circles; and Woodruff personally performed the marriage and sealing. It would be easy to turn those facts into a story that Woodruff introduced or arranged the match. The evidence does not permit that step. The report therefore identifies Woodruff's close position to both parties while classifying any matchmaking role as plausible but unproven.

The marriage also corrects a modern database problem. The Church History Biographical Database page for Sarah currently displays both Matthias Cowley and Jesse Williams Fox under 17 October 1857. That duplicate cannot represent the chronological marital history established by other evidence. Sarah was married to Matthias until his death in 1864. The Wilford Woodruff Papers profile places her later relationship with Jesse Fox about 1871. The identical 1857 Fox date is therefore best treated as a conflated or misassigned sealing/marriage datum, not as a simultaneous marriage proven by primary evidence.

For the interpretation of the 1838 artifact, the marriage is a major bridge. Sarah Elizabeth is one of the children Woodruff wrote on the Foss chart. Nineteen years later Woodruff himself officiated as she entered the Cowley family. The chart, the migration, and the marriage are thus linked by the same record keeper across two decades.

Sources: Church History Biographical Database, Matthias Cowley and Sarah Elizabeth Foss; Wilford Woodruff Journal, 17 Oct. 1857; Wilford Woodruff Papers, Sarah Elizabeth Foss profile.

Children drowning and Sarah's later Fox marriage

Matthias and Sarah had four children. Family compilations identify them as Matthias Foss Cowley, born 25 August 1858; Sarah Isabella Fabyan Cowley, who died in early childhood; Ezra Carter Cowley, who also died young; and Ann Elizabeth Cowley, born in 1864. The exact vital dates of the three younger children should be checked in original civil and cemetery records when possible, but the Wilford Woodruff Papers profile for Sarah independently confirms that the marriage produced four children.

The first son's name is historically revealing. 'Matthias Foss Cowley' joined his father's given name with his mother's family name. The Foss identity recorded by Woodruff on paper in 1838 thus became embedded in the name of a later Church leader. The child was born less than a year after the marriage, during the unsettled aftermath of the Utah War crisis.

Matthias the father died young. Church Historian's Press describes his death as an accidental drowning in the Jordan River and cites the Deseret News notice 'Drowned,' published 8 June 1864. The official Church History Biographical Database gives 5 June 1864 as the death date, while the Wilford Woodruff Papers subject page gives 4 June. The one-day discrepancy has not been resolved from an openly accessible image of the contemporary notice. The report therefore gives 4-5 June 1864, with 5 June favored by the Church History database and cemetery-derived references, and preserves the disagreement in the source notes.

Sarah was left a widow in her mid-thirties with young children. Her later relationship with Jesse Williams Fox, prominent territorial surveyor, created another important family connection. The Wilford Woodruff Papers profile places the sealing or marriage about 1871 and states that Sarah and Jesse had one child. A Foss family compilation gives a specific date of 13 March 1871, but because the original register was not inspected online, the report cites that day as a secondary family date rather than an independently verified primary date.

Jesse Fox became an important paternal figure for Matthias Foss Cowley. Later biographical accounts remember the boy helping with surveying work and acquiring practical experience in the territorial environment. This later Fox household also explains how a modern database could become confused when compiling multiple marriage or sealing relationships for Sarah. The correct life sequence remains: Matthias Cowley marriage in 1857; Matthias's death in 1864; later Fox relationship about 1871.

Sarah died 14 June 1899 in Bountiful, Utah, according to the official Church History profile. Her life therefore spanned from the Maine household recorded by Woodruff in 1838 through the migration of 1850, the Cowley marriage and widowhood, the Fox household, and the adulthood of a son who became a major missionary and Church leader.

Sources: Church Historian's Press, Matthias Cowley; Church History Biographical Database; Wilford Woodruff Papers, Matthias Cowley and Sarah Elizabeth Foss; Foss family compilation for child list and specific 1871 family date.

