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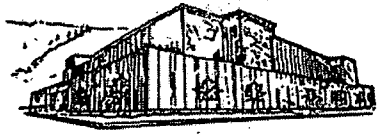
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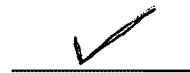
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MORMON MOVEMENT TO MONTANA

by

Julie A. Wright

B.A. Brigham Young University 1999

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

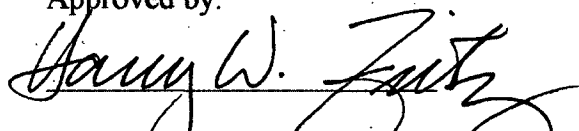
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November 2004

Approved by:


Chairperson


Dean, Graduate School

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Mormon Movement to Montana

Chairperson: Dr. Harry Fritz



Mormons exhibited a willingness to assimilate into the Montana farming and small community culture. They came mainly in search of land and as the Mormons dispersed and carried their religion with them, they acted similar to their Utah counterparts. Their attitudes toward their fellow citizens were usually characterized by good will. They also influenced contemporary Montanans by bringing church buildings into areas and organizing activities. Their political influence was never large in Montana, but they did show their patriotic spirit during times of war or elections.

Even though Mormons found difficulties in Montana, they built up communities and had a tendency to form enclaves of uniformity. Montana was home to Mormon schisms such as the RLDS and Morrisites before the mainstream Mormons began seeking out homesteads.

The manner in which the Mormons treated the land was shaped by their irrigating past in Utah and Idaho. Their common belief that land was placed there for man's use showed itself in their irrigation efforts and raising of livestock. As Montana was increasingly industrialized, more Mormons moved off the family farms and found jobs within the cities. For the Mormons who came here initially to mine or seek urban employment, they found themselves members of increasingly larger wards and stakes. The Mormons tried to increase their numbers through sharing their religious message with both other settlers and the Native Americans, for whom they felt they had a special mission. The Mormons assimilated themselves into towns and today number enough members that they no longer feel like a curious minority.

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INTRODUCTION

While researching in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint Archives in Salt Lake City, I asked the curator if she knew of any sources dealing with early LDS, or Mormons in common vernacular, in Montana. She looked at me quizzically and responded, "I didn't know there ever were early Mormons in Montana." This response was incredulous, considering her archives contain information and early Church records of the members in Montana. However, her disbelief is supported by scholarship. Even historians of Mormon movement erroneously stated, "By 1960...for the first time formal Church organization took place in Montana."¹

A more noted historian, Wallace Stegner, published *Mormon Country* in 1940. His book was highly acclaimed and defused many rumors as well as explained much of what Mormons and their organization were about, but there was a problem. He clearly outlined the parameters of what constituted 'Mormon

¹Dean R. Louder and Lowell Bennion, "Mapping Mormons Across the Modern West," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, Richard H. Jackson editor, (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1978) , 148.

country' and did not include Montana within its boundaries.² His map would have looked very similar to an earlier 1849 map.³



²Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1942) , 34-35.

³Warren A. Beck and Ynez D. Haase, *Historical Atlas of the American West*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989) , 39.

If Stegner was using Mormon political dominance and Mormon town structure as a prerequisite for inclusion in 'Mormon country,' then he was right to leave Montana out.⁴ However, if he was defining Mormondom as a social and religious entity,⁵ with boundaries defined by vocations and cultural attributes, then certain Montana communities fit well within Mormondom. By 1942, there was enough of a Mormon presence within Montana for the Saints to form cohesive religious organizations and to conduct their lives in a very similar manner to their co-religionists safely entrenched in Utah. Beyond their religious views, their worldly life also mirrored their Utah counterparts. In some areas they formed Mormon "villages", in others they homesteaded, and where the land required they even dry-farmed.⁶

Author Phyllis Barber defined Utah Mormonism as "a unique blend of theology, history, insularity, and colonialism influenced by western middle class and agrarian values—a culture as much as it is a religion." It has its own jargon, behavioral norm, dress, and temples.⁷ Every one of these aspects the Mormons packed up and brought to Montana with them. The Mormons faced obstacles to

⁴Stegner, *Mormon Country*, 36.

⁵*Ibid.*, 37.

⁶Charles S. Peterson, "Imprint of Agricultural Systems on the Utah Landscape," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, 91.

⁷Phyllis Barber, "Culture Shock," *A World We Thought We Knew*, John S. McCormick and John R. Sillito editors, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah press, 1995), 397.

their presence even within Utah by the adamant non-Mormons, and they faced it within Montana. They used the same strategies of cultural and agricultural survival as their Utah friends and they followed the same counsel from the same prophet. What they didn't do was dominate the state politically. But politically active they were; Mormons were urged from the pulpit to exercise their right to vote.

A favorable bias toward Mormons is likely to be identified within this paper. This bias is due to the personal feelings of the author but is also supported by research and a study of Mormon history. Donald Worster aptly detected that "people who study their own religion tend to take an idealist approach-they see those ideas as having an independent life and an ideal set of origins."⁸ While trying to avoid this, the paper will explain why Mormons came to Montana and what they were doing here. It will explain some of the challenges they faced, as well as some of their activities and basic beliefs.

The implication is not that Mormons, as a people, are necessarily more religious than others but that, as a group, they constitute a highly self-conscious subculture whose chief bond is religion and one which has long established its mark upon the life and landscape of a particular area.⁹

An examination of their early trade forays, their agricultural base, their

⁸Donald Worster, "Expanding Our Moral Vision," *A World We Thought We Knew*, John S. McCormick and John R. Sillito editors, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995), 412.

⁹D. W. Meinig, "The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 55 (June 1965) : 191.

organizations, and dealings with Euro and Native American peoples within Montana will show that they brought their cultural baggage with them and were very much identified as Mormons in the typical Utah fashion.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, commonly called the Mormon Church¹⁰, now has more members outside of the United States than it has within, and far more outside of the Mountain West than within. The movement of Mormons out of the safety net of Utah was part of this trend. They found they could move to non-Church sponsored areas within Montana and bring their culture and traditions with them. They may have felt alienated and overrun by Gentiles¹¹ at times but within their church buildings they were safely within 'Mormon country.' The Mormons' relationship with their Montana neighbors exhibited both assimilation and at other times tendencies toward isolation.

¹⁰Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are instructed not to refer to themselves or their church as Mormon due to the misleading inference. The Church is based upon the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Church is nicknamed Mormon because the members believe *The Book of Mormon* is sacred scripture. Mormon was an ancient prophet. The term Mormon will be utilized within this paper because that is the name most non-members recognize.

¹¹Gentile has become a term with several different meanings. Mormons loosely define all non-Jews and non-Mormons as Gentiles. Scripturally the term refers to non-Israelites or people without the Gospel even if they are of Israelite heritage. Jews define all people not of the House of Israel as Gentiles. Mormons believe they are adopted into the House of Israel when they join the Church.

