

After Sutter's Mill: The Life of Henry Bigler, 1848–1900

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HENRY WILLIAM BIGLER marched west with the Mormon Battalion during the Mexican War (1846–47) and by January 1848 was an employee of Johann Sutter, constructing a saw mill on the American River northeast of Sacramento, California. On 24 January, Bigler noted in his journal that “some kind of mettle was found [which] looks like goald” (Gudde 1962, viii; Extracts, 1932, 95). While he almost certainly had no idea of the significance of James Marshall’s find, Henry Bigler was a conscientious diarist, and his entry later earned him a place in the history of the Gold Rush. In 1848 Henry rejoined the Latter-day Saints in the Great Salt Lake Valley and lived another fifty-two years, participating in and recording his observations of many significant local and regional activities.

Between 1848 and his death in 1900, Henry William Bigler worked as a gold miner, a Mormon missionary to the Sandwich Islands, a farmer and devoted family man, and, for over twenty years, as an ordinance worker in the St. George Temple. His extant diaries and day books not only chronicle obviously noteworthy events but provide an almost day-to-day narrative of his life. This study considers the period from the months immediately following the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill until his death over a half-century later.

Upon his arrival in Salt Lake City Henry Bigler took up a temporary residence with his sister, Emeline. Her husband, John W. Hess, had returned east on the Mormon Trail to assist his mother in crossing the Plains (Autobiography, 2 Nov. 1845; Diary, 28 May 1848; Hess 1931; Jenson 1:463). Henry Bigler found the inhabitants of Salt Lake City busily at work building roads, cutting timber, constructing adobes, and preparing to build permanent homes. Pleasantly surprised that a city lot had been reserved for him, he soon erected a small, one-room house on the site (Gudde 1962, 129–31). After having been

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a vagabond for about three years, Bigler now looked forward to settling down among his people in the Great Basin. He was over thirty years old and as yet had not had the opportunity to marry and begin a family.

Then at the close of the October 1849 General Conference, Brigham Young instructed John Smith, the elderly uncle of Joseph Smith, Jr., to send someone to California to mine gold for him so that he could spend his declining years in comfort. Smith chose Henry Bigler. For Bigler this was "an unlooked for request," one which he found most disagreeable. Nevertheless, within a few days he was "[m]akeing preparations to get gold for Father John Smith . . . it was with Considerable struggle with my feelings that I consented to go." This so-called gold mission was a difficult undertaking for Henry Bigler, and his distaste for it was no doubt intensified when several of the Saints, apparently unaware that he had been called to the gold fields, accused him of being a "Jack Mormon" for disregarding Brigham Young's counsel for Church members to stay in Salt Lake City (Journal, 8 Oct. 1849).

Just prior to his departure Henry Bigler recorded, "Last night I dreamed I was not going to the mines but was on my way to the Pacific Islands on a mission to preach the Gospel" (Diary, 16 Oct. 1849).¹ He would be called to just such a mission less than one year later. By September 1850 Bigler and other Mormons were mining for gold at Slap Jack Bar on the Middle Fork of the American River, but with little success. At the month's end Charles Coulson Rich, an apostle and the Church's representative on the West Coast, visited them. He had come to call several of the miners, including Henry Bigler, on proselyting missions to the Sandwich Islands. Bigler's dream of the previous year was about to be fulfilled. While he had accepted the earlier call to assist Father Smith with mixed emotions, he welcomed this assignment. In truth, most of the men were happy to go since digging gold was back-breaking work, and they had also experienced much sickness in recent months. "The turn of things was not looked for," wrote Henry Bigler, "[but] all felt it was for our best good" (*Union*, 13). Apparently Charles C. Rich felt that the men could preach the gospel and also live more inexpensively in Hawaii than in the gold fields (Journal, 25 Sept. 1850). Obviously a quest to bring additional converts to the religion would outweigh the original concerns of their call to California. Bigler's seldom-failing optimism and willingness to serve the cause was characteristic of many mid-nineteenth century Mormons.

