

## PASSING OF THE OLDER GENERATION

### 1880s

#### Letter #97

By this time, Pleasant Plains has changed its name to Pleasanton because of a conflict with another Iowa town with the same name. After many years, Gracie Robinson (now, Grace Gurley) and Mollie start writing to each other regularly. Although the first letter in 1880 is the only one of Grace's to survive after eleven years, she has already written Mollie about Deborah (Rockwell) Morey's illness [See Letter #99, par. 2], an illness that began in 1877 or 1878. Nevertheless, Grace does not know about Mollie's six-year-old son whose name has special significance for the Gurleys. By this time, Grace is the mother of four girls: Angie, 7; Evelyn, 6; Julia, nearly 3; and Ida, the baby. Mollie, meantime, has borne four boys: Irvin Perry, 12; James, 9; Zenas, nearly 7; and Albert, 3.

The influence of Angeline (Works) Robinson on many of the girls who grew to womanhood in the Pleasant Plains area can hardly be exaggerated. Because she was often ill, Angeline needed a hired girl much of the time. Two of her first helpers were sisters, Adliza and Deborah Rockwell, her nieces. Adliza, who went with the Robinsons when they moved from Nauvoo to Greencastle, Pennsylvania, married at fifteen. Angeline then recruited Adliza's sister Deborah in Ohio before the Robinsons moved to Iowa. Deborah, too, married young. (Her husband, David Morey, always claimed he proposed marriage because Angeline Robinson overworked Deborah.) Angeline then took in her orphaned niece, Mollie Works, as a hired girl, and Mollie admitted she learned much from her aunt. Even after Mollie left for Illinois and Grace Robinson was old enough to help her mother, Angeline hired fourteen-year-old Annett Dennis [See Letters #23, par. 4 and #24, par. 14]. Annett's failure as a hired girl is a strong clue as to how strict Angeline Robinson was with the girls.

Angeline's Mormon faith was remarkable to Ebenezer even before he married her, and it did not falter through the difficult years migrating from Kirtland, Ohio, to Far West, Missouri, to Nauvoo, to Pennsylvania, and finally, Iowa. Once, when Mollie and Gracie excitedly anticipated Fourth of July celebrations in Pleasant Plains, Angeline's strict faith showed itself. She demanded that the girls stay home and forgo celebrations, out of respect for a neighbor who had recently died. In another instance, Mollie remembered that Aunt Angeline would not even allow the girls to use the porch swing on the sabbath.

Angeline's faith and values, hard as they were, touched many households through the girls who worked for her and who later became wives and mothers themselves. Her passing was noted beyond her small community. Ebenezer had her coffin faced with glass and topped with a silver plate. Old friends, many of them officials in the RLDS, were her pallbearers. They buried her on the Robinson farm among the apple trees she loved.

Pleasanton, Iowa

April 15th, 1880

Dear Mollie,

- [1] Your kind letter was duly rec'd, but at the time it came, my darling baby Ida was very sick, and on Thursday evening the 11th of March her gentle spirit was called home to God. She was sick for three weeks with brain fever, a part of the time suffering greatly; and yet my cup of sorrow was not full, for just four weeks after my baby died, my dear mother [Angeline Robinson] passed calmly and peacefully to the bright world beyond.
- [2] She came with my father to our baby's funeral and seemed as well as usual, and I, feeling sad and lonely after losing my baby, came with my children and stayed two weeks with her. (My husband [Zenas] came with me & stayed a few days, then went home to attend to his business.) I went back home the first of April, little dreaming that in less than a week I should be summoned to the bedside of my dying mother, but such was the case. She died Thursday evening, the 8th instant, and last Sabbath she was buried, here in the orchard, according to her request.

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- [3] Three weeks ago, Pa [Ebenezer Robinson] & Ma went to Leon and had some pictures taken, and Ma gave me some to send to you. She said she would like to see you. I have a scarf of hers that I wish you to have. How shall I send it? I remember Ma spoke some time ago about sending it to you.
- [4] We will stay with Pa this summer. He is not feeling at all well and does not wish to leave home.
- [5] Deborah [Morey] is just about as she was when I last wrote. Her disease seems to be an affliction of the spine.
- [6] I have not seen Amulek [Boothe] since last fall, but I heard they were well a few weeks ago.
- [7] I would be very glad indeed to get your pictures. As you know, I have none that are good.
- [8] I am glad your brother Perry [Works] is doing well. How far does he live from you? Is your Aunt [Rachel] and Uncle [Samuel Stewart] still living?
- [9] So you have a namesake for my husband! He thought the name a pretty one. Yes, you spell it correctly, Zenas.
- [10] If you can visit us this summer, do so, as we would be glad to see you.
- [11] I had intended to send one of Zenie's pictures in this letter, but find they have all been given away. Will send one when he gets more taken.
- [12] Rebecca Potter's oldest son is married and lives on the old place in Eldorado, where Father [Robert] Booth used to live. Old Mr. Booth & wife [Phebe] live near Davis City.
- [13] Wm. Clark lives in Davis City, is a merchant there, and lives in fine style. You know his wife was Olive Booth. She is the same jolly soul as ever. If you would come out here, we would visit her. She has three children, the eldest a girl of 14 [Minnie], and two sons.

- [14] Hoping this may find you all well, I will close. My father & husband both join me in kind regards to you all.

Affectionately,  
Gracie

- [15] I have just learned that Angie Dennis has returned from Kansas, came this week and is going to live in Davis City so her four youngest children can go to school. The rest are all married, except Frank. I hope to see Angie soon. Adam is still in Kansas.

