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WITHDRAWN

MIGRATION
TO AND FROM
A Northern Wyoming
Mormon
Community
1900 to 1925

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MORMON MIGRATION has been analyzed by many scholars concerned with the development of settlement patterns in the American West (Sherlock 1975; Meinig 1965; Spencer 1940; Peterson 1973; Miller 1966; Arrington 1958; and Ricks 1965). Most studies emphasize the memorable 1847 trek from Nauvoo to the shores of Great Salt Lake, the subsequent planting of a long, solid core of Mormondom through the heart of Utah, or the successful expansion of Latter-day Saint colonization to increasingly more remote localities from Arizona to Alberta. Little attention has been paid to occasions when Mormon settlement was not an unqualified success, when a sizeable portion of the population left the colony. This paper, focusing on Cowley, Wyoming, which lost more than one-third of its original settlers within twenty-five years of its establishment in 1900, is a reminder that some Mormon colonization ventures did not live up to their founders' expectations, and it suggests that pioneers' ages, areal backgrounds, and occupations were instrumental in determining the degree and direction of settler mobility in and out of the Cowley community.

Settlement of Cowley and two other Mormon villages, Byron and

Lovell, all located within six miles of one another near the northern end of the Big Horn Basin (Fig. 1), was precipitated by several circumstances

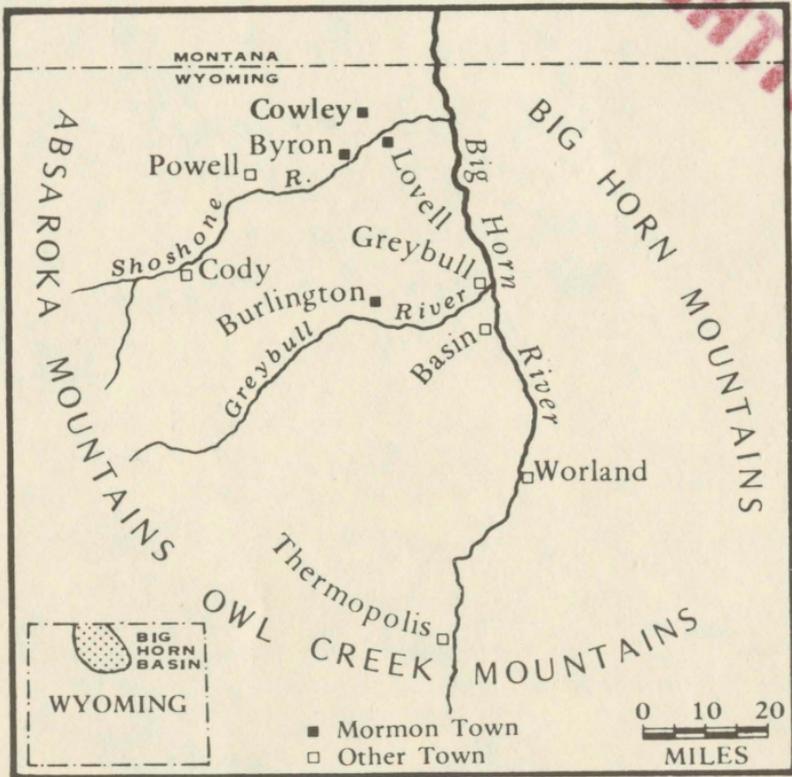


FIG. 1.

that combined in the late nineteenth century. Many Utah and Idaho valleys were already overcrowded. Drought, cold winters, and the economic depression of the 1890s hamstrung the Latter-day Saints' efforts to wrest a living from other intermontane lands, and in southeastern Idaho an invasion of ground squirrels destroyed many crops. As early as 1893, some beleaguered Mormons had left Utah and filtered into the Big Horn Basin to establish a small settlement on Burlington Flat, along the Greybull River (McIntosh n.d.; Bowen 1972a; 1976). Within six years, word of this pioneer community and favorable reports about settlement prospects elsewhere in the Basin convinced Church officials to investi-

gate organizing a northern Wyoming colony. A party of influential Latter-day Saints, sent to the Basin early in 1900 to select a settlement site, recommended the vicinity of the confluence of Sage Creek and the Shoshone River. Arrangements to obtain land and water rights were quickly made between Church leaders and Wyoming authorities, and the call went out for willing colonists. In May, 1900, only three months after the land selection committee had visited the Basin, the first wagon train of migrants arrived at Sage Creek. Before summer ended, approximately 800 Mormon settlers had reached the Basin, and by 1905, more than 1700 pioneers lived in and around Cowley, Byron, and Lovell (Lindsay 1932; Lythogoe 1942; and Wasden 1973).

MIGRATION TO COWLEY

INFORMATION OBTAINED from various collections of unpublished Church records and from the biographical section of a history of Cowley written by an original settler provides a reasonably complete profile of nearly 300 men and women who migrated to Cowley between 1900 and 1905.¹ This includes every adult who moved to Cowley before the end of 1905, at which time, according to Church statistics, 543 Mormons lived in Cowley and its immediate surroundings. For some of these colonists, it has also been possible to determine all places of residence prior and subsequent to their living in Cowley. Taken together, these sources provide unusually detailed insights into the nature of a pioneer society and the geographic patterns involved in the settlement of a single Mormon community.