Within a month Bigler and nine associates had left Slap Jack Bar to preach Mormonism in Hawaii: including Hiram Clark, Thomas Whittle, George Q. Cannon, James Keeler, Hiram Blackwell, James Hawkins, William Farrer, John Dixon, and Thomas Morris (Cannon 1879, 11). In late November they secured passage aboard the *Imaum of Muscat*, a British vessel bound for the Orient with an intermediate stop at Honolulu. They were required to furnish their own bedding, while meals, supposedly from the captain's mess, were pro-

¹ According to the minutes of the 30th Quorum of Seventies (LDS Archives), Bigler volunteered for missionary service to Hawaii on 23 December 1848. The thought of a Sandwich Islands mission must have been on his mind.

vided. The food was a source of constant complaints for the entire voyage of nearly four weeks, during which many of the missionaries were almost constantly seasick. Henry Bigler reported that immediately after clearing Hawaiian customs at Oahu, he and several others hurried to a "temperance Hotel" to partake of refreshments in celebration of their safe arrival (Cannon 1879, 4-7; *Union*, 15-16). After securing adequate lodging in Honolulu, the missionaries climbed a "convenient mountain" where they constructed a crude altar, sang hymns, and dedicated the Sandwich Islands for the preaching of the gospel. As George Q. Cannon, one of Bigler's companions, recalled: "Having thus dedicated the land and ourselves to the Lord, one of the Elders spoke in tongues and uttered many comforting promises, and another interpreted. The spirit of the Lord rested powerfully upon us, and we were filled with exceeding great joy . . . The sun was sinking low in the heavens when we got through" (1879, 9).

Two days later companions were paired and assigned areas of labor. Hiram Clark, who had been called as mission president, chose Thomas Whittle as his partner. Since Honolulu was considered the centerpoint of the islands—largely due to the size of its white population—Clark and Whittle stayed there. Four of the remaining elders were assigned to preside over the various remaining islands. Henry Bigler was selected to direct proselyting activities on Molokai. Presiding elders drew lots to choose their companions. Bigler drew Thomas Morris; but before the two men could leave for their assignment, President Clark advised Morris to stay at Honolulu to work, probably because Morris was short of funds. As a consequence, Bigler went with George Q. Cannon and James Keeler to labor on Maui (Journal, 15 Dec. 1850; Cannon 1879, 10-11; *Union*, 16).

At Lahaina, the principle town on Maui, the three Mormon elders looked for opportunities to spread their message. On 20 December they contacted the governor of the island, a "half-white" named James Young whose father had been one of the first Americans to settle among the Hawaiians. They boldly asked to preach in the royal palace, at the time unoccupied. Young promised to check into the possibility but never gave them a firm answer and was very evasive. George Q. Cannon thought that the governor "dare[d] not to grant us any favors" (1879, 13-14) and told the missionaries it would be a "hard matter" to convert the natives (Journal, 20 Dec. 1850). Then they sought and obtained permission from a Reverend Mr. Townsend Elijah Taylor, pastor of the Bethel Chapel at Lahaina, to hold meetings in their facility. Three days before Christmas 1850, Henry Bigler preached the first Mormon sermon delivered on Maui to a congregation of white residents and seamen. Bigler stated that he was chosen because "I was the oldest [and] must lead out." While the text of his remarks was not recorded, he and his companions were unable to generate any interest among the Americans on the island. "There was not a great many white folks living at Lahaina," Henry Bigler recollected, "and the few who did [reside there] did not seem to take an interest in our preaching." In fact, they were asked *not* to preach again (Journal, 22 Dec. 1850; *Union*, 17; Cannon 1879, 14).

Bigler, Cannon, and Keeler soon began to question the Anglo orientation which the Mormon missionaries had all initially followed. They now wondered whether they should also preach to the natives. "It [was] true that we had not been particularly told to preach to the natives of these islands," Cannon wrote, "but we were in their midst, [and] had full authority to declare unto them the message of salvation." Furthermore, the three men found it a "hopeless labor" trying to convert the local white population (1879, 14).