Descendants and historical interpretation

Matthias Foss Cowley and the Woodruff connection

Matthias Foss Cowley, first surviving son of Matthias Cowley and Sarah Elizabeth Foss, was born 25 August 1858 in Salt Lake City. Church Historian's Press and the Church History Biographical Database independently identify his parents and life dates. His middle name permanently carried the Foss family identity forward from the Maine household recorded by Woodruff two decades earlier.

His childhood was shaped by the death of his father in 1864 and the later Fox household. Official and scholarly biographies describe education in territorial Utah, work connected with surveying, early ward service, and close association with prominent Church families. He was baptized in 1866 and entered missionary service in the Southern States in 1878. A second southern mission followed in 1880-1882, and later assignments continued his association with missionary administration.

In October 1897 Matthias Foss Cowley was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. His later career became controversial because of post-Manifesto plural-marriage issues. He resigned from the Twelve in 1905; restrictions followed in 1911; and he was restored to full fellowship in 1936. A full treatment of those later controversies is beyond the artifact-centered purpose of this report, but they belong in a responsible biographical summary because they materially shaped his historical reputation.

For this study, his most important achievement is literary and archival. In 1909 he prepared Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors as Recorded in His Daily Journals. The published title itself announces the source base: Woodruff's journals. The connection creates an extraordinary documentary circle. In 1838 Woodruff spent most of a day making a five-generation family record that included the little girl Sarah Elizabeth Foss. Sarah became the mother of Matthias Foss Cowley. Seventy-one years after the chart was made, her son prepared the major published life of the man who had written her name into that chart.

That circle is not proof that the 1838 artifact directly inspired the 1909 biography. No source found says Matthias Foss Cowley consulted this particular sheet while writing. The significance is genealogical and cultural rather than causal: the same extended family network repeatedly produced record keepers, printers, historians, missionaries, and Church leaders. The artifact becomes a tangible starting point for that long chain.

Sources: Church Historian's Press, Matthias Foss Cowley profile; Church History Biographical Database, Matthias F. Cowley; Matthias F. Cowley, Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors as Recorded in His Daily Journals (Deseret News, 1909).

Historical significance rarity and conclusions

The strongest feature of the family-record fragment remains its day-specific provenance. Woodruff's journal for 9 September 1838 says he spent most of the day at Sister Sarah Foss's and made her a family record of Calvin Foss's progenitors for five generations and Sarah's Carter progenitors for five generations. The surviving sheet bears the same subject, two parallel ancestral lines, Woodruff's name, and the same date. Few privately held family manuscripts can be matched so precisely to the diary entry describing their creation.

The expanded Cowley research adds a second layer of significance. Sarah Elizabeth Foss was not merely a name on the chart. Her marriage carried the family line into the Cowley printing and missionary tradition. Her husband connected the artifact's family to Warsaw during the martyrdom crisis, John Taylor's Nauvoo printing office, the Seventies organization, the Nauvoo Temple, Orson Hyde's Frontier Guardian, the Deseret News, the British Mission, the Westmoreland emigration, and a wagon company crossing the plains in the first months of the Utah War.

A third layer is the persistence of record culture. Woodruff was a compulsive journal keeper and genealogical recorder. Matthias Cowley worked in printing offices across the migration corridor. Matthias Foss Cowley later mined Woodruff's journals for a published biography. The same extended family therefore intersects manuscript genealogy, newspaper production, missionary diaries, emigrant-company journals, temple registers, and published historical narrative.

The artifact should not be retroactively labeled a temple worksheet. It predates the mature Utah temple system, and nothing in Woodruff's 1838 entry says he created it for future ordinances. Yet the later history makes the sheet deeply relevant to Woodruff's developing ideas about generations and sacred kinship. In 1881 he recorded sealing and adoption ordinances involving Calvin and Sarah Foss; in 1894 he helped redirect Latter-day Saint sealing practice toward biological ancestry. The 1838 chart therefore stands as early material evidence of habits of family preservation that later became central to his religious life.