More than four-fifths of the migrants who settled in Cowley between 1900 and 1905 migrated directly from Utah, but their flow was not uniform from all parts of the state. Thirty-five percent of the Utah

¹Church records of importance include the Cowley Ward Historical Record, a day-to-day account of church meetings and community affairs, the Cowley Ward Record of Members, and the Cowley Ward Historical Statistics, all on file in the Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah, and the Latter-day Saints Family Genealogical Records, on file in the Genealogical Division of the Church

office Building in Salt Lake City. Partridge (1976) includes a historical sketch of Cowley, numerous anecdotes and historical vignettes, and a lengthy biographical section based on Church and family records and his personal familiarity with most of the early settlers. Unless otherwise noted, all information on individuals migrating to and from Cowley has been obtained from these sources.

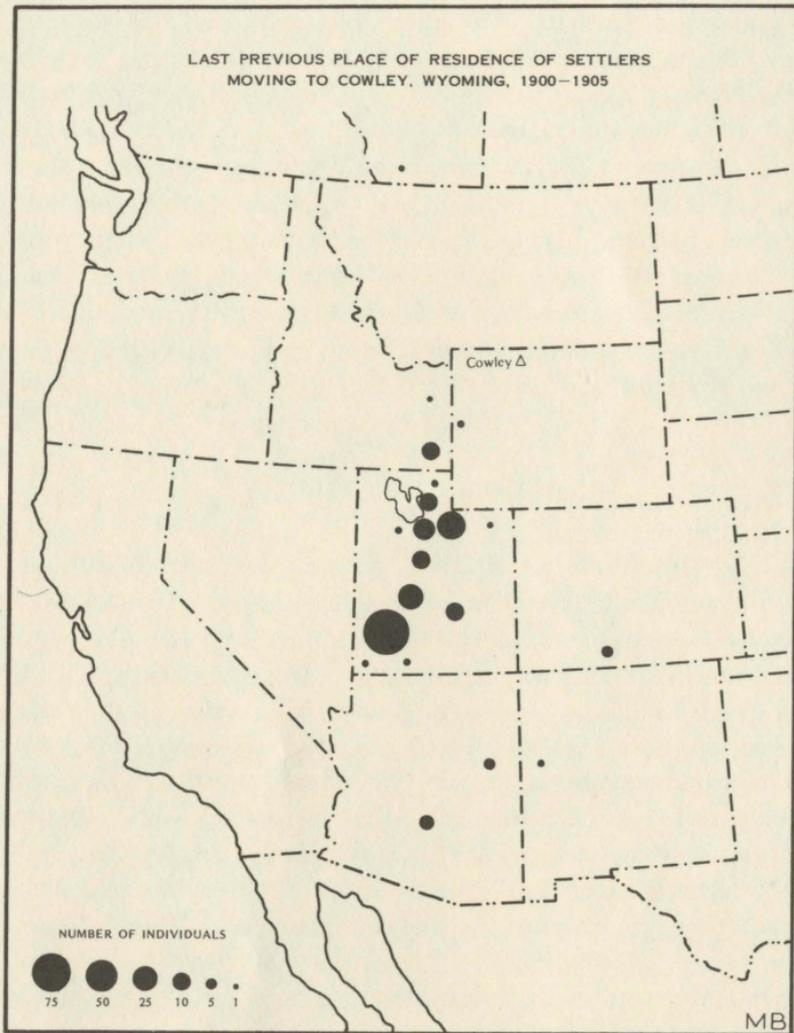


FIG. 2.

pioneers arrived from the dry basins of southwestern Utah, with the town of Parowan, some sixty miles north of the Arizona border, alone supplying forty-nine adult settlers (Fig. 2). The Parowan people, like most other groups migrating to Cowley, were closely interrelated. Every adult settler from Parowan who moved to Cowley was accompanied by at least one other adult, in addition to his spouse, to whom he was related by birth or by marriage (Partridge 1976:153-283). Most men and women from Parowan were recruited by Jesse W. Crosby, Jr., an influential south-

western Utah political leader who had recently been appointed as an officer in the Church-controlled Big Horn Basin Colonization Company, which carried out northern Wyoming settlement plans formulated by Mormon leaders. Crosby's efforts were a bit slow to bear fruit, however, and most of his colonists did not begin arriving until late in 1900, the bulk of them arriving in 1902 and 1903, after a series of crop failures in the Parowan area (Minutes 1900; Parowan 1900-1903; Wasden 1973). By that time the colony's original village, Byron, was overflowing with settlers, so the newcomers were shunted east of Sage Creek to Cowley. There they joined with fourteen adults and about a dozen children from Escalante, a small community east of Parowan, to swell the number of southwestern Utah people living in Cowley. About half of the Escalante settlers—most of them also related to one another—moved to Cowley in 1901 when Church authorities called one of them to transfer his sawmill from Escalante to a wooded area north of Cowley. All of the others, traveling together, arrived in 1903 when Escalante had a shortage of irrigation water. Combined with pioneers from Panguitch and Beaver, the settlers from Parowan and Escalante gave Cowley a distinctively southwestern Utah flavor, in contrast to its sister village of Byron, which was dominated by pioneers from northeastern Utah and adjacent Idaho. Significantly, very few people from the extreme southwestern fringes of Utah settled in Cowley. Instead, these men and women gravitated to Lovell, whose bishop, from Mt. Carmel, just twenty miles north of the Arizona line, had been a prominent leader in southern Utah affairs (Byron 1900-1925; Lovell 1901-1910; 1901-1925).