### Letter #98

Mollie learns what has happened to the Dennises in Amulek's letter of 1880. He also prepares Mollie for Deborah Morey's news concerning Sylvia (Butterfield) Morey [See Letter #99, par. 17].

Amulek is answering Mollie's question about an organ, probably a melodian, that Grace Gurley, when she was Grace Robinson, bragged about [See Letter #82, par. 11]. Significantly, Mollie and Maryann Boothe got more practical gifts.

Eagleville, [Mo.]

September 19, 1880

Dear Cousin Miriam,

- [1] I take my seat to write to you. We are well at this date, hoping the same with you.
- [2] I was out to Uncle [Ebenezer Robinson]'s last Wednesday, found them well, and I read a letter from you to Grace [Gurley]. You was wondering if I got your children's pictures. I did and much obliged. I wrote to you, but it seems as though you didn't get it, so I will try again. I supposed you had got it and neglected writing, like me.
- [3] Times is tolerable here. Has been dry through the summer, but is raining plenty [now]. Wheat was light, and so is corn.

- [4] Deborah [Morey] is no better. Old Mother [Sylvia] Morey is dreadful low. She can't live long. She was glad to see me when I called to see her. Helen [Rockwell] looks bad. There is a cousin out there on a visit. It is Deborah's sister's child [Herbert Palmer] from Pennsylvania. A pert looking chap he is.
- [5] Sister Angeline [Dennis] lives in Davis City. She moved up last spring. Ad [Dennis] will come up this fall. Frank [Dennis] fetched the family up and married while here and went back to tend Ad's farm in Kansas. Bub [Dennis] is married and Doll and Phebe [Dennis]. Annett [Daily] lives in Independence, Jackson Co., and Dave [Daily] lives in Colorado. Has been there a year last spring. He has a mine.
- [6] I still live in Mo. where I did, and I hain't come out to Ills. yet to see you and George. I suppose Perry [Works] is married from Grace's letter you sent.
- [7] Caroline Dennis lives at Lamoni, keeping hotel. Lamoni is a town on the railroad between here and Davis City, 11 miles from here. There is another road built from there to our county seat. It runs three miles east of Eagleville.
- [8] Mary[ann Boothe]'s father [Hugh Gilliland] and brother is living with us yet. They have been here for two years, so you see I have got a great big family—nine in all. Our house is small, you know, so when night comes, you see, we have to just hang around on pins and be as comfortable as possible.
- [9] Tell George the cholera has been working on my hogs. I had 43 head and sold 13 and there is 3 or 4 alive yet. Twenty-six of them was fat, just ready to sell, when they took to dropping off—after eating some four hundred bushels of corn, raising them, and fattening.
- [10] Corn is 20 cts, oats 20, wheat 6, flour 300 to 350, dry cows choice 225, hogs 410.
- [11] Mary has got her a sewing machine, but no organ yet.

- [12] George raised a right smart sprinkle of wheat, didn't he? 800 bushels. He certainly won't have to buy much flour. I shan't tell you how much I raised. Still, I eat flour when I buy it, and that is  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the time. I had 18 acres sown. If you want to know how much I had thrashed, guess at it. I'll not tell.
- [13] Tell George I would like to pitch horseshoes with him. I could knock the socks right off of him.
- [14] Mary has gone visiting, and I am writing. I am in the best business—ain't I?—for Sunday. I could write more, but I reckon I'd better quit. I hate to hop on to another sheet of paper. Maybe there won't be any left for the next time.
- [15] So, good-bye for this [time]. Give my love to the children and respects to George and Perry and wife, if he has any, and the same to yourself.

From your Cousin, Amulek Boothe

## Letter #99

For the first time in seventeen years, Deborah (Rockwell) Morey writes to Mollie, but not before Mollie has written her to find out about her paralysis. As difficult as it was for Deborah, she managed to run her home with help from both her oldest girl, Eliza, and Elsie, her fourteen-year-old. She even bore her last child, Blanche, while paralyzed.

As Deborah explains what has happened to herself and her family, Mollie learns that Adliza, the first of the nieces to have helped Aunt Angeline Robinson, is still living where she was married, in Greencastle, Pennsylvania (not Greensville, as Deborah has it).

It was near Greencastle that the Rigdonite branch of the Mormon faith, which included the Ebenezer Robinsons, started a colony. There Ebenezer published *The Conococheague Herald*, the area's first newspaper. It was devoted to persuading Mormon sects that only Sidney Rigdon was the true successor to Joseph Smith, Jr. Adliza Rockwell lived and worked for the Robinsons during this period, which was also when Grace Robinson was born. However, Adliza met and married Solomon Palmer, and the Robinsons went on to

settle in Iowa after the Greencastle colony failed. Now, thirty-two years later, Adliza's twenty-two-year-old son, Herbert, and her twenty-six-year-old son, Sylvester, have moved to Iowa (near Webster City). It is young Herbert's visit to his aunt Deborah Morey that Deborah describes in this letter.

The news about Adaline, another of Deborah's sisters, and especially what's happened to George Rockwell's children, Clara and Adrianna, would interest Mollie. George Rockwell had died three years before, and that is why his widow, Helen, is living with her mother, Sylvia (Butterfield) Morey, called Gran'ma Morey. George ("Father") Morey had died December 14, 1875, though Mollie had never been told [See Letter #100, par. 4].

Pleasanton, [Ia.]