CHAPTER 1

Early Forays Into New Territory

In the spring of 1928, a thirteen year-old boy left the countryside he knew, his boyhood friends, his relatives, and his community Mormon church. Their family car was old, and he had to help his father push it through the mud holes of Strawberry Valley, Utah. He had never seen the land he was traveling to, and he only knew that he was leaving the security of his home. His father talked of the opportunity in Bynum, Montana: the opportunity to have land, to farm. That young boy was Glen Bingham and what he found in Montana was land that required irrigation, and irrigation was one thing the Utah farmers knew and understood. As he grew in Montana, he also learned that it was possible to adapt his Utah-Mormon culture to the one he encountered in his new state. He eventually bought land on the Flathead Indian Reservation and had the same conflicting views many of his Utah friends shared; he was taught to love and respect the Indians but he also relied on irrigation and often felt the tribes did not allow him adequate water. He was always known as a Mormon and knew from

experience what it felt like to be disliked for religious beliefs when it put him into minority status, as opposed to the feelings he had in Utah when his religious beliefs placed him in the majority. Despite setbacks, he enjoyed Montana and the residents within the state. He witnessed the Mormon population in Montana grow from a few hundred, in 1927, to 39,000 in the year 2000.¹²

The religion he brought with him originated a hundred years before. Mormons believe that God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to a young boy, Joseph Smith, Jr., at the age of fourteen, informing him that the existing churches of the land did not contain the complete truth.¹³ Despite humble beginnings in Manchester, New York in 1820, Joseph Smith became the founder of an international church now known as the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often referred to as the Mormons. Joseph Smith received numerous other revelations and one of his greatest works was the translation of the *Book of Mormon* from gold plates left by ancient American prophets.¹⁴ Despite considerable persecution and erroneous rumors about what Mormons

¹²*1999-2000 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1998) , 544, 549.

¹³Joseph Smith, "Joseph Smith History," *The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985) , 47-50.

¹⁴The early history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is far beyond the scope of this thesis. For further reading the following are recommended: *The Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants and Joseph Smith History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985) ; James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992) ; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979) ; Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishing, 1999).

believed, the Church continued to grow.¹⁵

Following the murder of Joseph Smith by an angry mob, Brigham Young, the President of the Quorum of the Twelve, led the Church and was ordained the Prophet December 1847. The members of the Church, commonly referred to as the Saints, were violently persecuted and driven from Kirtland, Ohio, Independence, Missouri, Far West, Missouri, and Nauvoo, Illinois. Seeking to find a place of peace for the Saints, Brigham Young led the first pioneer party into the Great Salt Lake Valley on 24 July 1847.¹⁶ Utah became the gathering place, a 'Zion' to the Saints. They began arriving from the eastern United States and Europe by the thousands. Brigham Young formally organized Mormon colonies in what became California, Idaho, Wyoming, Arizona, Nevada, Mexico, and Canada, but never in Montana, even though it would seem a natural place for a colony. When Archie Wright came through Browning in 1937 he could still see the ruts left by the Cardston-going Mormons.¹⁷ The Cardston Saints initially cattle-ranched on dry-farms but eventually they brought in irrigation as the first

¹⁵There were persecutions for some of their peculiarities but by the time Mormons were filtering into Montana they were not even as unique as they liked to believe themselves. Alan H. Grey, "Mormon Settlement in its Global Context," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, Richard H. Jackson editor, 75.

¹⁶Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), vii-xii.

¹⁷Archie R. Wright, Miriam Warnick Wright, interview by author, 18 March 2000, St. Ignatius, notes.

sugar beet producers on the Canadian prairies.¹⁸ Montana was en route to Canada and gave many Mormons their knowledge of Montana land. The Mormons bought 722,382 acres of farm land in Lethbridge, Alberta that they planned to irrigate and colonize with Utahns.¹⁹ They passed through Montana which possessed great quantities of prime farm land. However, Montana also contained many mines and the accompanying rough mining culture was very unappealing to Church leaders.²⁰ The following 1965 map still reflected the apparent preference for areas other than Montana.

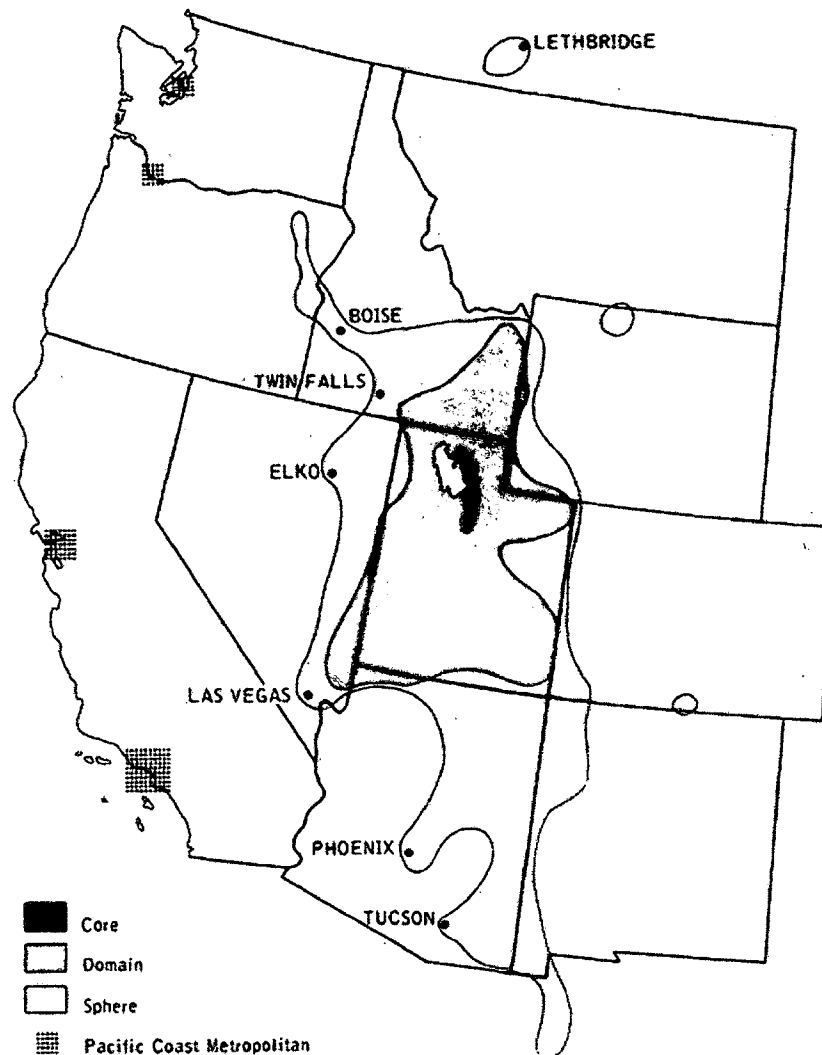
¹⁸Meinig, "The Mormon Culture Region," 208.

