



Descendants of Emer and Parna Harris—Albert O. Harris (great-grandson, left) and Charles Martin Harris (grandson, right)—with a false bottom chest, ca. 1952.¹⁴³ The chest was used to hide copies of the Book of Mormon from discovery by a mob that searched Emer and Parna's wagon after they were driven out of Missouri to Illinois in October 1838.¹⁴⁴



Interior of the chest used by the family of Emer Harris during the Missouri expulsion, 2022. It is possible that Emer, a skilled carpenter, made the chest. Evidence of the lining that created a false bottom in the chest is no longer visible.¹⁴⁵

2. Experiences in Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, and Utah

In 1838, Emer moved his family to Missouri,¹⁴⁶ no doubt with high hopes for an extended stay with the saints in Zion. Unfortunately, Emer arrived just days before Governor Lilburn Boggs issued his infamous Extermination Order on 20 October.¹⁴⁷ When the family was forced to leave, Emer hid copies of the Book of Mormon in the wagon so they could be preserved from hostile mobs. Tuckett and Wilson relate the events as follows:¹⁴⁸

About October 27, Emer and his family started for Quincy, Illinois, a hundred miles east. Among their meager possessions was a chest containing copies of the Book of Mormon. Emer had fitted the books under a false bottom, lined with Fuller's cloth,¹⁴⁹ in case they were searched by the mobs, who had threatened to destroy every Book of Mormon they found.¹⁵⁰

As a mob approached (said to be four hundred on horseback), Emer walked away from the wagon carrying his gun and ammunition, knowing that if the mob found weapons, it would mean punishment and loss of the gun, so much needed for protection and food. Parna, Emer's wife, was stopped by the mob and asked if she were a "Mormon." Her fearless reply was, "Yes, and thank God for it." She was told that they had authority to search her wagon. She told them to go ahead, saying, "You have driven us from place to place until we have nothing left but rags." The captain, who was on a beautiful horse, made the remark, "Well, you certainly are a brave woman, at least." He then took her little son, Alma, age six, and seated him upon his horse while he searched their possessions saying, "It is a shame to put him down in the snow in his bare feet." After searching the chest, they tapped the bottom and found it solid and soon were on their way. The precious books were undiscovered.

Exhaustion and exposure because of the violence in Missouri caused Emer's health to fail. In addition to factors relating to the expulsion and difficult living conditions in the fall and winter of 1838–39, Emer seems to have been afflicted with the recurring bouts of "ague" (malaria) that began to plague the Saints in the late summer of 1839.¹⁵¹ Ever after, it seems that Emer was no longer capable of doing the heavy work to which he had long been accustomed. After a year of recovery in Quincy, Illinois, he moved to Nauvoo and bought "forty acres in the timber."¹⁵²

140 On 6 March 1837, Emer received a license to preach, signed by Joseph Smith and Frederick G. Williams (License to Preach).

141 S. E. Black et al., *Martin Harris*, p. 271. On the move to Kirtland, see L. A. Harris et al., *Martin Henderson Harris*, p. 12; S. E. Black et al., *Martin Harris*, pp. 270–271.

142 Emer Harris Purchases.

143 The proposed year for this photo, circa 1952, is based on the conjecture that it was taken in conjunction with Charles Martin Harris' recording of the story about the chest, dated 6 October 1952 (C. M. Harris, Old Chest).

144 <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/memories/KWJB-J7Q> (accessed April 28, 2022). A non-colorized version of this photograph was originally published in M. H. Tuckett et al., *Harris*, p. 128.

145 Photograph copyright Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Photo ID: P1280297, 25 March 2022. The dark brown chest, donated by Charles M. Harris and Alma Harris, is currently at the Daughters of Utah Pioneers Pioneer Memorial Museum in Salt Lake City, Artifact #06254–001, Location 5D01—Carriage House Basement, Display West. During a visit on March 7, 2022, I was told by curator Kari M. Main that the trunk was one of the most popular items at the museum.

An undated story from the Ogden Standard-Examiner describes what seems to be a second chest owned by Emer that was in the possession of Cami and Doug Harris in 2002 (T. Archibald, Church History Hidden).

