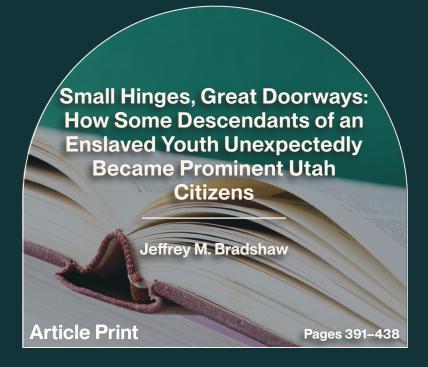


# Interpreter

A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship



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# Small Hinges, Great Doorways: How Some Descendants of an Enslaved Youth Unexpectedly Became Prominent Utah Citizens

### Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

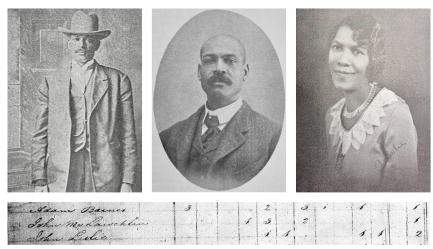
Abstract: A vivid illustration of how "the doorways of history turn on small hinges" is found in the Howell family tradition about Wilford Woodruff's short stay at the home of slaveholders in the South, where it appears he may have taught a 14-year-old enslaved boy named Jackson Howell. Decades later, Jackson's son Paul C. Howell would migrate to Utah and become a prominent citizen of Salt Lake City. Later, Paul's son, Abner, would serve a unique mission and would continue to speak and serve in the Church. Several Church leaders played a key role in the story of the Howell family throughout the years when priesthood and temple restrictions remained in place.

President Thomas S. Monson once said that "the doorways of history turn on small hinges, and so do people's lives." The history of the Howell family's enslavement and later rise to prominence illustrates that principle. Though many important elements of the Howells' story are widely known, some family traditions have heretofore lacked corroboration in the historical record. Some of these traditions—including the possibility that Wilford Woodruff lit the spark that led to Jackson Howell's embrace of the restored Church of Jesus Christ in the 1830s and the arrival of some of his children and grandchildren in Utah in 1887—have seemed to contradict known facts about the dates, places, and people involved. Moreover, details about an intriguing cross-country "mission" taken by Jackson's grandson, Abner, are also murky.

In this article, my purpose is not to provide a detailed history of the Howell family because much of their story has already been published by previous biographers.<sup>2</sup> Rather, my hope is to present some new details about their lives that have been uncovered by recent research and the availability of additional historical records. Besides relating new details that have emerged about the Howells, I will attempt to unravel some previous uncertainties surrounding three questions:

- Did Wilford Woodruff preach to an enslaved member of the Howell family in 1835?
- When did members of the Howell family emigrate to Utah?
- Why did Abner and Martha Howell travel across the United States in 1951?

The answers to these questions provide a fascinating story. Before addressing these questions, though, let's turn for background to a brief account of the progenitors of the Utah branch of the Howell family.



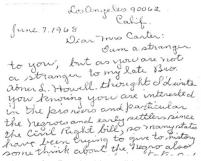
**Figure 1.** Upper: Paul and Levi (Howell siblings) and Byrdie (Paul's daughter).<sup>3</sup>

Lower: Record of John McLawchlin (McLaughlin) in 1820 US census for Ouachita, Louisiana.<sup>4</sup> McLaughlin was the owner of a Louisiana plantation where early members of the Howell family may have been enslaved.

# Byrdie Lee Howell Langon's Account of the Family of Jackson and Eliza Jane Hogan Howell

Byrdie Lee Howell Langon (1885–1979), a sister of Abner Howell (1878–1966), authored a fifty-eight-page typed family history in 1969. It was published privately a few months after a celebration in her honor





**Figure 2.** Left: James Later holds a megaphone for Byrdie Howell Langon at a twenty-fifth annual Salt Lake Picnic in Hollywood Park, 27 July 1969. At the event, Byrdie was honored with two citations, one from the Los Angeles Councilman from her home district and another from the Bethel A.M. E. church; Right: Excerpt from letter of Byrdie to Kate B. Carter about her family history: I am a stranger to you, but as you are not a stranger to my late Bro. Abner L. Howell thought I'd write you knowing you are interested in the pioneers and particular the Negroes and early settlers since the Civil Rights bill, so many states have been trying to give to history some thin[g] about the Negro also about the ones in their states."

by friends and relatives from near and far who attended the twenty-fifth anniversary of an annual picnic at Hollywood Park. In her history, Howell gives the most complete family account known of the early life of her grandparents Jackson Howell (ca. 1814/1821–1899) and Eliza Jane Hogan Howell (1829–1909). Since, apart from civil records, this is the only written narrative we have of their lives, it is difficult to understand and verify personal details. However, I have inserted bracketed text and notes within Byrdie's account, below, to document what has been found in civil records:

During slavery time in Mansfield, Louisiana a Mr. McClelland [or, possibly, "McLaughlin"<sup>7</sup>] had a plantation. He was the father of two daughters and one son by his slave maid. The McClelland's had gone to Scotland<sup>8</sup> and beside his family he had taken his pretty housemaid with him. While in Scotland she had a son by him,<sup>9</sup> which was common during slavery and they named him Jack.<sup>10</sup> McClelland was very fond of the boy and educated him along with his two girls. He told the boy that when he reached age 21, he was going to give him his freedom papers, but Jack had a mind of his own and by having some education knew that slavery was wrong as many white people knew and told him he did not want any paper because he was free.

Living next to the McClelland's was a family by the name

of Howell, who was also fond of Jack. He and Mr. Howell had many talks about slavery. He set all of his slaves free, but most of them stayed with Mr. Howell. There was one girl named Mary Eliza [rather, Eliza Jane<sup>11</sup>] who Jack was very fond of and so Jack married her, but he was so angry with his own father for still selling slaves, that when he married Mary Liza he took her name of Howell. She was a very pretty Madagascar girl and Mr. Howell was very glad of the union and gave Jack and Mary Liza a large piece of land where they raised a family of seven or eight boys and one girl. The girl's name was Celie. The boys were Levi, John, Elias, Nathan, Robert and Paul. Most of them grew to manhood. The girl Celie had one son, Dick who also grew to manhood.

Most of them stayed in Mansfield, but when Paul was a young man he said when he got enough money he was going west. Many people both black and white were going west to the gold rush. His father, Jack Howell, was a carpenter and even made coffins along with his farm work. . . .

After Mary and Paul's marriage, Paul had told Mary that they would go West as they would perhaps have a better opportunity....

[They eventually got to] Colorado and then [went] on to Salt Lake City. At that time there was quite a few Negro families. Some came over as early as the Mormons, but with every wagon load there would always be some Negroes. Paul came ahead of his family. When he left Colorado, his brother Levi remained as he was working; so Paul decided to go on and see how much work was in Salt Lake as the West was new and so much building was going on. Of course, they had to cut down their own timber in order to build their home. I heard my father [Paul] say many times that anyone with a saw and a hammer could get work.<sup>13</sup>

According to Byrdie, two of Jackson and Eliza Jane's children eventually came to Utah — Levi Martin Howell (1852–1936) and Paul Cephas Howell (1855–1915). They remained with their families in Salt Lake City the rest of their lives.

# Did Wilford Woodruff Preach to an Enslaved Member of the Howell Family in 1835?

Paul's children — Abner and Byrdie — took great interest in recording Howell family history. In addition to the forty-page history recorded by Byrdie about her family and early Black settlers in Utah, <sup>14</sup> we are fortunate to have firsthand written and audio versions of Abner's remembrances. <sup>15</sup>

Abner, along with his wife and children, were eventually baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He told many otherwise unknown stories describing the interactions of Church members and leaders with the Howell family. Notably, according to Abner, the first contact his family had with the Church members was during a mission of Wilford Woodruff to the southern states.

On 29 October 1960, George Boyd, Bill Hartman, and James Allen interviewed Abner Howell, then 81–82 years old, as part of the James Moyle Oral History Program.<sup>17</sup> However, because the collection containing the interview was never finalized, the recording has not been available to researchers until recently. In the recording, Abner claimed that Wilford Woodruff preached the gospel to his father, Paul Howell, during a visit to a plantation in Little Rock, Arkansas:

**Abner Howell:** [M]y father . . . said Woodruff came to his master's house and he had stayed there two, three days and then he baptized the master. And he was baptized too.

Interviewer: That was in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Abner Howell: Yeah.... My father was... his master's boy. He had to get his master's boot jack, help his master dress, and get him his cane and his umbrella and stay with him wherever he went. And it appears that the master went to bed early that particular night. And my father said he had to sit up before his master went to bed.... and help him go to bed.... Wilford Woodruff was there that night to stay all night. And after... his master had gone to bed, Wilford Woodruff told him, he said, "Someday you'll be free and someday you'll be a man and you'll go to Utah, Salt Lake City."...

**Interviewer:** How old is Wilford Woodruff now? About 15? **Abner Howell:** No, he's more than that. He's more. No, I don't remember the year.

**Interviewer:** He was only 15 years old when he started to go down to Little Rock, Arkansas.

**Abner Howell:** Yeah. Oh, I think he was older than that.<sup>18</sup>... But he told him he would go to Salt Lake. He was set free, and he grew up to manhood and married, and I was the first child born, see. And then...

**Interviewer:** Your father wasn't a member yet?

**Abner Howell:** No.<sup>19</sup> Then he started for Salt Lake.

**Interviewer:** What brought him here? Yeah. What brought him? Why did he come to Salt Lake?

**Abner Howell:** Because president would've told him he'd grow up and come to Salt Lake.

**Interviewer:** So that's why he made up his mind to come.

In a secondhand report of the same incident as related by Howell three years later, we read:

His father, \_\_\_\_\_ Howell, was baptized by Wilford Woodruff in Louisiana<sup>20</sup> after the master was baptized. (Slaves could only be baptized after the slave masters were.) His father saved every available penny until he had enough to go to S. L. City. In Dodge City on their way to S. L. C. Batt [sic] Masterson asked Abner where he was going. He said, "To S. L. C." Masterson said, "Don't you know the Mormons out there have horns? Don't let them hook you."<sup>21</sup>

There is nothing impossible in the idea that Woodruff met with an enslaved member of the Howell family during his mission to the South except for one glaring problem—Woodruff visited Arkansas for the first and only time as a young missionary in March 1835, twenty years before Abner's father was born. Margaret Blair Young, who recognized the incongruity of these timeframes, charitably concluded that although Abner's account must have been fictitious, it innocently "illustrates... Abner's way of weaving his own story into the larger Mormon narrative, especially through mentioning church authorities." 22

Despite the appealing simplicity of Young's hypothesis, I wondered whether there was some other explanation for the account. Eventually, another possibility occurred to me: Could Woodruff have encountered Abner's grandfather rather than his father?