¹⁹"Sold to the Mormons, the Alberta Railway Company Disposes of Thousands of Acres of Land," *Independent* (Helena) , 15 February 1892.

²⁰Richard Vetterli, *Mormonism, Americanism, and Politics*, (Salt Lake City: Ensign Publishing Company, 1961) , 547.

THE MORMON CULTURAL REGION

(D.W. Meinig, 1965)



Dean R. Louder and Lowell Bennion, "Mapping Mormons Across the Modern West,"
The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West, Richard H. Jackson editor, 160.

Despite the lack of encouragement from the Church, Mormons did come to Montana. When the Church ceased to encourage the membership to remain in Church-approved areas, the Mormon population in Montana became even larger. Rather than looking for a "better social order," they had a commonplace

motive of believing there would be greater opportunity somewhere beside Utah.²¹ Despite early Church forays into collective societies, their general economics had been fully suffused with capitalism. This meant Mormons going where they could use their skills to their advantage. Mormons were well-known as an agricultural and irrigating people, and the farming opportunities of Montana drew them in increasingly large numbers. Their movement to Montana was more a product of the times than any religious beliefs. Even though Mormons were a close-knit group and their beliefs set them aside as a unique people, they interacted with others in their communities. Mormons in Montana were outside the core settlement regions, placing them on the periphery of Mormondom. But because most of their roots came from Mormon-dominated Utah and Idaho, they exhibited many similar tendencies. One of these tendencies was a desire for financial gain.

The earliest Mormon ventures into Montana were more economic than agricultural in nature. The mining populations of Montana had grown considerably, and very few of those miners spent time raising their own food supplies. Fortunately, the Utah farmers were busy planting and harvesting a surplus, which they often sold at exorbitant prices.²² The earliest reported Mormon to travel from Salt Lake to Montana was E.W. Van Etten, who found it

²¹Grey, "Mormon Settlement in its Global Context," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, Richard H. Jackson editor, 79.

²²Betty M. Madsen and Brigham D. Madsen, *North to Montana!* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah press, 1980), 72-75.

profitable to trade with the Salish Indians. Cultural exchanges were a by-product of trade, and Van Etten even married a Salish Indian.²³ This was similar to the marriages that occurred near Ft. Lemhi, Idaho, when Brigham Young sent a colony there and counseled the young men to take Indian wives if it was agreeable.

Some Mormons in Utah found they were more adept at merchandising produce than raising it. A traveler with some Mormon freighters, Hugo Hoppe, reported that in Salt Lake City flour could be purchased for six dollars a hundred pounds and then sold in Virginia City for forty dollars. He made the astute observation that freighting was its own gold mine.²⁴ The Utah-Montana Trail, also known as the Montana Trail or Corinne Trail, ran from Salt Lake City, through Idaho, Monida Pass, the Big Hole Valley, and the Gibbons pass into Bannack City or Virginia City.²⁵ John Carpenter drove an ox team to Virginia City when he was only thirteen. Although the Church had taken a position against the members mining, it did encourage the trading business that supplied the mining towns. As the Utah citizens raised families, their children grew and

²³Don Cornelius, "Mormonism in Montana 1847-1898" (M.A. thesis, Montana State University, 1962), 43.

²⁴Ida McPherrren, *Imprints on Pioneer Trails* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1950), 116.

²⁵Marcella Walter, "The Utah-Montana Trail," *Montana Magazine* 120 (August 1993): 57-59.

needed land of their own, land that wasn't always available.²⁶ Freighting provided these landless men with jobs. The Church publication, *Deseret News*, encouraged freighting by reporting prices and profits and outlining the routes that traders should follow. It was the first to highly recommend the Corinne Trail, partially because it took freighters through Cache Valley and brought high profits to the community.²⁷ Willard Glen was even transporting wooden barrels of whisky from Cache Valley to Montana.²⁸

There were interruptions in this trade, however, and in 1862 Brigham Young warned the Cache Valley members to stop selling wheat. The Civil War was in progress and the California Volunteers at Fort Douglas had asked the Church to supply their wheat which cost Brigham Young \$3 a bushel to do.²⁹ Despite the cost, Young set a patriotic example and supplied the soldiers.

A mini-war was being waged economically against the Gentiles in Utah. Brigham Young called for a boycott against non-Mormon merchants. James Knox Polk Miller was trying to earn a part of the freighting profits but was losing too much due to the boycott. He left in May fully agreeing with "A Gentleman" who wrote, "How long shall it be said that the nation, so long recognized as the

²⁶Charles S. Peterson, "Imprint of Agricultural Systems on the Utah Landscape," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, Richard H. Jackson editor, p. 98.

²⁷Madsen, *North to Montana!*, 73.

²⁸Sharon Palin, Lower Valley Historical Society Manuscript, 2.

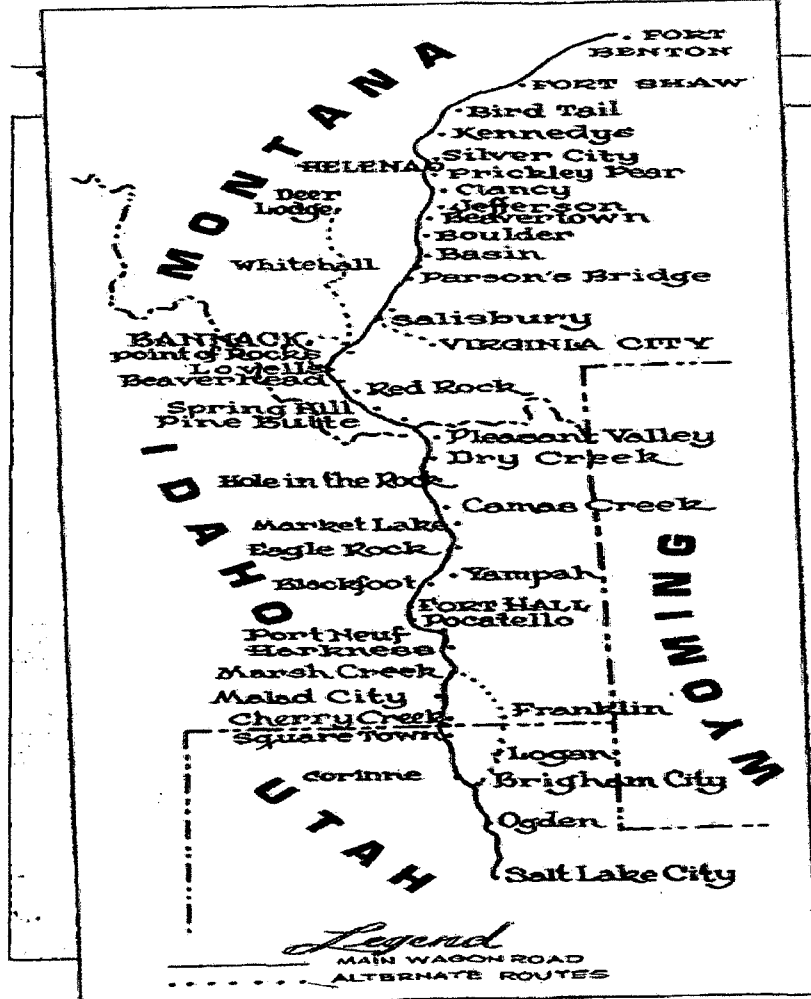
²⁹Madsen, *North to Montana!*, 73, 75.