October 13th, 1880

Dear Cousin Mollie,

- [1] I often think of you, and as often neglect writing to you, but I thought today I would write, and I guess you will be surprised to hear from me. I have started two or three letters and then wouldn't get them finished, and I am ashamed to write, and won't blame you if you don't answer, but want you should all the same, and forgive this once, and I shall do better in future, I think.
- [2] Well, Cousin, you have heard that I am an invalid. Grace [Gurley] said you wanted to know the cause. It was pain in my back causing weakness on the spine and bringing paralysis from my waist down. I have been unable to walk for near two years and am no better, but worse. Though I fail gradually, what the end will be, time will tell, and I can only watch, hope, and wait, and pray for better days which may never come. At least there is no indications to cause me to hope. But I trust, through the mercies of God, to stay with my family until they are better prepared to do without me than they are at present. That is all I can do.
- [3] I am glad to hear that you are getting along so well. I feared when you were here that you would have poor health. And now, take my advice and take care not to work too hard, for I am satisfied that is what brought me here where I am.

- [4] I have a family of nine children, and you know I could find work all the time and kept going and working till I had to stop, and now life is a burden. Only for my children do I desire to stay. But I try to make the best of my troubles and bear in patience, for our rest is not in this world. The time is not far away when we shall all pass away, and the places that know us now shall know us no more.
- [5] I guess I will try and change the subject lest you tire of my gloomy thoughts. I don't give way to such thoughts very often, but am generally cheerful.
- [6] I wish you could come and see me and bring your family with you. Wouldn't you enjoy the trip!
- [7] Eliza [Morey] is 17 and gets along with the work pretty well. Elsie [Morey] is 14 and is a great help to her. I don't know what I would do without them. The baby [Evangeline] is three years old and don't make them much trouble now. I named her after Aunt [Angeline] Robinson.
- [8] Cousin Amulek [Boothe] and wife [Maryann] were here about three week ago. They are well and doing well.
- [9] Cousin Ad [Dennis]'s folks live in Davis City. Their children are all married but the four youngest. Annett [Daily] has six children. Caroline has two.
- [10] Brother George [Rockwell]'s wife [Helen] lives with her mother on the old place. The old lady [Sylvia Morey] is very poorly.
- [11] Sister Adliza [Palmer]'s youngest son [Herbert] made us a visit this fall. She has only two children. They live in Hamilton Co. in this state. I enjoyed the visit very much. I expect the oldest one will come to see me before winter. Adliza is still in Greenville. They talk of moving to Iowa.
- [12] Ad[a]line [Perry] is in Connecticut [and] is not very healthy. She has three children.

[13] How is Perry [Works] getting along? And Cousin Joseph [Bonney]? Write me all the news. Give my love to George [McNutt] and the children.

From Cousin Deborah

Write soon and oblige.

[14] Ada [Adrianna Rockwell Scott] lives near Decatur City. She hasn't been down since June. The children see her at the fair. She is getting along pretty well.

[15] George [Rockwell]'s other girl (by his first marriage), Clare, is staying with Grace [Gurley]. She will teach our school this winter. I am lying in bed writing. Do you wonder that I am tired?

[16] I will send you Elsie [Morey]'s picture. It ain't a good one. I think she looks like you used to. I will send Eliza [Morey]'s some time.

[17] This letter was written last week and dated today. Gran'ma [Sylvia Morey] died this morning. She was 74 years old. Was anxious to go and be at rest.

## Letter #100

Now that Deborah has forgiven Mollie for being "converted to sectarianism," she writes regularly about the Morey family, especially her sons Charlie and David Ebenezer, called "Eben." In the next letter, she also asks Mollie to tell her about the Bonneys, whom she has lost track of. And she reports on Zenas, Grace (Robinson) Gurley's husband.

After a second mission into the heart of "Brighamite" land during 1878, Zenas Gurley, has returned to Iowa to preach, as Deborah writes. While he was in Utah, Zenas received word that the RLDS in General Conference had adopted, not only the writings of Joseph Smith, Jr., as a rule of faith and practice, but also the past and future revelations of his son, the present leader of the RLDS, Joseph Smith III. Zenas immediately resigned from the Church, but when the

church revoked the law requiring belief in the revelations of Joseph Smith III, Zenas rejoined in 1879.

His wife, Gracie, took their first son, two-month-old Zenas Robinson Gurley, into the pleasant spring weather on Good Saturday for a walk next door to the Moreys. There they visited Deborah and may have seen Clara Rockwell, George's daughter. As a schoolteacher, Clara had stayed with the Gurleys in 1880, but now she was staying with the Moreys. Just as it was in an earlier day, part of a schoolteacher's pay was room and board, and the extra burden of boarding a schoolteacher was shared each year by a different family.

Pleasanton, [la.]

Easter Sunday, April 17, 1881

Dear Cousin Miriam,

- [1] It has been some time since I received your letter, but I have been so poorly that I didn't feel able to answer it, and I guess I won't write a very interesting one now, but you must make allowances for sick folks, for sometimes I fancy my mind is weak as well as my body.
- [2] Well, Miriam, I have some more sad news to write you. Our oldest boy Charlie was married on the sixth of February and lost his wife [Miss Trembly] on the twenty-third of March, and, dear cousin, you may know it has been a severe trial to us all when I tell you she was taken away in 48 hours time. Her disease was congestion of the stomach, and she told us she was getting better. The doctor said that he couldn't have the heart to tell us what he thought, knowing it would distress her. She was so full of hope. They had been keeping house about two weeks. We all loved her so much. It was like losing a daughter.
- [3] Such is life. Full of disappointments, with only here and there a sunny spot peeping through to light our way, only to look more dark as the clouds gather to hide its beauty. But as the poet says: "'Tis only for a moment. It will all be over soon." I try to be patient, knowing there remaineth a rest for those who endure.