One-sixth of the settlers who moved to Cowley from Utah went there from the upland valleys in the northeastern part of the state, with pioneers from Morgan County, east of Ogden, in the Wasatch range, the most numerous. Most of these people were induced to move to the colony by the persuasive treasurer of the Big Horn Basin Colonization Company, Charles A. Welch, from Morgan, and, to a lesser degree, by Byron Sessions, a northeastern Utah rancher who directed the day-to-day affairs of the colony in its formative years (Lindsay 1932:193-195; Welch 1940; Morgan 1900; Woodruff 1900). Although most families recruited by Welch and Sessions settled in Byron, enough northeastern Utah people trickled into Cowley to give the latter community an element of diversity that partially offset the dominance of families from Parowan, Escalante, Panguitch, and Beaver.

In contrast to the swarm of men and women from southwestern Utah

and the relatively large number from sparsely settled northeastern Utah, a disproportionately low twenty-two percent of the settlers from Utah came from the densely populated seventy-five mile strip from Ogden to Provo, including Salt Lake City. The single most significant contributing community from this entire area was Bountiful, just north of Salt Lake City, where Session's sister convinced more than a dozen men and women to settle in Cowley (Mann 1972). But the overall impact of pioneers from the Ogden-Provo strip was relatively insignificant, for they represented twelve different towns and cities, rarely (except for the Bountiful people) knew each other before moving to Cowley, and lacked the solidarity of compact bands of friends and relatives from the smaller, more remote localities. Indeed, just as many migrants arrived at Cowley from Garfield County, which includes tiny Escalante, as arrived from all of Salt Lake County. The migration of Utah residents to the Cowley was predominantly a movement of men and women from parched desert basins and cool, isolated mountain valleys, where physical and economic conditions were ripe for emigration. People living in older, well-established communities near Salt Lake City, apparently satisfied with their location, were clearly more reluctant to leave solidly built homes, well tended farms, good job, and friends of long standing for a fling at Wyoming pioneering (Partridge 1971; Stevens 1971; Monk 1971; Johnson 1971; Doty 1972; Wolz 1972; Tippetts 1972; Mann 1972).

Similar patterns were exhibited by migrants from locales outside Utah. All but one of the Idaho colonists, for example, came from the little village of Bennington, north of Bear Lake. All of these men and women moved to Cowley at the urging of Brigham L. Tippetts, Sr., a Bennington man who had been in the party that originally selected the colony's site. This community provided Cowley with more than two dozen men, women, and children bearing a variety of surnames, but analysis of the individual relationships of these Bennington settlers shows that the group was a collection of cousins and in-laws who represented just two neighboring families. Specifically, the elder Tippetts, who led the Bennington group to Cowley, was married to his own cousin, who, with several married children, their spouses and children, all moved to Wyoming together. They were accompanied by Tippetts's neighbor, Emma Lindsay, a widow, with a number of her twenty natural children and step-children, a few of them young married adults (Partridge 1976:218, 265-267; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Lindsay and Tippetts family genealogical records).

Far to the south, half of the settlers from Arizona came from the town of Snowflake, an outpost of Mormondom on the Colorado Plateau. With the exception of one man, all colonists from Snowflake moved to Cowley in 1905, were all related to one another, and, in turn, were all related to a family from Parowan who moved to Cowley in 1901. Clearly, few men and women from these distant lands struck out for the Big Horn Basin alone.

PROFILE OF MIGRANTS

COWLEY MIGRANTS were young. Of 130 adult males who moved to Cowley between 1900 and 1905, nearly three-fifths were under thirty-five years old, forty-five percent were under thirty, almost one-third were under twenty-five, and over twenty percent were between twenty-one and twenty-five. Nearly one of every ten "adult" male heads of families who arrived on Cowley Flat was twenty years or younger. Only fourteen men (10.8 percent) were over fifty, and half of these were elderly folk who moved to Wyoming with their children or grandchildren. The median age of adult-male pioneers when they arrived at Cowley was thirty-two. Records of the ages of women who migrated to Cowley are somewhat less complete, but calculation of data available shows that fifty-one percent of the wives whose ages are known were from one to four years younger than their husbands, thirty percent were from five to ten years younger, and only thirteen percent were older than their husbands. Several fifteen- and sixteen-year-old brides were among the first arrivals. Without doubt, the bulk of Cowley's original settlers were youthful men and women, well-suited for pioneering by their vigor and exuberance, but perhaps lacking the stability and experience that older settlers might have possessed (Partridge 1976:153-283; Cowley 1900-1925 Record of Members).