Mand- 12th Sfr M. Burnst proceded Down to Prison to the Cadnon Spont to night in an old desented trudeing house Distance 50 miles Conway Co. 13th Seft to Cudron after risiting to black Bluffer traveld 40 miles Spent to night with Samuel Black burn Daloki Co. 14th Seli Blackburn hould to Sittle Rock after risiting Sittle Rich & fare bown hirls down to disen was kindly received by de gouve gours in palasti land 3 mis 15th Spart to Day with My yours one to 16th Soft our land with Mh gows trul up to River by land 10 miles took. He Military road leading from Momphio to Sittle heck was received by lat Blues in polishilo. 2 organoso to to potition Distance 22 mils 17th Seft Cal Blue troubed to Mr Jo Cribbins in Monroe lo. 4 a milo Most ofto way mudo wol 19 1 Sell-Mr Crittino Crossed Miledinen at lash form from tonce to Me games o Rolleane Monrae Co. Vistance 14 Mils 19H Sport to Dog in labouring for Mr Holke Also 110 20 B 2111

Figure 3. Wilford Woodruff Journal for 12-21 March 1835.23

I looked more carefully at Wilford Woodruff's journal for clues. As I read the details of his missionary journey to Arkansas, I was impressed with rough correspondences between Woodruff's description of a visit to a Mr. "James P. Kelleam Monroe Co" and Abner Howell's account. The relevant entries in Woodruff's journal read as follows:

Murch 22 Unto Seros Day preceded to an Montine large quition at Ho louse of M. LeMour 23th Seft Mr Rollown & trended 40 mits most of the way though mud Q water Stopes for Ho night with Mm &Chan at second enect in St frameis lunt a Digionte Don 24th Seff SChool hunded to gothe Coshen Vistance 14 miles flo lime had now usind when my hollsague Deamed it expedient to take a speech journey to his family of Pristed and on To 24 Hol March glock to Durling land with Droller Glowing Brown which loft meules gover dod in the Evening to M. lasheer time to a large langue galion got 2 organs to 16 Dollio 25 the Tranks from Mr lashear to Wir A gohramo in Critenta- 20. Distance 2 omiles Grand St. Francis Chinon get & signorate politica 26 Seft My golovano arosal Black fish Saksticked 14 miles though much & water preciol at to louse of Willio fields in Crittenton lo 1 got y signers to to politica. 27# Seft M- Fields hould to a croped to Mississippi Riser into Mamphis State of Jonnes of 14 miles

Figure 4. Wilford Woodruff Journal for 22-27 March 1835.24

**18 March 1835 (Wednesday):** Left Mr Cribbins crossed Wite River at Cash ferry from thence to Mr James P Kelleam Monroe Co. Distance 18 Miles

# **19 March 1835 (Thursday) to 21 March 1835 (Saturday):** Spent the Day[s] in labouring for Mr Kelleam

**22 March 1835 (Sunday):** On the Lords Day preached to an attentive congregation at the house of Mr Kellean [sic]

23 March 1835 (Monday): Left Mr Kelleam<sup>25</sup>

Let's examine the correspondences between Woodruff's journal and Howell family accounts one by one. Given that Woodruff's journal is the only source for his visit, our only recourse is to assess the plausibility that Howell's story refers to the same event by relying on a series of coincidences and general consistencies rather than to search for some single overwhelmingly strong piece of evidence.<sup>26</sup>

#### Name of the slaveholder

Given that the two sources for the slaveholder's name are independent, Woodruff's phonetically spelled name of "Kelleam" is remarkably close to "McClelland," the name given by Byrdie Langon. Significantly, unlike Byrdie's late recollection, Woodruff's journal records the name and events at the time they happened. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to locate primary records in the timeframes and geographical locations of interest for variants of the name "McClelland" that would confirm Langon and Woodruff's remarkably congruent remembrances.<sup>27</sup> Plus, we have no evidence of a plausible variant of "McLaughlin" in the county at that time. Is it possible that the James P. Kelleam of Woodruff's Arkansas diary and the well-attested John McLaughlin of Mansfield, Louisiana, are two different individuals—that is, potentially successive slaveholders of Jackson? Records are so fragmentary that we will probably never know.

# Identity of the enslaved youth

In Abner Howell's most complete account of the supposed meeting of his father with Wilford Woodruff, the setting is prior to emancipation when his father was still a slave. 28 However, in his confusion, he may have later come to believe that his father, Paul, must have met Wilford Woodruff before Paul "left Little Rock" about 1884, as his family made their way to Fort Smith, Arkansas. 29 Notably, Abner did not claim to have met Woodruff himself until he got to Salt Lake City. 30 If Abner believed that his father met Woodruff in Little Rock in 1884, it might explain why Abner also said that Woodruff "was here [in Salt Lake City] three years before" his own family arrived in 1887. 31 Remember also

Abner's contradiction when he said in the same interview both that Woodruff had baptized the enslaved boy and his slaveholder as a missionary, and also that his father "wasn't a member" when, as a married man, he left for Salt Lake City in the mid-1880s. All this seems to indicate that although Abner believed that Woodruff had visited his father in the South, he couldn't quite put all the facts together about when that happened. The difficulty may have been because the story about Woodruff he heard from his father actually concerned his grandfather.

#### **Place**

Woodruff describes the March 1835 residence of Mr. "Kelleam" as "Monroe Co." Arkansas, east of Little Rock where Abner remembered the meeting with Woodruff taking place. In a later summary, Woodruff describes the trials of this arduous part of his missionary journey but, regrettably, without mentioning his stay with Mr. "Kelleam":

We . . . continued our journey down the river to Little Rock, the capital of Arkansas, which then consisted of only a few cabins.

After visiting the place, we crossed the river and tied up our canoe, which had carried us safely one hundred and fifty miles.

We then took the old military road, leading from Little Rock to Memphis, Tennessee. This road lay through swamps, and was covered with mud and water most of the way, for one hundred and seventy miles. We walked forty miles in a day through mud and water knee deep.

On the 24th of March, after traveling some ten miles through mud, I was taken lame with a sharp pain in my knee. I sat down on a log.

My companion, who was anxious to get to his home in Kirtland, left me sitting in an alligator swamp. I did not see him again for two years. I knelt down in the mud and prayed, and the Lord healed me, and I went on my way rejoicing.

On the 27th of March, I arrived at Memphis, weary and hungry.<sup>32</sup>

The "old military road, leading from Little Rock to Memphis" mentioned by Woodruff "approximated the route of current Highway 40."<sup>33</sup> The rigors and tensions of this part of the journey may explain in part the elliptical nature of Woodruff's entries for these dates.

#### Date

The 1835 date given in Woodruff's journal is a reasonable fit with Abner's remembrances for the ages of the story's principals. In 1835, Woodruff would have not been fifteen years old, as Abner's interviewer claimed, but rather, as Abner insisted, "more than that." While Woodruff turned twenty-eight on 1 March 1835, Abner's grandfather would have been about fourteen years old, unmarried, and of an age appropriate to the role as the slaveholder's "boy" that Abner seems to have mistakenly attributed to his father instead of his grandfather.

Abner said that Woodruff "stayed there two, three days." Woodruff recorded that he arrived at the "Kelleam" home Wednesday night and left Monday morning.

### Favorable reception of Woodruff's preaching

Abner said that Woodruff "baptized the master" and that the enslaved boy "was baptized too." Woodruff did not specifically mention a baptismal service, but the journal entry for his last full day at the "Kelleam" home stated that "On the Lords day [he] preached to an attentive congregation at the house of Mr Kelleam." Although Woodruff felt his reception was favorable, he provides no evidence of baptisms that day. Since Woodruff usually was careful to keep track of baptisms, this makes the idea that any in the household received this ordinance at that time less likely.

# Woodruff's encouragement to gather with the Saints

According to Abner, Woodruff said, "Someday you'll be free and someday you'll be a man and you'll go to Utah, Salt Lake City." Abner's recollection of this statement by Woodruff would have been reasonable if it had been spoken to Abner's father sometime after 1847. However, if we suppose that a statement like this was made by Woodruff in 1835, the obvious problem is the fact that Salt Lake City was not founded until 1847.

A solution is suggested when we step back from the specific words recounted by Abner and focus, instead, on their gist, namely the idea that Woodruff wanted Jackson Howell, once he gained his freedom, to gather with the Saints. With respect to this statement, an anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this paper observed that embellished free speech that is spoken with such certainty that it sounds like direct speech would not be unusual in spoken narration of the sort

used by Abner—including for recollections regarding associations with prophets by those who revere them.

It is well known that Woodruff often preached about the gathering during his mission. Indeed, citing examples from Woodruff's mission to the South, Fred E. Woods observed that Woodruff "maintained his focus on the gathering of modern-day Israel through the duration of his varied missions from 1834" to 1850,34 consistent with the Lord's instructions for the missionaries to "bring to pass the gathering of mine elect . . . in unto one place upon the face of the land" (Doctrine and Covenants 29:7–8). Thus, it appears that when Abner seems to have mistakenly conflated the experience of his grandfather with that of his father, the specific place where he would have been gathered seems also to have been shifted with it — from Kirtland to Salt Lake City. If this conjecture is correct, it would have been natural for Abner to remember that the reason his father came to Salt Lake City specifically — and not just to the West generally—was "because president [Woodruff] . . . told him he'd grow up and come to Salt Lake." This was, after all, the place then appointed for the gathering of the Saints. Without such specific encouragement, Abner's father would have had less reason to choose Utah over other favorable places to settle.

#### **Evaluation**

At present, the evidence and arguments above are the best that can be mustered for the family tradition that Wilford Woodruff visited Jackson Howell in 1835. However, continued research sometimes yields serendipitous surprises of the sort that may confirm (or disconfirm) such tentative conclusions.

Deciphering the historical record relating to Abner Howell's recollection is a good demonstration of Don Bradley's principle that "establishing the chronology of events is the first step in doing history." The application of this principle will also be demonstrated as we puzzle through the answer to the next question.

# When Did Members of the Howell Family Emigrate to Utah?

In Byrdie's history, she writes that her father, Paul, arrived in Salt Lake City a year or so prior to his wife and children, sending for them in 1890 after he had earned a little money. Later family biographers have accepted the date of 1890 for the arrival of Paul's family. Abner, however, remembers the arrival as three years earlier—early enough to witness the funeral of John Taylor on 29 July 1887:





**Figure 5.** Left: President John Taylor shortly before his death, ca. 1887.<sup>38</sup> Right: Interior of Salt Lake Tabernacle decorated with garlands, ca. 1890.<sup>39</sup>

We arrived in Salt Lake City in 1887. At that time, President Taylor was president, and that's the year he died. And I can remember going to his funeral. . . . He was in the tabernacle, and you go in the north door and walk past President Taylor's coffin.<sup>40</sup>

Abner's account is consistent with the public viewing described in the historic record.<sup>41</sup> President Woodruff was being sought for arrest at the time of the funeral, and a request for exemption to enable him to attend failed.<sup>42</sup>

We are provided with an additional data point by Byrdie's account of her westward journey where she relates that she was born three weeks before her family left Kansas.<sup>43</sup> In a FamilySearch record, her birthdate is given as 27 June 1887, but without any supporting documentation.<sup>44</sup> Such a date would make 1890 rather than 1887 the arrival year in Salt Lake City, making it impossible that Abner would have witnessed the viewing of John Taylor.