146 On the move of Emer's family to Missouri and their expulsion soon afterward, see S. E. Black et al., *Martin Harris*, pp. 306–8. Of the move, Emer's son Martin Henderson Harris wrote (L. A. Harris et al., *Martin Henderson Harris*, p. 13):

... Father returned some time in July [1838] with a span of horses and light wagon, bought another horse and two-horse wagon from Uncle Preserved and started for Missouri with one two-horse wagon and one one-horse wagon on the fifth day of September. Passed through Columbus the capital of Ohio, through Indianapolis the capital of Indiana and through Springfield the capital of Illinois. Crossed the Mississippi at Louisiana and arrived at the house of Ezekiel Kellogg about the 12th of October. ...

147 Of this period, Emer wrote (E. Harris, Emer Harris Letter to Brigham Young, p. 1):

Six years ago last fall I gathered to gether what little I had from the East and with a wife and seven small children I started for Masouria got there time enough to enter an 80 [?] of Land and the next day ^was ordered of and to leave within one week and go East The expense and sufferings we went through in the Month of November of that year I pass over at this time Four years last fall I came to this place and was soliseted to sell my land in Masouria to the trustees in trust for the curch for which they gave me a scrip of \$400 to be paid in land in Lee County I[o]wa or in city lots in Nauvoo and twety Dollars was to be paid within a short time in store pay but I have not as yet ever received one cent any way

Martin Henderson Harris later wrote as follows about the expulsion of Emer's family from Missouri and their life in Illinois until they purchased a claim of 40 acres northeast of Nauvoo (L. A. Harris et al., *Martin Henderson Harris*, p. 13):

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... About the 20th the mob ordered us to leave the State and go East and leave the County within one week or they would put the Governor's order of extermination into effect., and about the 27th started for Quincy, Illinois (Father having traded off one span of horses for a yoke of cattle and got 18 dollars boot) about 100 miles distant and arrived on the banks of the Mississippi about the 12th of November, having traveled the whole distance through rain, snow and mud. Remained there until about the 22nd before we could cross on account of floating ice. At this time we crossed the river and went up to Whipple's Mill about one mile distant and staid there until about the first of December when we moved into the home of John Gault near Rock Creek about eight miles north of Quincy in Adams County.

1839 Lived there until the Spring of 1839 when we moved into a house we had built on the farm of Cephas Stow. Worked some this Winter for Simpson Bicky cutting cord wood at 40 cents per cord and then took my pay in corn and pork, pork four cents per pound and corn 37½ cents per bushel. Father bought two cows and (paid) 20 dollars for one and 25 dollars for the other. Worked a part of the farm on which we lived, raised 18 acres of corn and sold the same for 20 cents per bushel in trade.

This Fall got disappointed in learning the Carpenter's and Joiner's trade along with Father on account of his being taken sick from which he did not fully recover for one year. Worked some in harvest this year for one dollar per day.

1840 Father rented the same place again this year. ...

Although there is no evidence that Emer was directly involved in the October 1838 military clashes in Missouri, a notebook in the Church History Library includes a "partial letter postmarked 15 February [1840] from Luman Gibbs in Columbia, Missouri, to Harris in Quincy, Illinois, requesting aid after being released from imprisonment in Columbia in November 1839. Gibbs refers to the death of Missouri state attorney Thomas Burch and activities of mob leader Samuel Bogart and other anti-Mormons" (see E. Harris, *Emer Harris Notebook*, Church History Library description and pp. 6–7, 23–24). Emer and Gibbs had both attended the October 25–26 conference at Orange, Ohio (see E. Robinson et al., *Minutes*, 25–26 October 1831, p. 86). According to sources summarized by the editors of the Joseph Smith Papers (Gibbs, Luman), Gibbs had been "charged with murder and imprisoned at Richmond, Ray County, and Columbia, Boone County, Missouri" as a result of his presence at the Battle of Crooked River on 25 October 1838. Because he "apparently agreed to testify against codefendants" he was "excommunicated in absentia, 26 April 1839, at council in Far West, Caldwell County, Missouri" (see J. Smith, Jr., *Documentary History*, 26 April 1839, 3:336). He was later a "member of the Nashville branch, Lee County, Iowa Territory, 1840" and "died at Watertown," Jefferson County, Wisconsin on 11 January 1873. In addition to the sources for Luman Gibbs given in the Joseph Smith Papers biography, see J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Documents, Volume 6: February 1838–August 1839*, pp. 275n46, 382–383n677; C. V. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions*, Parley P. Pratt's *History of the Late Persecution*, pp. 92, 96, *The Scroll Petition*, p. 613; A. L. Baugh, *Call to Arms*, pp. 161, 162–163, 170n156, 185, 198; L. H. Gentry et al., *Fire and Sword*, pp. 414, 431–433, 445n165; S. C. LeSueur, *1838 Mormon War*, pp. 205, 256.