Reorienting their proselyting was not without its problems, however. Their most pressing concern was to learn the language. Not just on Maui but throughout the islands, the native peoples could not be taught until the Hawaiian language had been mastered. Some of the elders met the challenge head on, but for others it was simply too much. Bigler, Cannon, and Keeler each appear to have studied hard and, to varying degrees, experienced success. Cannon seemed to have a particular gift for the task. He reported that one evening, while attempting to converse with some natives, he felt an "uncommonly great desire" to understand them. Then, all at once, he experienced a "peculiar sensation" in his ears. He jumped up from his seat and excitedly told Henry Bigler and James Keeler what had just happened. They both expressed the belief that Cannon had received the divine gift of interpretation. From then on he could understand what the natives were saying and became so skilled in the language that he was later assigned to translate the Book of Mormon into Hawaiian (Cannon 1879, 15, 58-61; *Union*, 26).

For others the ability did not come so easily, if at all. In a letter to Henry Bigler dated 1 December 1851, Cannon, then laboring on another island, told him of James Hawkins's difficulties. Hawkins was reportedly very discouraged because he could not learn the language and was having little success proselyting. In George Cannon's opinion, Hawkins should forsake English entirely and communicate only in Hawaiian (Cannon to Bigler and Farrer, 1 Dec. 1851).

For Henry Bigler, Hawaiian did not come without great effort, but he kept struggling until he conquered it. In an 1852 letter to Elder William Farrer, another Mormon missionary in the islands, Bigler mentioned that "I am increasing in the language thank the Lord." But over a year later in a journal entry he lamented, "I never can speak fluently and . . . I cannot understand readily what a native sayes when speaking." Bigler then wrote, "I have wanted this language so bad some times that I could not rest and when a lone to give vent to my feelings it would seam as if my heart strings would burst" (Bigler to Farrer, 26 June 1852; *Journal*, 28 Aug. 1853).

Many of the elders, including Bigler, also experienced problems in adapting to the Hawaiian culture and diet. In February 1851 Bigler mentioned that Hiram Blackwell was intent upon returning home to Utah. In Blackwell's opinion, the natives were "so low and degraded" that it was not worthwhile to spend time preaching to them. However, Bigler had told him that he felt a "fair trial" had not yet been made (*Journal*, 2 Feb. 1851). Bigler believed that "the Hawaiian race was once a favored people of the Lord and must have had the law of Moses and observed its teachings but through transgression they

fell into darkness, error, and superstition, as regards the true God, . . . and as time rolled on the greater became their ignorance, until at last they became a wild and savage nation" (*Union*, 23).

The native foods were also a challenge. In August 1853, he chose to go hungry as he had "a great many times on these islands" rather than partake of boiled fish. He found it particularly difficult to eat shark, although he thought "flying fish" palatable if roasted — but never in the morning! The traditional dish of *poi*, a paste made from taro, if clean, was "about as good eating as I all most wish for." But he did the best that he could since, in his own words, "I hate like the duce to go hungry" (*Journal*, 18 Aug. 1853).

By mid-April 1851 half of the original missionaries had left Hawaii. Those who remained included Cannon, Keeler, Hawkins, Farrer, and Bigler. Even Hiram Clark, the mission president, had left seeking more success in the Marquesas Islands. Clark had tried to persuade the others to accompany him, but seeing no "propriety" in his proposal, they chose to stay where they had been sent to labor. Concerned, Bigler and his remaining brethren directed a letter to Brigham Young requesting additional assistance. Nine new elders were called to the Hawaiian mission at the Church's general conference of October 1852 and arrived at Honolulu four months later (*Union*, 27–30).

Now the greatest stumbling block to the Church's growth in the islands was the mounting opposition of other denominations. Between the summer of 1851 and February 1853, Cannon and Bigler both recorded confrontations with representatives of other churches. Cannon's proselyting activities displeased a Presbyterian minister at Wailuku on the eastern shore of Maui who was determined to stop the Latter-day Saint encroachment. To Cannon's agitation, he publicly attacked Joseph Smith and the heresies of the Mormons in a "most abusive discourse." "My first impulse," wrote the youthful missionary, "was to jump [up] and tell the people he had told them a pack of falsehoods." Instead he privately confronted his adversary after the service. They discussed the "falsehoods" for half an hour, but the recantation which Cannon sought was never offered (Cannon 1879, 30).