That said, there is good evidence for a birth year for Byrdie prior to 1887. The earliest available census record (1900) gives Byrdie's birthdate as June 1885. 45 Significantly, the 1885 date is consistent with Abner's remembrance of having "walked across the plains in Kansas" when he was "seven years old." In light of this possibility, Abner's recollection of seeing President Taylor's coffin in the Salt Lake Tabernacle in 1887 is not unrealistic. The fact that Abner accurately remembered and recounted details of Taylor's viewing so long after the event occurred also lends credence to other memories of his early life.

Max H. Parkin reports Abner as having provided a second recollection of being in the Tabernacle, as a young man on 2 April 1899

when the famous evangelist Dwight L. Moody<sup>47</sup> gave a speech to the assembled crowd of an estimated 6,000 people:

The evangelists, Moody and Sankey, were loaned the Tabernacle (S. L.) for a preaching service by Pres. W. Woodruff. Abner passed the coin plate: only time in history, according to Bro. Howell.<sup>48</sup>

There are two problems with the recollection. First, President Woodruff passed away seven months before the meeting (2 September 1898), so the authorization to preach in the Tabernacle would have come from the succeeding president, Lorenzo Snow. Second, we have no evidence besides Howell's recollection that Ira David Sankey, a famous gospel singer, was at the 1899 meeting.<sup>49</sup>

#### Paul and Abner Rise to Relative Prominence

Although little is now known about later events in the lives of most of the Howell family, Paul and his son Abner improbably rose to relative prominence in Salt Lake City in the early years of the twentieth century. While Paul became Salt Lake City's first Black police detective, Abner received recognition as a talented football player in high school and college. As described below, Abner's eventual conversion to the Church and tenacious faithfulness was recognized by Church leaders. Their love and friendship for Abner set the stage for an unusual 1951 mission he took with his wife.





**Figure 6.** Left: Paul C. Howell in Police uniform. Fo Right: Paul C. Howell house at 138 East 800 South, Salt Lake City, 2020. Paul was living in this house when he passed away in 1915.

### Paul Howell becomes Salt Lake City's first Black police detective

According to Rachel Quist, Abner and Byrdie's father, Paul Howell "served on-and-off the Salt Lake City Police Department between 1892 and 1911, attaining the rank of Detective in 1908." <sup>52</sup>

The *Deseret News* reported that Paul was appointed to the police force to replace R. Bruce Johnson:

LOST HIS OFFICIAL HEAD.

City Detective Bruce Johnson Relieved of His Star, Last Night...

REMOVALS AND APPOINTMENTS

Mayor Baskin sent in the following:

To the President and City Council:

Gentlemen: — I hereby appoint . . . P. C. Howell as patrolman on the city police in place of R. B. Johnson, removed; and submit the appointments for confirmation. Adopted.

Johnson's successor is a darkey of mastodon proportions.<sup>53</sup>

Johnson was removed from the police force in an apparent move by the new Mayor Baskin to "clean house." With regard to the shocking description of Howell, Rachel Quist comments that "segregation and racism were rampant in [Salt Lake City] and although Howell was well respected and believed to be a man of principle, he was also demeaned for his skin color and tall frame." Paul retired in 1911 and on 11 February 1915 died of Bright's Disease (a kidney condition).

# Abner becomes a talented high school and college football star

As Abner grew, he attended public school in Salt Lake City. During high school he was an avid and formidable football player.

Wendell J. Ashton, in relating the history of the *Deseret News*, wrote about the attention football games garnered in Salt Lake City and included an account of an important game in which Abner starred:

Football games seemed to receive more notice than any other local athletic event when the *News* was kicking off with its daily sports coverage. There were almost two entire columns describing the 34–0 victory of Salt Lake High over East Denver's footballer's [sic] on Thanksgiving Day in 1900. The game was attended by five thousand fans, including



Figure 7. Abner Howell (9) with victorious 1900 Salt Lake High School team. 57

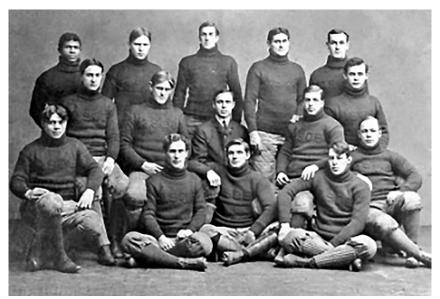
Utah's Governor Heber M. Wells, arriving in a beautifully rubber-tired vehicle. Those were the days when perspiring huskies discarded gear as they played, fists flew frequently, and a colored fullback named *Abe Howell* "was everything from the band-wagon to the steam calliope" for Salt Lake High.

At the century's turn, the sports writer handled players as roughly with his words as they did each other with their hands. A little exaggeration was alright too, if it made good reading. The *News* account of the Salt Lake-Denver game started off: "Salt Lake High school, 34; East Denver High school, G-O-O-S-E E-G-G." 58

After high school, Abner scrimped and saved money for two years and eventually enrolled in the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Like some of his high school classmates, he intended to study law.<sup>59</sup> While there, he continued his interest in football and played on the freshman football team under Coach Fielding Yost.<sup>60</sup> Abner is listed as a

second-year student in the "Department of Law" at Ann Arbor from 1903–1904.<sup>61</sup>

However, Abner never completed his studies. He no doubt faced strong racism in Michigan during that era, 62 and it is reasonable to suppose that this factor may have played a part in his decision. 63 Biographer Young concludes that "money was scarce," 64 especially after his marriage to Nina Stevenson on 30 August 1904, 65 and his father's health had begun to decline. 66 Young adds, "There is, of course, no documentation of the pain Howell must have felt as he packed up his possessions and his pregnant wife, and abandoned his dreams of becoming a lawyer. He returned with Nina to Utah, where he adopted his father's former profession—that of a bricklayer." 67



**Figure 8.** Abner Howell (rear left) with University of Michigan freshman football squad, 1902.<sup>68</sup>

# Abner's conversion and baptism

Despite his friendly encounters with Church leaders as a youth, Abner was not baptized until later in life.<sup>69</sup> He relates his conversion as follows:

Before I was in my teens I wondered many times why I was a different color to the other boys. Little by little I was told that I was cursed and could not go to heaven when I died, but was doomed to go to hell with the devil and burn forever.

One day, when the boys were telling me these things, I was so touched that I began to cry. While in this frame of mind, Bro. John Henry Smith [of the Twelve] came along and wanted to know what was wrong and why I was crying. So I told him. He comforted me with a few kind words and took me to his house, a block away. He got the Book of Mormon and turned to the 26th chapter of 2nd Nephi, and last verse. He then said, "Read this," which I did ["the Lord . . . denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God"]. When I was through reading, a great load was lifted from my heart and mind, and my eyes were opened, and I read more and more. I thought how great that was! The words "all are alike unto God."

I could not find anything in the Bible that pleased me so much as what I had just read in the Book of Mormon. I never discussed my thoughts with anyone. I just dreamed day after day to myself. I did not tell my mother about this as she did not want to join the Church. The people who owned her in slavery time were Methodist and she always said that was good enough for her. With this background I grew up joining no church but with all Latter-day Saint ideas, ways and thoughts.

I did not go to church much until I was married and my first child was old enough to be baptized. My wife and I were baptized and then was when I became active in the Church and have been ever since.<sup>70</sup>

In an oral history interview, Mary Lucile Bankhead spoke with admiration of Abner's faith in the face of the discrimination he experienced when his family attended Church in the Holladay area of Salt Lake City. She said that during Sunday meetings his family had to "sit out in the vestibule" because "he couldn't go in the congregation. . . . It didn't seem to [faze] him at all. It seemed that he went on through it. I don't know what he said or what he did. But I know he never went away from the Church. He was a staunch member."

# Why Did Abner and Martha Howell Travel Across the United States in 1951?

With the understanding of Abner's early history and conversion to the Church just described, we are now ready to consider what can be known about the purpose of the long cross-country trip that he and his wife Martha took in 1951. As background for how that trip came to be, it's important to understand the many strong friendships that Abner had formed with Church leaders from the time of his family's arrival in Utah in 1887 until the middle of the next century.

### Church leaders and the Howell family

From historical and family records, there is no doubt that Church leaders were aware of the Howell family and took interest in them over the years, starting with Wilford Woodruff. Abner remembered with gratitude that Woodruff helped his father transition from day labor on construction projects<sup>72</sup> to a better job as a policeman:

And he [Paul] came to Salt Lake and he worked. And in 1888<sup>73</sup>... President Woodruff who knew him—he remembered him, see, when he came here—got him on the police force and he was on the police force for twenty years. And I can remember President Woodruff coming to the house after we got here....

But anyway he [Wilford Woodruff] told him he wanted him [Paul] to stand on the front gate of that temple over there [the Salt Lake Temple] when it was being dedicated [in 1893]. And he was six foot four, my father was, in stocking feet. And President Woodruff had him on that front gate, he says, "You're tall, you can see over everybody." And I never forgot that.<sup>74</sup>

Besides the kindness shown by President Woodruff in finding better employment for his father, Abner was impressed that the prophet never lost the common touch:

President Woodruff was such a wonderful man [in] that he was liked more by the poor than he was by the rich because any place he saw you his hand was out for you. If you had rags. It didn't make any difference for him.<sup>75</sup>

I can remember President Woodruff being an entirely different president to any we have ever had, because he was just a common man. I've seen him come to my mother's house, come in the back door and say, "Mary, have you had, got any good hot biscuits?" One more thing about President Woodruff. I have seen him hauling fertilizer from Salt Lake City out to his farm. And the apostles got after him and said he'd have to quit hauling manure because he had to do his duty as president of the church and quit farming. And ... he'd have on just common clothes. <sup>76</sup>

The friendship of Elder John Henry Smith, an apostle, and his son, Elder Nicholas Groesbeck Smith—a teammate on the high school football team and later an Assistant to the Twelve—had a lasting impact on Howell. After the Smiths died, others continued to extend friendship. For example, Abner recounted the following experience at the 1945 funeral of his former classmate:<sup>77</sup>

And when we were down there looking at Nick in the coffin, Winslow and I, Harold B. Lee [then an apostle] came up and he knew how much Nick thought of me and how much I thought of Nick. And he says to me, "Ab," he says, "there's one thing I want to do. I want to take Nick's place in your heart. Remember that. I want to be just as Nick has been all his life." . . . That's what he's been doing, look after me.