- [4] Grace [Gurley] was over yesterday. It was the first time she had taken her babe [Zenas] outdoors. She is looking pretty well. Her children are large and healthy looking. She said you wanted to know about Father [George] Morey. He has been dead five years ago last December. David [Morey] bought the old place for the two oldest boys, Charlie and George [Myron Morey].
- [5] Well, many of the old folks are almost all gone. Mr. and Mrs. [Robert and Phebe] Booth are still living, but are quite feeble.
- [6] You never said whether you thought of coming to see us. You spoke of Cousin Joseph [Bonney]'s children. I thought that the oldest was called Effa Josephine. Was I mistaken?
- [7] Does Perry [Works] live near you? Give my love to him.
- [8] Well, I am getting tired. Will have to say good-bye. Tell George [McNutt] we have not forgotten him and would be ever so glad to see him. My love to all and yourself especially.
- Debbie Morey
- [9] Yesterday was the first pleasant day of the season. Our folks are all at church to hear Zenas [Gurley, Jr.] preach. They think him a great speaker.
- [10] George [Rockwell]'s daughter [Clara] is staying with us. She keeps school in our district this summer.
- [11] Elsie [Morey] would [not] send her picture as she thought it too poor a one. Will send you one as soon as she gets some taken.

 **Letter #101**

Amulek's 1881 letter confirms much of what Deborah Morey has written in hers, though he naturally concentrates on the Dennis and Boothe families. The Dennises are now depending on the Lamoni hotel that Caroline started, but Lamoni, Iowa, has become the headquarters of the RLDS. After Illinois proved unsuitable, RLDS leaders came west to Iowa to relocate the church headquarters. Among the prospective towns were Davis City, which the Clark enterprises had helped make prosperous; and Pleasanton (formerly, Pleasant Plains). The church leaders chose to plat a new city four miles west of Davis City in 1879 as their headquarters, calling it Lamoni. A railroad coming from Missouri through the territory helped make their decision. [See Letter #93, par. 7.] The faithful were encouraged to relocate, just as they were encouraged to settle Kirtland, Nauvoo, and earlier Mormon towns, but there was resistance to proclaiming Lamoni a "Zion," which would mean that relocation would be more than encouraged, it would be required. The RLDS later relocated its headquarters to Independence, Missouri.

Eagle[ville, Mo.]

May 1st, [1881]

Dear Cousin Miriam,

- [1] As I have no one to talk at, I will write to you and George. This is Sabbath day, and a fine day it is. This leaves us all well, hoping the same with you.
- [2] It is more of a task for me to write than it used to be, as I don't write much.
- [3] We have had a long steady winter as I ever seen, but the spring has now come with its warm sunshine. Times is good and money plenty, but I hain't got any.
- [4] I have just written to brother Mosiah [Boothe]'s wife [Mary] in Idaho. Mosiah has gone to Europe to preach. He passed through Iowa last fall on his way, but didn't stop. He said he would call as he went back home. He will be gone 2 years.

- [5] I was up to Ad [Dennis]'s yesterday. They was well. They keep hotel in Lamoni.
- [6] Grace Gurley has another boy [Zenas Robinson]. They have bought Uncle [Ebenezer Robinson]'s home place, and they live there. Uncle is building some houses in Davis City for the purpose of renting out.
- [7] Deborah [Morey] don't get any better. Charley Morey was married and lost his wife soon after. Old Mrs. [Sylvia] Morey is dead.
- [8] I stayed night before last with Mr. [Robert] Booth. The old lady [Phebe] keeps trotting around yet, but they are both getting very feeble. Still, they keep house alone. The old man is getting tottery so he can't hardly stand still. They live west of Davis City, 2 miles.
- [9] Charley Potter's oldest boy is married. He lives on Booth's old place. Bob Booth is married again. Caroline lives on John Booth's place this year.
- [10] Net [Daily] lives in Independence. Her husband [David] was up here last week, but didn't only just call and went on. They were well.
- [11] Tell George [McNutt] I am trying to build a house this spring. So, good-bye. Write soon. My respects to George.

Amulek Boothe

Miriam McNutt

## Letter #102

Grace and Zenas Gurley are now living on the Robinson family farm, and with this letter Grace finally tells Mollie about the birth of Zenas Robinson Gurley, their first son. Grace's wishes for Mollie will come true soon, since Mollie is pregnant with Myrtle Dell McNutt.

The first mention of the Boothe's little girl, Louisa, is in this letter. Though she was Amulek's second oldest girl (not his oldest as Grace

has it) Louisa died August 24, 1876, one of the few years during this period that no letter from Amulek survives.

Zenas' mother, Margaret Bell (Hickey) Gurley, had been living with her son George in Sandwich, Illinois [See Letter #105, par. 3], but she may have been in Lamoni with a relative when Zenas got the message mentioned in this letter.

In this same year, Zenas went to Washington, D. C., with RLDS Church Elder E. L. Kelly in order to lobby the Forty-seventh Congress and convince President Chester A. Arthur that Utah should not be admitted to the Union until the Edmunds Bill passed. Passage of the Edmunds Bill would outlaw polygamy in the United States. Zenas would work very hard during the next few months to get the bill passed [See letter #103].

