

Kansas City Daily Journal

Kansas City, Mo., Sunday, June 12, 1881

MORMONISM

The Settlement of the Peculiar People in Jackson County.

AND SUBSEQUENT EXPULSION.

Gen. Doniphan's Recollections of the Troubles of that Early Time.

There is probably no man in Western Missouri who is better acquainted with the various causes of the difficulties between the citizens of Jackson and Caldwell counties and the Mormons during the years of 1833 and 1838 than Gen. Alexander W. Doniphan, then a resident of Clay county, but now of Richmond, Ray county, Mo., and there is, perhaps, no one who took such an active part in the events of those years who can now look back and relate the history of those troubles as dispassionately as he can. In view of these facts a representative of the JOURNAL called upon Gen. Doniphan at his rooms at the Hudgins' house at Richmond, for the purpose of interviewing him upon the subject. The general, after learning the object of the visit, seemed very willing to communicate all he knew in regard to the history of the Mormon troubles, and after a few introductory remarks, related the following:

"I came to Missouri in 1830, and located in Lexington, where I lived until April, 1833, when I removed to Liberty, Clay county. The Mormons came to Jackson county in 1830, and I met Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer and Christian Whitmer, three of the Elders, in Independence, during the spring of 1831. Peter Whitmer was a tailor and I employed him to make me a suit of clothes."

"What kind of people were the Mormons?"

"They were northern people, who, on account of their declining to own slaves and their denunciation of the system of slavery, were termed "free soilers." The majority of them were intelligent, industrious and law abiding citizens, but there were some ignorant, simple minded fanatics among them, whom the prophet said would steal. Soon after they came to Jackson county

they established a newspaper at Independence called the Morning and Evening Star, edited by W. W. Phelps, in which they published their peculiar tenets and pretended revelations in which they set forth that they had been sent to Jackson county by divine Providence and that they, as a church were to

POSSESS THE WHOLE OF THE COUNTRY,

which then embraced what is now Jackson, Cass and Bates counties. These assumptions were evidently made use of for the purpose of exciting the jealousy of persons of other religious denominations and the more ignorant portions of the community. This of course caused hard feelings between them and the people of the county, but I think the real objections to the Mormons were their denunciation of slavery, and the objections slave holders had to having so large a settlement of anti-slavery people in their midst, and also to their acquiring such a large amount of land, which then belonged to the government, and subject to pre-emption. From these and other causes a very bitter feeling was engendered between the Mormons and citizens which culminated in the month of July, 1833, when a public meeting was held at the court house in Independence, at which it was resolved to tear down the Mormon printing establishment, which resolve was immediately carried out. The mob also committed numerous other outrages, the most brutal of which was the

TARRING AND FEATHERING

of Bishop Partridge. I can't positively state who were the leaders of the mob, but it was participated in by a large number of the leading citizens of the county. The Mormons made but little if any resistance, but submitted to

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the inevitable, and agreed not to establish another paper, and there was an apparent tranquillity existing until about the first of the following November when, from imprudent conduct upon both sides, both Mormons and Gentiles -- as the citizens were then called by the Mormons -- seemed to arm themselves as if expecting a collision. The first clash of arms took place at Wilson's store on the Big Blue, about four miles east of Westport, about the third or fourth day of November, which resulted in several persons being killed upon both sides and several others wounded."

"In a few days after this the citizens organized and determined upon ejecting the Mormons from the county which soon after was done. During the ejection a great many outrages were perpetrated and the Mormons were compelled to leave almost everything they possessed behind them and it was only by

A HURRIED FLIGHT

that they saved their lives. As it was, quite a number were killed on both sides. The majority of the Mormons, after being driven from Jackson county, went to Clay county, where they were received and provided for as well as was possible by the citizens. The Mormons remained in Clay county until 1836, in an unorganized community, when it was agreed between them and the citizens of Clay and Ray counties that if they (the Mormons) would buy out a few citizens then inhabiting what is now Caldwell county, then a part of Ray county, the balance of the land being public, they could enter it at their leisure and we would urge the legislature to create a county for them, which was done at the session of the legislature of 1836-37."