**Figure 9.** Left to right: Elder John Henry Smith, <sup>78</sup> Elder Nicholas Groesbeck Smith, <sup>79</sup> President Heber J. Grant, <sup>80</sup> Elder Harold B. Lee. <sup>81</sup>

Apart from Monroe Fleming, 82 perhaps no other Black Latter-day Saint in the first half of the twentieth century enjoyed more friendships with Church leaders than did Abner. He was also well-acquainted with apostle and later Church President Heber J. Grant: 83

I knew President Grant since I was a boy, and always liked him because he used to let me in the baseball games when he used to play 2nd base on the team. Then in 1902 he took 50 missionaries to organize the Japanese Mission. I was the porter on the car that took them to Portland, Oregon. When he left me there he told me about living a good straight life and then our paths did not cross anymore until 1936 when he was President of the Church, and had started the church welfare plan and I began to work for the Church. I helped build all the buildings in the welfare center. I did other work for the Church: I tore down the last of the old tithing office. It was while working there that he gave me this letter that I will copy [see figure 10].

### Unraveling the purpose of the Howells' unique "mission"

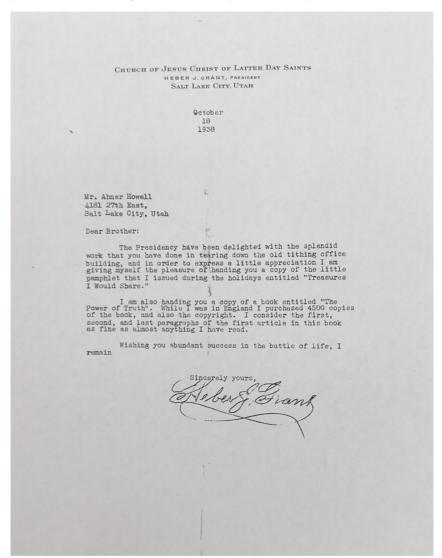
Because of Abner's friendship with various Church leaders, it was no surprise that his name came to mind in 1951 when the need came up for someone to fill a unique "mission." Although the fact of the mission is not in doubt, its precise purpose has been less clear.

Margaret Blair Young reported that church leaders were considering the idea that "separate congregations be set up for the Negro Saints"84 and hoped that Abner and Martha's trip could provide them with useful information. Young based her conclusions on a 2002 interview of Boyd Burbidge, who had made an audio recording of Abner relating some of his experiences in 1958.85 The Burbidge source and Young's summary have been cited since by other biographers.86 Unfortunately, the audio recording was lost for many years, and the whereabouts of Young's notes are still unknown. Happily, Young recently found the long-lost recording and since it is not available elsewhere, she has given permission for the full transcript to be included in the appendix to this article.

Independently, historian Matthew L. Harris has researched this question. Citing the letter from Bishop LeGrand Richards<sup>87</sup> in figure 11, Harris wrote that Richards "asked Abner Howell . . . to travel to the South with his wife to gauge the feasibility of establishing a segregated congregation for Black members."88 However, the letter by Richards cited by Harris does not mention anything about a proposal for establishing a segregated congregation.

In short, Young's account is based on her recollection of interview notes whose location is currently unknown. The 1958 audio recording, transcribed in the appendix, does not say anything relevant to the notion of establishing segregated congregations. And the Richards letter given to Abner Howell does not provide support for this motive.

Unfortunately, evidence cannot be sought from the Church leaders' journals and meeting minutes, as they are currently closed to research.



**Figure 10.** Letter, 18 October 1938, from President Heber J. Grant to Abner Howell thanking him for his work on the old tithing office.<sup>89</sup>

Going further, Abner's firsthand accounts always describe their trip in purely personal terms. In one early account, Abner simply described his personal motivation for the trip being that he "wanted to see some of the East and South." Elsewhere, he stated that he had originally

# LE GRAND RICHARDS PRESIDING BISHOP THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS SALT LARE CITY 1, UTAH June 20, 1951 TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: This will introduce to you Brother and Sister Abner L. Howell (colored) who are good members of our Church, being members of the Evergreen Ward here in Salt Lake City. Brother and Sister Howell have been faithful through the years and are now enjoying what they have looked forward to for a long time; namely, a trip through the Southern and Eastern parts of the United States. We have invited them to call upon our people, the missionaries and saints wherever convenient. Any courtesies extended to them will be very much appreciated. Sincerely yours, A/x

**Figure 11.** Letter of introduction, 20 June 1951, by Presiding Bishop LeGrand Richards on behalf of the Howells.<sup>91</sup>

planned the trip because he had "a lot of relations down there and ... visited some of them on this trip." In addition, Elder LeGrand

Richards of the Quorum of the Twelve wrote a letter of introduction on behalf of the Howells (figure 11) that alluded to the reason for their travel being that they "are now enjoying what they have looked forward to for a long time; namely a trip to the Southern and Eastern parts of the United States."

Fortunately, a new firsthand source recently made available at the Church History Library provides additional hints from Abner himself about the nature of their visit to the Southern and Eastern United States. In a previously unpublished transcript of a fireside in the Pasadena California Stake (probably held between 1955 and 1958), Abner personally confirmed that his trip was originally conceived by Church leaders as a "short mission":

Have you seen any noticeable change in the attitude of the Church towards Negroes? Well, four years ago, President [Stephen L] Richards, ... a good friend of mine ... called me into his office and he said, ... "It's about time that the Church did a little more on what we're doing for the Negro race."

He says, "You have been here longer than anyone. . . . I want to know if you will go on a short mission and see if you can't get some of them to come back into Church who left the Church. And some who would have been baptized in the Church because their parents were." I said, "I'll certainly go."

He says, "I'll give you Brother Claude Petersen." (Brother Claude Petersen is [Elder] Mark Petersen's brother). And so we went for six weeks, and we got twenty to come back into the Church. But they didn't stay long. But we got them to come back in. He also made this statement to me. He says, "If we can get them to come back in, . . . if they don't want to mingle with us, we'll build them a church of their own, like we have done the Spanish people here."

A lot of people don't know that. They're... trying hard. But it's just almost impossible. You know, this thing. The Church is not yet bringing the Gospel to the Negro. But there's this thing about it. When you go down south on a mission, and one of them wants to join the Church, there's no way to keep him out. You must baptize him. And that's a must to every missionary.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, while Abner and Martha's primary objective was to encourage Black members of the Church who had "left the Church" to return

to activity, he indicates that the Church leaders were also "trying hard" by whatever means to help them — including the possibility of establishing separate Church units, as they had done with some Spanish-speaking congregations, if it might make returning easier.

Note that Howell's explanation does not mention a desire by Church leaders to accommodate white members who might want to exclude Black Saints from their meetings, but instead emphasizes Church leaders' focus on ascertaining the wishes of Black members. In Abner's words, new units would be created for Black Saints only "if they don't want to mingle with us...like we have done [with] Spanish people." This understanding was recognized in an email exchange with Matthew L. Harris:

The Brethren were not interested in establishing a segregated unit for the same reasons that Southerners were. Rather, the brethren were interested in reactivating Black Latter-day Saints, and the way to do that was through a separate unit where they could worship with folks who shared the same burdens in life. It's the same reason the brethren created the Genesis Group some two decades later, and the same reason the Church allows today the "Polynesian Branch" or "Hispanic Branch" or whatever. Church attendance, they've learned, is greater when folks from a shared language and culture worship together.<sup>94</sup>









**Figure 12.** Left to right: Elder Stephen L Richards, 95 Elder LeGrand Richards, 96 Elder Mark E. Petersen, 97 Elder Spencer W. Kimball. 98

As Abner and Martha Howell planned their travel, apostles LeGrand Richards, Mark E. Petersen, and Spencer W. Kimball each visited with him separately. Elder LeGrand Richards's letter of introduction had announced that the couple had been "invited to call upon our people, the missionaries, and Saints wherever convenient." Abner Howell records being warmly received as he spoke to members and

missionaries in Boston, Cincinnati, Atlanta, and Shreveport.<sup>99</sup> One of his longer accounts of their trip is as follows:

We left as soon as we got the letter [from Bishop Richards], for Boston, as Brother Dilworth Young<sup>100</sup> was there at that time and he has been such a good friend to me all his life. At the mission there as we arrived, were missionaries, and there was a homesick girl, who, after hugging my wife and finding that we were from Utah, she was made a happy, well girl. I was happier than her to think a few words could make such a change in anyone.





**Figure 13.** *Left:* Martha Ann Stevens Howell and her husband, Abner.<sup>101</sup> *Right:* Church members Len and Mary Hope with some other Hope family members in Cincinnati, Ohio, probably in 1942 or 1943.<sup>102</sup> Len is in the middle of the front row, Mary is at the far left in the second row. In February 1952, soon after the visit of the Howells, the Hopes moved to Salt Lake City. Len passed away a short time after their move.<sup>103</sup>

Our next stop was Cincinnati, as this was a special stop to see a colored Brother and his family [Len and Mary Hope]. Bro. Mark E. Petersen gave me the address, as he had baptized two members when he was on his mission and thought a lot of the family.

On arriving in Cincinnati, we had a sadder outlook. We found that society had creeped into religion. Most of the members lived across the river on the Kentucky side and some of them did not want the Negro family to come to church. They could only come to church once a month, on fast Sunday. Cincinnati was at that time only a branch. I went Sunday with the colored brother whose name by the way

was Len Hope. His family had been receiving missionaries for many years. Bro. Petersen said he had many a meal in the Len Hope home. I went in the gospel doctrine class and as I had already had the lesson they were on, I was able to answer many questions. When Sunday School was out I gave my letter to the bishop to read, and after reading he said "How long will you be here?" and I said "two days." He said, "Would you like to say a few words at Sacrament tonight?" I said, "Sure I would." Then it was that he told me of the feeling of some of the members of the Church about the Negro family. He told me to be easy on the "haters." I said, "I will be so nice they will like me." He said they all sat on the right side, the leader had long bushy hair.

When Brother Spencer W. Kimball heard that I was going down South he called me into his office to talk to me. He said, "I want to tell you something. You have been raised in Utah and you don't know those people. You won't get treated there like you do here. Be very careful, what you say, and where you go. They will always be right and you will be wrong, but say nothing, you will then get along."

That afternoon I asked the Lord to lead me in the right way that night. The bishop had said about ten minutes. Somehow that last verse in the 26th chapter of 2nd Nephi said "Read me." I talked a short while on brotherhood. Then I took the Book of Mormon and started to read, but my time was up—I looked at the bishop. He said, "Go on." I finished the entire evening by looking at the bishop several times and each time getting the go-ahead sign. As I had expected, those people came to shake my hand and greeted me as a good Latter-day Saint. One man said, "I did not know there were such things in the Book of Mormon." That Negro family was permitted to come and were made welcome by all the members of the church.

I went to Atlanta next and had a wonderful time. There were 15 missionaries there, and they all read the letter I had from Bishop Richards. I did not have time to stay long in Atlanta, as I wanted to get to Shreveport where the new mission was being set up. We stayed overnight there. There were no missionaries there.

We had an experience that is worth mentioning. I was on

the train between Jackson and Meridian, Mississippi when a lady and her grown daughter got on the train. She began to look at me and my wife. I don't know what she thought, but she finally said, "Are you a preacher?" I said, "No lady—I am a Mormon." She said, "What is a Mormon?" I told her about the Prophet Joseph. When she got off the train in Meridian, I gave her the only tract I had. It was baptism. The birth of water and spirit by Orson F. Whitney. I did not get her name, but two years later on the [Salt Lake] Temple grounds she tapped me on the back and said, "I know you." She told me about the time on the train, then said, "I'm here for my first conference."

