

Preface

Joseph Fielding, one of the original seven LDS missionaries whom the Prophet Joseph Smith sent to England in 1837, and who is my direct-line ancestor, kept a journal which detailed his four years as a missionary. He continued the journal as he lived in Nauvoo and later in Utah. As I created a biographical context for his journal entries and letters, the length of the work increased far behind my initial expectations. I had not anticipated that through family letters and other documents I would find so much material about his sisters Mary and Mercy Fielding. As a result, I chose to cover these sisters' lives in Canada, Kirtland and Missouri as I covered Joseph's in England during his mission.

I spent over four years researching and writing about this family, and even as I wrote, I continued to encounter new sources. As much as I could, I detailed the lives of the other original missionaries to England and the apostles who interacted with Joseph Fielding.

I found it necessary to write about the rise of Methodism in England and North America. I worked hard to learn the origins of the study group Toronto to which Joseph Fielding belonged, including the development of the Charleton settlement where Apostle Parley P. Pratt found so many converts, including John Taylor and his wife Leonora Cannon, the latter being the sister of my ancestor George Cannon.

I learned that members of this study group, including John Taylor and Joseph Fielding, were willing to be reprimanded by the Methodist Church rather than cease their search for truth. Through family letters, it became evident that Joseph's older brother James, a minister of a large congregation in Preston, was intently following the actions of the Canadian study group and offering direction and guidance. James Fielding ultimately rejected his brother's teachings of the Restored Gospel, and with his brother-in-law Timothy Richards Matthews, they became a great persecutors of the LDS Church and its missionaries.

I located a copy of a journal kept by Leonora as she emigrated from England to Toronto. Upon arriving in the United States, she traveled along the Erie Canal, most likely using the same route Joseph and Mercy Rachel Fielding traveled in 1832. This route was later followed by Mary Fielding and other Canadian immigrants. In the spring of 2016, I found myself walking along the banks of the Erie Canal with my husband, our son and his family. It was humbling and even spiritual experience for me to be there.

Joseph Fielding served his mission in England at the same time his youngest sister Mercy lived in Canada while her husband served as a missionary. Although Joseph passed through Kirtland, he did not live there, but his sister Mary did, and on Christmas Eve of 1837 she married the recently widowed Hyrum Smith. In the spring of 1838, the apostles who had accompanied the first missionary group to England returned home, leaving Joseph Fielding in charge of the British Mission. Through Joseph's eyes, we can see how the missionary work grew in England, all while he was learning through letters across the Atlantic of the severe trials in Missouri. His relief is palpable when in early 1840 apostles finally return to England, an event for which Joseph Fielding waited with great faith.

Upon his return to the United States, Joseph became a member of the Council of Fifty. He was involved with the extensive planning and preparations to move the body of the Saints from Nauvoo to the Great Basin. Through his writings and family letters, we learn of the extreme suffering they endured as they crossed the plains, and of Mary Fielding's desperation when halfway through her trek, she realized she might not make it to the Valley.

As much as possible, I have used the voices of the Fielding siblings from their writings and letters. I was deeply touched to find letters by Sarah Maria Fielding Wright, the daughter of James Fielding. Sarah and her daughter Millicent exchanged letters with their Utah cousins into the twentieth century and provided a bounty of genealogy information, including a memoir of Rachel Ibbotson Fielding written by her daughter Ann, the sister of Joseph, Mary and Mercy.

For an unknown reason the Fielding family referred to their birthplace as Honidon. However, local records of the time, including census records, refer to this location as Honeydon, as it is known today. I have quietly corrected their spelling to reduce any confusion. I was pleased to find the exact location of John Fielding's farm in Graveley, although I had to intensely study Google Maps to find this. A lane still named "Fielding Place" marks the spot.

I owe a deep gratitude to Geneil Loader Harris, whose husband Blaine is a descendant of Mary Fielding Smith through her daughter Martha Ann Smith Harris. Geneil not only directed me to many valuable sources, including the desperate Chimney Rock letter written by Mary Fielding Smith as she crossed the plains in 1848, but she also proofread this lengthy work many times, making countless suggestions and editorial comments. I am in her debt.

I must thank my husband Ben, who has been patient and tolerant during the years that this biography consumed my life. If you can picture a husband coming down the stairs into my workroom to bring me snacks and pick up my dishes, please put a happy face on that man.

I have used a decades-old transcript of the original Joseph Fielding diary. In a few instances, I have corrected a mistake the transcriber made, although this is without doubt an excellent transcription. In referencing this document, and all others, I have infrequently made slight corrections to spelling or punctuation to enable the passage to read more easily. In no case have I changed or altered the intended meaning in any way.

Proofreading a work of this size has been daunting. Publishing online, however, allows me to easily correct mistakes. If any reader finds an error, I would appreciate an email: juliemarkhamfamilyhistory@gmail.com.

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