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EDITORIAL

David M. Morris
Editor

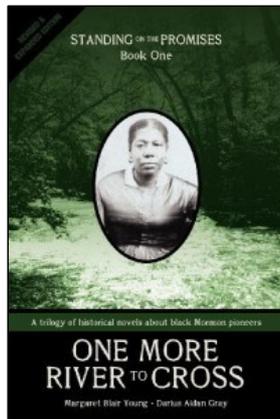
Since 2007, we have published one volume a year filled with scholarly articles, as well as book reviews. We will of course continue to do this, however, we will begin to publish book reviews directly, to the website and make a selection for each volume. This is to respond to the now numerous books and publications that are coming out.

In this issue, we are excited to publish a lengthy consideration of Mormon identity by Wilfried Decoo, as well as Armand Mauss' article 'From Galatia to Ghana'. Following which, we are able to publish, 'Sacred Secrecy and the Latter-day Saints' by Douglas J. Davies as well as articles by Alan Goff and Kirk Caudle. A number of book reviews also appear, all of which are available on <http://www.ijmsonline.org>. A special appreciation is extended to the contributors for their kindness in making available their submissions.

We, as always, extend our appreciation to those who took time to blind peer-review articles and review books fairly and as formatively as possible. As an editorial board we hope you will enjoy the contents of this issue.

If you wish to make a comment or suggestions on its improvement, please feel free to email us at editorial@ijmsonline.org

**BOOK REVIEW: ONE MORE RIVER TO CROSS (BOOK ONE,
STANDING ON THE PROMISES, TRILOGY) – FIONA SMITH**



Title: *One More River to Cross* (Book One *Standing on the Promises*, Trilogy) Revised and Expanded.

Author: Margaret Blair Young / Darius Aidan Gray

Publisher: Zarahemla Books, Provo, Utah.

Year: 2013

Pages: 356

Binding: Paperback

ISBN-13: 978-0984360383

List Price: \$17.95

Standing on the Promises is a trilogy of historically based novels dedicated to the experiences of nineteenth-century black Mormon pioneers in the early period of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *One More River to Cross* is the first volume in the series and it would appear that the authors Margaret Blair Young and Darius Aidan Gray have themselves undertaken a journey by crossing from publishers Deseret Book in 2000 to Zarahemla Books in 2013. Their purpose: to give greater insight into the lives of individuals within the trilogy, particularly when descendants came forward with their own research that provided an expanded empirical basis for the writing. Indeed as the authors blend both real and fictional characters into the narrative the revised notes at the end of each chapter provide a factual context for the historical events amidst the fiction. Of course the nature of poetic license is to allow themes to develop within the genre of historical fiction, yet the authors attempt to give the reader a more accurate picture of historical events is a praiseworthy effort.

One More River to Cross is situated during the gradual emancipation period of slavery in nineteenth-century America, and primarily focuses on the journeys of two characters, Jane Manning James and Elijah

Abel, who are arguably the most documented of black pioneers in Mormon history. The novel begins with a list of characters that is not extensive in its detail, however, the book does in fact name dozens of figures, real and fictional, bond and free, converts to the LDS Church and those who are not. Some of these figures have whole chapters dedicated to their stories and others appear as supporting or incidental characters in the book. Black pioneers make appearances with well-known white Mormon leaders such as Joseph Smith Jr.—founder and Prophet of the LDS Church, his wife Emma Hale Smith, his parents—Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, and Brigham Young—Joseph’s closest confidant and second president of the Church. The stories of the principle characters are illustrated against the backdrop of the Mormon pioneer trek to Nauvoo, Illinois, with Jane being one of the few in the black community to continue west to Utah’s Salt Lake Valley with her husband and children.

The novel begins with a prologue in the narrative voice of the fictionalised great-great grand-daughter of Jane Manning James. As storyteller, her name is never revealed, nor is her voice distinct throughout the novel, yet she speaks in the first person of an encounter with her great grandmother, noting that among ‘several black Mormons Jane James was one of the earliest.’ Jane’s story in the novel begins in Wilton, Connecticut as she gives birth to a child conceived by rape from her white minister, Pastor Sylvester. Historically, Jane is said to have remained silent on the issue of rape and this view is supported in the authors’ notes at the end of the chapter. However, the authors make the unlikely choice of having Jane name her child Sylvester, after the offending priest. Of course a reader is always confronted with the believability in storytelling using their own discretion and experience with that of the author and it would appear in *One More River to Cross* that occasionally the author’s treatment of the principle characters can indeed be challenged on factual credibility.