Cousin Joe Bonney's daughter Jessie Katie Belle ("Katie") married George Larkin ("Lark") Loudermilk on March 1, 1881, as Gracie supposed.

Pleasanton, Iowa

Sunday, August 14th, 1881

Dear Mollie,

- [1] I received your kind missive "long long ago" and have neglected answering until I am almost ashamed to write, but please do forgive me, won't you? I have not written a letter this year, so thought I would begin by writing to you.
- [2] In the first place we have bought the old home and have moved here, and we are working the farm this year, which you know is hard work. The weather has been very hot and dry for a month past, until the past two days. We have had a couple of light showers, and the atmosphere is cooler.
- [3] Now for the news! Have you heard that a "young man" has taken up his board with us? It will be six months the 20th of this month since he came; and for short, Zenie calls him "Zenas Robinson Gurley." Of course we feel quite rich. Hope you may be as fortunate in finding a daughter.
- [4] I would be so glad if you could visit us this fall. Deborah [Morey] would also be delighted to see you. Two weeks ago yesterday I spent the day with her in company with Mrs.

Martha Shafer (Cowles) who is here in the neighborhood on a visit from California. Some three or four years ago, Martha married a rich old bachelor and moved to California where they are engaged in fruit raising (oranges, lemons, and grapes) for the market. She will go back in a few weeks. She seems to be very happy and contented.

- [5] You asked about Father [George] Morey. He died several years ago. There has a great many changes taken place among old neighbors. Father [Robert] Booth and wife [Phebe] are still living. I heard when I was at David [Morey]'s that Cousin Amulek [Boothe] had buried his eldest girl. This must be a great sorrow for them. I have not seen them for a year.
- [6] Yesterday a message came for Zenie [Gurley] stating that his mother [Margaret] was very sick and wanted to see him immediately, so he went & has not yet returned. It is 15 miles over there. I could not go with him very well as there is so much to see to. Mother Gurley is in her 75th year, and we feel anxious about her.
- [7] A great many are dying now. I think the excessive heat is the cause of so much sickness. Our baby [Zenas Robinson] has not been very well for a few days.
- [8] Pa [Ebenezer Robinson] is quite well. He makes home with us a part of the time. He has bought property in Davis City & built a number of houses which he rents, so his business keeps him there much of his time. He is gone now. I keep a girl, as I cannot do my work alone.
- [9] Please remember me to your husband and write soon to yours affectionately,
- Gracie
- [10] When you write, tell me all the news about Cousins Joseph [Bonney] and Perry [Works]. I suppose Katie [Loudermilk] is married, as a friend of mine who lives in Pleasanton visited LaGrange last winter & saw Katie & said she was to be

married last spring. The lady is well-acquainted with the young man and says he [Larkin] is all right.

- [11] Zenas sent you a Davis City paper containing his oration. Did you receive it?

 **Letter #103**

This letter, not to Mollie but to Grace (Robinson) Gurley from her husband Zenas Hovey Gurley, Jr., shows how hard Zenas worked lobbying to prevent Utah from entering the Union. The Reorganized Church sent him, E.L. Kelly, and, eventually, Joseph Smith III to Washington to convince government officials that, unlike the Brighamites in Utah, members of the RLDS did not believe in establishing a Zion, which blurs the separation of church and state, and that the Mormons in Utah not only practiced polygamy, it was a doctrine of their faith. Zenas, like his father before him, who had ordained Joseph Smith III as the head of the RLDS, despised religious polygamy.

The people of Utah Territory had been trying to join the Union since 1849 as the State of Deseret, but the Mormon polygamy doctrine had repulsed officials. The State of Deseret representative was denied a seat in the House of Representatives, despite the efforts of Democratic senator Stephen A. Douglas, chairman of the Committee on Territories, whom the Mormons had asked to help them. Although President Millard Fillmore signed a bill providing for the organization of a Utah Territory in 1850, six years later Senator Douglas advised Mormon representatives who had come to Washington carrying a new constitution for the state not to press for statehood at that time. He apparently wanted them to wait until his principles of popular sovereignty were firmly in place. These same principles, which would have allowed each state—by referendum—to determine whether slavery was allowed within its borders, became one of Douglas' arguing points in his debates with Abraham Lincoln in 1858. Democrats were generally for slavery and polygamy, if they agreed with Douglas' popular sovereignty principles, and Republicans were against them. Indeed, the Republican Party Platform during the election of 1856 had demanded that Congress prohibit in the territories both slavery and polygamy. They were called "...those twin relics of barbarism."

On July 8, 1862, President Lincoln signed the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act, prohibiting polygamy in the territories. The law also nullified any law “pertaining to polygamy and spiritual marriage” that the legislature in Utah had enacted. When asked, after he had signed the bill into law, what he was going to do about the Mormons, Lincoln was said to have replied with a story about clearing timber for a farm field. “Occasionally we would come to a log which had fallen down,” he recalled. “It was too hard to split, too wet to burn, and too heavy to move, so we plowed around it. That’s what I intend to do with the Mormons. Tell Brigham Young that if he will let me alone, I will let him alone.”<sup>1</sup> To Lincoln in 1862, saving the Union was obviously more important than vigorously enforcing the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act.

