

Letter of Vinson Knight to William Cooper

3 February 1839

Dear Sir [William Cooper]

I received yours of the 8th and am glad to hear that you are well. I have my family with me and shall move into the state of Illinois as soon as I can. We are well and in very good spirits. I will attempt to answer your request by writing you some facts I received in the county of Caldwell the last days of May [1838] last about which time there were some men in the Church that were disposed to do things that were not right from which we have been injured. I then went into Daviess County and prepared for to settle, there being about 120 families of Mormons in that county and about 140 of the old inhabitants. I soon heard that elections [at Gallatin] would be along that the old citizens were trying to get the Mormons to vote for them and there being two parties, they sought hard for their vote, but the Mormons were all for the Democrat candidates. But the thing passed along until the day of election when the federal candidate for representative mounted on to a barrel and called on the citizens and made a long speech, abusing the Mormons all that he could and said that he had been to drive the Mormons and he would do it again, and then he got down and in a few minutes there was one of the Missourians struck one of the Mormons and then another Mormon stepped in between them. Then he was knocked down and then both parties gathered some clubs and they commenced. They were about 20 Mormons and 100 Missourians and the Mormons knocked them down as fast as they could get them away

until they got out of the way, but the Missourians got guns and kept the Mormons from voting the next morning.

The Mormons in Far West [Caldwell County] heard that the Missourians had two Mormons on the ground dead and would not let them be buried and about 100 of the Mormons got on their horses and went out to get them, but found when they got there that there had not any of them been killed, and then they went to see some of the judges and wished to have the matter settled, wishing him to sign a paper that he would do all that he could to keep the peace, which he was willing to do. And he then went to the circuit judge and made oath that the Mormons compelled him to sign it, and got out writs for a number of the Mormons and made some attempt to take them, but the sheriff was afraid and made a great complaint but after some bustle, Lyman Wight and Joseph Smith Jr. gave themselves up and had an examination and were put to bail, and the Mormons hoped that it would stop here. But the Missourians began to move their families out of the neighborhood where the Mormons lived, and gathered together all the help that they could and said that the Mormons should leave the county, and they took some Mormons Prisoner and the Mormons used them very bad, and shot at some others, and then the Mormons made some complaint to the circuit judge in Ray County and the major general of Clay County, and they ordered about 200 troops out, which came on and stayed about 15 days and we thought that the matter was settled and we went about our business.

But the mob soon gathered against a small place called DeWitt and the mouth of Grand River, which place was half owned by Mormons. The mob got them a cannon and came on very strong and the militia officers said that they could not do anything with them. The mob then burned some houses and shot some of the Mormons but not killed any at that time. The mob then proposed to make a treaty with them, which they did, hoping that it would stop there and that the difficulty would be settled. But as soon as the Mormons left DeWitt, the mob gathered around Daviess County in two companies, one of the west of Clinton County and the other on the east in Livingstone County and commenced by burning some of the Mormon's houses and we saw that, unless there was something done to stop them, that we must have a battle as they were moving away their families and some settling fire to their houses to raise excitement, which the Mormons saw that they would do. Then the Mormons made the best moves that they could to defend themselves and their families, and the mob saw that mobbing was not what they thought it was and they fled and left their cannon and their houses and then it was mob for mob, and the Missourians most all left the county.

So you see that they were fairly at it and we concluded that we would as soon die as live in this way. The Mormons then went at their work except a few that were kept out for to see the movement of the mob. As the militia officers said that they could not do any more and it appeared that the mob did not know what to do when the Reverent Mr. Boyard [Samuel Bogart] of Ray County had gotten

the permit of the general to call out a company 36 to guard that county, and he got about as many more that volunteered and they came into the south part of Cardwell County and made some threats and took some of the Mormons prisoners. When the Mormons heard it, they went to relieve them and came on them unawares, it being the first time that the Mormons could get to have a battle [of Crooked River] with them when there were Mormons killed and some wounded. I have not been able to ascertain how many of the mob were killed (but I think some 20 or 30). There was one of the men here at my house last week that was taken prisoner. He said that when Mr. Boyard [Bogart] saw that they had gotten to fight, he took him and placed him in front of his line between the two companies and then had their guns reserved to shoot him if he attempted to run. He waited until the first fire when he started. They shot him through the left shoulder. This skirmish was what they wanted. They then sent to the governor to have help and he order about 5,000 troops out and gave General [John B.] Clark the command to come and settle the difficulty.