Rarity must remain carefully worded. The online searches conducted for both the original and expanded projects did not locate a second copy, institutional catalog entry, or published photograph of this exact 1838 Foss family record. That does not justify an absolute declaration of uniqueness because private family papers can remain uncataloged and archival descriptions may be collection-level. The responsible statement is that the fragment is presently an apparently unrecorded and potentially sole surviving manuscript of the family record Woodruff documented making on 9 September 1838.

The expanded research also demonstrates the value of preserving contradictions. The Cowley death date differs by one day among modern authoritative sources; the exact Nauvoo endowment date rests on a register-derived index whose original page was not openly inspected; the full patriarchal blessing remains restricted; and the modern Sarah Foss database displays a misleading duplicate 1857 Fox date. None of these problems weakens the central narrative when each is correctly labeled. On the contrary, they define the precise points where future manuscript access can improve the record.

Final assessment: the fragment deserves treatment as an important Wilford Woodruff manuscript artifact and as the documentary root of an unusually rich extended-family history. Its importance rests on the convergence of artifact, diary provenance, conversion history, migration, printing, temple practice, pioneer leadership, and descendant record keeping. The Cowley expansion does not replace the Foss study; it reveals how far the historical consequences of one of the names on the 1838 sheet ultimately reached.

Confidence statement
Established beyond reasonable historical doubt: Woodruff made a five-generation Foss-Carter family

record for Sarah Foss on 9 September 1838 and the surviving sheet matches that record. Strongly established: Matthias Cowley's 1857 marriage to Sarah, his printing employment, mission, pioneer-company leadership, and accidental drowning. Strong but awaiting original-image verification: the 31 January 1846 endowment date derived from the Nauvoo register index. Unresolved: the complete patriarchal blessing text, exact first day in the Nauvoo printing office, exact Frontier Guardian duties, and how Matthias and Sarah first met.

Consolidated chronology

Date	Event and significance
26 Dec. 1827	Sarah Elizabeth Foss born at Scarborough, Maine.
2 Dec. 1829	Matthias Cowley born at Braddan, Isle of Man.
9 Sept. 1838	Wilford Woodruff makes the surviving Foss-Carter family record for Sarah Brackett Carter Foss.
17 July 1843	Matthias Cowley baptized by Henry Cuorden.
1843-1844	Cowley family emigrates to America, reaches Nauvoo, and moves to Warsaw for work.
27 June 1844	Joseph and Hyrum Smith killed at Carthage; Matthias later recalls Warsaw celebration and persecution.
Summer 1844-1845	Matthias enters the Times and Seasons/Nauvoo Neighbor printing establishment; BYU source specifies the bindery.
31 Oct. 1844	Woodruff baptizes, confirms, and blesses four younger Foss children in Maine.
26 Mar. 1845	Patriarch John Smith gives Matthias Cowley a patriarchal blessing.
7 Sept. 1845	Cowley later records ordination as a Seventy in Nauvoo.
31 Jan. 1846	Nauvoo Temple endowment date assigned by a register-derived name index; register citation p. 246.
1846-1852	Exodus-era printing period; Frontier Guardian employment at Kanesville is documented.
8 July-10 Sept. 1852	Matthias travels to Utah in Henry W. Miller Company.
Jan. 1853	Named on committee of arrangements for printers of Deseret festival; employed at Deseret News.
16 Oct. 1853	Begins British Mission; official record lists him as single and a Seventy.
25 Apr. 1857	Westmoreland departs Liverpool under Cowley presidency.
31 May 1857	Westmoreland reaches Philadelphia.
1 June 1857	Cowley writes detailed report on the voyage and onward arrangements.
15 June 1857	Matthias Cowley wagon company organized at Iowa City.
18 Aug. 1857	Richards and Stringam report Cowley company traveling in good condition near upper Platte crossing.
13-15 Sept. 1857	Cowley company reaches Salt Lake City.
17 Oct. 1857	Wilford Woodruff marries and seals Matthias Cowley and Sarah Elizabeth Foss.
25 Aug. 1858	Matthias Foss Cowley born.
4-5 June 1864	Matthias Cowley accidentally drowns in Jordan River; sources differ by one day.