protector of freedom, allows its citizens to be so grossly insulted by a body of fanatics?"³⁰ Utah-Montana trading resumed after the Civil War and proved to be a major undertaking. By 1871, in one month, 562 tons of goods traveled from Corinne to Montana. It was inevitable that some of these traders would bring favorable reports of Montana to Utah. The trading routes also opened up passenger travel. By 1878, travelers could board a coach in Helena or Corinne at 7a.m. and arrive in either city one week later. They were told to sleep sitting up, provide their own food and pay between \$25 and \$75.³¹ The Corinne/Montana connection was not the most advantageous for establishing friendly Mormon/Montana relations. Corinne, located thirty miles northwest of Ogden, was a railroad town and a "tumultuous center of strongly anti-Mormon political activity."³²

³⁰James Knox Polk Miller, *The Road to Virginia City, The Diary of James Knox Polk Miller*, Andrew F. Rolle, ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 61.

³¹Walter, *The Utah-Montana Trail*, 59.

³²Meinig, "The Mormon Culture Region," 211.



The Corinne Trail from Utah to Montana. Map courtesy of Marcella Walter, "The Utah-Montana Trail," as reproduced from *Montana the Magazine of Western History*.

Employment beckoned some who struggled to find a job and adventure in Utah. In 1912 a young nineteen-year old, Herschel Tanner, obtained employment with a United States Geological surveying party that was making maps of Glacier Park. "Mother," he said, "any one of your boys could lie down in the open and sleep unafraid." He received a real taste for the dangers of the mountains when he split from his guide to retrieve a strayed horse. It was

September and an early snow fell so heavily he could barely see his hand in front of his face. After one wet night he left the pack horses to die because he couldn't get them out. He got one horse and a few provisions to the top of a mountain but it was still snowing so heavily he could not gain any sense of direction. After another wet night, the storm lifted enough that he could see them afar off on another mountain. He was on foot by this time and so exhausted he didn't think he'd make it. With his clothes nearly torn off him he staggered into camp. The topographer was so impressed he named the canyon "Tanner Canyon," located in the South Fork Mountains.³³

Less picturesque was the lure of Butte mining. Clarence (18), and Amasas (16) Wright came from Utah to Butte in 1905 in charge of a grading team of mules. At one point Amasas contracted pneumonia and was shipped home nearly dead on the train. It was a "rough, rough" life, rough enough that even the mules were eager for the whistle blow. When they heard it, the mules stopped dead in their tracks and wouldn't move another foot until the slipscraper was unhooked. The minerals were shipped on cars to Bingham and Magna for refinement. It was the only job they could find and they didn't make much but it was more than could be made on the farms of Utah. They eventually made

³³Herschel Tanner, South Fork Mountains, MT, to Annie Clark Tanner, Farmington, UT, 13 September 1912, in Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991) , 233-236.

enough to return to Lindon, Utah, marry their Utah sweethearts and settle on little farms.³⁴

Not all of the miners returned to Utah. August L. Anderson, born in Sweden in 1864, immigrated with his wife to Utah in 1895. His brother-in-law told him there was a good opportunity to get a homestead in Blackfoot, Idaho. After moving his wife and two children there he discovered that while a homestead was easy to come by, making money on it was not. Three children later, he moved again, this time to Anaconda to smelt. He then left his smelter job and moved eight miles from Butte in 1904 when he was employed as foreman for the Great Northern Railroad. After a brief move to Pocatello, Idaho, he returned to his Great Northern job in Montana. Here his final and tenth child, named Joseph Moroni, was born, 1909, at a place named Donald on the Continental Divide on the Milwaukee Railroad. He only mentioned one Montana Church connection in his personal account, "wife and I took an active part in the Church as we have always done in our modest way."³⁵ The miners who chose to stay in Montana were a part of building up the Church.

The railroad eventually superseded wagons for transportation, and both Montanans and profit-seeking Utahns were anxious for the completion of a rail line. Following nearly the same route as the Corinne Trail, the Utah and

³⁴Archie R Wright, interview by author, 18 July 2002, St. Ignatius, notes.

³⁵August L. Anderson, "Personal Record," MSS 1168, Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo.

Northern Railroad Company constructed part of a line. The Union Pacific Railroad purchased the line in 1877 and completed construction in 1881.³⁶ This was just one more door opening to move Mormons north to Montana both for pleasure trips and for livelihoods. For three years Sheldon Tanner from Farmington, UT worked in the office of the West Yellowstone Entrance, becoming the assistant manager. He obtained a park pass for his mother and his brother, a railroad man, secured her a train pass. With these, Annie Clark Tanner and her daughter Lois, were able to travel through the park having a "delightful" time.³⁷ Because of the relatively easier travel, compared to the Saints' original westward movement, church members trickled into Montana. Even though the trek across the plains was not as difficult as is often portrayed in popular folk lore, it did serve as a unifier of the saints.³⁸ Moving to Montana did not offer this forging together experience and could be an explanation for the Mormons' willingness to assimilate into the existing communities.

From Trade to Agriculture

William John Hill and John H. Stuart drove ox teams from Corinne to Missoula, hauling merchandise to the Missoula Mercantile, the present-day Bon Macy's. Their route followed the Corinne and Mullan Trails and reportedly took

³⁶George W. Rollins, "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *Religion in Montana*, Lawrence F. Small editor, (Billings: Rocky Mountain College, 1995), 227.

³⁷Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press: 1991), 297.

³⁸Jackson, "Introduction," p. viii.

an average of three months. Along the way they always stopped to trade at New Chicago, near Drummond.³⁹ William John Hill's son, John Ensign Hill, saw an advertisement announcing that the land near Drummond, then called Allendale, would pasture three cows to the acre. He did not believe it until he went there himself in 1915 and purchased a ranch. During the following winter, John acted as real estate agent for the Allendale Land Company of Salt Lake City. By spring, there were between fifteen and twenty men from Cache Valley, Utah, who had purchased parts of the subdivided Allen Estate.⁴⁰ Drummond thus became one of the early Mormon strongholds within Montana. This was not out of line with Church policy which had ceased to urge the "gathering." Rather than moving to Utah for religious reasons, many Mormons were moving from Utah for economic and other opportunities. Dean R. Louder and Lowell Bennion designated the period from 1918-1945 'West Coast Expansion' due to the large numbers of Mormons moving from the Great Basin but the Montana pattern does not fit their assessment that they were moving to "burgeoning urban centers of western America."⁴¹ Allendale was and still is a rural ranching and farming community.