To Zenas Gurley in 1882, however, making the Edmunds Act the law of the land was of utmost importance because it would strengthen the 1862 law and put an end to the detestable practice of church-sanctioned polygamy. Although both acts would punish polygamists with a \$500 fine and up to five years in prison, the Edmunds Act disenfranchised polygamists and made them ineligible for public office. It also vacated all registration and elective offices and called for the creation of a five-member Utah Commission, appointed by the President, to oversee elections. The Commission even had the power to deprive citizens of civil rights without a trial. Like the Morrill Act before it, the Edmunds Act would be tested and approved by the U. S. Supreme Court. These are the details, reprinted in the newspaper article, that Zenas includes with his letter. Two days before he writes this letter, the Senate had passed the Act. A little more than a month later, March 22, 1882, President Chester A. Arthur signed it into law.

Despite the emotional demands his lobbying work must have made on him, in his letter, Zenas is careful to instruct Gracie on how to supervise the building of a barn to be built on the farm that they have purchased from her father Ebenezer Robinson. Gracie is busy with Zenas Robinson, their son whose first birthday is two days after the date of the letter. Her husband’s fervor for his work in Washington does not stop him from lovingly writing to his three girls. And he and the other RLDS lobbyists were successful. It was not until the president of LDS advised all Mormons to refrain from unlawful marriages and a final Utah Constitution provided penalties for polygamy did Utah become a state in 1896, a full 37 years after its first petition to do so.

825 13th St. N.E.  
Washington, D.C.

Feb 18/[18]82

My Darling Gracie:

- [1] Yours, Pa's & the children's letters came yesterday after I had sealed mine to Pa [Ebenezer Robinson]. As I wrote Pa yesterday, will omit answering his of the 13th enclosed with yours of the 12th—
- [2] If Pa has the Bill made out for barn, he can give to Quirt. & let them saw it out and pile the lumber in good shape. After the barn pattern is fully out, saw the balance of 14 foot elm into fencing. And all will be well—If we lack a little for barn, we can get it sawed afterward; however, the Bill can be filled or even a little over as there is generally an extra demand for such stuff, as it's always convenient.
- [3] I am very glad that the sick are improving & hope they may recover. Mr. Bicknell's folks will feel their loss very much. We are constantly assured that "life is a span" & soon passes away. May we also be ready.
- [4] Your views of my mission here are like mine, although I must visit Phil[adelphia] & N.J. [New Jersey]. I wrote Pa of our work before Judiciary Com[mittee], and next week we propose to lay upon the desk of each member of C.[ongress] a copy of the Polygamic Rev.[elation?] together with our argument (which I have sent Pa) and then we shall feel that the responsibility of tolerating or extirpating shall be with Congress.
- [5] Then I expect to go to Phil. Bro[ther] E. L. [Kelly] may go with me, but will return shortly, as we do not feel at liberty to abandon this city while this measure is pending and our presence might aid materially, as we are known to be here to fight it. I would like to see the work we love relieved from this reproach.

[6] Utah Legislature has just passed [a] resolution asking Congress to send out a Com.[mittee] to investigate and see whether it is as bad as told. The anti-polygamists there also met & passed resolutions at once asking Congress to go on with this matter, and was telegraphed here yesterday. You see, Utah is getting anxious. I send you N.Y. Herald with text of Edmunds Bill against polygamy.

[7] Be thorough in treatment for colds & may God bless & protect you all is the prayer of your loving husband,  
Z. H. Gurley

[8] Love to Mother [Margaret Bell Hickey Gurley] and Pa & all friends. Kiss the babies all for me, dear souls.

My Darling Children, Angie, Eva, and Julia,

[9] Your very pleasant letters came to hand yesterday and was read with interest and pleasure. I am much pleased with progress you are making in letter writing. I am very thankful that my little girls can write to me and tell me the news. And how they are getting along—

[10] Yes, Angie, Mr. Kelly & I board together & get along nicely. And so, Eva, your little brother [Zenas Robinson] is a "sweet man;" good for your brother; hope he may grow sweeter. And dear little Julia. You want Papa to "come home tomorrow." Well, we shall hope that the "morrow" will soon come when he will, and see all his loved ones at home.

Kiss Grandma for me, & your mother & each other. God bless you my dear children.

As ever, your loving father,  
Z.H. Gurley

 **Letter #104**

Nearly six full years after the last one, a letter from Deborah Morey survives. Though she is forty-six, only three years older than Mollie, the illness which has paralyzed her is draining her spirit as well as her body. She spends much of her time in bed, knitting and mending. From there she conducts the family business out of a black satchel full of important papers under her bed. Children needing discipline are sent to her room, and one of her sons, David Ebenezer (“Eben”), whose eyes are bad, often stays with her on sunny days with the shade drawn. In the darkened room, she tells him many family stories and makes him promise to keep them secret. But her worry about his health is mistaken, for though he is not very “stout,” it is his younger brother, William Supply, who dies in 1889, many years before Eben [See Letter #106, par. 6]. A year and a half after this letter, on December 3, 1888, Deborah herself dies.

She comments on the importance of education because Mollie has written to her about her son Irvin Perry’s graduation from college, something that made Mollie proud [See Letter #105, par. 2].

Zenas Gurley’s final break with the RLDS came a year before this letter, but it is still fresh in Deborah’s mind. During 1885, Zenas, a Church elder, was attacked in the pages of the *True Latter Day Saints Herald*, the church’s official newspaper, because he denied tithing, the gathering to Zion, and the words of Joseph Smith “as if [coming] from God’s own mouth.”<sup>2</sup> The RLDS had moved its headquarters for the last time to Independence, Missouri. Having to believe in all the revelations of Joseph Smith, Jr., in order to be faithful was abhorrent to Zenas. He had proof that the Mormon Prophet himself had started the practice called “spiritual wifery”—polygamy.