Characteristically, Abner did not dwell on whatever disappointments and challenges their mission must have encountered. Instead, he rejoiced whenever his efforts at preaching, testifying, encouragement, fellowship, and increased understanding were welcomed. His faith and optimism taught him to persist until he found a way to warm up people's hearts. Once he was asked how well he thought he would be accepted if he walked into a ward he had never visited before. His answer:

I have been in churches, Mormon churches, from coast to coast, from ward to ward. And I have never gone into one yet that I didn't receive a welcome. 106

# **Continuing Witness**

After Abner returned from his "mission" to encourage Black members of the Church outside of Utah, he continued to bear witness of the Gospel—by word and example. For example, at an advanced age, he spent the better part of four years serving the Church in southern California. He recounts working during the open house of the newly constructed Los Angeles Temple:<sup>107</sup>

My wife Martha died in May 1954, and as I wanted to go to California, I went to visit my sister, who had been living there some 35 years. I placed my recommend<sup>108</sup> in the Arlington Ward from where I acted as a guide to the dedication [open house] of the Los Angeles Temple.<sup>109</sup>

# At Temple Information Bureau



ABNER L. HOWELL, 78, of Arlington Ward, Los Angeles Stake is greeted by President Benjamin L. Bowring at the Bureau of Information. A. Bent Peterson, Temple recorder, looks on. Mr. Howell's father, Paul Howell, was baptized by Presiclent Woodruff. His wife's grandfather, Green Flake, came with Brigham Young to the Salt Lake Valley.

**Figure 14.** Abner Howell served as a guide to visitors at the Los Angeles Temple open house in 1955–1966.<sup>110</sup>





Figure 15. Harris Weberg (1898–1979): Scenes from the Los Angeles Temple Creation Room, 1955.<sup>111</sup>

Abner had a singular experience in the Creation Room of the Los Angeles Temple, just prior to the dedicatory services. Significantly, he tied this experience to his recollection of how God touched his father (grandfather?) through President Woodruff. In the way he constructs

his account, it is easy to sense that Abner saw his own extensive missionary opportunities with a special gratitude, since they allowed him to fulfill the promise he remembered having been given to his forebear by President Woodruff that "someday [he'd] be able to do a wonderful work":

On the day of the dedication for the members of the church, . . . I was in the Creation Room one full hour before things started. And surprising, the feeling that you have in a place like that, in God's holy house.

I couldn't sleep, I couldn't stay awake, I didn't know what was happening. But after the proceedings started, I came wide awake, and realized that God put his finger on my father, the slave boy, so that President Woodruff could say to him, "Someday you'll be free, and you'll go to Salt Lake City, and there you'll be able to do a wonderful work."

My father died without doing very much. Although he was faithful. I had no brothers [in the Church], so if there's anything to be done, I had to do it.

And that's what I've tried to do all my life — to let my light shine so that men could see it.



**Figure 16.** Abner received this card as a dues-paying (honorary) member of the High Priests Quorum when he visited California in 1956–1958. 112

Abner's firm testimony as a faithful Black convert who, because of racial restrictions at that time, could not hold the priesthood thrilled hundreds of Saints in firesides and Institute classes. He related:

I spoke to many firesides and seminaries and University of S. Cal Institute. Pres. Paul Dunn said I could please his classes better than he could, sometimes, as they liked to see me come. I spoke to several of Brother Tingey's classes.

I talked to a class of Brother William Hartman in Long Beach, that had no standing room, all wanting to know why I was a Mormon.<sup>113</sup>

Mary Lucile Bankhead observed, "He died before the Church recognized the Blacks in the priesthood. Which I wish he had lived — he could have been in. . . . Because he was really a staunch member of the Church even so with that." <sup>114</sup>

Abner stayed in Los Angeles until sometime after 24 October 1958, when a brief history and testimony was recorded by Boyd Burbidge (transcript in Appendix). Abner says on the Burbidge recording that after the temple dedication, he was "getting lonesome because I couldn't go to work," and, at Elder Mark E. Petersen's suggestion, spent the remainder of his time in California repairing furniture for Deseret Industries. Abner commented, "There isn't very much wages. But there's pleasure in knowing that you're trying to keep up a plan organized by the Church which has been felt all over the world. In no place in the United States has a more successful plan been instituted."

#### Conclusion

The small hinges that may have begun to turn on behalf of the Howells in the South nearly two hundred years ago opened great doors for some members of their family. Although we may never be able to corroborate with certainty the family tradition that the impetus for their migration to the West came through a visit by Wilford Woodruff to their progenitor, Jackson Howell, in 1835, somehow the seeds that motivated his son Paul's eventual journey to Utah seem to have been planted well in good soil and later reaped with great blessings to their family and those who have known them. Jackson's children became well-respected citizens, and his grandson Abner became the first known Black member called to serve a short-term mission to encourage and strengthen fellow Black members of the Church. Abner's testimony, born from the spark lit long ago in the South and burning brightly in the lives of his family for generations, still thrills us today.

If, in the challenging circumstances of his life, Abner ever had doubts about the gospel he wholeheartedly embraced and lived with great vigor, no extant record of his life gives any indication of it. His expressions are more focused on doing than on contemplation. Certainly, he seemed to draw strength from the love and tangible support he received from Church friends and leaders over his lifetime. But

there was an unquenchable fire in his soul that cannot be explained as the result of a mere social conversion. Over the course of his life, his testimony was affirmed by spiritual conviction that was bone-deep. According to Max H. Parkin, "One time while Bro. Howell was invited to talk in Los Angeles he was asked . . . 'Why do you stay with that Church?' 'Because it is the true Church' was his answer." 116





**Figure 17.** Left: Abner Howell, undated.<sup>117</sup> Right: Levi and Betty Howell's daughter, Beulah, and her husband, Perry, with their first grandchild in Salt Lake City, ca. 1944 <sup>118</sup>

# Appendix: Transcript of Abner Howell Recording by Boyd Burbidge on 24 October 1958

The transcription below has been made from the only known copy of a cassette tape in the possession of Margaret Blair Young and Bruce Young, 119 and is included here with their kind permission. It includes details about Abner and Martha's 1951 trip to the southern and eastern states but, unfortunately, does not add to our understanding of the purpose of the trip. It also contains new details about Abner's personal experiences in Los Angeles at the dedication of the temple, his later

work at Deseret Industries there, and a brief testimony. At the time the recording was made, Abner was about eighty years old.

### [Boyd Burbidge]

The information that we're getting on this tape is to be received from Brother Abner Howells, taken on October 24th in Los Angeles, California, in the home of his daughter.

We're gathered here just rather informally to ask him a few questions and talk to him for a moment and ask him to bear his testimony to the truthfulness of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. So that this might be used in the future to help and to strengthen the testimonies of those who are not yet members of the Church, or that who are members of the Church, and need help in understanding more of the Gospel, and also in receiving more information as to the power of the priesthood of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

#### [Abner Howell]

I have here a letter given me by Bishop LeGrand Richards in 1951. It is:

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This will introduce you to Brother and Sister Abner L. Howell (colored), who are good members of our church, being members of the Evergreen Ward here in Salt Lake City.

Brother and Sister Howell have been faithful through the years and are now enjoying what they have looked forward to for a long time; namely, a trip through the Southern and Eastern parts of the United States. We have invited them to call upon our people, the missionaries and saints, wherever convenient.

Any courtesies extended to them will be very much appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

LeGrand Richards.

I want to tell you I went through the Southern States Mission—my wife and I. We had a wonderful time, with

huge [unintelligible] while we were there. We had a wonderful time.

In Atlanta, where the mission is, we had quite a hard time getting permission because of, uh, [unintelligible] not being able to ride in the only taxi cabs we were able to afford. We eventually got the taxi cab and got to the mission home in Atlanta. We presented our letters there. Those people surely enjoyed seeing someone of our race away down south, members of the Church.

We, uh, came from there, went to Shreveport, Louisiana, where they organized the mission there — and that was just in the process of opera — of organization at that time. And we came to Independence, Missouri. And we were at the mission there. And then we went from there to Nauvoo, over to Carthage. We saw the Carthage Jail. We saw that spot on the floor where the Prophet and his brother, was killed.

That strengthened my testimony and it made me more faithful to the Church. I want to say, without hesitation, from all this time I have learned to know that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true. I've also learned to know that the Prophet Joseph Smith was called of God. And that what he has done, the restoration of the true Church, and the gospel of Jesus Christ [unintelligible], it has helped me from boyhood till now.

And I believe with all my heart, with sincerity and humility, that the Prophet Joseph Smith was truly a prophet of God. And this is my testimony as to the faithfulness of the Prophet. And all the members of the Church at the present time, I believe that all our presidents have been called of God. And that the things they have said and done have been under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This is my testimony, that I bear in the name of Jesus Christ, humbly, Amen.

# [Boyd Burbidge]

You might say, one or two—a little bit about what you're doing down at the Deseret Industries, so that I can bind this all together and correlate it for you. Just what your, what your work is there at Deseret Industries and what—

# [Abner Howell]

I, I came down to California for the dedication of the temple.

And I was guide out there at the temple during the dedication, and I want to say this to you.

On the day of the dedication for the members of the Church, when the public was excluded, I was in the Creation Room one full hour before things started. And surprising, the feeling that you have in a place like that, in God's holy house.

I couldn't sleep, I couldn't stay awake, I didn't know what was happening. But after the proceedings started, I came wide awake, and realized that God put his finger on my father, the slave boy, so that President Woodruff could say to him, "Someday you'll be free, and you'll go to Salt Lake City, and there you'll be able to do a wonderful work."

My father died without doing very much. Although he was faithful. I had no brothers [in the Church], so if there's anything to be done, I had to do it.

And that's what I've tried to do all my life — to let my light shine so that men could see it.

After the dedication of the temple, I stayed around a while. Then I saw Brother Mark [E.] Petersen, who said, "Why don't you go to work at the Deseret Industries?" I said I was getting lonesome because I couldn't go to work. I went down there. I went to work. And I've worked ever since at the Deseret Industries.

I spend my time repairing furniture. Figuring out what's good and what's bad. There isn't very much wages. But there's pleasure in knowing that you're trying to keep up a plan organized by the Church which has been felt all over the world. In no place in the United States has a more successful plan been instituted.

That's at this time, that's about all I can say.



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patents and has been an adviser for initiatives in science, defense, space, industry, and academia worldwide. Jeff has written detailed commentaries on the Book of Moses and Genesis and on temple themes in the scriptures. For Church-related publications, see www. TempleThemes.net. Jeff was a missionary in France and Belgium from 1975 to 1977, and his family has returned twice to live in France. He and his wife Kathleen are the parents of four children and sixteen grandchildren. They served two missions in the DR Congo and currently live in Nampa, Idaho. As a church service missionary for the Church History Department, Jeff is writing histories of the temples in the DR Congo and the Republic of the Congo. For The Interpreter Foundation he is working to document the history of the Church in Africa on film (NotByBreadAloneFilm.com).

