

## Preface

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A “Mormon mountain man” is in many ways a contradiction in terms. Free-spirited explorers like Jim Bridger, William Ashley, Jedediah Smith, and others were often unchurched, single, buckskin-clad pioneers. Although William Adams Hickman was a trusted member of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), husband to ten plural wives, including an Indian squaw, father to thirty-five children, and one of Utah territory's earliest lawmen, he was also an independent, rough, undisciplined mountain man and outlaw. As much at home in his trading post near Fort Bridger as in his more comfortable house in the Salt Lake Valley, and responsible for more deaths than lives saved, Hickman led an enigmatic eventful life.

There was never a time during Bill Hickman's western experience that stories often exaggerated of his usually “notorious” exploits were not related in homes throughout the Salt Lake valley and elsewhere. His sixty-eight years took him from Mormonism's beginnings to its periods of isolation and adjustment during the 1850,s and 1870's. He died in 1883 a non-Mormon because of an excommunication he considered unwarranted. Hickman's loyalty to the Mormon church and its leaders continued until 1863, thirteen years after his arrival in the Great Salt Lake Valley, when he accepted employment with the United States government. Earlier, he had served his church as one of the most valuable, effective Mormon guerrillas harassing federal troops during the 1856-58 Utah War. But after he took a position as a federal Indian guide, Mormon church leaders viewed him as a renegade church “spy,” no longer worthy of their support and friendship.

Excerpts from *Wild Bill Hickman and the Mormon Frontier* by H.A. Hilton

<sup>1</sup> For the last twenty-four years of his life Bill Hickman carried a bullet lodged in his thigh, leaving him a partial cripple with a “shuffling gait,” unable to haul freight, ride a horse without pain, or earn sufficient money to care for his large polygamous family. During these last years he suffered greatly. Mercifully, the pain ended with his death in 1883. Poverty, coupled with disgrace, stalked him to the end. Far from Utah;s populated centers Hickman found solace in the wilds of central Wyoming, a confirmed addict of the alcohol and drugs he took to alleviate his pain and perhaps to bolster his wounded ego. He died fifteen years after the railroad tied America together by ribbons of steel, altering America in ways he could scarcely comprehend.

<sup>2</sup> Bill's father gave him a nearby tract of prairie and timber land in October 1832 and told him to go to work. He built a house, fenced his farm, and 320 acres with good buildings.

<sup>3</sup> Missouri governor Lillburn W. Bogg's “extermination order” against the Mormons that the Mormons be forced to leave the state or be exterminated in October 1838 convinced the Hickmans (Bill and Bernetta) they could no longer delay joining the persecuted sect. Their baptism probably took place in the Middle Fork of the Salt River adjacent to their farm.

<sup>4</sup> In the spring of 1839, Bill Hickman sold his 320 acre farm for “a low figure” to his brother Josiah and to Richard W. Shipp and left for the gathering place of the Mormons. He placed his wife and four children in a buckboard wagon filled with less than adequate supplies and headed east along the same Missouri-Illinois road which had first brought the Mormons into their lives. They headed toward

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1 Chapter 1 pg1 The Call of Mormonism

2 Chapter 1 pg 6

3 Chapter 1 pg 7

4 Chapter 2 pg 1 To Follow the Prophet

the Nauvoo area where they would live for one year before “moving our into the country” in Adams County, Illinois.

Hickman and his young family arrived in Nauvoo in late April 1839. On 6 May, Hickman met Joseph Smith, Jr., who ordered Bill ordained to the Council of Seventy the same day. On 12 May, the Council of Seventy delivered to William Adams Hickman a letter of recommendation. A hunter since his youth and handy with a gun, Hickman seemed a natural choice to be one of the bodyguards of the prophet Joseph. A similar call was extended to Hosea Stout, Orrin Porter Rockwell, and Lot Smith, all of whom had grown up on the frontier.

After being introduced in Nauvoo, Bill decided to settle in Lee County, Iowa, directly across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo. He purchased land adjacent to the river in Nashville, (later named Galland), six miles below Fort Madison, the county seat.

<sup>5</sup> On 5 June 1844, word reached Nauvoo that Joseph Smith had been arrested in Quincy. Early the following morning Hosea Stout, Tarleton Lewis, Bill Hickman, and four others started in a skiff from the Nauvoo landing for Quincy to rescue their prophet. A heavy headwind delayed them, and they arrived at their destination in the evening, after Smith had already left for Nauvoo in the company of two officers.

Three weeks later, on 27 June, Smith and his older brother Hyrum were murdered at Carthage Jail, Illinois. Hickman was in Huntsville, Missouri, with Bernetta, who was awaiting the birth of their seventh child at her parents home in Huntsville. As soon as the news of the prophet's death reached Huntsville, Bill returned to Nauvoo, anxious to be of assistance. He found that Joseph's death had thrown the Saints into turmoil...