In October 1852 Henry Bigler recorded confrontations with a Calvinist minister and a Catholic priest. According to Bigler's account, the priest had initially perceived the Mormon elders only as misguided individuals and had treated them with courtesy. The Calvinist, on the other hand, charged them outright with being emissaries of the devil. In what must have struck the missionaries as an interesting reversal of roles, Bigler and his companion found the priest attempting to convert *them* to Catholicism. But when that failed and the missionaries began to enjoy some success among the natives, the two clergymen joined forces to fight the Mormons (*Union*, 27–30).

When the promised new missionaries arrived early in 1853, Henry Bigler was appointed presiding elder on the island of Oahu where he spent the remainder of his first Hawaiian mission. During this time he worked hard at improving his language fluency, tried to strengthen the native converts to Mormonism, and fought the mounting opposition from other denominations and, occasionally, from government authorities. The nine new elders from Utah

had brought with them a copy of what would become, for mid-nineteenth century Mormons, both a blessing and a curse — a copy of the document which officially recognized the Church's practice of plural marriage. Although "Celestial Marriage," as faithful practitioners preferred to call it, had been introduced by Joseph Smith on a limited, and secretive, basis over ten years earlier, Brigham Young's formal recognition in October 1852 of the doctrine certainly provided the Hawaiian foes of Mormonism with additional firepower. The word spread rapidly. In mid-April 1853 Bigler observed that "The Rev. Mr. [John] Emerson [a Protestant clergyman on Oahu] had been preaching and telling the natives that it is a fact that the Mormons have got more wives than one." Ironically, Emerson's source was Henry Bigler! The elder was quite willing to defend the belief as a "sacred" law of God and made no attempt to downplay its practice in the Utah Territory. It was illegal in Hawaii, thanks to Protestant opposition to the earlier native customs and, according to Bigler, was accepted in principle by most of the native Saints (Journal, 17 April 1853).

The missionaries faced another problem during 1853 which was beyond anyone's ability to counter. Beginning about May and lasting until the end of the year, the Hawaiian Islands were devastated by an outbreak of smallpox, perhaps introduced by the passengers or crew of an incoming ship. Oahu was hardest hit, and Henry Bigler found himself in the middle of the epidemic. After a few isolated cases in May and June, the disease soon spread rapidly to the more distant areas of Oahu. Over 2,000 deaths ultimately resulted from the outbreak (Kuykendall 1933, 185; Kuykendall and Day 1948, 127; Judd 1966, 310-11). Bigler, then in Kahaluu, northeast of Honolulu, first mentioned smallpox on 12 July when some natives were afraid that he might be a carrier of the disease. The following week he was in the village of Puheemiki, which had suffered much from the epidemic. He reported several deaths there and many people who were ill. At about the same time he received a letter from William Farrer in Honolulu informing him that "the Smallpox [was] so bad that they had not been able to hold any meetings" (Journal, 12 July, 20-21 July 1853).

As the outbreak spread, Bigler expressed concern that Oahu might soon become depopulated. His sympathy for the victims was evident in a 6 August 1853 entry: "I went to see Sister Dennis who is very low with the small pox and I never seen any person in all my life hardly that I felt so sorry for as I did hur. . . . I am afraid she never will recover she was a awful sight to look at and my verry soul was filled with pity for hur" (Journal, 6 Aug., 24 Aug. 1853; Kuykendall and Day 1948, 74). When called upon to bless a sick child, Bigler wrote: "I was called in to look at a sick boy with the small pox this exceeded anything I have seen yet the stench was allmost intolerable and he seamed to be a perfect mass of corruption from head to foot. Poor little fellow how I felt for him [I] told his father . . . to nursh [nourish] him well with ginger tea and keep him from the wind and from drinking cold water (Journal, 2 Sept. 1853).

