

# Historical highlights



Church history, like all history, is filled with ironies. Less than one hundred years ago, for example, LDS authorities were as vigorously discouraging young men from cutting their hair as they are now encouraging them to cut it. Interestingly, even though the standard of approved grooming has shifted diametrically, the reason for sanctioning either long or short hair styles has remained basically the same.

## CUTTING HAIR

Whether the hair should be cut I could never quite satisfy myself. As a physiological practice, I seriously doubt the propriety. Every cutting is a wounding, and there is some sort of bleeding in consequence, and waste of vital force. I think that it will be found that long-lived persons most frequently wear their hair long. The cutting of hair stimulates to a new growth, to supply the waste. Thus the energy required to maintain the vigor of the body is drawn off to make good the wanton destruction. It is said, I know, that after the hair has grown to a certain length it loses its vitality at the extremity and splits or "booms up"; whether this would be so if the hair should never be cut, I would like to know. When it is cut a fluid exudes, and forms a scar or cicatrix at each wounded extremity, indicating that there has been injury.

Women and priests have generally worn long hair. I never could imagine why this distinction was made. The ancient priest was very often unsexed or devoted to a vow of celibacy, but I can not surmise whether that had anything to do with it. Kings wore their hair long in

imitation of Samson and the golden sun-god Mithias. I suspect from this that the first men shorn were slaves and laborers; that freedmen wore their hair un mutilated, as the crown of perfect manhood and manliness. If this be correct the new era of freedom, when it ever shall dawn, will be characterized by men unshorn as well as women unperverted.

I wish that our science and civilization had better devices for preserving the integrity of the hair. Baldness is a deformity, and premature whiteness a defect. If the head was in health, and the body in proper vigor, I am confident that this would not be. I am apprehensive that our dietetic habits occasion the bleaching of the hair; the stiff, arsenic-prepared hat is responsible for much of the baldness. Our hats are unhealthy, from the tricks of the hatters.

I suppose however, there are other causes. Heredity has its influence. Certain diseases wither at its roots; others lower the vitality of the skin, and so depilate the body. I acknowledge that the shingled head disgusts me. It can not be wholesome. The most sensitive part of the head is at the back where the neck joins. That place exposed to unusual heat or cold is liable to receive an injury that will be permanent, if not fatal, in a short time. The whole head wants protection; and the hair affords this as no other protection can. Men have beards because they need them, and it is wicked to cut them off. No growth or part of the body is superfluous, and we ought, as candidates of health and long life, to

preserve ourselves from violence or mutilation. Integrity is the true manly standard.

*The Contributor*, Junius F. Wells, editor. July, 1883, p. 391, Volume IV, Number 10.

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### The Diary of Howard Coray

In 1882 Howard Coray, a former clerk of Joseph Smith, started a very interesting autobiography, the original of which is at the Brigham Young University Library. In this autobiography he recounts that he was introduced to the Prophet at April Conference in 1840, just a few weeks after he had joined the Church. Joseph Smith asked him to move to Nauvoo and work for him. The twenty-three-year-old clerk spent the next few years living with the Smith family, writing letters for Church officials and copying the History of the Church. The following is an extract from this autobiography which gives interesting insight into Joseph Smith's love for physical activity:

In the following June, I met with an accident, which I shall here mention: The Prophet and myself, after looking at his horses, and admiring them, that were just acrossed the road from his house, we started thither, the Prophet at the same time put his arm over my shoulder. When we had reached about the middle of the road, he stopped and remarked, "Brother Coray, I wish you was (sic) a little larger, I would like to have some fun with you." I replied, perhaps you can as it is, — not realizing what I was saying — Joseph, a man of over 200 lbs. weight, while

I scarcely 130 lbs., made it not a little ridiculous, for me to think of engaging with him in anything like a scuffle. However, as soon as I made this reply, he began to tip me; he took some kind of a lock on my right leg, from which I was unable to extricate it; and throwing me around, broke it some three inches above the ankle joint. He immediately carried me into the house, pulled off my boot and found, at once, that my leg was decidedly broken; then got some splinters and bandaged it. A number of times that day did he come in to see me, endeavoring to console me as much as possible.