## **Notes**

- Thomas S. Monson, "Finishers Wanted," Ensign, July 1972, 68–70, churchof jesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1972/07/finishers-wanted. The original statement of this concept ("Great doors turn upon small hinges") was probably the sermon "Naaman, the Syrian" by John McNeill in Sermons of the Rev. John McNeill,vol.1(NewYork:FlemingH.Revell,1890),339,books.google.com/books/about/Sermons.html?id=IBgTAAAAYAAJ. Compare Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "The Influence of Righteous Women," Liahona, September 2009, 3–7; Gordon B. Hinckley, "Caesar, Circus, or Christ?," in BYU Speeches of the Year (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University [BYU], 1965), 1–8; Sterling W. Sill, "Good Judgment," in The Wealth of Wisdom (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 85–88, archive.org/details/wealthofwisdom00sill.
- 2. For readable accounts of Abner Howell and his family, see Byrdie Lee Howell Langon, Utah and the Early Black Settlers (self-pub., 1969), available at Utah State History Library, PAM 20898, MSS A 2002; Abner L. Howell, "Abner's Story," in The Story of the Negro Pioneer, ed. Kate B. Carter (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1965), 55-60; Margaret Blair Young, "From Slavery to Freedom: Martha Ann Jane Stevens Perkins Howell," in Women of Faith in the Latter-days, ed. Brittany Chapman Nash and Richard E. Turley Jr., vol. 4, 1871–1900 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 97–107. See also Margaret Blair Young, "The Black Woman Who Served an Unprecedented Church Mission to Help Reduce Segregation, Prejudice in the Church," LDS Living, 19 February 2019, Idsliving.com/the-black-woman-who-served-an -unprecedented-church-mission-to-help-reduce-segregation-prejudice -in-the-church/s/90299; Abner Leonard Howell, "One Seeking to Know and Learn: Abner Leonard Howell, 1878–1966," in My Lord, He Calls Me: Stories of Faith by Black American Latter-day Saints, ed. Alice Faulkner Burch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022), 24-28; Tonya S. Reiter, "Howell, Abner Leonard," Century of Black Mormons, University of Utah J. Willard Marriott Library Digital

Exhibitions, exhibits.lib.utah.edu/s/century-of-black-mormons/page/howell -abner-leonard; Rachel Quist, "Paul Cephas Howell: First SLC Black Detective," *Rachel's SLC History* (blog), 11 February 2020, slchistory.org/2020/02/paul -cephas-howell-first-slc-black.html. More recently, see the brief account of Abner and Martha Howell's mission in Matthew L. Harris, *Second-Class Saints: Black Mormons and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 81–82.

- 3. See Langon, *Early Black Settlers*, photos following p. 4 and p. 28, and frontispiece.
- 1820 U.S. Census, Union parish, Louisiana, M33, image group 005156915, image 108, digital image s.v. "John McLaughlin," *FamilySearch*, familysearch. org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYB3-2QB?view=index.
- 5. Langon, Early Black Settlers, Addendum.
- 6. ByrdieLeeHowellLangontoKateB.Carter,letter,7June1968,PioneerMemorial Museum.
- 7. For genealogical information on John McLaughlin (1804-ca. 1861-1870) compiled by Stephen Howell, see "Family Tree," database, FamilySearch, John McLaughlin (LV4R-LYH), familysearch.org/tree/person/details/LV4R-LYH. Comments on the discussion page for McLaughlin's record mention the name "McGlocklin" and Byrdie Lee Howell gives the name as "McClelland." Regarding "McGlocklin," while not being a plausible spelling of the name "McLaughlin," it is certainly a very plausible reflection of the pronunciation of the name "McLaughlin" by someone who may have never seen it written. (See "McLaughlin (surname)," Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki /McLaughlin\_(surname)). While Byrdie's version, "McClelland," is implausible as a pronunciation of "McLaughlin," it is not entirely out of range for a childhood memory of an Irish name recorded in writing more than a century later. Extant 1820 census records also struggle with the spelling, giving the name "John McLaughlin" as John "McLawchlin" and "Mclauchlin." See 1820 U.S. Census, Union parish, Louisiana, M33, image group 005156915, image 108, digital image s.v. "John McLaughlin," FamilySearch, familysearch.org /ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYB3-2QB?view=index. There are at least as many variants of McClelland, including McClellan, McCellan, McLellen, and others even closer to Woodruff's "Kelleam"—e.g., McKillion, Killion, Killean.

Though it is unlikely that we will ever be able to connect "John McLaughlin" to the Howell family definitively, I include below a relatively complete account of what inconclusive evidence I have been able to find that may bear on his identity so that later researchers can be aware of what has already been investigated. Specifically, Stephen Howell's research has uncovered McLaughlin's ship arrival records (see note 9) and US census records from 1840 onward (see below) that are generally consistent with Byrdie's account. My own research has failed to find any plausibly similar names, such as McClelland, corresponding to these details and timeframes, adding weight to Stephen Howell's research—but perhaps also suggesting alternatives such as that Jackson may have been enslaved by a James P. Kelleam/McClelland in Monroe County, Arkansas, before he was enslaved by John McLaughlin in Mansfiled, Louisiana. Consistent with the general geography of the Louisiana

site of Byrdie's recollection, there is a John McLaughlin in 1840 (Caddo and Natchitoches, Louisiana), 1850 (DeSoto, Louisiana) and 1860 (DeSoto, Louisiana) census records. See 1840 U.S. Census, Caddo parish, Louisiana, M704, image group 005154540, image 98, digital image s.v. "Jno McLaughlin," FamilySearch, familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YY1-58K?view=index; and 1840 U.S. Census, Natchitoches parish, Louisiana, M704, image group 005154540, image 291, digital image s.v. "Jno McLaughlin," FamilySearch, familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YY1-G1Q?view=index. 1850 U.S. Census, DeSoto parish, Louisiana, M432, image group 004193965, image 35, digital image s.v. "John McLaughlin," FamilySearch, familysearch.org /ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-D55Q-SPN?view=index; 1860 U.S. Census, DeSoto parish, Louisiana, M653, image group 005169992, image 453, digital image s.v. "John McLaughlin," FamilySearch, familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ -GBSD-1KL?view=index; and in a slave schedule for DeSoto parish, Louisiana in 1850, see 1850 U.S. Census (Slave Schedules), DeSoto parish, Louisiana, M432, image group 004198716\_005\_M9C8-ZW8, image 16, digital image s.v. "Jno McLaughlin," FamilySearch, familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HY -D1J3-4BP?view=index. The estimate for his death date is based on his appearance in the 1860 US Census, entry for John Mc Laughlin and Rebecca Mc Laughlin, but not in the 1870 census.

- 8. The name *McLaughlin* is of Irish origin but also exists in Scotland; see "McLaughlin (surname)," Wikipedia. In the relevant census record, McLaughlin stated that he was born in Ireland. See 1850 U.S. Census, DeSoto parish, Louisiana, M432, image group 004193965, image 35, digital image s.v. "John McLaughlin," *FamilySearch*, familysearch.org /ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-D55Q-SPN?view=index.
- 9. Stephen Howell has located a "McLaughlin" and a "John McLaughlin," probably two different individuals, as listed on ship record returning to the USA from Ireland in 1830 and 1831. See United States Index to Passenger Arrivals, Atlantic and Gulf Ports, 1820-1874, M334, image group 004883726, image 4434, digital image s.v. "McLaughlin," FamilySearch, familysearch.org/ark: /61903/3:1:33SQ-G5J1-98L6?view=index; and United States Index to Passenger Arrivals, Atlantic and Gulf Ports, 1820-1874, M334, image group 004883726, image 5178, digital image s.v. "McLaughlin, John," FamilySearch, familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-95J1-9H2Y?view=index. However, Jackson Howell's birthdate is estimated as 1821 in the 1870 census and 1814 in the 1870 US Census, so either Jackson spent several years in Ireland before coming to America, or we can rule out the 1830 and 1831 ship records as being relevant to the individual described in Byrdie's account. For Jackson's birthdate, see 1870 U.S. Census, DeSoto parish, Louisiana, M593, image group 004269412\_002\_M9CF-L51, image 235, digital image s.v. "Kinee, Jack" FamilySearch,familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HY-DTP3-9L6?view=index.
- 10. In genealogical records he is listed as "Jackson H." (Howell?), "Jackson M." (McLaughlin?) and "Jack Kinee." See "Family Tree," database, FamilySearch, Jackson H. Howell (L415-X3P), familysearch.org/tree/person/details/L415-X3P. The "Jack Kinee" seems to be a mistaken transcription of "Jack Howell" from the 1870 Louisiana census—a hastily written "H" in cursive taken to be a "K," a scribbled middle part, and a miniature "II" at

- the end understood as "ee." See 1870 U.S. Census, DeSoto parish, Louisiana, M593, image group 004269412\_002\_M9CF-L51, image 235, digital image s.v. "Kinee, Jack" *FamilySearch*, familysearch.org /ark:/61903/3:1:S3HY-DTP3-9L6?view=index.
- 11. Thereisprobably some confusion of the name "Mary Eliza" with the name of Mary Eliza Sharp, the wife of Paul C. Howell. FamilySearch records currently assert that Eliza Jane Hogan Howell was the daughter of Stepney/Sephny/Stephen Hogan (b. 1790) and Tempy/Temby/Temperance (b. 1790) and was later adopted by Mr. Howell (b. 1810) and Mrs. Howell (b. 1810). See "Family Tree," database, FamilySearch, Stephen Hogan (LVC1-QXG), familysearch.org/tree/person/details/LVC1-QXG; and "Family Tree," database, FamilySearch, Mr. Howell (LVJV-6XN), familysearch.org/tree/person/details/LVJV-6XN).
- 12. Nathan and Robert were not listed with the immediate family in the 1870 and 1880 censuses, so it is presumed that they died as children.
- Langon, Early Black Settlers, 4–5. For genealogical information about Jackson, Eliza, their parents, and their children, see "Family Tree," database, FamilySearch, Jackson H. Howell (L415-X3P), familysearch.org/tree/person/details/L415-X3P.
- 14. Langon, Early Black Settlers.
- 15. Abner Howell, testimony, AV 1802, audio recording, Pasadena California Stake Audiotape Collection, 1954–1958, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/341d9588-7cd8-44ae-a50c-1f62f4f3 d0b6/0/0; Abner Leonard Howell, oral history interview by George Boyd, Bill Hartman, and James Allen, 29 October 1960, AV 227, item 1, audio recording, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets /e29a6e96-84db-4791-bd78-17894854fe31/0/0; Howell, "Abner's Story;" and Abner Leonard Howell, interview by Boyd Burbidge, 24 October 1958, copy of a cassette tape given to Darius Aidan Gray, Margaret Blair Young, and Bruce Young. Apparently, Abner Howell intended to write a larger history, but never did so. In a letter to Kate B. Carter (see figure 2), Byrdie Lee Howell Langon wrote, "My Bro and I thought some years ago of writing a book . . . but keep putting it off" (Langon to Carter, 1968).
- 16. Tonya S. Reiter wrote that the Howells lived in the Salt Lake LDS 23rd ward, and that their eldest son, Jay, and eldest daughter, Abbie, were baptized in 1915. Abner, Nina, and their ten-year-old daughter Lucille Mary were baptized six years later on 26 February 1921 and confirmed on 6 March 1921 in the Holladay First Ward. Less than two weeks earlier, on 17 February 1921, their youngest son, Paul Cecil, died of kidney failure. Reiter, "Howell, Abner Leonard."
- 17. Howell, oral history interview.
- Howell was correct. Wilford Woodruff was born on 1 March 1807 and would have just turned 28 when he visited Monroe County, Arkansas, in the second half of March 1835.
- 19. Note that Abner's confirmation that his father "wasn't a member yet" contradicts his previous statement that his father "was baptized . . . in Little Rock." This and other contradictions will be discussed later.