The men who settled Cowley had been employed in a wide variety of jobs before moving to Wyoming. Farmers were the most numerous single category, but altogether they constituted only twenty-three percent of the settlers. Ranchers, ranch hands, and shepherds were nearly as numerous as farmers, and there were probably more former livestock ranch operators and hands than farmers in the community at any one time (Monk 1971; Johnson 1971). At least nine skilled craftsmen (including a weaver, a shoemaker, a cabinet maker, and a blacksmith) were among the first settlers, while a dozen pioneers had formerly been either operators of

grist or saw mills or workers in mines and quarries.

Slightly over half of the men whose occupations before going to Cowley are known arrived from four localities that provided nearly three-fifths of the original settlers. Analysis of occupations of settlers in this group shows that the Parowan area, which supplied more than one-sixth of all Cowley pioneers, was the source of nearly forty percent of the men who had been farmers before coming to Wyoming. The Ogden-to-Provo axis, including Salt Lake City, which was the source of another twenty-two percent of the settlers, contributed only one-sixth of the men who had been farmers, but supplied almost half of the former miners and mill operators. Information about former occupations of men from Escalante and northeastern Utah is more sketchy, but it does show that few pioneers from either of these isolated localities were farmers. The available evidence suggests that if a man migrating to Cowley had been a farmer, it was far more likely that he had farmed near Parowan, in arid southwestern Utah, than at the base of the Wasatch, or in cool, high Morgan County, or in the Escalante area.

Diversity of pre-migration employment is consistent with the Mormon colonization principle that Latter-day Saint settlements, planned as nearly self-sufficient units, should include artisans and professional men, as well as farmers (Nelson 1952:51-52, 86; Arrington 1958:216-218; Spencer 1940 185-186). Fewer than one-fourth of the Cowley settlers had first-hand farming experience, but in the first years of settlements, non-agricultural opportunities were limited. At least sixty percent of the pioneers, spurred by the need for survival, moved directly into farming occupations. By 1905, they were raising oats, wheat, alfalfa, garden vegetables, and a variety of barnyard livestock on forty-to eighty-acre, irrigated plots surrounding the village, on what became known as Cowley Flat (Partridge 1976:63-64; Cowley, August 27 and December 30, 1905, Historical Records). Every one of the former ranchers, ranch hands, and shepherds became farmers; all but one of the men who had been farmers elsewhere continued as farmers; and half of the miners and quarriers took up farming. These groups provided eighty percent of Cowley Flat's farmers. The remaining farmers included bakers, plasterers, freighters, and lawyers.

ALKALI AND THE DECLINE OF COWLEY

IRRIGATION AGRICULTURE, after a promising start, on Cowley Flat, encountered serious difficulties. Men from southwestern Utah, where water was scarce, believed that if application of small amounts of water resulted in good crops, then unrestrained use of abundant Shoshone River water would permit outstanding yields. Some of these farmers permitted water to flow into their fields for as long as thirty-six successive hours. Because no one had bothered with careful investigation of soil structure, most men were unaware that the land under cultivation, largely heavy clays, was underlain by a nearly impermeable hardpan. By 1905, some fields were waterlogged, and alkali had begun to accumulate. Serious crop failures occurred in 1909, 1910, and 1912. By the 1920s, over sixty percent of the cultivated land on Cowley Flat had become highly charged with alkali; southeast of Cowley village, fields that had produced good crops from 1905 to about 1910 had become so boggy and salt-encrusted that several quarter sections were abandoned and became overgrown with salt sage (Bowen 1972b:17; 1974:5-6).

The most serious waterlogging and crop failures occurred on lands cultivated by men who had not been farmers before migrating to Cowley. A former teacher, a one-time miller, and an ex-sheriff were among the first to become disillusioned with increasing accumulations of alkali and declining yields. By 1910, these men had given up farming, and soon other pioneers with similar backgrounds admitted their failures. By 1925, fully eighty percent of the men still farming on Cowley Flat were people with at least some experience in using the land; two-thirds of them were farmers or former ranchers, and most of the remainder had been previously employed as cowboys and shepherds. Presumably, these men had been quicker to perceive the dangers of overirrigation and had acted to combat them, or perhaps, knowing no other trade, they were trapped on deteriorating farmlands with no alternative sources of employment.

Migration from Cowley began almost as soon as the first speck of alkali appeared. The exodus reached a peak in 1912 when ninety-five residents, about fifteen percent of the community's total population, moved away (Cowley 1912, Historical Record). By 1925, forty-one percent of the surviving adult pioneers who had come to Cowley between 1900 and 1905 had departed. Departure was most pronounced among men with limited agricultural experience. Not a single surviving

craftsman, public servant, miller, or tradesman who had tried farming on Cowley Flat still lived there 1925. In fact, every man who had been employed as a craftsman before coming to Cowley, regardless of whether he had attempted to farm, had left the community by 1925 (Partridge 1976:153-283). By that year, over four-fifths of Cowley's male population was engaged in farming, while the remainder consisted primarily of a few clerks and businessmen who had managed to follow their former occupations in the new colony. The sifting out process was nearly complete.