148 M. H. Tuckett et al., *Harris*, p. 127. Kate B. Carter reports the incident as follows (K. B. Carter, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 19:452):

Emer Harris brought this reddish-brown chest to Utah. While the Mormons were being driven out of Missouri, the mobs were in search of all the published copies of the Book of Mormon. When they were found on a person or in his wagon, the man was tied to a tree and whipped, his books confiscated and burned. Emer Harris was determined to bring some of these books to Utah. He cut off the end of the old chest, thus making it to fit a certain number of books which he placed in the bottom, afterward covering them with two pieces of cloth making a complete bottom. He then proceeded on his journey. His wife, Parna Harris, who was as brave as a lion, marched ahead. She was met by a mob of 400 men on horseback. The captain said to her: "Madam, are you a Mormon?" She answered, "Yes, and I thank God for it." The captain said, "We will have to search your wagon." She replied, "You have driven us around so much I think you will find nothing but rags." Alma Harris, her son, who was only 8 years of age and barefooted, was placed in the captain's saddle on account of the deep snow. In searching the chest they imagined the books to be the bottom of the box and left them undisturbed.

See also the account in S. H. Oaks, *Martin Harris*, p. 1.

149 It is not clear precisely what we should understand by the reference to "fuller's cloth" here. However, "fuller's earth," a kind of clay, is used today to filter, decolorize, or clean oil or liquids, and has been used for centuries in the production of woolen cloth. Such cloth was cleansed of greasy impurities by a process of kneading fuller's earth and water into it.

150 In the account by Charles Martin Harris, he adds that when mobs found copies of the Book of Mormon "on a person, or in his wagon, the man would be tied to a tree and whipped, and his books confiscated and burned" (C. M. Harris, *Old Chest*).

151 According to a 2009 study (E. L. Ivie et al., *Deaths in Early Nauvoo*, pp. 166, 168, 169, 172; for a description of medical terms used by the Saints in Nauvoo to describe their illnesses, see D. C. Heiner et al., *Medical Terms*):

Malaria ["ague"] was the most common cause of death in Nauvoo. Since Nauvoo was a swamp before the Saints arrived, it was undoubtedly a haven for mosquitoes. Malarial deaths tend to peak in August and September in the Northern Hemisphere. ... 59 percent of the malarial deaths were males. Men were more exposed to mosquitoes because they were outside more often than women were and because they dug the drainage ditches. ... Almost no malarial deaths were reported for the Nauvoo Catholic Cemetery for 1850–65. One possible explanation might be that the swamps in Nauvoo had been drained by the time the Saints left, leaving a much smaller mosquito population for the future Nauvoo residents. Another explanation might be that an almost completely new citizenry who were not carriers of the disease moved into Nauvoo. ... In all likelihood, persecution, stress, and malnutrition contributed to the severity of some illnesses caused by infectious disease.

For a representative sampling of accounts from diaries kept during that time by Saints suffering from severe sickness in Nauvoo, including reports of reliance on priesthood blessings, see D. Birch, July 22, 1839.

152 L. A. Harris et al., *Martin Henderson Harris*, p. 13. The 1840 U.S. Federal Census in Quincy, Adams, Illinois apparently took place prior to Emer's move (Emer Harris, 1840 U.S. Federal Census, Quincy). In an 1845 letter to Brigham Young, Emer described his situation as follows: "I am now