- 20. This contradicts the premise of his interview three years earlier that Woodruff preached at a plantation in Arkansas, not Louisiana. This and other contradictions will be discussed later.
- Max H. Parkin, notes on Abner Howell's talk at Olympus Seminary, 17 April 1963, ACCN 1539, box 61, folder 3, Max H. Parkin Papers, 1820–1995, Special Collections, University of Utah J. Willard Marriott Library, Salt Lake City.
- 22. Margaret Blair Young, "Abner Leonard Howell: Honorary High Priest," Paperzz .com, paperzz.com/doc/8830890/abner-leonard-howell. Tonya Reiter similarly concluded that "no evidence has been found to corroborate that story." Reiter, "Howell, Abner Leonard."
- 23. "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," p. 47, The Wilford Woodruff Papers.
- 24. "Journal (December 29, 1833-January 3, 1838)," p. 48, The Wilford Woodruff Papers.
- 25. "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," pp. 47–48, The Wilford Woodruff Papers, wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/documents/b048a7c5-6b6b-438a-bce7-262d5ba297d8.
- 26. Paraphrasing Henry G. Tomkins, as cited in Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book. 1988). 4.
- 27. Though we currently possess no contemporary records in relevant places that include variants of the name "McClelland," Stephen Howell has located genealogical records for a John McLaughlin (1804–ca. 1861–1870) that lead him to identify this individual as Jackson's slaveholder. While Howell's conclusions have some support in the records he has found, the name "McLaughlin" is harder to justify than "McClelland" as a plausible spelling of the slaveholder's name in light of Langon and Woodruff's recollections. However, if Howell's findings are taken as conclusive, one might argue that Woodruff's spelling of the name as "Kelleam" might have been influenced by his acquaintance with a prominent early Church member who bore a similar Gaelic name, William E. McLellin. See notes 7 and 9.
- 28. Howell, testimony.
- 29. Howell, oral history interview.
- 30. "That's where I met President Woodruff." Howell, testimony.
- 31. Howell, oral history interview.
- 32. Wilford Woodruff, *Leaves from My Journal*, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 17–18, archive.org/details/leavesfrommyjour04wood/page/n4/mode/1up. For a more detailed description of the events of 12–27 March 1835, see "Journal (December 29, 1833–January 3, 1838)," pp. 47–48.
- 33. Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 35, archive.org/details/thingsinheavenea0000alex. See also "Memphis to Little Rock Road," CALS Encyclopedia of Arkansas, Central Arkansas Library

- System, encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/memphis-to-little-rock-road -7503/.
- 34. Fred E. Woods, "Wilford Woodruff and the Gathering of Modern-day Israel, 1834–50," in *Banner of the Gospel: Wilford Woodruff*, ed. Alexander L. Baugh and Susan Easton Black (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 65, rsc.byu.edu/banner-gospel-wilford-woodruff/wilford-woodruff-gathering-modern-day-israel-1834-50.
- 35. Don Bradley, conversation with author, 30 August 2023.
- 36. Langon, Early Black Settlers, 5.
- 37. See Howell, "Abner's Story," 55; Reiter, "Howell, Abner Leonard;" Young, "Abner Leonard Howell;" Quist, "Paul Cephas Howell."
- 38. John Taylor, circa 1887, photograph, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/01bfbe96-1232-4403-b796-e0ec408b3a17/0. Thanks to Stephen O. Smoot and Brian R. Passantino.
- 39. Charles R. Savage, *Interior of Mormon Tabernacle, 250 Feet Long [ceiling decorated with garlands]*, circa 1890, photograph, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets /7291ea92-51bc-498a-97d4-d24c6c6273e7/0/0.
- 40. Howell, testimony.
- 41. See, e.g., Brigham H. Roberts, *The Life of John Taylor: Third President of the Church* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1982), 437–39, archive .org/details/TheLifeOfJohnTaylor.Taylor; and Francis M. Gibbons, *John Taylor: Mormon Philosopher, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 272.
- 42. Gibbons. John Taylor. 271.
- 43. Langon, Early Black Settlers, 4.
- 44. "Family Tree," database, FamilySearch, Byrdie Lee Howell (L859-8DH), familysearch.org/tree/person/details/L859-8DH. An estimate of her birth year is given in the 1920 census as 1888. See 1920 U.S. Census, Mesa county, Colorado, T625, image group 004964350, image 218, digital image s.v. "Langdon, Bertie L," FamilySearch, familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GRX7-JPT?view=index.
- 45. 1900 U.S. Census, Salt Lake county, Utah, T623, image group 004115259\_001 \_M9KG-HPF, image 482, digital image s.v. "Howell, Birtie," *FamilySearch*, familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-DZ2Q-64V?view=index.
- 46. Howell, oral history interview.
- 47. Kyle Beshears, "'Sowing and Reaping': Dwight L. Moody's 1899 Mormon Tabernacle Sermon," *Kyle Beshears* (blog), 4 January 2024, static1 .squarespace.com/static/5f91fc6b08a5626206a4a5c9/t/6596ad73455b52 052da3f739/1704373620181/Sowing+and+Reaping+Moody+Sermon+1899 .pdf. Beshears provides a convenient amalgamation of various contemporary newspaper sources for the event which are listed in his posting (see, e.g., *Salt Lake Herald*, 3 April 1899, p. 5, loc.gov/resource/sn85058130/1899-04-03

/ed-1/?sp=5&r=0.524,-0.137,0.533,0.708,0; "Moody in Tabernacle," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 April 1899, p. 8, newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=12821272; "Moody at the Tabernacle," *Deseret Evening News*, 3 April 1899, p. 4, chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045555/1899-04-03/ed-1/seq-4/. Moody had previously preached in the Tabernacle in 1871 (see, for example, *Deseret Evening News*, 5 June 1871, p. 3, newspapers.lib.utah.edu/pdfjs-4.0 .379/web/viewer.html?file=/udn\_files/9c/70/9c7030ef2edb02a0d018f50a4 2b555790ed0ecbe.pdf.

- 48. Parkin, notes, spelling corrected.
- 49. Sankey reports accompanying Moody to Salt Lake City at an earlier time during the period when John Taylor was leading the Church, but does not appear to have left a record of any subsequent visits. See Ira David Sankey, *My Life and the Story of the Gospel Hymns* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928), 86–87, archive.org/details/mylifestoryofgos00irad.
- 50. Photo from Quist, "Paul Cephas Howell." With permission of Rachel Quist.
- 51. Photo from Quist, "Paul Cephas Howell." With permission of Rachel Quist.
- 52. Quist reports that Howell's great-grandson Jake Green Jr. also served on the Salt Lake City police force beginning in 1968. Quist, "Paul Cephas Howell."
- "Lost His Official Head. City Detective Bruce Johnson Relieved of His Star, Last Night," Deserte Evening News, 22 June 1892, p. 5, newspapers.lib.utah.edu /details?id=1633944.
- 54. For additional context of Johnson's firing and Howell's hiring, see Rachel Quist, "SLC's First Black Police Officer: R. Bruce Johnson," *Rachel's SLC History* (blog), 11 February 2020, slchistory.org/2020/02/slcs-first-black-police-officer-r-bruce.html.
- 55. Quist, "Paul Cephas Howell."
- 56. Quist, "Paul Cephas Howell."
- 57. "HomeBoysVictorious—EastDenverDefeatedbySaltLakeHighSchoolbefore Great Throng of People—Story of the Game," *SaltLake Tribune*, 30 November 1900, pp. 5, 7, newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=13427183. Also see Howell, testimony.
- 58. Wendell J. Ashton, Voice in the West: Biography of a Pioneer Newspaper (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pierce, 1950), 235. See also "Home Boys Victorious," Salt Lake Tribune. According to Matthew L. Harris, "When the team decided to eat in the kitchen area with Howell, the restaurant owner relented and let Howell eat in the dining area." Harris, Second-Class Saints, 354n80. Harris provides no source for this anecdote.
- 59. Langon, Early Black Settlers, 26.
- 60. Some historians err in placing Howell on the famous Michigan "point-a-minute" varsity team. He is only documented to have played on the freshman team (see figure 8). For information on Coach Yost, see Wikipedia, s.v. "Fielding H. Yost," en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fielding\_H.\_Yost.
- 61. Calendar of the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, 1904), 351.

- 62. Though we have no indication from the historic record that racism in University of Michigan football was a factor in Abner's decision to leave the school, it seems important that readers be aware of the challenges that some Black athletes at the school are said to have been experiencing around that time. Students of the history of Michigan football report that coach Yost had a reputation for racism during his time at the school. See, for example, John Behee, Hail to the Victors! Black Athletes at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI: Ulrich's Books, 1974), 7, 19, 33, quod.lib.umich.edu/g/genpub/AEN3524.0001.001/1. One author writes that in 1932—obviously long after Abner had left Michigan— Yost had a "change of heart from his racist past." John U. Bacon, "Column: The Other Side of Fielding Yost," Ann Arbor Chronicle, 16 March 2012, annarborchronicle.com/2012/03/16/column-the-other-side-of-fielding-yost /index.html. Examination of Yost's views about Black football players culminated in 2021 when, "after a year-long review of Yost," "an eightperson panel of university historians . . . made the 'unanimous' preliminary recommendation" that his name be removed from its ice-hockey arena. Aaron McMann, "Michigan Considers Removal of Fielding H. Yost's Name from Hockey Arena," MLive, 26 May 2021, mlive.com /wolverines/2021/05/michigan-considers-removal-of-fielding-h-yosts -name-from-hockey-arena.html. Abner, of course, was on the freshman football team, and as far as we know his selection and management as a player had nothing directly to do with Yost. That said, it seems reasonable to suppose that Abner knew about Yost's reputation and would likely have considered whether Yost's views would impact the prospects of his eventually joining the varsity team.
- 63. It is, perhaps, notable that another Black student—Lloyd Gaines, enrolled at a Missouri law school—disappeared and was possibly murdered a generation later. See Chad Garrison, "The Mystery of Lloyd Gaines," *Riverfront Times*, 4 April 2007, riverfront times.com/news/the-mystery-of-lloyd-gaines-2479115.
- 64. Young, "Abner Leonard Howell."
- 65. Howell, "Abner's Story," 55.
- 66. Young, "Abner Leonard Howell."
- 67. Young, "Abner Leonard Howell."
- Rentschler's Studio, 1902 UM Freshman Football Team, photograph, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, quod.lib.umich.edu/b/bhl/x-bl009531 /BL009531.
- 69. Abner was baptized on 26 February 1921. Reiter, "Howell, Abner Leonard."
- 70. Howell, "Abner's Story," 57–58. Compare the account given in Howell, testimony.
- 71. Mary Lucille Bankhead, interview by Leslie G. Kelen, 14 January 1983, MS 0453, box 1, folder 4, transcript, p. 9, "Interviews with African Americans in Utah," University of Utah Oral History Institute, University of Utah Libraries, Salt Lake City, collections.lib.utah.edu/details?id=893605.
- 72. Langon, Early Black Settlers, 5.