Date	Event and significance
About 1871	Sarah enters later marital/sealing relationship with Jesse Williams Fox.
2 Mar. 1881	Woodruff records temple ordinances involving Calvin and Sarah Foss and adoption of Calvin to Woodruff.
4 Mar. 1894	Sarah Brackett Carter Foss dies; Woodruff speaks at funeral on 8 March.
14 June 1899	Sarah Elizabeth Foss Cowley Fox dies in Bountiful.
1909	Matthias Foss Cowley publishes/prepares Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors from Woodruff journals.
16 June 1940	Matthias Foss Cowley dies in Salt Lake City.

Manuscript and archival sources - verified and still outstanding

The following list separates sources whose existence and relevance are verified from items whose full original images or complete texts were not available through ordinary public web access. It is intended as a practical roadmap for future Church History Library, FamilySearch, BYU, newspaper, or descendant research.

Wilford Woodruff journals and papers MS 1352 Church History Library

VERIFIED / DIGITIZED

Primary source for creation of the family record (9 Sept. 1838), Foss baptisms (31 Oct. 1844), 1850 blessing meeting, 1857 marriage, 1881 temple kinship, 1889 visit, and 1894 funeral. Continue to use the Woodruff Papers digital edition for page images and transcripts.

Matthias Cowley reminiscences 1856

VERIFIED EXISTENCE / PARTIAL PUBLIC ACCESS

Official Church History Biographical Database cites this source, including page 7. The complete manuscript text was not located in an unrestricted searchable form. Highest-priority archival target for checking exact wording of Warsaw, Joseph Smith, Carthage, printing, Seventy, and temple recollections.

Matthias Cowley diary January-May 1857 MS 8886 Church History Library

VERIFIED / DIGITIZED

Church History Library lists MS 8886 among recently digitized collections. Saints by Sea provides diary material associated with the Westmoreland voyage. Full review of every image may yield additional personal remarks about return plans and perhaps pre-marriage relationships.

Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register p. 246

VERIFIED CITATION / ORIGINAL PAGE NOT INSPECTED

Early LDS compilation cites p. 246 for Matthias Cowley. A register-derived name index assigns 31 Jan. 1846. Obtain or inspect the original page to confirm exact date, spelling, ordinance company, and surrounding names.

Nauvoo Seventies records / early Seventies record p. 178

VERIFIED CITATION / ORIGINAL ENTRY TARGET

Used by compiled early-LDS sources for Cowley. Confirm ordination on 7 Sept. 1845, quorum number, officiator if stated, and any later quorum notes.

Patriarchal blessing of Matthias Cowley 26 Mar. 1845 Patriarch John Smith

EXTANT IN EXCERPTS / FULL TEXT NOT PUBLICLY RECOVERED

Public sources reproduce only excerpts. Request the original blessing or authorized copy if access rules permit. Do not reconstruct omitted language from other blessings.

Patriarchal blessings for Sarah Brackett Carter Foss and family 20 Dec. 1850

EVENT VERIFIED / INDIVIDUAL TEXTS UNCONFIRMED

Woodruff journal proves that John Smith gave blessings at Woodruff's house. Church History Library access rules may require a verified direct-line descendant to request individual texts.

Times and Seasons / Nauvoo Neighbor office records

EMPLOYMENT VERIFIED / EXACT START DATE OPEN

Joseph Smith Papers and BYU RSC independently place Matthias in the office; RSC specifies bindery. Seek payroll, daybook, bindery, subscription, or account records that might narrow start/end dates.

Frontier Guardian office and business records Kanesville

EMPLOYMENT VERIFIED / DUTIES OPEN

Church Historian's Press and BYU RSC confirm employment. Search Orson Hyde papers, Guardian business ledgers, job-printing records, and correspondence for Cowley's precise work.

British Mission manuscript history and historical reports 1841-1971

VERIFIED

Official CHD uses this collection for Cowley's 1853 arrival in the field. Further review may identify conferences served, transfers, companions, and responsibilities before the 1857 emigration.