Most of the people who left Cowley before the end of 1925 were relatively young adults and their families. Of males whose dates of birth and departure are known, about sixty percent were no more than forty-five years old. One-sixth of the male departees were between thirty-six and forty years of age. Only a handful of old men moved away from Cowley, discounting the premise that migration away from a rough Wyoming pioneer community would be dominated by feeble old-timers, unable to work, who would leave the state to live out their last years in more comfortable, settled circumstances. If a man stayed in Cowley for more than a dozen years, and had reached the age of sixty by that time, it was a near certainty that he would not move away. Instead, the exodus was most pronounced among men who had stayed in northern Wyoming about nine or ten years, who were still young and vigorous enough to work, and who sought better prospects for farming or other employment, but not retirement.

Destinations of people leaving Cowley varied considerably, but the bulk of the departees moved westward, primarily to Mormon communities in Utah and Idaho, or to California cities (Fig. 3). The string of communities between the Wasatch Mountains and Great Salt Lake attracted most of them, Salt Lake City alone receiving nine percent of the people moving from Cowley; towns in the immediate vicinity of Salt Lake City, such as Bountiful and Murray, drew an additional twelve percent. Another one-third of the people leaving Cowley traveled to other Utah communities, but with the exception of an area recently opened for settlement on the Uintah Indian Reservation in eastern Utah, no other place in Utah attracted more than a half-dozen departing Cowley pioneers. Idaho settlements provided homes for eleven percent of the men and women from Cowley. In contrast to the overwhelming role of Bennington in supplying Idaho settler for Cowley in earlier years, there were now six communities in three different parts of Idaho that received

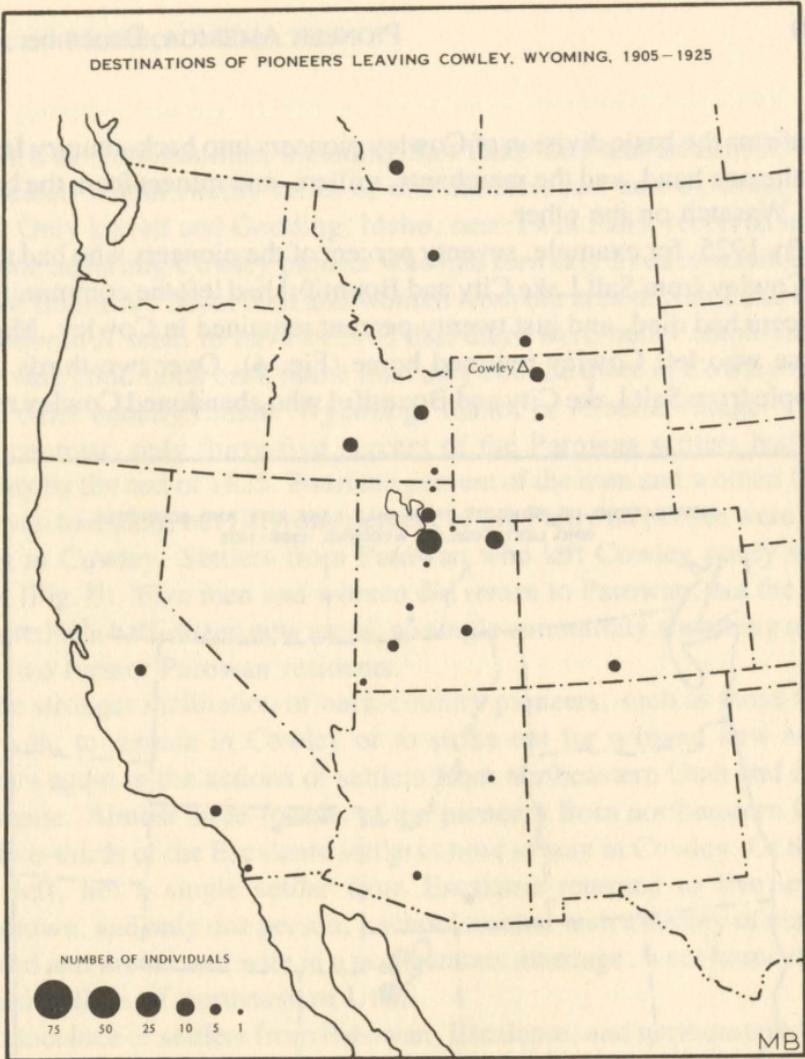


FIG. 3.

people leaving Cowley. Of these, Bennington was the least significant, with only one couple returning home to the neighborhood of Bear Lake. Elsewhere, fifteen percent of the departees from Cowley moved to other Wyoming localities, particularly Lovell, while California received another nine percent, with Los Angeles accounting for half of them.

BACKGROUND AS A BIAS IN DEPARTURE

COMPARISON OF THE DEGREE of departure and the destinations of settlers from the Salt Lake City-Bountiful area with those from Parowan

confirms the basic division of Cowley pioneers into back-country farmers on the one hand, and the merchants, millers, and miners from the base of the Wasatch on the other.

