

THE GREAT MIGRATION

Ronald Thurber is volunteer director of the Mormon Trails Center in north Omaha. Ron said his responsibility also includes the Kaneshville Tabernacle in Council Bluffs. He is wrapping up a two year mission assignment with his wife and will soon be returning to their home Boise, ID. Ron stated he retired from his architecture business to assume the mission task of directorship of the historic landmarks and monuments of the Mormon winter quarters associated with their migration west. These historic landmarks include the Mormon Pioneer Cemetery, Winter Quarters monument, Mormon Pioneer Memorial Bridge, Mormon Mill, and Kaneshville Tabernacle. Ron noted these are described in the Mormon Trails Center at 3215 State St. in north Omaha. In 1846 one of the nation's greatest planned migrations moved through Omaha and established a winter camp and staging area for westward travel the next year. Over 3000 people were included in the winter encampment which encompassed a 27 sq. mile area. Ron noted that 500 cabins and 80 dug outs were prepared on the Nebraska side of the Missouri River. Other pioneers stayed through the winter on the Iowa side. The Mormon migration continued for several years and more efficient transportation was sought. In 1856 hand carts, first built by the John Deere Company, were used and they were 20% faster than ox driven carts and wagons. Ron noted that the migration west, primarily to Salt Lake, UT, continued until 1869 when the transcontinental railroad was completed.