Westmoreland voyage sources Saints by Sea

VERIFIED / MULTIPLE DIGITAL ACCOUNTS

Includes Cowley diary, June 1 letter, emigrating-company journal, Liljenquist, Sorensen, Dorius, Garff, Frantzen, and others. These should be preserved as the core source group for the 1857 ocean crossing.

Brigham Young office files Richards and Briant Stringam 18 Aug. 1857

VERIFIED / TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE

Contemporary outside report on Cowley company near the Platte. Original image review could refine names, location, and wording.

Anna Christina Jensen McRae reminiscences; Isaac Sorensen journal; O. N. Liljenquist autobiography

VERIFIED / TRANSCRIPTS AVAILABLE

Participant perspectives on ox-team learning, camps, road hazards, illness, cattle losses, and the military context.

Original 17 Oct. 1857 marriage/sealing record for Matthias Cowley and Sarah Elizabeth Foss

DATE STRONGLY VERIFIED / REGISTER IMAGE DESIRABLE

CHD and Woodruff Papers agree; Woodruff journal records the ceremony. Original ordinance or civil record would help resolve the modern duplicate Fox-date error conclusively.

Deseret News "Drowned" 8 June 1864

VERIFIED CITATION / IMAGE NEEDED

Church Historian's Press cites this notice. Inspect original newspaper image to see whether it resolves the 4 vs. 5 June death-date discrepancy and supplies circumstances of the drowning.

Foss family "Temple Records" formerly associated with E. Foss Richards

SECONDARY MENTION / PRESENT LOCATION UNRESOLVED

A family compilation refers to these records. If they survive in descendant hands or an institutional collection, they may clarify Sarah's later ordinances, Fox relationship, and other Foss temple work.

Correspondence Sept.-Oct. 1857 Woodruff Foss Cowley Fox Richards families

TARGETED NEGATIVE RESULT ONLINE

No accessible letter found describing first meeting or courtship of Matthias and Sarah. A manuscript letter in family papers remains the most likely route to resolving the question.

Patriarchal blessings and ordinance-source notes

Matthias Cowley - 26 March 1845. Publicly accessible excerpts identify Patriarch John Smith as the officiator. The surviving excerpt promises priesthood power and usefulness in Israel, spiritual gifts including prophecy and revelation, and participation in the gathering and future Zion. Because the online versions explicitly label themselves excerpts, this report does not reproduce or imply a complete text. The original blessing register remains the authoritative source.

Sarah Brackett Carter Foss and family - 20 December 1850. Wilford Woodruff's journal records that Patriarch John Smith gave blessings at Woodruff's house, including to Sarah and her family. This proves the event but not the exact list of Foss recipients or the wording of each blessing. Church History Library rules for patriarchal blessings may restrict access to verified direct-line descendants, deceased children, or spouses. An eligible descendant could materially advance the project by requesting the relevant blessing copies.

Matthias Cowley Nauvoo Temple endowment. Cowley's autobiographical recollection says he received his endowment in the Nauvoo Temple. Compiled Nauvoo sources cite the Endowment Register at page 246, and a name index assigns 31 January 1846. The exact date should be treated as strongly supported pending direct inspection of the register image. The existence of the ordinance is considerably stronger than the exact-date question.

Sarah Elizabeth Foss and Jesse W. Fox. The modern Church History Biographical Database displays both Fox and Cowley under 17 October 1857, but the independently established chronology makes that impossible as a simple reading of Sarah's marital life. The Wilford Woodruff Papers instead places the Fox relationship about 1871. Future inspection of original sealing and marriage registers should determine whether the duplicate date arose from an extracted proxy/sealing field, a data-linkage error, or another cataloging issue.

Law of adoption, 2 March 1881. Woodruff recorded Sarah Brackett Carter Foss sealed to her father Ezra Carter and Calvin Foss adopted to Wilford Woodruff, along with second-anointing work. This nineteenth-century ritual adoption was not civil adoption and should not be confused with the biological ancestry recorded on the 1838 chart.

