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THE ENSIGN OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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Latter-day Saint Settlement
of the West





COLONIZING ^{THE} GREAT BASIN



— By Leonard J. Arrington —

When the Latter-day Saint pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in July 1847, they divided themselves into small groups or "brigades." One group went to the mountains to secure timber for building cabins. Another built bridges across the streams. Another plowed and planted crops. Still another brigade went to southern California and to Fort Hall in Idaho to secure seeds, fruit, fruit trees, and cattle.

But the largest brigade commenced a systematic program of exploration, beginning with the Salt Lake Valley and then proceeding to Tooele Valley to the west, Weber and Ogden valleys to the north, Utah Valley to the south, and other nearby areas. The goal was to find suitable areas where the 16,000 Latter-day Saints poised on the banks of the Missouri River could settle. Within a year or two a large exploring company was dispatched to southern Utah and across southern Nevada to southern California. They found iron in southern Utah, and oases and springs along their route, and laid the basis for many future Latter-day Saint settlements.¹

1848 — Within Utah

The settlement process took place in five stages. The first colony out of Great Salt Lake City, as they called it at the time, was ten miles south in what is now Cottonwood and Holladay. In 1848 a group of 250 migrants from Mississippi, including 40 black servants, located on farms there. Within two years, the irrigable land in the remainder of the Salt Lake Valley and contiguous valleys was occupied. About 20,000 Latter-day Saints had settled in Tooele and Grantsville, Davis and Box Elder counties, Weber and Ogden valleys, Utah Valley, Sanpete Valley, and Parowan and Harmony in southern Utah.

1850s — Nevada, the "Mormon Corridor," and parts of Idaho

The second stage of settlement, occurring in the early 1850s, was the colonization of western Nevada, southern California, and northern Idaho. Early in 1849, a group of fifteen Latter-day Saints joined a company of non-Mormons traveling westward to Humboldt Springs, the Sierra Nevada, and northern California. Upon reaching Carson Valley, near the California border, seven of the Saints decided to remain and establish a supply station. By the mid-1850s the Mormon station at Carson was an officially supported and strategic colony in the Latter-day Saint network around the Great Basin.

Meanwhile, the Saints were locating a whole string of settlements



*Salt Lake City as photographed in 1868.
(From the Carter Collection, Church
Archives.)*



stretching south from Salt Lake City to San Pedro and San Diego, California, in a geo-political plan called the "Mormon Corridor." The first in the chain was in Utah Valley, where Provo is located; three thousand people lived there in 1852. Ephraim, Manti, and other towns were located farther south in Sanpete Valley. Parowan was established in the Little Salt Lake Valley in 1851.

The line of new settlements stretched on to Las Vegas, now Nevada, where a colony was established in 1855 to work with the Indians in the region, to mine lead, and to raise semitropical agricultural products. Farther on, a colony was

purpose of the settlement was to make friends with the Bannock, Shoshone, and Snake Indians. The men erected a fort, built homes and a blacksmith shop, and planted and fenced several acres of land. The settlement was a success, at least temporarily, and other settlers from Utah arrived. When President Brigham Young visited the settlement in 1857, everything seemed to be going well. But the next year a large party of Bannock and Shoshone, some of whom had previously been friendly, attacked the settlers, drove off most of their stock, and killed some of the men. The colony was abandoned.

The second Mormon experience

day Saint apostle, militia general and frontiersman. This picturesque region had been the site of a fur trapper rendezvous in the 1820s. The success in colonizing Cache Valley had given confidence that Bear Lake could be settled successfully. The Bear Lake colony was strengthened by additional families in the years that followed—sixteen villages were settled.

In all, some ninety-six colonies or settlements, including the twenty-seven along the Mormon Corridor to California, were founded by the Saints during the first ten years after they came into the Great Salt Lake Valley in 1847. The pattern was one of directed settlements—that is, the colonization was a community effort directed by Church authorities rather than the result of spontaneous and independent movement of individuals: First, there was preliminary exploration by companies appointed, equipped, and supported by the central Church; second, colonizing companies were appointed to found the settlements; and third, the companies were expected to pattern the new community institutions after those of Salt Lake City, which were in turn patterned after those of Nauvoo, Illinois, and Jackson County, Missouri.