³⁹Sharon Palin, Historian at the Lower Valley Historical Society, "History of the New Chicago Region," Drummond.

⁴⁰Ivy Blood Hill, "John Ensign Hill Diaries and Biographical Material," (1962), 107.

⁴¹Dean R. Louder and Lowell Bennion, "Mapping Mormons Across the Modern West," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, 145.

The transition from Utah to Montana posed a threat to some, such as Ivy Blood Hill, John Hill's wife. She had spent her entire life in Utah and recalled that she dreaded the unknown, fearing she would be isolated in Montana. In Utah, she loved being close to the Mormon Church, family, and friends. Once in Montana, Ivy often wanted to go back until her son, Armin, helped her realize Montana was her home. Returning from a trip to Utah, he said he didn't know why she liked Utah because Montana was much better.

The train to Montana was a fairly safe and reliable means of travel, but others still chose to drive. Ivy and John's car sunk to the running boards in mud and had to be pulled out by a farmer with four horses. The farmer advised them to drive on the railroad tracks. They found it a challenge to drive up the steep grade and straddle the high steel rails and just as difficult to drive off them. In a sense the Hills did come to Montana by the tracks.⁴² Although it only took them three days, their story in a sense could be likened to that of the early Mormon pioneers who had to travel into the unknown West. The majority of Mormons who joined the Hills in Drummond were ranchers. A visit to the present-day Lacey Ranch, Hill's posterity, attests to their legacy as breeders of prime livestock.

The Hills are significant as examples of the importance one or a few families had in early Church organizations. Melvin J. Ballard, president of the Northwestern States Mission, visited every branch every three months. He

⁴²Ibid., 109.

always set up his headquarters at the Hills. He organized the Allendale Branch on 16 July 1917. This branch served the Lower Flint Creek Valley, including Drummond, Allendale, and New Chicago. Ivy Hill was called to be the Relief Society President and her husband, John Hill, was the Branch President. Saints from the Lower Flint Creek Valley gathered on Sundays in members' homes to meet. Following the pattern established in Utah, they then donated their time and talents to the building of their first meeting house, which they dedicated 2 March 1919. John donated the land for the building.⁴³

John Hill is an illustrative example of an early Mormon who was active in both his church and his community. In 1915 and 1916 John shipped dairy cattle from quality herds in Cache Valley, then sold them without down payment to Allendale men. His time payment plan allowed many beginning ranchers to start and build up herds. The train then picked up hundreds of gallons of milk and cream at the New Chicago siding. John didn't limit himself to dairy cattle; for years he had the largest registered Hereford herd in Montana. His selective breeding attracted buyers and breeders from as far east as Indiana. Again, John helped his community by selling his neighbors cattle on the time payment plan. With the idea of helping ranchers progress, John spearheaded the New Chicago Federal Farm Loan Association. Through this they were able to save many defaulted homes. John also helped organize the Western Montana Cattlemen's Association. In 1918, he, along with H.J. Faust of Drummond and Charles

⁴³"Historical Sketch," Courtesy of the Lower Valley Historical Society.

Anderson of Hall, rented a power plant at Stone, up the valley from New Chicago. After they sold stock, they built a power line through the valley to Drummond. This was one of the earliest cooperative rural electrification projects. He certainly couldn't escape a concern for irrigation and directed the Allendale Irrigation Company. In 1937 he helped organize the Flint Creek Valley Irrigation Project. The state and Anaconda Copper Mining Company helped them build the East Fork dam and canals that brought water from Rock Creek.

The story behind the story was that John had a very capable wife who took over the ranching duties, even selling a carload of thirty registered bulls. Their multiple visitors, and children, meant she had a full house to run as well as ranch back-up. At one point her church callings included teaching Sunday School, Mutual Improvement, Primary, Relief Society, and Teacher's Training. The large responsibility placed upon Ivy probably accounted for part of her enthusiasm for appliances. They had the first radio, electric refrigerator, freezer, and lawn mower in the valley. She recalled how excited she was when electricity came to the ranch in 1920 and running water in 1921.

Despite their prosperity, they were not immune to calamities of nature. The year 1919 brought record droughts. They had eight hundred head of cattle to feed through the winter and the hay was very short due to lack of irrigation. Following bad banker advice they bought feed through the winter rather than selling them on the flooded market. In the spring, with a persistent low market, John realized he would have been in a better financial situation had he "given

away the cattle plus \$20.00 a head in the fall of 1919.” In 1922 the foreclosed cattle didn’t pay off the debts but the Hills wouldn’t consider bankruptcy. John’s mother and Francis Jorgensen loaned them \$1,300 to buy back a few of their best registered cattle. They then baled and sold their hay to dig their way out of their debts. One of John’s favorite phrases following this experience was that “every man should go broke at least once in his lifetime to round out his education.”⁴⁴

Mormons in Utah were very social and members in Montana were eager to socialize also. In 1925, the Primary and the Mutual associations were formed for the Drummond area. Their plays and minstrel shows drew such large community crowds that there weren’t enough seats. They didn’t charge admission but a Drummond resident took up a collection for them so they could buy more pews.

Although activities such as that facilitated Mormon interaction, it was still “slim pickins” for those seeking a Mormon spouse. Being a Mormon was not just a Sunday religion but a way of life and a culture. This was just one of the reasons Church leaders encouraged Mormons to marry within their religion. This may have been simple counsel to heed within Utah, but Montana was “Gentile” dominated. The number of Mormon to non-Mormon marriages led to a large number of families who were related to or at least knew somebody who

⁴⁴Ivy Hooper Blood Hill, “John Ensign Hill, Diaries and Biographical Material,” entirety.

was a Mormon. Glen Bingham of Charlo, Montana, married Grace Hendrickson, a Methodist. He went to her church and she went to his and after three years was baptized a Mormon.⁴⁵ This was a typical scenario, but it was also not uncommon for the Mormon spouse to become inactive and fall away from the Church. Within Utah, non-Mormons often faced the same predicament and when there weren't enough non-Mormons they had the option of marrying a Mormon or remaining single.

Despite Montana's reputation as a tough mining frontier, the people in the state were reputed to be good, honest, hard-working people. The Mormons were open to friendships even with non-Mormons. Archie R. Wright's neighbor moved to Montana from Utah because the people were the "friendliest and most-helpful he had ever met." Archie R. and Miriam Warnick Wright moved to Montana's Sun River irrigation district in 1937. They were young and had two children when they moved to Montana, and raised their four subsequent children there. When questioned whether it was harder to be a good Mormon in Montana because of the non-Mormon dominance, they were quick to point out the noble qualities of the many people they had come in contact with in Montana. They also cleared away any ideas that Utah was a perfect environment. Archie had worked at granaries and on farms and he attested that the men in Montana didn't swear any more than those in Utah and that among the ranchers and farmers of

⁴⁵Glen Bingham, interview by author, 5 February 2000, Charlo, tape recording, Julie Wright Thesis Collection Box, Missoula.