Source bibliography and online access record

1. Owner-supplied photograph of Calvin Foss's Family Record, signed W. Woodruff and dated 9 Sept. 1838.

2. Wilford Woodruff. Journals and papers, MS 1352, Church History Library. Digital images and transcripts through the Wilford Woodruff Papers, including 9 Sept. 1838; 31 Oct. 1844; 20 Dec. 1850; 17 Oct. 1857; 2 Mar. 1881; 25 Aug. 1889; and 8 Mar. 1894.

3. Wilford Woodruff Papers. Subject profiles: Calvin Foss; Sarah Brackett Carter Foss; Sarah Elizabeth Foss; Matthias Cowley. Accessed 3 Sept. 2026.

4. Church History Biographical Database. 'Matthias Cowley' (1829-1864). Birth, baptism, 1852 pioneer company, British Mission, 1857 company captaincy, marriage, and source list including 1856 reminiscences. Accessed 3 Sept. 2026.

5. Church History Biographical Database. 'Sarah Elizabeth Foss' (1827-1899). 1850 Woodruff Company, baptism, marriage entries, and death. Accessed 3 Sept. 2026.

6. Church History Biographical Database. 'Matthias Cowley Company' (1857). Formation and arrival dates, participant database, and source list. Accessed 3 Sept. 2026.

7. Church Historian's Press. 'Matthias Cowley' in The Journal of George Q. Cannon people database. Summarizes Times and Seasons, Frontier Guardian, Deseret News, Thirtieth Quorum, mission, marriage, and drowning; cites Cowley Reminiscences, Cowley diary, Deseret News, and Cannon journal.

8. Church Historian's Press. 'Matthias Foss Cowley.' People database. Birth, parents, missions, apostolic service, resignation, and death.

9. Church History Library. 'Recently Digitized Collections - July 2022.' Identifies Matthias Cowley diary, 1857 January-May, MS 8886.

10. Joseph Smith Papers. Council of Fifty minutes / printer-directory annotation identifying Matthias Cowley among men believed to have worked in the Nauvoo printing office in spring 1845.

11. BYU Religious Studies Center. Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, Volume 3, items 769-812, especially item 776 and the biographical note identifying Cowley as a Times and Seasons bindery worker, Frontier Guardian employee, Deseret News worker, and printers' festival committee member.

12. BYU Saints by Sea. Westmoreland voyage, Liverpool to Philadelphia, 25 Apr.-31 May 1857. Passenger database and twelve voyage accounts.

13. Matthias Cowley. Letter, 1 June 1857, in Saints by Sea. Contemporary report of voyage organization and onward transportation.

14. Journal of Matthias Cowley Emigrating Company, in Saints by Sea. Shipboard company organization and daily events.

15. Anna Christina Jensen McRae. Reminiscences, pp. 2-3, transcript linked through Church History Biographical Database, Matthias Cowley Company.

16. Isaac Sorensen. Journal, Utah Historical Quarterly (1956), excerpts linked through Church History Biographical Database.

17. S. W. Richards and Briant Stringam. Letter, 18 Aug. 1857, Brigham Young office files, transcript linked through Church History Biographical Database.

18. O. N. Liljenquist. Autobiography, Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine, July 1881, p. 571, transcript linked through Church History Biographical Database.

19. 'The First Matthias Cowley,' Manx Notebook, Isle of Man. Web transcription taken from Matthew Cowley: Man of Faith and drawing on Matthias Cowley's autobiographical journal/reminiscence. Used cautiously as a later transmission of early autobiographical material.

20. EarlyLDS.com. Matthias Cowley profile citing Nauvoo Temple Endowment Register p. 246 and early Seventies records. Used as a finding aid, not as a substitute for original register inspection.

21. Nauvoo Temple Endowment Name Index. Secondary index assigning Matthias Cowley the date 31 Jan. 1846. Used with an explicit verification caveat.