The story proceeds with Mrs Fitch casting aspersions on Jane’s pregnancy, becoming further offended when Jane leaves the household to join the Mormon religion. Jane and a band of eight members of her family convert to the Church and heed the call given to pioneers across the globe to travel west to Nauvoo, Illinois. Upon reaching Buffalo, New York the family are denied boat passage, and subsequently set off on a journey of over eight hundred miles to Nauvoo, Illinois by foot. The dialogue that takes place between the family during their difficult crossings,

through river and snowy banks, is probably the liveliest portion of the book and gives a certain authenticity to the African American voice. Similarly, Jane's courtship later in the novel, with her husband Isaac James, contains humour that is an enjoyable read. The novel details the James family's arrival at the Mansion House, Joseph Smith's Nauvoo residence, and Jane's experiences with the Smiths as she takes up abode in housework. Jane's journey with her family continues, subsequent to Joseph Smith's martyrdom, when she migrates to the Salt Lake Valley following Brigham Young as head leader.

Though relatively unknown in the pioneer stories of contemporary Mormons, Jane is one of the most researched black pioneers and was undoubtedly one of the most popular female pioneers in her day. She is reported to have been known as the leader of the small, black Mormon pioneer community in the state of Illinois, during the 1840's, where most of the story takes place. Though her picture appears on the front cover of the novel Jane's story in the main is undertaken in the latter half of the novel and it is in fact Elijah Abel who is the main focus in the book. Elijah Abel was the first known black Church leader ordained to the priesthood by Joseph Smith and his presence dominates the book, not only due to the predominance of pages dedicated to his story but in his placement right at the beginning of the novel, his treatment in the middle, and finally his concluding presence at the end.

The story of Elijah Abel begins with his escape in the night from the slavery in his master's household, along with his family. This escape is led by his mother, Delilah who bears the name of Abel's real mother, as recorded in history, the brothers—Daniel and Jeremiah, however, are completely fictionalized. Their escape comes shortly after the death of the Master—known to the slaves as "Massa"—who gives Elijah his free papers prior to his passing away. Delilah, only too aware that as a result of Massa's death Elijah's free papers may hold no value to save him from slavery, organises an escape with her family but dies on the way. Following the death of his mother, Elijah is presented as a tragic figure, a fugitive wandering lost, who creates an imaginary friend to help ease his grief. This 'friend' is known as Joseph of the rainbow coat (or as recorded in the Bible's Old Testament, Joseph with the coat of many colours—sometimes referred to in the novel as "Ancient Joe")—who Elijah has frequent conversations with, sometimes arguing with himself as he consoles his demons, wrestling with the world and his place within it. Elijah's place in society is multifarious, in history he was a carpenter who reportedly

worked on the construction of the Mormon temple at Kirtland, Ohio, as well as one of the official undertakers for the saints, and upon his conversion received an ordination that placed him in the high priesthood, third quorum of the Seventy in the Church. In the face of racial discrimination in and outside of the Church, Elijah was eventually counselled to limit his preaching to blacks when previously he was given the freedom to preach without a colour bar. The novel presents within him, the conflict of ambition for a better life, and his abasement in response to the harsh realities of the dangers presented in the life of a black man, and his high status during nineteenth-century society. However, the authors present him as acceding far too readily to submission without demonstrating in equal measure his obvious leadership qualities. Never finding his former companion and child, Elijah Abel eventually goes on to marry a young woman called Nancy, and pays a visit to Emma Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois. Emma by this time, (after the martyrdom of her husband in 1844), has remarried, but bares the heavy scars of the persecution endured in Nauvoo, where the main action in the novel occurs, and where she remained while the main Church under Brigham Young moved westward.

One More River to Cross is one of many books illustrating the pioneer experiences of Mormon saints where its uniqueness lies in the depiction of black pioneers often absent in mainstream Mormon culture. The simplicity in its storytelling belies the occasional didacticism of the black presence, particularly when referring to Africa's ancient presence in the Bible as depicted in characters such as Simon the Cyrene who carried the cross of Jesus, Moses and his Ethiopian wife, and Joseph of Old with his Egyptian wife. It is a story of black saints who joined a Church that extended their membership to all, regardless of race, yet wrestled, sometimes with scripture, in its administration of racial policies. Many black pioneers past and present maintain faith to withstand it all because it is a religion they believe in. In this regard *One More River to Cross* is a valuable contribution to the black Latter-day Saint experience in Mormon literature today.