Montana, there did not seem to be a drinking problem. Miriam added that a person was a good Mormon because of what they believed, not where they were.⁴⁶

Opposition to Mormons

The Mormons may have liked their neighbors and didn't report trouble with other denominations, but the opposite was not always true. Even within Utah there was the Gentile League, designed to thwart some of the power of the Mormons. Mormon religious beliefs and practices led outsiders to maintain prejudices against them and the rumors about Mormons spread fear and anxiety. John Owen, a non-Mormon, maintained a written record from 1850-1870, during part of which he was an assistant in selecting the route for the Northern Pacific Railway. As early as the 14 of January 1858, he reported that he had contemplated leaving for St. Louis via Fort Benton but:

Things from the Mormon quarter are rather too alarming to leave at the present. I have all my property carefully invoiced, also the property of the employees, In case of loss by a Mormon mob, the government may take a favorable view of claims...From all appearances there must be an open rupture between the United States government and the Mormon clan.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Archie R. and Miriam Warnick Wright, interview by author, 18 March 2000, St. Ignatius, notes, Julie Wright Thesis Collection Box, Missoula.

⁴⁷C. Rank Steele, "Early Montana and the Mormons," *The Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), 20 January 1940.

The situation was mis-named the 'Mormon War.' President Buchanan had sent Johnston's army to ensure the loyalty of the Mormons, causing Brigham Young to notify the people to gather themselves together and be prepared in the event that they were attacked.⁴⁸ They were not attacked and the Mormons later proved their loyalty by volunteering to fight on the Union side in the Civil War.⁴⁹ A few Mormon stragglers fled to Montana when they heard of Johnston's approaching army but they subsequently lost contact with the Utah Church and were forgotten. These earliest Mormons had no support network. Phyllis Barber identified in "Culture Shock" the difficulties for non-Mormons in Utah facing the "unique blend of theology, history, insularity, and colonialism."⁵⁰ The experience of Mormons first venturing into Montana was the exact opposite as they faced a life without that insularity. This helps to explain why many later movers chose to settle in areas already occupied by Mormons.

Mormon belief in polygamy also created problems. During the heated years leading up to the Civil War and after, it was stated to be a "twin relic of

⁴⁸Col. Albert Sydney Johnston was sent to relieve Col E.B. Alexander after he had been driven back to the ruins of Fort Bridger by a blizzard and wily Mormon commandos who continually sabotaged his supply trains. Johnston's command of 3,000 troops was allowed into the Salt Lake area in 1858 where they peacefully established Camp Floyd in Cedar Valley.

⁴⁹Richard Vetterli, *Mormonism, Americanism, and Politics* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Publishing Company, 1961), 543.

⁵⁰Phyllis Barber, "Culture Shock," *A World We Thought We Knew*, 397.

barbarism” along with slavery.⁵¹ The Butte *Inter-Mt.* published a scathing tirade against President Cleveland because, “The removal of Judge Zane, of Utah, is an unspeakable outrage. He has been a terror to Mormon lawbreakers and has done more than any other one man to break up the iniquitous institution of polygamy.”⁵² The Montana State Constitution, adopted in 1889, contained a clause aimed specifically at discouraging polygamous Mormons from entering the state:

The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination, shall forever hereafter be guaranteed, and no person shall be denied any civil or political right or privilege on account of his opinions concerning religion, but the liberty of conscience hereby secured shall not be construed to dispense with oaths or affirmations, excuse acts of licentiousness by bigamous or polygamous marriage...⁵³

Utah Mormons had to deal with the same political abhorrence of polygamy despite their insular communities. The Utah residents desperately wanted to elect their own governor (U.S. presidents had replaced Brigham Young as Territorial Governor), and enact their own laws. This meant they needed to be admitted as a state. The majority of the U.S. Congress did not see them as ‘American’ enough, so despite their adequate population, they were not granted statehood. Part of Utah’s ‘Americanization’ and subsequent statehood included

⁵¹Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, compilers, “Republican Platform of 1856,” *National Party Platforms* (Urbana and London: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 27.

⁵²“More Carpet-Baggers,” *Inter-Mt.* (Butte) , 10 July 1888.

⁵³Montana State Constitution, art. III, sec. 4.

giving up polygamy.⁵⁴ The Church issued a manifesto in 1890, stopping the performance of any future polygamous marriages,⁵⁵ but rumors of illicit sexual practices continued and spread to Montana. Some newspapers printed articles calling for a stop to the "MORMON MENACE."⁵⁶ William Rappleye, a later Montana resident, was a missionary in Vermont and found it necessary to hold public meetings to assuage the fear that the Mormons were seducing young girls and shipping them off to Utah marriages.⁵⁷ Often polygamy was seen in a more light-hearted manner such as 'James A. Young's' question to the *Miner* pleading confusion with the newly enacted income tax law. He was at a loss as to

⁵⁴Gustive O. Larson, *The Americanization of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1971).

⁵⁵Wilford Woodruff, "Official Declaration-1," *The Doctrine of Covenants* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985) , 291-292.

⁵⁶Although many people now respect or admire the Mormons, there are still many who see them as a menace. "Michael Austin, a West Virginia college professor tracks popular literature with a Mormon theme. The negative Mormon images have been fixed since the nineteenth century...and the frequency with which these stereotypes appear in contemporary fiction suggests that they have never really disappeared from America's collective cultural memory." Taken from Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1999) , XXI.

Montana's situation was not far different from that documented by M. Wells, in "Origins of Anti-Mormonism in Idaho, 1872-1880," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Vol. XLVII (1956), 107-16.

⁵⁷William Rappleye, "William Rappleye's Missionary and Life Records," L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

determine what his exemption should be because he had two wives. Would he be allowed to claim deductions for both of them?⁵⁸

Many sources formed how Mormons were perceived. Newspapers, such as the *Independent* of Helena, had interesting stories about the Mormons. One column entitled "The Belles of Deseret" advised the men of Montana that they should travel to Utah to seek a wife because the Mormon women were the most beautiful in all of America.⁵⁹ Other clippings reported General Authority visits, Church land purchases, or the LDS pledge to cooperate with the Draft Board.