- 73. As mentioned earlier, Quist also concluded that his service lasted about twenty years, but started in 1892 rather than 1888.
- 74. Howell, or alhistory interview. Contra Abner's statement concerning Paul's height, Byrdie wrote that their father was "six feet two inches." Langon, *Early Black Settlers*, caption on photo following p. 4.
- 75. Howell, oral history interview.
- 76. Howell, testimony.
- 77. Howell, oral history interview.
- 78. Charles Roscoe Savage, *John Henry Smith*, between circa 1898 and circa 1901, photograph, Wikimedia Commons, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:John\_Henry\_Smith.jpg.
- 79. The Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Nicholas G. Smith*, 1946, photograph, *Wikimedia Commons*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File: Nicholas\_G.\_Smith.jpg.
- 80. Associated Students of Brigham Young University, *Heber J. Grant*, 1932, photograph, *Wikimedia Commons*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Heber\_J\_Grant.jpg.
- 81. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Harold B. Lee*, 11 July 1944, photograph, *Wikimedia Commons*, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Harold\_B\_Lee\_1944.JPG.
- 82. "Obituaries: Monroe Fleming," *United Press International*, 4 August 1982, upi .com/Archives/1982/08/04/Obituaries/2148397281600/. Also see Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 210, google.com/books/edition/Lengthen\_Your\_Stride/TKHtAAAAMAAJ?hl=en.
- 83. Howell, "Abner's Story," 58.
- 84. Margaret Blair Young and Darius Aidan Gray, Standing on the Promises, vol. 3, The Last Mile of the Way (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 269.
- 85. Young, "Abner Leonard Howell"; Young and Gray, Last Mile, 271n; Young, "From Slavery to Freedom," 322n20.
- 86. E.g., Reiter, "Howell, Abner Leonard;" Howell, "One Seeking," 26, editor's note.
- 87. LeGrand Richards was said in 1983 by an unidentified Black woman to be wellloved among the Black Latter-day Saint community, as attested by Abner Howell:

LeGrand Richards was the backbone of the Black-Mormon. . . . I mean he's the one who kept everything in perspective. . . . He came [to the Hill-Haven nursing home] and he stood at the door and he could hardly walk. He was all in pain with arthritis. And he had a cane. He wouldn't let them put him in a wheelchair. . . . And we were talking and I was telling how I used to use him, you know. And he said, "How?" And I would tell him, that, you know, if I had trouble down in the neighborhood with the Mormons, I'd just tell, "You wait until I call LeGrand Richards." Never even knew who LeGrand Richards was. But I knew Abe Howell always said he would help Blacks. So I got

myself out of a lot of trouble—or into it, I don't know. And he started laughing. And he said, "Well, if it did you some good great! But," he said, "You know, I get blamed for more things that I don't do."

Unidentified woman present during Frances Leggroan Fleming, interview, 7 March 1983, MS 0453, box 7, folder 6, "Interviews with African Americans in Utah, 1982–1988," University of Utah Oral History Institute, J. Willard Marriott Library, Salt Lake City.

- 88. Harris. Second-Class Saints. 81.
- 89. Heber J. Grant to Abner Howell, letter, 18 October 1938, Papers and Materials from Margaret Blair Young, BYU Special Collections, reproduced with permission of Margaret Blair Young.
- 90. Howell, "Abner's Story," 58.
- 91. LeGrandRichards,letterofintroduction,20June1951,PapersandMaterialsfrom Margaret Blair Young, BYU Special Collections, reproduced with permission of Margaret Blair Young.
- 92. Howell, testimony.
- 93. Howell, testimony.
- 94. Matthew L. Harris, email message to author, 27 August 2024.
- 95. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Stephen L. Richards, July 1959, photograph, Wikimedia Commons, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Stephen\_L\_Richards3.jpg.
- 96. The Churchof Jesus Christof Latter-day Saints, Le Grand Richards, 11 September 1934, photograph, Wikimedia Commons, commons. wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Le Grand\_Richards\_1934.JPG.
- 97. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Mark E. Petersen*, 22 August 1944, photograph, *Wikimedia Commons*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mark\_E. Petersen.JPG.
- 98. Portrait in Pinstripe Suit, circa 1943–1950, photograph, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/dfc887c2-1728-474e-bc70-0e3b204b9011/0/0.
- 99. The couple also visited Church sites in Independence, Missouri, and Nauvoo/ Carthage, Illinois. See the account of these visits in Howell, interview by Burbidge.
- 100. S. Dilworth Young was then president of the New England Mission. He would later go on to decades of service in the First Council of the Seventy.
- 101. Margaret Blair Young, "Abner Leonard Howell (1877–1966)," Black Past (website), blackpast.org/african-american-history/howell-abner-leonard-1877-1966/. Used by permission.
- 102. "Len and Mary Hope: Black Converts in the American South," Liahona, February 2022, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2022/02/united -states-and-canada-section/len-and-mary-hope-black-converts-in-the -american-south.

- 103. Scott Hales, "Recorded in heaven: The Testimonies of Len and Mary Hope," BYU Studies Quarterly 62, no. 1 (2023): 61, byustudies.byu.edu/article /recorded-in-heaven/.
- 104. Howell, Abner's Story, 59-60, spelling corrected and style modernized.
- 105. Evaluating the success of the mission primarily in terms of the challenging prospect of "helping establish a Black congregation," Harris concludes that the Howells "returned to Utah without success." Harris, Second-Class Saints, 82.
- 106. Howell, testimony.
- 107. The temple open house took place from 19 December 1955 to 18 February 1956 and the dedication occurred on 11–14 March 1956. See "Los Angeles California Temple," Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Rick Satterfield, churchofjesuschristtemples.org/los-angeles-california-temple/.
- 108. Since Abner was not eligible at the time, because of his race, to hold a temple recommend, his mention of a "recommend" no doubt refers to a document from Church leaders in Utah certifying his status as a baptized member in good standing (see Doctrine and Covenants 20:84). The need for such documents at the time, regardless of race, may seem foreign to members today when membership records can be moved from unit to unit in a matter of seconds.
- 109. Howell, "Abner's Story," 60.
- 110. Los Angeles Intermountain News, 29 June 1956, MS\_8648\_r0009\_f0002, p. 226, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/5a1be8b6-3799-4084-876a-772eb8daaf63/0/0.
- 111. "Los Angeles Temple Murals," *The Improvement Era*, November 1955, 825, ia600902.us.archive.org/35/items/improvementera5811unse/improvement era5811unse.pdf.
- 112. LongBeachStakeHighPriestsQuorum,membershipcard,1958,XX(7049807.1), Papers and Materials from Margaret Blair Young, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU, Provo, UT, lib.byu.edu/search/byu/record/cat.7049807.item.7049807-1001?holding=pjer2udfjxhzyz76.Currentlyinprocess of cataloging. Reproduced with permission of Margaret Blair Young.
- 113. Howell, "Abner's Story," 60.
- 114. Bankhead, interview, 9, style modernized. According to a recollection by a "dear friend," Ruffin Bridgeforth Jr., Abner said, "Until we get the priesthood, we can never become sons of perdition." Bridgeforth commented, "People laugh at that, and it is true. To whom much is given, much is expected. All of this period, our people are not held responsible—no responsibility." Bridgeforth also said that Abner "was a great man—one of the greatest members I have ever known." Benjamin D. Lee, ed., Ruffin Bridgeforth (self-pub., 2017), p. 49, MS 31721, available upon request from the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/8cfeadd4-ad4a-45c5-aa98-074674 aa4bcf/0/0. See also Howell, testimony: "In order to get in the celestial kingdom, you can get in the highest degree in the celestial kingdom without the priesthood. But the priesthood can keep you out of a lot of places. Because

- if you have the priesthood and you desecrate that priesthood, your curse is worse than the person who has the priesthood."
- 115. As one example, Matthew Harris cites this account of a talk by Abner to students at the Olympus High School Latter-day Saint seminary in Salt Lake City, as reported by Max Parkin: "In Los Angeles he was asked how he felt about the fact that the negroes couldn't hold the priesthood. He answered, "I'm too busy getting into the Celestial Kingdom that I'm not worried about the priesthood." (Parkin, notes, 2, as reported in Harris, Second-Class Saints, 181.) Thanks to Matthew Harris for pointing me to this statement and its source.
- 116. Parkin, notes, 3.
- 117. From Reiter, "Howell, Abner Leonard."
- 118. Langon, Early Black Settlers, photo following p. 34.
- 119. Howell, interview by Burbidge. Margaret Blair Young wrote that Boyd Burbidge gave the tape to her and Darius Aidan Gray in connection with a 2002 interview (Margaret Blair Young, email message to author, 11 August 2024). According to the obituaries of Boyd Marcroft Burbidge (1930–2017) and his wife Carol (1933–2011), the couple were married in the Los Angeles Temple on 23 August 1956 and spent fifty-five years together in marriage. See "Boyd Marcroft Burbidge," Deseret News, 14–15 March 2017, findagrave.com/memorial /177327638/boyd-marcroft-burbidge; "Carol Burbidge," Deseret News, 22 September 2011, legacy.com/us/obituaries/deseretnews/name/carol-burbidge-obituary?id=26304270.
- 120. In Howell, testimony, Abner gives details on this sad situation in Atlanta, as well as recounting other challenges faced by himself and other Black members of the Church due to racial prejudice:

Now we went, I'll tell you, in Atlanta, where the mission is, we had trouble, because our face was dark. In the first place, you know, down there they separate. The people have never gotten over the fact that we were slaves.

And I had to wait two days before I could get a, a taxicab driver. Because I couldn't ride in a taxi cab driver driven by a white man, and neither can a white man ride in a taxi cab driver driven by a colored man. And of course, the colored taxi cab drivers never go on that side of town because they don't have anyone to take over there.

But after waiting two days, I found one that had been born there and he knew where the mission home was, and he took me there. And I had to have him stay one hour and a half to take me back because if I  $\dots$  had called for a taxi cab, and they came and saw that we were colored we couldn't ever gotten out of that part of the town.

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