Brother Coray compared this experience with the Old Testament experience Jacob had when he wrestles with the angel. This and many other experiences helped him develop a great love for the charismatic prophet and that love was expressed many times until Coray's death in 1908.

Jeffery O. Johnson

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### AXLE GREASE AND FIVE CARD STUD

In 1870, flour was selling in Montana for \$190 per hundred pounds. Adam Sharp (Uncle Adam to everyone) took fifteen wagons, loaded them with flour, and headed north against the wishes of his brother, Bishop John Sharp, who maintained the flour would be paid for with gold dust and the chances were ten to one that road agents would take his money away from him before he made it back home.

My father, John C. Sharp, a young man of twenty, was in charge of the

commissary wagon which was loaded with supplies for the round trip, including food, bedding, ox yokes, staples, chains, shoes for the oxen, and other necessities. Father said there was an over abundance of axle grease in round wooden buckets. Each bucket held four pounds, and there were twelve buckets to a box. Father had to see that the wagons were properly greased, and when a bucket was emptied he had instructions to put the lid back on and place the empty bucket in the case.

On the fourth day out they stopped for lunch at a spring just north of Brigham City. Two men on horseback and leading a pack animal rode up, watered their horses, and rode on. No one said a word to them.

Two days this side of Virginia City, father said there were three bodies hanging to a large cottonwood tree right alongside the road, and on that tree was a notice which read:

**WARNING**

Road Agents, Horse Thieves,  
and Such Can Expect a  
Similar Fate When Caught  
**The Vigilantes**

Uncle Adam rode into Virginia City and sold his flour to a large wholesale company for \$90 per hundred. At that price, he stood to make a handsome profit. After the flour was weighed Uncle Adam brought out a whole stack of hand-made small buckskin bags and into each bag was eighed \$1,000 in dust. Then each sack was tied, the end and the string dipped into red sealing wax, and the letter S stamped in the warm wax in such a manner that no dust could be taken out without breaking this seal.

The train pulled out about two miles

from town and camped for the night. Uncle Adam placed the sacks of dust in the commissary wagon and stayed there with the dust all afternoon and night and until mid-morning the following day. His instructions were to keep an armed guard around the wagon and to let no one near.

That evening a few of the men went into town. When they returned they commented on the number of gambling houses and the amount of gold and gold dust that was changing hands.

The next day the men were busy shoeing oxen and repairing wagons. Uncle Adam came out of the commissary wagon and had a bite to eat. Then he strolled into town. When he returned he appeared to be under the influence of liquor. That evening he and three of his men went back into town. They had supper at a restaurant and then started to see the town, going from one gambling joint to another. Finally at about ten o'clock they stopped at a saloon where the stakes were high. Uncle Adam stood behind a chair and watched. The man in front of him got up — broke — and Uncle Adam slid into the chair. He placed a buckskin sack of dust on the table and called for chips. The dust was weighed out, and he received \$1,000 in chips. As the game went on, he appeared to be just drunk enough not to care what happened, for his hands were more used to handling a bullwhip than those slick cards.

He won and lost and then finally looked at his cards with his eyes wide open and shoved what chips he had in, approximately \$750. The dealer stayed. The others dropped out. Uncle Adam dug up another sack and placed it on the

table. The gambler did likewise. Then Uncle Adam asked for time to get more dust. It was granted. He arose, took a dirk from his belt, and stuck it through the cards and into the table. The dealer did likewise. Each left a man to see that no cards were changed and then they departed, Uncle Adam to go back to the wagon camp, the gambler to go to the saloon keeper for a number of buckskin sacks of dust that had been left with him for safekeeping.