22. Publicly accessible excerpt of Matthias Cowley's patriarchal blessing, 26 Mar. 1845, John Smith. Only excerpted wording used; full blessing not claimed.

23. Foss family pictorial chart and histories compilation. Secondary family source for descendants, child names, and later family tradition; used only where distinguished from contemporary records.

24. Matthias F. Cowley. Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors as Recorded in His Daily Journals. Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909. Public-domain digital edition consulted for the descendant/recordkeeping connection.

Research status recorded in September 2026

The September 2026 study concluded that the principal remotely accessible lines of inquiry identified for the project had been substantially examined. That assessment was limited to the sources then identified, not every online or uncatalogued source.

Further work can proceed in the manuscripts and registers identified above. Remaining uncertainties concern specific original records, complete blessing texts, precise dates, and the unresolved personal history of the Cowley–Foss courtship.

Research scope and method

This report began with a damaged nineteenth-century family record owned and photographed by the present owner. The manuscript identifies itself as Calvin Foss's Family Record, contains parallel Foss and Carter ancestral lines, and bears the name W. Woodruff with the date 9 September 1838. The central purpose of the study is to determine what the artifact is, who made it, how it fits Wilford Woodruff's family history, and how the people recorded on it later entered the religious, migration, printing, and kinship history of the Latter-day Saints.

The expanded edition places special emphasis on Sarah Elizabeth Foss, a child named on the 1838 sheet, and her husband Matthias Cowley (1829-1864). That line proved much more consequential than the first report could establish. Matthias was an Isle of Man convert, a Nauvoo and Warsaw resident during the 1844 crisis, a worker in the Times and Seasons printing establishment, a Seventy, a Nauvoo Temple endowment recipient, a printer at the Frontier Guardian and Deseret News, a British missionary, president of the Westmoreland emigrant company, and captain of a wagon company to Utah in 1857. Sarah and Matthias became the parents of Matthias Foss Cowley, later an Apostle and the compiler of the major 1909 published life of Wilford Woodruff.

Evidence is ranked in this report. Highest weight is given to the artifact itself, contemporary journals, official manuscript registers, contemporary correspondence, company journals, and contemporary newspapers. Near-contemporary reminiscences are used when the underlying manuscript can be identified. Later biographies and family compilations are valuable but are explicitly labeled as secondary evidence. Modern databases are treated as finding aids and are checked against underlying sources when possible. Database conflicts are preserved rather than silently harmonized.

The phrase 'online research exhausted' is used in a limited and practical sense. It means that the principal openly accessible databases, digital editions, finding aids, digitized journals, missionary records, pioneer-company sources, voyage accounts, and relevant bibliographic tools identified during this project were searched until remaining questions pointed to manuscripts or registers whose full contents are not publicly exposed. It does not mean that every uncataloged family paper or every restricted institutional record has been physically examined. Those residual archival targets are listed in a clearly marked appendix.

Executive conclusion
The surviving sheet can be identified with very high confidence as the family record Wilford Woodruff wrote in his journal that he made for his sister-in-law Sarah Brackett Carter Foss on 9 September 1838. Its significance is enlarged by what happened to the family afterward: conversion, migration, patriarchal blessings, temple kinship, marriages into the Richards, Sessions, Woolley, Cowley, and Fox families, and finally a descendant - Matthias Foss Cowley - who prepared Woodruff's life from his journals for publication.

Notes to the illustrated narrative

N1. Wilford Woodruff, journal, 9 September 1838, with entries for 5–8 September; MS 1352, Church History Library. Wilford Woodruff Papers, digital page 59, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/qXp and https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/day-in-church-history/1838-09-09. The owner’s manuscript photograph and the expanded project study support identification of the fragment.

The journal establishes that he made such a record; identification of this surviving sheet is a historical conclusion from the converging evidence.

N2. Expanded project study, sections on the Foss household and family relationships; Wilford Woodruff Papers profiles for Sarah Brackett Carter Foss, Phebe Whittemore Carter Woodruff, Calvin Foss, and their children. See also Loretta D. Nixon's family compilation, listed under I3. Some vital dates remain in dispute and are preserved in the detailed study.