By 1925, for example, seventy percent of the pioneers who had moved to Cowley from Salt Lake City and Bountiful had left the community, ten percent had died, and just twenty percent remained in Cowley. Many of those who left Cowley returned home (Fig. 4). Over two-thirds of the people from Salt Lake City and Bountiful who abandoned Cowley moved

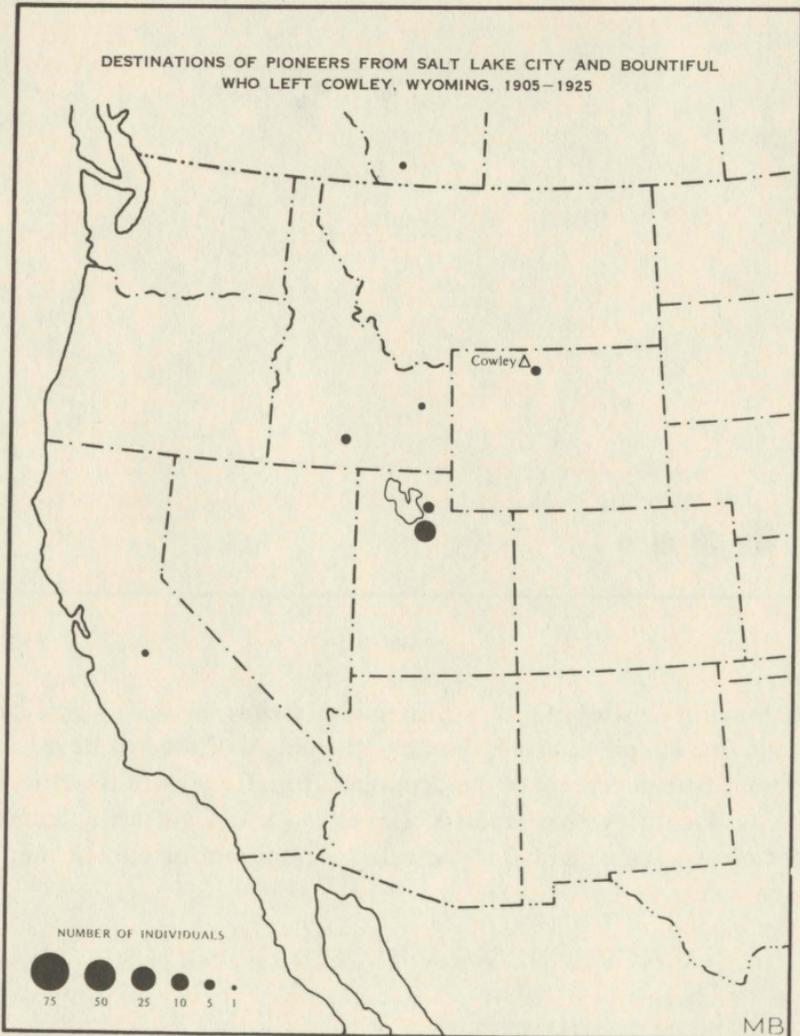


FIG. 4.

to four Utah communities, including Salt Lake City and Bountiful, that are located within twenty miles of one another, just east of Great Salt Lake. Only Lovell and Gooding, Idaho, near Twin Falls, received more than one departing Cowley pioneer who had formerly lived in Salt Lake City or Bountiful. Most men and women from the area of Salt Lake City and Bountiful seem to have believed that there were better employment and living conditions back home than they could expect in Cowley or in some other equally remote Wyoming, Idaho, or Alberta village.

In contrast, only thirty-five percent of the Parowan settlers had left Cowley by the end of 1925. Fourteen percent of the men and women from Parowan had died, but fifty-one percent of the Parowan people were still living in Cowley. Settlers from Parowan who left Cowley rarely went home (Fig. 5). Five men and women did return to Parowan, but the rest scattered to a half-dozen new areas, no single community absorbing more than two former Parowan residents.

The stronger inclination of back-country pioneers, such as those from Parowan, to remain in Cowley or to strike out for a brand new home appears again in the actions of settlers from northeastern Utah and from Escalante. Almost three-fourths of the pioneers from northeastern Utah and two-thirds of the Escalante settlers chose to stay in Cowley. Of those who left, not a single settler from Escalante returned to live in his hometown, and only one person, a school teacher with a history of marital discord and the second wife in a polygamous marriage, went home to the upland valleys of northeastern Utah.

Reluctance of settlers from Parowan, Escalante, and northeastern Utah to return home might well have been predicated on the lack of opportunity in these areas, and is suggestive of precisely why they left these remote basins and valleys in the first place. For example, a survey conducted in Escalante in 1923 showed that almost all irrigable land was already in use, housing conditions were inadequate, public education stopped at the tenth grade, medical, dental, and legal aid were not available within sixty-five miles, and recreational and social opportunities were quite limited. There was little incentive for Cowley residents to return to Escalante, for at least Cowley could boast of newer, more substantial housing, a full public high school, professional services available either locally or within six miles, and diversity of recreational and social opportunities (Nelson 1952:83-108; Partridge 1976:75-122; Cowley 1900-1925, Historical Record).