Upon reaching their destination the colonists dedicated the land by prayer and cooperatively erected a fort or stockade which would serve as a temporary home and community center, as well as a protection against Indians. From this fort, colonists went forth each day in organized groups to dig canals, plant crops, build roads, fences, and homes, and otherwise prepare the groundwork for village life. This day-to-day work was usually planned in meetings of all heads of families—and each colonist was given specific assignments. These meetings were conducted under the direction of an apostle, if one were present, or the bishop who had been appointed in Salt Lake City before the company left.

During this period of preparation the settlement area was


established at San Bernardino, California. The reasons for the settlement are given in President Brigham Young's official journal: to continue the chain of settlements from Salt Lake City to the Pacific; to provide a mail station; to cultivate olives, grapes, sugar cane, cotton, and other such desirable fruits and products; and, in President Young's words, "to plant the standard of salvation in every country and kingdom, city and village, on the Pacific and the world over, as fast as God should give the ability."² Some 450 Church members from the Salt Lake Valley arrived in 1851, and by 1855 there were about 1,500 inhabitants. Their butter, cheese, eggs, and flour were sold throughout southern California, as also was a large supply of lumber which they secured from the San Bernardino Mountains.

The Idaho colony was founded in 1855, when a company of men went to the Lemhi Range of mountains near present-day Salmon. This was then Oregon Territory. The

into present-day Idaho began three years later as part of the settlement of the irrigable places in Cache Valley. Many persons had thought that Cache Valley was too cold to grow crops on a regular basis, but a long dry spell in 1855-56 caused Church leaders to reconsider. An experimental colony was established at Wellsville in 1856. In 1858 there was an influx of additional settlers, particularly Latter-day Saints originally from the southern states who had returned to Utah from San Bernardino. Their success attracted others, and Franklin, Idaho, was settled under the direction of Preston Thomas, a former Texan, in 1860. This was the first permanent Anglo-Saxon settlement in what is now Idaho. As time went on, the Saints spread up into Preston and other places in Oneida and Franklin counties.

Three years later, when Idaho was made a territory, forty families established a settlement at Paris, in Bear Lake Valley, under the direction of Charles C. Rich, a Latter-




The Latter-day Saint settlements were not the result of independent efforts by individuals; instead, the Church directed colonizing efforts along the Mormon Corridor and elsewhere. Some ninety-six colonies were established from 1847-57.

surveyed and divided into blocks of ten acres each by an appointed Church engineer. The blocks were separated by wide streets. A large block in the center was reserved for public buildings, and an important early task was the construction of a combination meetinghouse-schoolhouse on this lot. Each of the remaining blocks was divided into equal lots of an acre or more each, which were distributed among the colonists in a community drawing. Each family was entitled to one lot. On these lots the colonists built their homes, planted their orchards, raised their vegetables and flowers, and erected their livestock and poultry sheds.

Outside the village, the surveyor located an area (called "the Big Field") that could be conveniently irrigated. It was divided into lots ranging from five to twenty acres each, depending on the amount of irrigable land and the number of colonists. One of these farming lots was assigned to each family, again by a community drawing.

Besides the heavy community involvement, life in the farm villages was a family affair—everyone helped out. Resourcefulness was an important asset. The women often helped build the houses, plow and plant the crops, cut and stack the hay, shear sheep, spin and weave cloth, care for the chickens, and milk the cows. One sister tells the story of a young man who was leaving in seven days on a proselyting mission. When the women heard that he had no suit to wear, they went to work: "One Sunday the wool was on the sheep's back," she writes, "but by the next Sunday it had been clipped, cleansed, corded, spun, woven, and made into a splendid suit and was on the back of the missionary as he delivered his farewell address in our little church house."³

1870s—Surrounding areas in the West

The third wave of Latter-day Saint colonization took place in the 1870s when the Saints swarmed

into southern and eastern Idaho, southwestern Wyoming, southern and eastern Nevada, southwestern Colorado, and northern and central Arizona. While this colonization was not called or directed in the same sense as in the 1850s, it was encouraged and supported by the central Church. In most instances the colonies were supervised and assisted by local wards and stakes located near the area being settled.