"I was a member of the legislature and drew the bill organizing Caldwell county for the Mormons exclusively, and the offices of the county were given to their people. The new county filled up very rapidly and they made great progress in agricultural and other improvements. They continued to live prosperously and tranquilly until the summer of 1838, when Joseph Smith came out

from Ohio and soon after they commenced forming a settlement in Davis county, which, under their agreement, they had no right to do. This occasioned difficulties with the citizens of Davis county, and in September, 1838, a large number of citizens of Davis and adjoining counties collected with arms in the Mormon settlement called

'ADAM-ON-DI-AHMAN,'

in Davis county. The Mormons also gathered at the same point, and I, being at that time brigadier-general of the western division of Missouri, was sent by Gov. Boggs with a regiment of Clay county militia to prevent a collision, which, after being there one week, I was able to do, and left them apparently harmonious, the Mormons agreeing that they would return to Caldwell county as soon as they could take care of their crops, etc."

"About one month after this new difficulties arose between the citizens and Mormons, from what causes I never knew, which culminated in the Mormons burning and sacking the Gentile towns of Millport and Gallatin, then very small villages. A few days after this a battle took place on the line between Caldwell and Ray counties between the Mormons, under the command of Capt. Patton, and the citizens of Ray county, under command of Capt. Bogard, in which two Ray county citizens and several Mormons, including Capt. Patton, were killed. The place where the battle occurred is still known as

'BOGARD'S BATTLE GROUND.'

"Gen. Atchison, who was afterwards United States senator, was then major-general of Northwest Missouri, and ordered me to raise a regiment of militia from Clay, Clinton and Platte counties. I did so, and proceeded at once to the battle ground, and the next day I received an order from Gov. Boggs to take command of all the forces and remain in Ray county until the arrival of Gen. Clark with the state troops. Being satisfied that the governor had over-estimated the number of Mormons, I went on to Far West, county seat of Caldwell county,

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where all the Mormon forces were assembled. I sent for Judge King, of the circuit court, to come to my camp, and at that juncture Gen. S. D. Lucas, of Jackson county, arrived with a small number of men sent out by the governor. I opened negotiations with the Mormons by going up to their lines in person, and when Judge King came out I consulted with him, and upon his advice the Mormons gave up their arms and turned over to me such men as had violated the laws of the land, and those upon the other side who had done the same were arrested upon warrants issued by Judge King. It has been said that in the treaty I made with the Mormons I stipulated that

THEY MUST LEAVE THE STATE,

under penalty of annihilation if they refused to do so. This is utterly untrue as I made no such stipulation. It is true, however, that in an order to me and other officers Gov. Boggs used the expression 'that the Mormons leave the state or be exterminated,' whereas this order was entirely illegal. I paid no attention to it. In my report to Gov. Boggs I stated to him that I had disregarded that part of his order, as the age of extermination was over, and if I attempted to remove them to some other state it would cause additional trouble. The Mormons commenced immediately after this to move to Nauvoo, Ill., and I know nothing further about them. While the Mormons resided in Clay county, they were a peaceable, sober, industrious and law-abiding people, and during their stay with us not one was ever accused of a crime of any kind."

Gen. Doniphan is now in his 73d year, but is still hale and hearty. He is a man of fine appearance and intellect, and is well known and highly respected all over the state. He has resided in Richmond during the past several years. His statements as given above may be relied upon as strictly the truth in every particular. There are a few old citizens still living near Independence who were in this county during the troubles of 1833, whose statements will be given in the near future.

Note 1: The text of this interview was reprinted in various RLDS publications and was eventually added to the official RLDS Church History, vol. 4, pages 360-62

Note 2: For more on General Doniphan see Roger Launius' 1997 Alexander William Doniphan: Portrait of a Missouri Moderate.

The Kirksville, Missouri Weekly Graphic, September 28, 1883 featured a similar Doniphan interview, and the Lamoni, Iowa Saint's Herald, August 2, 1884 published a brief report of Reorganized LDS leaders meeting with the General.

Mormon Historian George A. Smith had many laudatory things to say about Doniphan (then visiting the Utah Saints) in his discourse of May 24, 1874, which was published in the Deseret Evening News, June 13, 1874.