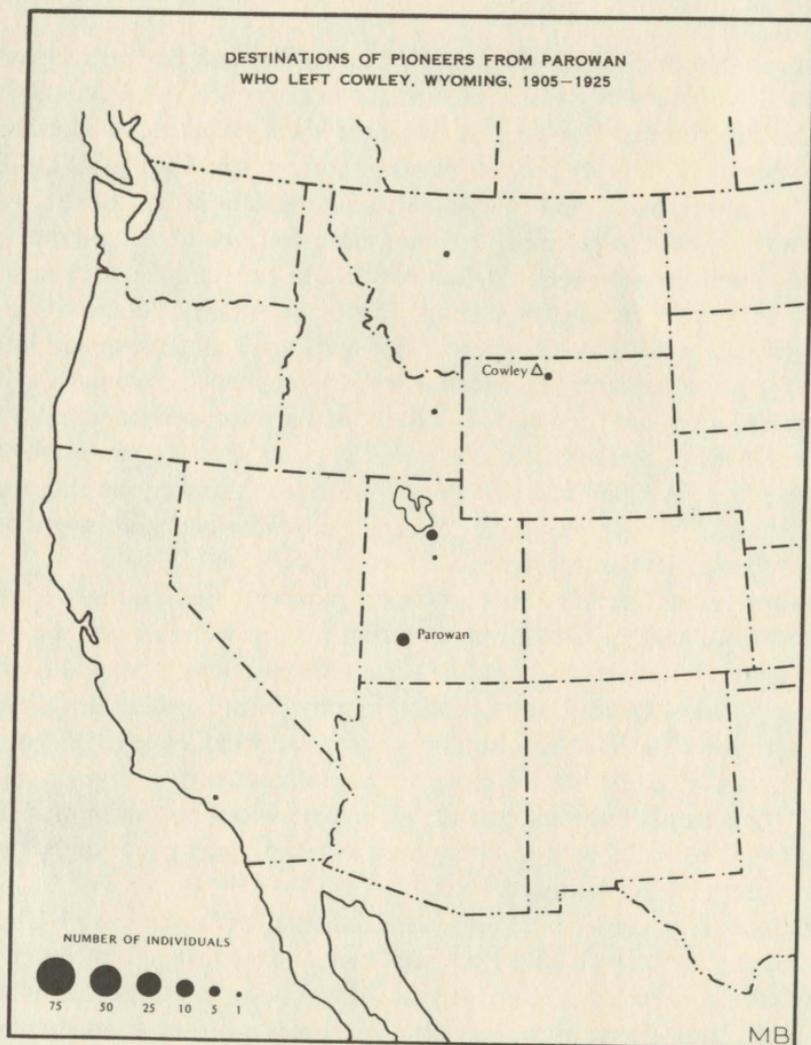


FIG. 5.

WILLINGNESS TO MIGRATE

THE UNWILLINGNESS of men and women from the area of Salt Lake City and Bountiful to remain in Cowley, plus the inclination of settlers from Parowan and other Utah communities to move on to new settlements upon leaving Cowley, calls attention to the possibility that much of

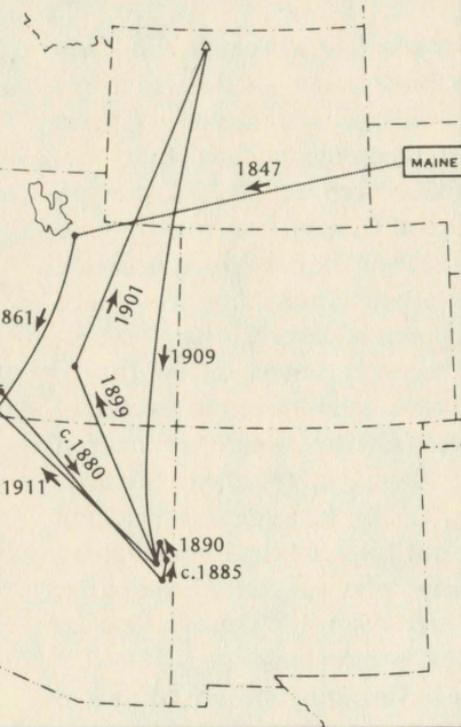
western America's Mormon country of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contained a highly mobile society. Analysis of men's places of residence before and after they lived in Cowley seems to support this premise. One Cowley settler who exhibited exceptional mobility was George H. Crosby, who moved nine times before settling in Cowley in 1901 at the age of fifty-five (Fig. 6). Six of Crosby's moves, some of them unsuccessful attempts to avoid prosecution for polygamy, occurred between 1880 and 1901, an average of a new community about once every four years (Partridge 1976:171; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:Crosby Family genealogical records; Henderson 1971).

More common were men like John Lowe, who moved at the age of twenty-one from Parowan, his birthplace, to Cowley, where he remained for seven years, and then moved on the Teton County, Idaho; Summit, Utah (near Parowan); Delta, Utah; and finally to Baggs, in southern Wyoming, where he lived from 1929 until his death in 1946 (Fig. 6). Other followed the pattern of Lemuel Willis, who was born in southwestern Utah in 1863, moved to Snowflake, Arizona, in 1883, moved back to Utah in 1895 to a village not far from Escalante, and migrated to Cowley in 1900. After a dozen years of residence in Wyoming, he moved back to Snowflake, and then went to Mesa, Arizona, in 1920 to live out the last ten years of his life (Fig. 6). Even those who remained in Cowley had been quite mobile before settling down. For example, Joseph Mathews, born in an isolated valley north of St. George, Utah, lived in Panguitch on two occasions, separated by a decade in Arizona, before he moved to northern Wyoming in 1903 (Fig. 6). A few individuals did exhibit less inclination to move from place to place, but they were rare, certainly not representative of most persons who moved to Cowley, nor, perhaps, of most rural Mormons of this period.