N3. Wilford Woodruff journal, 10 September 1848; expanded project study, Sarah Brackett Carter Foss biography and journal chronology.

N4. Wilford Woodruff journal, 31 October and 3–16 November 1844; expanded project study, baptisms and blessings. See https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/documents/6e34557b-3015-4803-9a97-d913b4afd003/page/b38d2c2f-e8f5-4010-b06f-668d42487740.

N5. Ensign Peak Foundation, "Wilford Woodruff Home," https://ensignpeakfoundation.org/wilford-woodruff-home/. The account cites Scott G. Kenney, ed., Wilford Woodruff's Journals, 2:233 and 3:49, and Loren C. Dunn, "Introduction to Historic Nauvoo," BYU Studies 32 (1992), 30. This source is used for the house context; it does not locate the 1838 chart's creation in Nauvoo.

N6. Extended Matthias Cowley biography retained in this report, including its specific sources for Warsaw reminiscences, Nauvoo printing, emigration, marriage, death, and the later Fox relationship. The retrospective nature of the Warsaw account and the unresolved courtship are retained.

N7. Church History Biographical Database, Sarah Elizabeth Foss, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/chd/individual/sarah-elizabeth-foss-1827?lang=eng; Wilford Woodruff Company records; Foss family recollection in the expanded study. The river location is family testimony.

N8. Wilford Woodruff journal, 20 December 1850, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/documents/0c971e56-08d1-4e91-9ade-4fb00f2883f0/page/7d8dfd8c-75a4-4322-ad82-0fc30ac4d8dd. John Smith was the officiating patriarch.

N9. Wilford Woodruff journal, 25 August 1889 and 8 March 1894; expanded project study, Sarah Foss biography. See https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/day-in-church-history/1894-03-08.

N10. Wilford Woodruff journal, 2 March 1881, and the temple adoption discussion retained in the documentary study. The chart is not established as a temple worksheet.

N11. Matthias F. Cowley, Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors as Recorded in His Daily Journals (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909); expanded project study, Matthias Foss Cowley biography. The study identifies Sarah Elizabeth Foss as his mother and expressly distinguishes a family connection from proof that this fragment was used in the book.

Illustration sources

I1. Wilford Woodruff, portrait by Filippo Pistrucci, completed 20 January 1841, London. Church History Museum, through Wilford Woodruff Papers: https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/media/photos/d93d0d33-1a68-428a-8875-50d6aacd8065. The portrait is identified and dated in the source catalogue.

I2. Wilford and Phebe Woodruff, daughters Phoebe and Susan, and Ezra Carter. Marsena Cannon, 16 May 1849, Boston. Church History Library, PH 9679. Wilford Woodruff Papers: https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/media/photos/7160bf08-0313-458e-ba8e-735a164b186c.

I3. Historic photographs reproduced in Loretta D. Nixon, Recreation of the 1953 Foss Reunion Picture Chart with Some Additional Pictures and a Family Group Sheet of Calvin Foss and Sarah Brackett Carter Foss, draft dated 12 July 2013, PDF pp. 4 and 6. https://jameswilliamnixon.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Foss-Pictorial-Chart-and-Histories-1.pdf. Individual historic photographs are reproduced with the compilation's identifications; original photographers and exact dates are not supplied. The modern compilation itself is not reproduced as a complete work.

I4. Wilford Woodruff house, Nauvoo. Historic photograph reproduced at https://ensignpeakfoundation.org/wilford-woodruff-home/ with credit to the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Related HABS record: https://www.loc.gov/item/il0283/. The available reproduction is small; it is reproduced without invented detail or an unsupported photograph date.

Manuscript photograph. Supplied by the owner and embedded in the preceding expanded project report. No missing handwriting has been reconstructed in the image.

Journal image. Wilford Woodruff Papers, digital page 59, https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/qXp, from Church History Library MS 1352. Source consulted 4 October 2026.