<sup>6</sup> That Brigham Young succeeded in leading the main body of the church to Utah can partly be attributed to the men he chose to assist him. Young assigned Hickman to oversee covert spying activities, to “subdue” the enemies of the church, and to serve as his chief bodyguard. Hickman and others in a tightly knit group served Smith in Nauvoo and Young in Winter Quarters (Florence, Nebraska), Council Bluffs (Kanesville, Iowa), and crossing the Great Plains. Then, in the Great Salt Lake Valley, the same group acted as the first lawmen, serving Young whenever trouble erupted, whether with Indians, outlaws, or Gentiles. From 1850 to 1853, they shared the duties of government with Young's secret political organization, the Council of Fifty. Their skills contributed to the survival of the entire body of Mormons, and Gentiles picturesquely labeled Young's strong-arm lawmen “Destroying angels” and “Blood Avengers.” In 1860 British explorer Richard Burton, writing of this group, called them “desperadoes.” He identified a triumvirate of Ephraim Hanks, Orrin Porter Rockwell, and Bill Hickman, whom he termed “the leaders of the Danites.”

<sup>7</sup> To the end of his life, Hickman believed that in every instance of violence directed toward non-Mormons he had done the right thing not to submit to persecution but to fight back.

Pressures on the Saints in Nauvoo continued to build in the wake of the Smith murders. Antagonists wanted the Mormons to leave the state and enumerated the crimes of the Mormon people. The practice of polygamy was largely secret, but rumors persisted. Minerva Wade, who later became Bill's third wife, wrote of the period:

To teach polygamy openly in Nauvoo was forbidden yet at the same time it was public knowledge among the Saints. I know polygamy was preached by Joseph Smith. I heard Ira Hatch say the Prophet had a revelation that would cost him his life when it was made known. The Prophet

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5 Chapter 2 pg 11

6 Chapter 2 pg 12

7 Chapter 2 pg 13

said, "It must come forth no matter what it costs me." There was so much hatred already that it was not preached public for fear of mob violence but Joseph Smith had wives sealed to him besides Emma: Eliza R. Snow, Destimony Fuller, Lucy Walker were all well-known to me. Lucy Smith Walker said the Prophet said if she would live with him as a wife she would have a son that would be a great man but he did not urge her knowing the persecution that would follow. After the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, these girls were all working at the Nauvoo Mansion, a big hotel. Lucy Walker was waiting on table. After the martyrdom Heber C. Kimball, one of the Twelve Apostles, was sent to tell the girls who had been sealed to Joseph Smith, not to leave but to choose among the Twelve apostles and remain with the Church. He told her she had a right to make her choice. He had been so kind and sympathetic that she decided he would be a good husband and there and then promised to marry him which she did. She regretted she had not complied with Joseph Smith's request he had been killed and she had no offspring from him so she made up her mind such a thing should not happen again and she had a child by Heber C. Kimball in polygamy at Nauvoo. The babe was kept in hiding. My mother nursed it Lucy had to appear in society. The baby died at Winter Quarters when near a year old. Parley P. Pratt took other wives before Joseph Smith died named Malinda Wood and Huldah frost. The girls used to go and see the immigrants come on the river and the boats., after unloading the boats passed Nauvoo going further up the river with cargo.

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there was a last such to participate in the ceremonies in the Nauvoo temple, where Bill and Bernetta received their "endowments" on 30 January, at which time Bill was also married to a second wife, Sarah Luce. Almost nothing is known of Sarah beyond what appeared in Brigham's Destroying angel, although her three brothers played a prominent role in Bill's life as members of his "gang."

As part of these Nauvoo temple endowment rituals Hickman promised to avenge the blood of Joseph Smith. Mormon apostle Heber C. Kimball recorded in his diary on 21 December 1845 that "I have covenanted, and never will rest nor my posterity after me until those men who killed Joseph & Hyrum have been wiped out of the earth." As Hickman himself later explained to his daughter Katharine, "After the assassination of that great and good man Joseph Smith the Prophet of God, I took a solemn Oath to stand up against all oppositions that might stand at the head of Gods Kingdom." In many ways, Hickman's future activities would reflect his understanding of what he believed to be a sacred oath.

According to Hickman, Sarah Luce traveled to the Salt Lake Valley in 1848 with her father, who is not identified by name. Sarah may have become romantically involved with one of the other pioneers because when Hickman arrived in the valley in 1849 he found a newborn son a few days old. He says he never had children by Sarah yet later writes boastfully, "I had children by them all." (This is one of the contradictions in Brigham's Destroying Angel.) Sarah apparently never lived with Bill in the valley, although her son was raised under the name Hickman to cover her "indiscretion".

More to come please check back...