The Latter-day Saint movement into Idaho was a direct result of a new railroad from Ogden, Utah, north to Montana. The Utah Northern Railroad, financed by eastern interests but with Cache Valley Saints doing most of the labor, was completed from Ogden to Franklin in 1874. It was extended on through the upper Snake River Valley in 1878 and succeeding years. As the railroad pushed north, settlements followed. More than a dozen different villages or communities were settled in the next few years, including Rexburg, Parker, Menan, Lewisville, and Teton. In general this settlement was relatively well organized, under the direction of William B. Preston, the ecclesiastical leader in Cache Valley. Preston's instructions from Church headquarters in Salt Lake City were to settle the Saints in villages, just as was the pattern in Utah. In this way their ecclesiastical organizations could more effectively serve them, they would be closer to schools, and they could more effectively cooperate in making ditches, fencing fields, building bridges, and running their livestock. The village plan also made it easier to guard against horse and cattle thieves, land jumpers, and hostile Indians.

The Church instructions included the following admonition:

"Care must be taken that the interests of the Indians on their reservations, water claims or otherwise are not interfered with; but they must be guarded and protected in all their rights as is the white man. In all cases, a friendly and brotherly disposition should be nourished towards the Lamanites who will be our friends if we do not repulse

them."⁴

The movement into Star Valley, Wyoming, was similar, and was accomplished primarily by Cache Valley Saints. Eleven communities were founded in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Another movement at the same time resulted in the founding of a cluster of colonies in San Luis Valley in southwestern Colorado. Most of the early residents there were migrants from Mississippi who, after their conversion to the gospel, wished to locate somewhere in the Mountain West.

The movement into Nevada began in 1864 when a group was called from southern Utah to settle Meadow Valley in east central Nevada. But in the years that followed, group after group went to southern Nevada to settle about a dozen communities to grow cotton and semitropical products, and to supply provisions for travelers on the Spanish Trail toward California.

But the largest and most important movement of the 1870s and early 1880s was directed toward Arizona. The Mormon Battalion had passed through that country on its memorable march in 1846 from the Missouri River to the Pacific Coast. After four settlements had been founded in 1876 on the Little Colorado River, other settlements were soon founded on the Gila and Salt rivers. Despite their hard lot initially, these settlers eventually began to prosper, and they provided the foundation for the community of Latter-day Saints in Arizona which now numbers about 200,000. The Udalls, Eyrings, Ellsworths, and Kimballs are all products of this heritage.

Outside the U.S.

With the upper Snake River solidly settled, a group of colonies began in Alberta, Canada. And with many communities now located in Arizona, it was also natural to establish bases in Sonora and Chihuahua in Mexico. These, and colonies in the Hawaiian Islands and elsewhere in the South Pacific, were lonely outposts until the significant Latter-day Saint expansion

throughout the Free World after World War II. There are now more LDS stakes in Latin America than in all the world in 1928.

Twentieth Century

We should not overlook the significant colonization in this century. In Wyoming and Idaho, for example, many members of the Church moved into the Teton area, primarily from Star Valley, Wyoming; into Magic Valley, after the completion of the Milner Dam in 1905; and into the Boise and Payette areas. Earlier colonies also grew. Some of this expansion was the result of the erection of beet sugar factories by Latter-day Saint and other interests early in the twentieth century. In still more recent times, the opening of new lands for settlement after the completion of reclamation projects has seen considerable numbers of Latter-day Saints move into the American Falls area, Rupert, and Emmett. These provided the foundation for the 200,000 or more Latter-day Saints in Idaho today.