Two days before 1874 began, Zenas, as a notary public, attested to the sworn statement of Ebenezer and Angeline Robinson, that Hyrum Smith, brother of Joseph Smith, had met with the Robinsons in Nauvoo and taught them the doctrine of spiritual wifery that had been revealed to the Prophet. By this doctrine, a woman could only receive the full benefits of heaven if she were “sealed” on earth to a high church official. Many of these sealings were truly spiritual, like the one between Mollie’s sixty-five-year-old grandmother Abigail (Marks) Works and Brigham Young in 1846.<sup>3</sup> Abigail, the mother of Miriam (Works) Young, had once been Brigham’s mother-in-law. A widow and suffering from breast cancer, she may have been one of

the many who were sealed in the newly completed Nauvoo Temple to prepare her way into the afterlife. She died six and a half months after the ceremony.

However, some of the sealings were considerably more earthly. A second affidavit by Ebenezer alone in 1885 attested that Hyrum Smith had detailed a way for Ebenezer to be sealed to a young wife and that if a child resulted from the sealing, Hyrum would swear it was by the young woman's husband who was away on a mission. The affidavit noted that Hyrum was perturbed when Ebenezer refused the offer.<sup>4</sup> Years later, Ebenezer wrote about his moral struggle with the doctrine of spiritual wives, a doctrine that was tearing the Mormons apart:

I prayed almost constantly to my heavenly Father to know what I should do. I did not trouble myself about others, what they should do but the burden of my soul and the intense agony of my heart was to know what my individual duty was in this matter. I did not wish to embrace anything that was not of the Lord, nor reject anything that was from him.

About ten o'clock, on the morning of the third day, my heavenly Father, in his loving kindness, answered my prayer. As I was walking by myself, down Parley Street, just before entering Main Street, he spake to me, clear and distinct, and said: 'I have not placed you to set in order the affairs of my church. Stand still and see the result of all things, but keep yourself unspotted from the world.' 'Amen, Father,' was my glad response. I knew from that day to this, that if others could have more wives than one, and have the spirit of the Lord, I could not, and there I let the matter rest. It troubled me no more.<sup>5</sup>

Ebenezer had made Zenas promise never to reveal the affidavits while Ebenezer lived, but the attacks on his faith prompted Zenas to have them published in a local history.<sup>6</sup> Zenas defended his stance. He pointed out that when Joseph Smith III spoke with the United States' Secretary of State, outlining the official legal differences between the RLDS and the Utah Church, one of those differences was that the RLDS did not believe in "the gathering to Zion." Assuring Federal officials that the Reorganized Church did not believe in gathering to Zion helped "make prestige and friends for the church,"

according to Zenas. “Concentrating [the church’s] power for religious and political purposes had, from its inception down till today, proven abortive of good, and highly detrimental to the Government,” Zenas wrote.<sup>7</sup> The history of resentment against the Mormons who voted in a block, who acted as one, in Ohio, in Missouri, and in Illinois was certainly proof enough for Zenas.

None of his arguments succeeded, however. In 1885 he was not sustained as an officer of the RLDS Church, and the next year Zenas, his wife Grace, his seventy-eight-year-old mother Margaret, and his brother Edwin’s family all resigned from the church. So did Jason W. Briggs, who, with Zenas’ father, was one of the founders of the Reorganized Church.

In that same year, Ebenezer was talking with RLDS Leader Joseph Smith III as both rode to Independence for the April church conference. Suddenly Ebenezer broke away from the group, cantering off to Richmond, Missouri. There he met with David Whitmer, one of the original founders of Mormonism who had long since been disfellowshipped. With that action, Ebenezer, too, resigned from the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. He and David Whitmer, together with David’s nephew, John, began a new church.<sup>8</sup>

All this is behind Deborah Morey’s simple statements to Mollie about the beliefs of Zenas Gurley and his father-in-law, Ebenezer Robinson.

Pleasanton, [Ia.]

July 15, [18]87

Dear Cousin Miriam,

[1] I rec. your long looked-for letter some time ago. Was real glad to hear from you, for I get anxious waiting. Well, I know how time passes when one has so many steps to take, and then letter writing isn’t very pleasant when the feet are tired. And sometimes the brain needs rest.

[2] This is a busy world, and no mistake about that part of it, and sometimes I think ‘tis a cruel one, and no mistake. I get weary of it. Sometimes think I have enough of it. Am satisfied to leave it for others to make the same experience, but yet I stay, and perhaps ‘tis for the best, for as long as mother is here ‘tis home, and without me ‘twould never be the same. So I try to be patient and cheerful and, at times, thankful that ‘tis as well with us all as it is.

- [3] I am glad you are so pleasantly situated and hope you will all live to enjoy your home for years to come. I wish I could come and see you but 'tis not likely I shall ever be able. But you must come and see me if you can, and I should think you could. Your boys [Irvin and James] could keep house awhile and let you and George [McNutt] rest.
- [4] You are doing better than we are, I think. Well, I suppose that country will always be better than this is. 'Tis one good crop, and two half, and one failure. That is just about how 'tis here. A great many have their farms all in grass. Stock-running will pay the best, I guess. Zenas [Gurley] don't raise any grain. Keeps mostly horses. He tried cattle but has sold most of them now.
- [5] We are elected for hard work, I think. Well, so the world goes round and round, and we wouldn't be missed if we wasn't in it.
- [6] We had an awful dry time last summer, and the ground is dry yet. Corn looks nice but needs rain bad. The grass is dry. Pasture isn't good. Oats are short.
- [7] I am glad you are giving your children such a good education. 'Tis what everyone needs, and something that my children haven't got. How old is your girl [Myrtle]? My youngest [Evangeline] is nine years old. She rides the horses, helps milk, and likes the outdoors pretty well. The children have a swing under the old elm tree. The oak is mostly dead.
- [8] Well, you must come and see how nice we are. I guess you would know the place. The old log house is gone, though.
- [9] Well, Charley [Morey] was home to see us last winter. His wife [Mary] and baby came with him. George [Myron Morey] is in Nebraska farming with Charley. David [Morey] still makes a hand on the farm. We have two boys, one 18, the other [James] 15, but the oldest one [William] isn't very stout. They are tending 35 [acres] of corn and harvesting 25 [acres] of oats. The rest is in grass pasture and brush that don't forget to grow.