The opinions of Montanans were also influenced by Mormons they met in Utah. Joseph C. Walker supervised a millcrew of fourteen men located on Mill Creek in Madison County. Five of his men were Mormons but his opinions seemed to have been shaped by a trip he took to Salt Lake in December of 1864. "I will just say here that the Mormon people are very industrious and they have a very strong infatuation for dancing and attending theatres. The old as well as the young, the claimed-to-be saints as well as the sinners." This observation was not exactly negative and in confusing contrast to his view that Mormons "overran the country, disguised as peddlers, preaching and singing all the day long, an intolerable nuisance, murderers, robbers, stealers, slaves to the

⁵⁸"Man of Mormon Faith Infers that Supporting Two Wives and Seventeen Children Is Some Responsibility," *Miner* (Butte) , 16 March 1918.

⁵⁹"The Belles of Deseret, Blonde Loveliness of the Young Girls," *Independent* (Helena) , 18 November 1891, LDS Church Historical Archives, Salt Lake City.

church, Brigham Young is a despotic ruler.” Whether or not he held his employees in this low esteem is unknown.⁶⁰

Brother Van and Dr. Iliff, both Methodist ministers, in the spring of 1875, traveled from Missoula to Salt Lake City to attend the Methodist Rocky Mountain Conference. They had immense curiosity about the “peculiar” Mormons and sneaked around the Salt Lake Temple grounds. They watched with amazement as the Tabernacle Assembly Hall filled to its 5,000 person capacity. When they spotted Brigham Young being followed by two of his wives, they dared each other to cross the street and meet Young. They did this and found him to be a cordial man who shared that he too was once a Methodist.⁶¹

Cordiality mattered little when jobs were at stake, however. If too many Mormons moved into an area, they were seen as job competition and a threat to the existing society, the exact inverse of the Utah situation where Gentiles were held in suspicion. Sometimes the Church organizations had to be postponed. George Reynolds wrote to inform President Stevenson of the situation at Gaylord in 1896. The missionaries laboring in the area were eager to organize a branch; however, trade unionists were angry so many Salt Lake men were being

⁶⁰Papers of Joseph C. Walker, 1830-1908. Box 1 Folder 1, Box 2 Folder 2, Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo.

⁶¹Stella W. Brummit, *Brother Van* (New York: Missionary Movement of U.S.A. and Canada, 1919).

employed there. They threatened the foreman, Elder William Tuddenham, and other foremen with assassination.⁶²

Their early movements into Montana held both positive and negative aspects for the Mormons. They were usually accustomed to the pervasively Mormon Utah and some struggled to understand Montana life. Sometimes the adjustment didn't happen and they moved back to Utah. In 1912, eleven Mormons left Montana specifically to return to "Zion."⁶³ In the 40's, Boyd Warnick recalled riding along in a car with other teenagers when the subject of religion came up. Wes Hire was the driver and while slamming on the brakes exclaimed, "You're a Mormon? Get out!" Another of his friends defended him. He and his twin brother used to attend Luther League because there were no LDS sponsored youth groups yet in rural Simms. But when both boys started getting serious with Lutheran girls, their father, Blaine, moved the family back to Utah.⁶⁴ Likewise their neighbors struggled to understand them, sometimes successfully but sometimes their minds were clouded by preconceptions. Another ingredient that added interest, or too often confusion, was the plethora of Church offshoots.

⁶²George Reynolds, to President Edward Stevenson, Lima, 19 June 1896, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.

⁶³Record of Members Collection, 1836-1970, (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints History Department, Salt Lake City: Microfilm).

⁶⁴Lloyd Warnick, interview by author, 13 June 2000, South Salt Lake City, notes.

CHAPTER 2

Mormons and Almost Mormons

Those who had broken off from the mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were often those who harbored the most bitterness. One such schism was the Morrisites. Joseph Morris envisioned his own religious following and preached that he, not Brigham Young, was the appointed Prophet of God. Morris and his followers were entrenched at Manti, Utah, waiting for Christ, whom Morris repeatedly promised was coming to deliver them. In 1862, the Morrisites were holding prisoner some followers who were threatening to leave. By orders of U.S. officials, the Utah Militia, mostly Mormons, was sent in. William Blood, Ivy Blood Hill's father, was in the company called to free the Morrisite prisoners. On June 13th shooting continued the entire day, from the hill into the town and from the Morrisites back. It rained all day; for years after it was dubbed the 'Morrisite rain.' The next day they surrendered, but before

being taken into custody, Joseph Morris yelled, "All who are for me, follow me!"⁶⁵ They dashed for their weapons and Joseph Morris was shot.⁶⁶ He became a martyr to the religion and the tragedy held the Morrisites together for a short while.

Yet, the Morrisite movement lacked a charismatic leader to take over Morris' position. Soon the fragments assimilated back into the surrounding Mormon communities or left the area. Due to its low Mormon population, Montana was a favorable location for the Morrisites who wished to preserve their distinctness. The most united fragment moved to Deer Lodge, the Heavenly City, and fostered the belief that Deer Lodge Valley would be the location of Christ's Second Coming. The first Morrisites arrived in 1863, but the general Morrisite migration did not begin until 1871. Their elected leader, the Prophet Cainan, had informed the Saints that he intended to move to Montana and take up a claim as soon as possible, but instead he went proselytizing in England and never did make it to Montana. Nevertheless, the majority of his followers from Iowa and Nebraska went to Montana. These Morrisites traveled by train to Corinne, Utah, and then headed north on the Utah-Montana trail with their

⁶⁵Ivy Hooper Blood Hill, "John Ensign Hill, Diaries and Biographical Material," 36.

⁶⁶The accounts of what happened and why Morris was shot are very conflicting. For a thorough account of the incident consult C. LeRoy Anderson, *For Christ Will Come Tomorrow, the Saga of the Morrisites*, (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1981). Anderson has written a very insightful and detailed account of the Morrisities.

wagons and draft animals. They fled to Montana as the earlier Mormons had fled to Utah.

One of their followers was Neils Rasmussen Beck, baptized a member of the LDS Church in Denmark, 1851. Persecution from mobs in Copenhagen, combined with Brigham Young's call for members to 'gather,' motivated Neils, his wife, three brothers, and their wives, to sail for America. Four hundred forty-one Scandinavian saints started the voyage together, thirteen died en route to New Orleans and seven died on the Mississippi River journey. Niels reached Salt Lake in 1855. They moved to Moroni and had the distinction of giving birth to the first baby girl there. They had a happy beginning but Neils could not reconcile himself to the idea of polygamy. The preaching and practicing of polygamy was in full bloom at this time and his wife believed in it, an interesting reversal of the expected situation. He no longer wished to reside in polygamous Utah whereas she did. He left the Church and joined the Morrisites. His wife would not leave Utah with him and their daughter had the sad memory of seeing them kneeling in prayer together, her mother crying, and then walking blocks with him before they parted. She told her husband she could never love another as she loved him. It was evidently not enough to keep him in a church he could not support. In Montana he established himself as a cattle rancher and became extremely wealthy, willing the majority of his

inheritance to the LDS Church he had left.⁶⁷ Even when joining other churches, some members were not able to escape their allegiance to the Utah Church.