How much Uncle Adam received from the sale of that train of flour father did not know, but he did say, "I never saw so much gold dust at one time before or since as there was while the sacks were being filled." Uncle Adam and the two men returned, and the betting was resumed. Finally, a man standing nearby said, "The old freighter has bet every sack we weighed out and filled for him."

Proudly, Uncle Adam drew his dirk out and turned his cards over. He had four queens and an ace. The gambler turned his over and had four kings and a jack. Uncle Adam looked at the cards, arose, and calmly said, as he staggered away, "I'll go back to that Mormon town and get me another load of flour and bet it all, and next time I'll win."

The gambler bought him a gallon of whiskey, just to show that there were no hard feelings, and while Uncle Adam and his men walked back to camp the gambler gathered up all of those sacks, put them all in a seamless sack, sealed it, took a receipt from the saloon keeper for it, and walked up the street, for well he knew that a man's life would be worthless if he started to drag that amount of gold dust around in that mining town.

Back at camp Uncle Adam seemed to be the happiest man in the entire outfit as he crawled into the commissary wagon and went to bed. The others stood around and commented on his loss, and it was a mighty forlorn group of men who headed for Salt Lake City the following morning.

The second day out the train was stopped by road agents. There were far more road agents than there were men in the entire train. Their leader asked to see the train boss and was taken to the commissary, where Uncle Adam apparently was sleeping off the effects of a protracted drunk with part of that gallon of whiskey beside him. The leader looked at him, called three of his men, and said, "This is that crazy old Scotch-Mormon I was telling you about. Lost upwards of \$50,000 on one hand. I admire him, for he never let out a whimper. Too bad for us, but we will just appropriate what whiskey he has and wish him better luck next time."

Uncle Adam seemed to get over his drunkenness mighty suddenly after that, but the men rarely ever spoke to him. The morning the train pulled into Salt Lake City, some of the drivers noticed the same two horsemen enter town who had been at the spring near Brigham City. Straight to the yard went the train, and to the office went the commissary, where the extras were checked in. Then it was that those men, father included, received the surprise of their lives, for there was Uncle Adam in the commissary wagon carefully removing the lids from some of those empty cases of axle grease. He took up one of the wooden buckets, took the cover off, scraped off about one inch of axle grease and a layer of

paper, and then those men saw three sacks of the very gold dust they had seen sealed up when the flour had been paid for. More buckets were opened and more sacks taken out. The two strangers rode up and tossed in three sacks of dust, some that they had. When the sacks were counted, not a single one was missing.

How was it done?

Well, Uncle Adam spent considerable time during the nights before he left filling up lead bars and mixing those lead filings with sand and weighing them into buckskin bags which he sealed with sealing wax just as he had done in Virginia City. He placed his sacks in the buckets and took them north just as he brought the gold back. He had hired the two gamblers and they showed him how to hold his cards, for he had never played a game of cards in his life. All he had to do was to play his hand and when he was dealt four queens, He was to bet all the money. The sacks that gambler got from the saloon keeper were some Uncle Adam had made for him and filled with lead and sand and given to him before they left so that the saloon keeper in Virginia City was holding a lot of sealed buckskin bags, thinking they were full of gold dust. The gambler and Uncle Adam each had two sacks of real dust to begin with.

Father said that Uncle Adam paid each of the men \$500 before they left, and they came back with over \$6,000 they had won while waiting for the wagon train to come in and after it had left.

Who were they? Father would never tell, but he did say they were prominent members of the Mormon Church. Possibly those were the

men Brigham Young referred to when he said, "Gamblers in the Mormon Church? Sure we have them, and they are so smooth they can trim the slickest gamblers that the West can produce."

No general ever planned a battle more carefully than Uncle Adam planned that trip. Now about the liquor. When the last of the axle grease was taken out, Bishop John put in an appearance, for he had heard the train was in. Adam called the men all together and asked each one if he had seen him take even one swallow of liquor. Not a man had, but some intimated he must have done so or "else he was the best damned actor living."

James P. Sharp