[Surrender at Far West] They came up and without letting the Mormons know who they were, they made an attempt to march into town when the Mormons met them, and they came back in the morning. They sent word in to the Mormons that they must give up their leader and guns, and their property, and leave the state or be exterminated. So you see that the cause was not inquired into but you must do this or be killed, when we as a people are ready to have the whole subject investigated. The men that they first wanted were Joseph

Smith, Jr., Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, Lyman Wright, Parley P. Pratt, and George W. Robinson. These men they expected to shoot without trial but General Alexander Doniphan of Clay County said that if they were going to murder he would not have any hand in it, and he took his troops and went home. They then proceeded and took from the remainder all the guns and swords and then put four companies to guard all the Mormons, as they were all in Caldwell County towns, and they did not allow them to go out for a week, in which time they took about 200 horses, cattle, sheep, hay and corn and took some money, some bed clothes and then they went to Daviess County and served them the same.

I was at Far West while the troops were there and I did not go home as they threatened my life. Then took about 60 more prisoners and took them to Richmond, Ray County, where they pretended to examine them, when they let some go and some they put to bail, some they have kept in jail, charged with almost all crimes that can be mentioned. I saw two men the first day February [1839]. They told me that Joseph Smith, Jr., and all those that were with him in prison would be let out on bail or set free and that all their proceedings had been contrary to law and that they have no business with any of them. Such is the ignorance of the people in that county, that they wind themselves up and if any man which they have confidence in tells them anything, they will do it.

While the troop was at Far West, there were about 30 Mormons that were moving and got within 15 miles of the town where about 100 of the mob fell upon them [at Haun's Mill] and killed 17 men,

two boys, and wounded some more and took their wagons and horses and left the women to bury the dead. They dragged them and put them into a well that had no water in and covered them up. Amongst the wounded was one man that had two ball holes in his skin, two balls passed through his body, one through his hip and he is now walking and riding about. They say that they will not shoot him again. A man by the name of McBride [Thomas McBride] was killed, but not Rueben.

There is one more circumstance that I will mention. There is one man taken prisoner by the troops that came into Far West and one of the men took his gun and stuck him on the head and killed him. I mention this that you may see what the troops were. No Sir, the Mormons have made all the exertions that they could to have their abuse taken notice of, but not the first thing can they get done. I could mention numerous abuses such as whipping, tying ropes to their heels and putting them into wells, and making them deny Joseph Smith, tar blacking them and most all ways to torment them. There have been petitions sent to the legislature and they quarrel about it and then they dropped it. The Mormons do all calculate to leave the state as fast as they can get away. But what the final end will be, I am not able to say. I would not have you think that all the Mormons have done is exactly right but when men are pushed as the Mormons were, they will do almost anything to save their lives and the lives of their families. So sir, I do not believe that we should have had any difficulty had they not been afraid that the Mormons would have carried the election next year.

There is not a Mormon in this church that has had a better chance to know the minds of the leading men than I have, and I do know that they would let the Missourians alone had they been let alone.

This letter has been written to tell you the persecution as near as I could. There is much more that I could write but have not time now. Perhaps there may be mistakes, but I have not the time to copy it and you must get the best sense of it that you can. Now sir, you ask, you and every republican in these United States, how you would like to be brought up and compelled to lay down your arms. I think that you would feel the same as I did, that death would be a welcome messenger if you could have the privilege of fighting as long as life lasted and I ask not to live one moment but to get revenge.

Now I will let you know something of my situation and the situation of that country. I was placed in as good a situation as any man in this state to get a living, but now deprived of it all except my health and the faith I have in that God that has created and preserved me thus far through life. I expect to go from here as soon as the river is navigable. Where I shall stop I do not know as yet and I am of the opinion that all citizens of these United States that do not know how to pity Mormons will some time know it.

The country is the best country to get a living in that I have seen. A man that is industrious can get a good property in two or three years. It is two years last August that the Mormons settled in the county of Caldwell. It is 24 miles square and there are now

more potatoes for sale than in all the rest of Missouri south of the river, and corn can be bought for 10 cents per bushel in large quantities.

I must close this lengthy communication by sending my best respects to you and family and old neighbors, hoping that the time will come when I can see them again in this world or the one to come, and my father have done, so have I been willing to lay down my life for my liberty and I am willing to do it for my friend that is deprived of his liberty. I wish you would send word to my mother. Tell her that my family is all well and that they send their love to her and we are the same faith that we were when we left there. Say to Sister Clarrisa that I was glad to hear from her and from those that belong to the same faith and that I am not in a situation to advise them now but as soon as I can find out what is best for the eastern brethren, I will write to them. I and my companion send our best respects to her and all in that place.

Yours in good spirit and feeling to all that are republicans.
Indeed I go the whole hog for liberty or I die.

V. [Vinson] Knight

Spencer, Missouri February 8, 1839

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