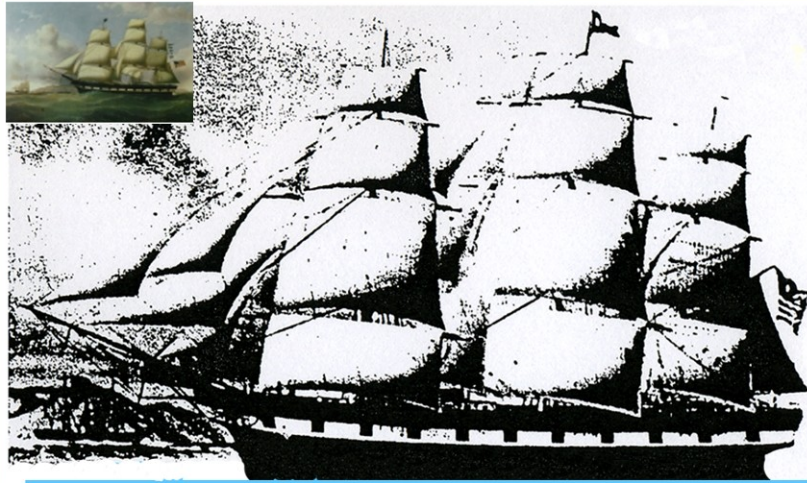


## The Ship Clara Wheeler



### CLARA WHEELER

Courtesy The Mariners Museum, Newport News, Virginia

Ship: 996 tons: 174' x 35' x 27'  
Built: 1850 by John Taylor at Medford, Massachusetts

This square-rigger sailed from Liverpool on 24 April 1854 with twenty-nine Mormon passengers. After seventy days at sea the *Clara Wheeler* arrived at New Orleans on 3 July. Virtually nothing is known of this passage, except Captain J. F. Nelson's report of three deaths.

A second voyage under Nelson's command commenced from Liverpool seven months later—on 24 November 1854. There were 422 Saints on board under the presidency of Elder Henry E. Phelps and his two counselors, Elders John Parson and James Crossley. However, bad weather forced a return to port on 30 November. During this experience the "Saints suffered considerably from sea-sickness." After taking on more provisions the vessel again set sail on 7 December. In three days she had cleared the Irish Channel, but tragedy stalked the passage. Soon after leaving Liverpool measles broke out among the emigrants, and twenty children and two adults died at sea. Upon arrival at New Orleans on 11 January another child died.

The *Clara Wheeler* was a three-decker with a square stern and a billethead at the bow. Her original owners were William Bramhall, Thomas Horne, and Josiah S. Comings of Boston, Massachusetts. In 1856 her owners were listed as Benjamin F. Blydenbaugh and John H. Brower of New York City. Seven years later the ship was sold to foreigners.

Their journey is described this way: "The *Clara Wheeler*, with 421 Saints on board, including infants, cleared for New Orleans on the 24<sup>th</sup> ultimo. Elder Henry E. Phelps took the presidency of the company, with Elders John Parson and James Crossly as his counselors. We commend these brethren and their company to the watchful care and protection of our Heavenly Father, and trust that his blessings

will constantly attend them in their journey to the land and cities of Zion."  
*(Millennial Star, Dec. 9, 1854)*

"The Clara Wheeler put into the Mersey on the 30<sup>th</sup> November, having been driven back by stress of weather. We understand that she received no material damage and the Saints on board were generally well, with the exception of seasickness. After receiving further supplies of water and provisions, she again put to sea on the 7<sup>th</sup> instant with a favorable wind." *(Millennial Star, Dec. 23, 1854)*

"Seventy-eighth Company - 422 souls. The ship Clara Wheeler, with four hundred and twenty-two Saints on board cleared the port at Liverpool November 24, 1854, bound for New Orleans. Elder Henry E. Phelps was appointed president of the company, with Elders John Parson and James Crossly as counselors. After a rough experience in the Irish Channel, being unable to proceed against the incessant head winds and rough weather, the Clara Wheeler was obliged to return to port on the thirtieth of November. During this extraordinary experience the Saints suffered considerable with seasickness. After receiving further supplies of water and provisions, the ship again put to sea on the seventh of December with a favorable wind, and on the tenth she cleared the Irish Channel after which she had a very quick trip to New Orleans, where she arrived on the eleventh of January, 1855. Soon after leaving Liverpool the measles broke out in the company, resulting in the death of twenty children and two grown persons. One child also died after the arrival at New Orleans which made twenty-three deaths in all. On the twelfth of January, James McGaw, the church emigration agent at New Orleans, contracted with the captain of the steamboat Ocena, to take the passengers to St. Louis at the rate of three dollars and a half for each adult, and half of that for children between three and twelve years old; and twenty-four hours after their arrival in New Orleans, the emigrants were on their way up the river. Nearly one half of the company had not the means wherewith to pay their passage to St. Louis; but the more well-to-do Saints who had more money that they needed themselves, were influenced to lend to those who had none, and thus all who desired to continue the journey were enabled to do so. At St. Louis where the company arrived in safety, the emigrants were met by Apostle Erastus Snow and others, who gave the new arrivals a hearty welcome, and conducted them to comfortable quarters, which had been secured for their accommodation. This company, although leaving England in the latter part of 1854, really belonged to the emigration of 1855, in connection with which the Saints who crossed the Atlantic in the Clara Wheeler continued the journey to the Valley." *(Millennial Star, Vol XVI, pp. 778, 815; Vol XVII, pp. 10, 142, 184)*