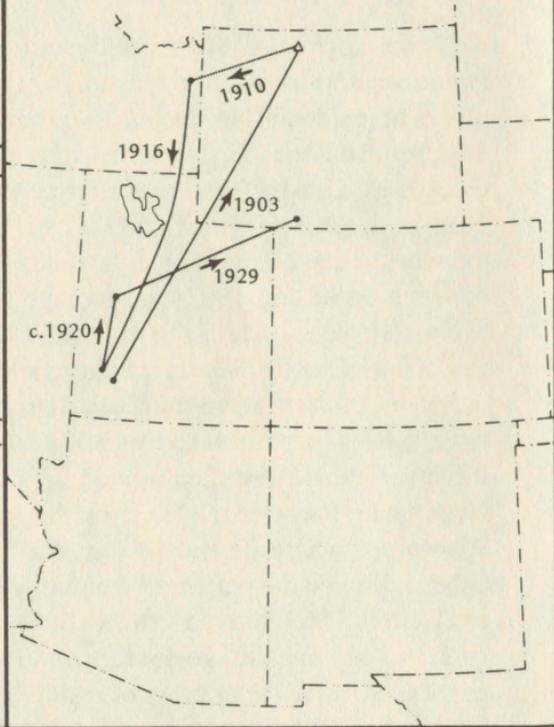
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

MORMON SETTLEMENT of Cowley, Wyoming, which became largely an agricultural community, was conducted primarily by youthful colonists, most of them farmers, from remote localities in southwestern and north eastern Utah, and secondarily, by non-agricultural people from the Salt Lake City area. Lack of experience with irrigated farming, particularly on such heavy soils as those encountered near Cowley, hastened waterlogging and saline encrustation, which in turn brought widespread crop

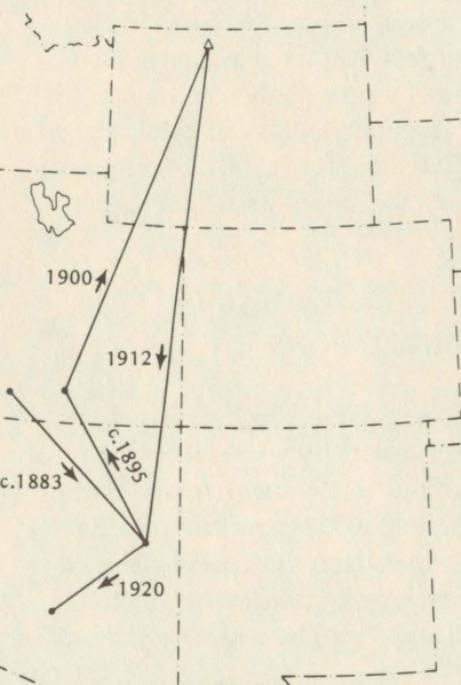
GEORGE H. CROSBY (1846–1916)



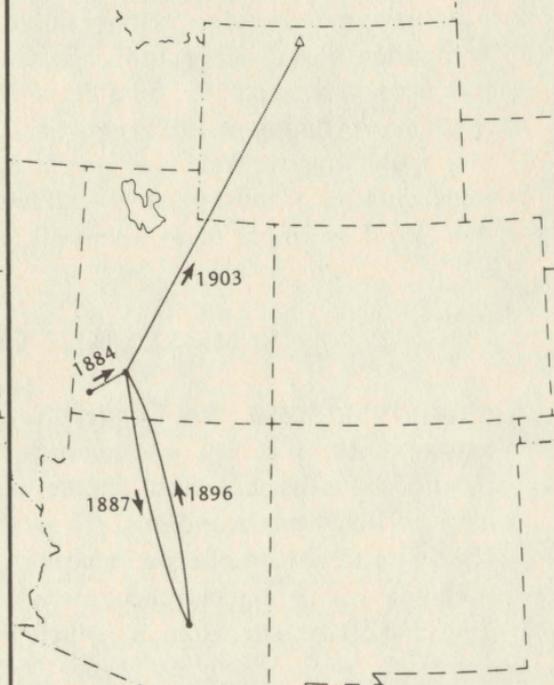
JOHN LOWE (1882–1946)



LEMUEL WILLIS (1863–1930)



JOSEPH MATHEWS (1862–1919)



failure. Nearly half of the surviving pioneers eventually left the community, moving across the mountains to Utah or Idaho—although not necessarily to their pre-Cowley place of residence—or on to California.

The men and women who settled Cowley were a mobile lot, commonly having lived in several different communities before coming to Cowley and, once again, after they left. Presence of less than fully favorable colonization conditions at Cowley seems only to have accentuated a trend that already existed in the outlying realms of Mormondom: young Latter-day Saints, whether responding to a call by the Church or sensing a lack of opportunity in their hometowns, were frequently on the move, searching for that one special community that would fulfill their economic, social, and religious needs. Many of these pioneers, it is clear, had strong, unswerving bonds to their Church and their families, but not, until many years had passed, to any one particular place. The occupations and specific experience that the settlers had before moving to Cowley largely determined their success in Cowley and, if they failed there, where they would next locate.

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