- [10] Well, I don't think of anything more to write. Our folks are all well, as usual. I am about the same as last summer.
- [11] Grace [Gurley] and family are well and prospering. Zenas won't never join the church again, I don't think, though he believes what Mormonism was in the beginning, but thinks and knows they done wrong and introduced bad doctrine and are still making mistakes.
- [12] Uncle [Ebenezer Robinson] thinks very much as Zenas does, I think, but haven't had a chance to talk with him lately. He don't come over often. Was here about four weeks ago, just a few minutes. He looked feeble.
- [13] Well, I will close. I have written to Adaline [Perry], and I am getting very tired. Write soon and tell me if you think of coming up this fall. Love to you and yours, as ever.

Your loving cousin,  
Debbie M.

- [14] I would like your picture ever so well. Good-bye. I have a photograph of myself, but it is ugly. Worse-looking than I am. So I shan't send any away unless I can get some better ones, and there isn't an artist nearer than Leon [Iowa], and I would have to have them come to the house.

## Letter #105

By now the formal openings to letters that were so common twenty-five years ago [See Letters #13, #16, and #19 especially] have given way to terse telegraphic prose sprinkled with ampersands, as in this letter of Grace Gurley's.

While attending college in LaGrange, Mollie's oldest son Irvin Perry stayed with Joe Bonney and his daughters. As a college graduate, he would later teach in Liberty and Camp Point, Illinois.

Grace is careful to point out the result of her father Ebenezer Robinson's recent marriage. At sixty-nine he married his second wife, Miss Martha Ann "Mattie" Cunnington. (The title "Miss" was important to let it be known that she had not been married before.) Joseph

Smith III, the son of the Prophet who had married Ebenezer and his first wife, Angeline, years before, performed the ceremony on February 5, 1885, just two months before Ebenezer quit the RLDS Church.

Mollie has written to Grace asking about the Gurleys' religious convictions, and Grace explains them in this letter.

Pleasanton, Iowa

Oct. 2nd, [1887]

Dear Mollie,

- [1] I suppose you are not offended because I have been paying you back in a little of your own coin? I am always glad to hear from you & hope you will write more promptly in the future, & I will try & do better if you will.
- [2] I am pleased to hear of Irvin [McNutt] graduating. Suppose you attended commencement exercises at LaGrange. The Institution is a Baptist one, is it not? I read of it in the "Baptist Flag," a paper which is published in St. Louis, & which we are now taking.
- [3] Why haven't you visited us ere this? We have had several visitors this fall or latter part of summer. In the first place, a friend from Des Moines came & stayed nearly a week in July & the latter part of August. Brother George Gurley, wife, & daughter from Sandwich, Ill., visited us & also my husband's mother [Margaret Gurely] was with them. They returned home the 17th of September.
- [4] Do you know that my father [Ebenezer Robinson] has a little daughter [Mary]? It was a year old in June. We have a little boy [Gladstone] three weeks older than it is. They were over to see us in June, and I was there about two weeks ago. They are well.
- [5] Cousin Deborah [Morey] is about the same. Has not been to see me for about a year. Hardly ever goes away from home. She would be very glad to see you. I go to see her quite often. Have not been for some time now, on account of company, but intend to go before long.

- [6] How is your fruit crop this fall? We have a very few apples & other fruit scarce. The drouth caused short crops & hard times for money.
- [7] You ask what church we belong to. We have not united with any as yet. Zenas preaches every Sunday to full houses in different localities. He occupies an "independent pulpit," tells people what he believes & his reasons etc. We accept the Gospel as taught in the New Testament & believe the words of Christ will save us if we follow his teachings.
- [8] Come & see us when you can. Remember me to your family & all the relatives.

Your loving cousin,  
Gracie

#### NOTES

1. As quoted in *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood* by Gustive O. Larson. (San Marino Press) Huntington Library: 1971. p. 60

2. *Record of Ringgold & Decatur County*, p. 542.

3. Stanley P. Hirshson, *The Lion of the Lord, a Biography of Brigham Young*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), pp. 201-202.

4. *Record of Ringgold & Decatur County*, p. 543.

5. Robinson, "Personal History," *The Return*, Vol. 3, No. 2 February 1891, p. 29.

6. Heman C. Smith, ed., *Journal of History*, (Lamoni, Ia.: Board of Publication RLDS, 1917), pp. 366-367.

7. *Record of Ringgold & Decatur County*, p. 542.

8. Joseph Smith III remembers: "To our surprise, he switched off at St. Joseph, and went to Richmond... where...he was baptized and ordained by David Whitmer. Whatever may have been his purpose in leaving us in that manner, I could never determine..." *The Saints' Herald*, February 1936, p. 176.