Some LDS Contributions to West-ern Colonization

Most of the Latter-day Saint colonists in the mountain states and Oregon and Washington were farmers. Latter-day Saints have always been heavily involved in the growing of cattle and horses, wheat and hay, potatoes and peas, and sugarbeets. Some time ago, Kusum Nair, a charming writer and educator from India, who had received a grant from the World Bank to make a study of agriculture in the United States, Japan, and India, suggested a reason for the Latter-day Saint success with these crops. In her prize-winning book *The Lonely Furrow*, there are two chapters on Latter-day Saint farmers. She wrote of one prominent non-Mormon agriculturist in Washington who told her that most Americans could not do irrigated farming. "It is much harder work than other kinds of agriculture," he said. "An American can look big—six feet tall. But he cannot work hard. Now the Orien-

tals and Mormons can do that kind of work. They don't mind it. But not Americans. It's too hard." And he went on to tell Mrs. Nair that the Mormons "learnt to do it only because they had to. It was a desert they settled, and there was no place else they could have gone to." Mrs. Nair concludes her two chapters on the Mormons by commending them for their blending of agriculture and religion in what she calls spiritual economics.⁵

Hard work is not the only contribution of Latter-day Saint pioneers to the development of the West. Here are some others:

1. They made persistent efforts through the years to establish friendly relations with Indians, and they have played a significant role in the intellectual, social, economic, and cultural achievements of western Indians in the past generation.

2. They contributed significantly toward the passage of women suffrage in the states of the mountain west in the years before World War I.

3. They helped perpetuate a heritage of economic cooperation, which has helped provide the kind of economic organization necessary to the development of the arid West.

4. They established and maintained cultural facilities and activities: ward schools, stake academies, colleges and universities, dance halls, choirs, theatrical productions, art festivals, classes in literature, and instruction in health and nursing.

Finally, it would be well to remember three general goals of early Latter-day Saint colonists. First, they cultivated a reverence for life and for nature. Even as they crossed the Great Plains, headed for the Salt Lake Valley, they agreed upon a rule that they must be kind to their animals. "The more kind we are to our animals," said President Brigham Young, "the more will peace increase, and the savage nature of the brute creation will vanish away" (in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:203).

Second, they tried to keep their

settlements clean and productive. "Build cities," said President Young, "adorn your habitations, make gardens, orchards, and vineyards, and render the earth so pleasant that when you look upon your labors you may do so with pleasure, and that angels may delight to come and visit your beautiful locations" (in *Journal of Discourses*, 8:83).

Third, they sought personal development and improvement. This accounts, no doubt, for their heavy investment in education. Elder Parley P. Pratt said: "Here we can cultivate the mind, renew the spirit, invigorate the body, cheer the heart and ennoble the soul of man. Here we can cultivate every science and art calculated to enlarge the mind, accommodate the body, or polish and adorn our race."⁶

President Brigham Young often said that the way to achieve success as a person, as a family, as a community, as a nation was to work hard, plan well, and trust in God.

That formula, inherent in the success of the Latter-day Saint colonization of the Old West, remains valid for all of us. □

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1. The following sources provide documentation for most of the information in this article: Milton R. Hunter, *Brigham Young the Colonizer* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1940); Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958); and B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, 1930).

2. Manuscript history of Brigham Young, 20 Mar. 1851.

3. Miscellaneous pioneer interviews and sketches: Mary Julia Johnson Wilson, p. 31, Mormon Diaries, Journals, and Life Sketches, Box 10, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

4. John Taylor and Joseph F. Smith to William B. Preston and Counselors 26 Dec. 1882, First Presidency Letter Press Copybooks, vol. 6, Church Hist. Dept. Archives.

5. Kusum Nair, *The Lonely Furrow: Farming in the United States, Japan, and India* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1969), pp. 37-38; italics in original.

6. Manuscript history of Brigham Young, 23 Aug. 1848.