At first, Bigler had been afraid of the disease and "dreaded to go near where it was," but he soon overcame his apprehensions and actively worked to

aid the afflicted. Though he was disturbed by the suffering of the Hawaiian Church members, he reaffirmed his devout faith when he wrote of the dead and dying, "Perhaps they are taken for a wise purpose in the Lord" (Journal, 16 Nov. 1857).

In February 1854 the original missionary party, including Bigler, was instructed to prepare to return home soon. Official word came from Brigham Young the following April (Journal, 20 Feb. 1854; Young to Missionaries, 1 April 1854). For Henry Bigler, his first mission to the Sandwich Islands had been very much of a growing experience. After three and a half years in Hawaii he apparently had a solid grasp of the language and customs of the people, had made some life-long friendships with men who would continue to play a part in his later years, and had demonstrated time and again his religious dedication. Contrary to the expectations of those elders who had earlier left their Hawaiian missions, the gospel had established a firm foothold in the islands.

The homeward-bound missionaries landed at San Francisco on 12 August 1854. Bigler worked for several months in the Santa Cruz area to outfit himself for the rest of the journey. In the spring of 1855 he returned to Salt Lake City through the Mormon settlement at San Bernardino and took up residence in Farmington near John and Emeline Hess. On 18 November he married Cynthia Jane Whipple, whose family he had met during the previous years while in California. The bridegroom was forty, the bride twenty. With his new wife and a milch cow, a gift from his father, Bigler began to farm. In October 1856, a daughter, Elizabeth Jane, was born to the Biglers (Gudde 1962, 133). Then only four months later, Bigler's long-delayed domestic life was to be interrupted by yet another summons to Church duty. On his way to Salt Lake City in February 1857, he happened to meet Brigham Young who told him to "prepare for another mission to the Sandwich Islands" and requested that he submit a list of all others "whome I knew had the language" (Journal, 28 Feb. 1857). Two months later at April conference eleven missionaries, including veterans Bigler, William Farrer, James Hawkins, and John Woodbury, were called to Hawaii. They were supposed to leave by the end of the month, but their departure was delayed until mid-May. Once again it was a heart-wrenching separation for Henry Bigler, no doubt magnified by leaving behind his wife and baby. As he was about to go, Bigler blessed his family and gave them over the God's care, "not knowing when I would see them again perhaps not for several years." Although he felt this mission to be a "hard trial," Henry Bigler was, as usual, "willing to do anything the Lord required . . . however great the cross mite be" (Journal, 14 May 1857).

The party of elders went first to Carson Valley, Nevada, then worked in northern California to earn passage to Hawaii. While in California Bigler stayed with his wife's uncle, Eli Whipple, and had an interesting discussion with Mrs. Whipple, "who has been a Sister in the Church." She asked him if his wife, Cynthia Jane, was "willing for [him] to have another wife." When Bigler responded affirmatively, Mrs. Whipple proceeded to offer her views on plural marriage. "She said it was polygamy that had destroyed all the mor-

monism she had," and that she wished to hear no more of it. Henry Bigler told her that if she would "throw off all prejudice" regarding the doctrine and then humbly pray that she would learn it was a correct principle (Journal, 23 July 1857). A journal entry the following year (24 March 1858) reported that Sister Whipple had mended her ways and was now supportive of the Church once more. While willing to defend the practice of plural marriage, Bigler never practiced it himself.

The Mormons sailed for Hawaii in August 1857. The cold and damp gave Bigler an ear infection which lasted for several weeks and appears to have left him partially deaf. The ship dropped anchor in the Honolulu harbor 4 September, and Bigler commenced his second mission to the Sandwich Islands. Things were not as he remembered, however. "Everything seems dead and dieing," he wrote. "My soul was pained to hear the Elders all testify that there was no Saints except here and there" (Journal, 13 Sept. 1857).² Following a conference at Honolulu in late September Bigler reported that "the work on this island is at a low ebb." The next month at a gathering of Mormon elders, Mormon membership was reported as 3,192. In October 1853, the estimate had been near 3,000. An 1853 census of full- or part-Hawaiians showed 2,778 who gave Mormonism as their religious preference (Journal, 13 Sept. 1857; Schmitt 1973, 43). During this same meeting, Bigler was sustained by his associates as mission president.

He does not comment on the call; but at a preaching meeting he conducted in October, he felt as if he were "preaching to the walls" due to the lack of interest (Journal, 4 Oct. 1857). Brigham Young must have been having similar doubts about the growth of the Church in the Sandwich Islands. In a September letter to Silas Smith, Bigler's predecessor, Young observed:

The reports . . . have for a number of years agreed in one thing, that is; that the majority of the Saints on those Islands have either been dead or dying Spiritually . . . Having taken the matter into consideration I think it best for all of the Elders (with one or two exceptions) to come home. . . .

You had better wind up the whole of your business and return with most of the Elders as soon as possible (Young 4 Sept. 1857; Journal, 20 Nov. 1857).

Bigler immediately forwarded a copy of these instructions to all Mormon missionaries in the Hawaiian Islands along with his advice to be prepared to move upon further notice.

By the following spring most of the missionaries had left the islands, and only Bigler and a few companions were left. Another letter from President Young, dated 4 February 1858, arrived in mid-April advising the remaining elders of conditions in Utah and urging their hasty return: "You are all, without regard as to *when* you were sent, counselled to start for home as speedily as you can wind up your affairs and obtain passage money, not even leaving

² By the mid-1850s Protestant and Catholic missionary groups were being similarly rebuffed as the natives joined with more worldly settlers in intemperance, sexual vices, and other social forms of backsliding. According to one student of the subject, "The . . . retreat [from strict, Puritanical behavior] became a route in the fifties . . . The apparent victory for frivolity was complete by the late sixties and early seventies" (Daws 1967, 34).

one Elder who has been sent there . . . Try to inform br[other] Alvares Hanks and the Elders in Australia . . . that they are all recalled" (see also Journal, 20 April 1858). He warned of the mounting threat of Johnston's Army, who, according to Young, intended to kill "every man, woman, and child" who would not renounce the religion. In an attempt to bolster the defenses of the Mormon kingdom in the Great Basin, Young not only recalled the missionaries to the Sandwich Islands and Australia, but also Latter-day Saint settlers from outside of Utah.

Nine days after he received Young's letter, Bigler wrote in his journal that all of the elders had secured passage on a vessel bound for California, though the only available space was in steerage. It was, wrote Bigler, "the horriblest, stinkingest place I ever was in. I had not been there 2 minutes before I was seasick." On two consecutive Sundays during the voyage, the missionaries were asked to preach. Henry Bigler was delighted and, on 9 May, observed that the people paid "good Attention" and that the following week they rendered "sincere thanks" for the services (Journal, 9 May, 16 May 1858). Regardless of whether the other passengers were truly interested in Mormonism or simply seeking a diversion from the monotony of the trip, the preaching lifted Bigler's spirits. They dropped anchor at San Francisco on 19 May 1858.

At the San Francisco post office, he picked up a letter from his wife who was living with her father. They had moved to Provo the first part of April as part of Brigham Young's strategy to move the Saints southward and, if necessary, lay waste to northern Utah when the federal troops approached. Cynthia Jane told Henry that the soldiers were at Fort Bridger and "they swear they will come in [to Salt Lake City]." The Church members expected to move again shortly and were said to be determined to leave their settlements "in ashes" if required (Journal, 9 May 1858). Such reports must have increased his anxiety, but Bigler again found it necessary to work in northern California to raise funds for the rest of his journey. He started on the last leg of his return trip in early September. The crisis with Johnston's army had passed, and Brigham Young approved the return of the exiles from northern Utah to their homes. When Henry Bigler was reunited with his family 27 October 1858, they were once again living in Farmington. "[I] found my wife and little family all well and glad to see me," he wrote, "everything appeared to be right side up" (Journal, 27 Oct. 1858; Gudde 1962, 133-34).

Between October 1858 and April 1869, Henry and Cynthia Jane Bigler had four more children. He recorded each birth, including the name and blessing, in his journal. In 1862, he blessed his newborn son, Henry Eugene, that as he grew to manhood he might "do much good in helping to build up the Kingdom of God that you might be an ornament in His kingdom and an honor to your parents." Three years later he similarly consecrated little Jacob Edwin that he might "grow up to manhood . . . [and] help build up the Kingdom of God on earth" (Journal, 3 Sept. 1862; 24 April 1865).

Bigler's most poignant record occurred in April 1869 when Cynthia Jane gave birth to a frail daughter, Emline Elvira. His blessing to her was a parent's pleading for divine intervention to spare his child's life. "O God my Eternal

Father I take this child in my arms to bless it . . . and I pray the[e] . . . that thou wilt bless it with thy holy spirit and with health that it may live to a good old age and not die that its life may be precious in thy sight that thou wilt not let the powers of Darkness destroy its tabernacle [tabernacle]." Despite this fervent plea, Bigler's small daughter died the following August (Journal, 23 April, 5 Aug. 1869).

The final stage of Henry Bigler's life, for which detailed documentation is available, commenced in 1877 when he became an ordinance worker in the St. George Temple. Since 1875 Bigler had held a similar assignment at the Endowment House in Salt Lake City. Then, in late October 1876 he noted that "President Young told me that he would like me to go work . . . in the St. George Temple ("Extracts," 1962, 143). Henry Bigler was willing. During much of this period he kept detailed day books of his activities. This assignment, which included some monetary compensation, was apparently in return for his years of selfless service to the Church. And, interestingly, several of his temple co-workers were former missionary associates from the 1850s in the Sandwich Islands.

The St. George Temple, dedicated 1 January 1877, was the only temple operating until the Logan Temple was completed in 1884. Thus for a number of years the St. George Temple was the center of Mormon religious activity. And Henry Bigler was a participant in and chronicler of that activity. Wilford Woodruff initially directed the ordinance work. Following Brigham Young's death in 1877, Woodruff assumed other assignments, and John D. T. McAllister was called to direct the temple. Official records as well as many individual journals all indicate that during these years Henry Bigler was very active as a temple worker.

Bigler took a regular role in the dramatized endowment ceremony, performed numerous baptisms for the dead, and was often listed as a witness to various temple ordinances for the living and proxy ordinances for the dead. Bigler notes:

- 30 October 1877 — I went to the Temple and witnessed 258 baptisms for the Dead.
- 20 November 1877 — Today I acted as proxy for Br[other] Aaron Benedict West, being baptized 56 times for his dead relatives.
- 5 March 1878 — Witness to baptisms for the dead . . . , 482 baptisms.
- 1 January 1880 — gave endowments today

Often Bigler's ordinance work was directed toward the salvation of his own relatives or former friends. On 9 May 1878, he acted as proxy in the endowment ceremony for Edward Conner, a deceased "friend of mine"; on 5 February 1882, he assisted some of his relatives who were "working in the Temple endowing their Dead"; and on 22 October 1889, "I was endowed for John A. Sutter [Johann Augustus Sutter]," his acquaintance from forty years earlier. He continued as an active ordinance worker in the St. George Temple for nearly a decade more.

In 1898, just two years before his death, Bigler was honored by the Society of California Pioneers during the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the gold

discovery at Sutter's Mill. Thanks to the efforts of historian John Shertzer Hittell, the four surviving members of James Marshall's work crew on that epic-making day were invited to San Francisco to participate in the gala commemoration. All of Henry Bigler's expenses were paid and George Q. Cannon generously furnished him with a new suit of clothes ("Extracts," 1962, 143).

This jubilee extravaganza climaxed a life seldom punctuated by such grandeur. The Bigler story was, for the most part, unspectacular. But, Erwin G. Gudde's closing summation that his "niche" in the pageant of the American West rested on the premise that he "accidentally" became the chronicler of certain significant events between 1846 and 1848 was misleading (1962, 135). Whether as a Mormon missionary to the Sandwich Islands, an ordinance worker in the St. George Temple, or a husband and father from a rural community in the Utah Territory, Henry William Bigler, the observer and recorder, made a contribution to Western American history.

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