Nor could they completely escape the Mormon missionaries. In September of 1896, Utah Elders Mason and Bramwell went to Willow Glen, MT to meet with a number of Morrisites. They were impressed with how well read in scripture the Morrisites were but disappointed because they were more anxious to convert the elders than to be converted themselves. The differences separating the LDS, Josephites (RLDS), and Morrisites were not so great as to prevent them from gathering together to hear an address from Elders Tempest and Black who went to Willow Glen in October. It was cordial and the Morrisite Apostle Eardly even thanked them for the visit. Less cordial was Elder Miller's visit a year later to the Morrisites at Racetrack. There, Morrisite Elder Hendrickson read a revelation of Joseph Morris then said, "Mormons were fallen spirits, George A. Smith was a devil, and that Joseph Morris was elevated above Joseph Smith."⁶⁸

⁶⁷Eva and Evelyn Sorenson Jacobsen, "Life History of Niels Rasmussen Beck," LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.

⁶⁸"Butte District, Northwestern States Mission," *Manuscript History and Historical Reports*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City.



Andrew Hendrickson, President of the Montana Morrisites from 1886 until his death 3 July 1921.
Photo courtesy of Grace Bingham.

The Morrisite's Montana population probably never exceeded a hundred at any given time and they were plagued by divisions amongst themselves. Unlike the Utah Mormons, they were very lax in regards to raising their children in their faith. This was a large reason the majority of the children did not follow in their parents' faith. And the fact that the Morrisites did not actively recruit or send out missionaries, as did the Utah Mormons, accounted for their low increases in membership. Their last leader, George Johnson, died in 1954 and

with him went the last vestiges of the Morrisite faith. Their small white building, dedicated in 1879, still stands near the railroad tracks at Dempsey Crossing.⁶⁹



The Deer Lodge Morrisite Church, 2000. Photo by author.

The other main Mormon schism was the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. When they began proselytizing in Montana in 1868 they even converted many of the Morrisites.⁷⁰ The RLDS formed their own sect following the martyrdom of Joseph Smith with the belief that the call of prophet and president of the Church should be passed through Joseph Smith's male

⁶⁹C. LeRoy Anderson, *For Christ Will Come Tomorrow, the Saga of the Morrisites* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1981) , 205, 211-229.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 228.

posterity. They did not come West with the pioneers and established their headquarters in Independence, Missouri. More importantly, they did not espouse polygamy and were thereby able to convert many who believed Mormon teachings but did not endorse polygamy. They were very active within Montana but could not escape the prejudice from the mainstream Mormons and those who disliked Mormons in general.

There were five RLDS missionaries laboring in Montana and Idaho in 1869 and they reported that there was a definite need for more missionaries to combat the false doctrines of the Utah Church and its hold upon the people. By 1927, they reported 481 members in Western Montana and 250 members in Eastern Montana.⁷¹ Their dislike of the Utah Church worked to fuel the animosity aimed at the Mormons. Their early presence may have been another factor in Brigham Young's decision not to colonize Montana. The RLDS began missionary work there in 1868 and the LDS did not organize the Montana Mission until 1896. LDS missionaries Jackson and Misser met J.R. Anthony of the presidency of the Seventy of the Josephite/RLDS Church. He had charge of the missionary activities of the RLDS in that district. They had an animated discussion but the LDS missionaries felt humiliated because they were less well-versed in some points. They left him and didn't return to the discussion until they had studied more. They failed to persuade him that he should belong to the

⁷¹Diane D. Peffers, "The Diffusion and Dispersion of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: an Overview," (M.S. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1980), 18-19.

LDS Church but he did commend them in making an excellent defense of their calling.⁷² When the LDS mission opened, there were no organized branches in Montana but the RLDS already had a branch in Victor and Anaconda. In 1900 the RLDS added one in Bridger and followed that by one in Bozeman in 1911. In 1913 and 1914 Warm Springs, Culbertson, and Fairview branches were added.⁷³

Whitehall, Montana, is an area with a long RLDS history. In 1877, James and Marietta Sacry were the first RLDS to move to Whitehall. Marietta came from traditional LDS stock, born in Nauvoo and traveled with the pioneers to Utah. They left the Church, moved to California and joined the RLDS in 1860. The gold mines drew them to Montana. Although independent settlers, their numbers grew with the addition of the Moore, Hill, and Thorburn families. Their Church growth took them from meeting in members' homes to buying a building, and when that was outgrown they had to use the Community Building for their meetings. Similar to other RLDS groups in the nation, their numbers dwindled, and since 1973 they have met in Gayle Sacry's home, with only thirteen priesthood members. Today the RLDS of Whitehall consist mainly of Sacrys.⁷⁴

⁷²"Butte District, Northwestern States Mission," *Manuscript History and Historical Reports*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City.

⁷³*The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints 1890-1902*, (Independence: Herald House, 1969) , 648-652.

⁷⁴Cora Sacry, "Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," *Whitehall Centennial 1890-1990*, 20.

This is not unusual considering the strong tradition that religion plays within the family line and the particular emphasis that Mormons, RLDS or LDS, have always placed upon rearing children in the Gospel. Why their faith has less attraction is a theological question but they have been very outnumbered within Whitehall by the LDS, which numbered 225 members in 1990. Some of the RLDS defected to the LDS camp. One of the early LDS elders even conducted his services in the home of William Sacry in 1904.⁷⁵ The RLDS had a definite headstart in Montana but by 1941 the LDS claimed 32 branches throughout the state and the RLDS had only 11. The RLDS had a small building in Missoula, dedicated in 1948. This building was also used by a Hamilton congregation that formed in 1969. In 1974 they had enough members to plan an annex for their building located on Longstaff. More recently their movement has slowed in growth.

⁷⁵“Whitehall’s Fifth Church-LDS,” *Whitehall Centennial 1890-1990*, 19.

CHAPTER 3

Looking For Land

The odds seemed stacked against Mormons; there were Mormon schisms, prejudice of Montana citizens, and lack of Church support. So why did mainstream Mormons come to Montana? Land—and land meant opportunity. What they did not always understand was that they would not have the same support network for irrigation that survived in the Mormon-dominated regions. The Mormons moving to Utah left an individualistic culture, had a commune-like trek across the plains, and set up a new society heavily reliant on the learned cooperation.⁷⁶ Now they were leaving their Mormon towns and reverting to an individualistic mindset. Gottlieb Blatter and his family moved from Idaho Falls to Chinook in the spring of 1928. His family had increased to nine children and he needed more land to make a living. He sent his stock and farm machinery by freight car and drove the rest of the family. He had to leave behind his son who had a bad attack of appendicitis. Two weeks later Leonard Ball, the Chinook

⁷⁶Jackson, “The Overland Journey to Zion,” 20.

bishop brought him to Chinook. Bishop Ball was the same sugar beet industry representative who recruited the Warnicks to Chinook. Poor Gottlieb Blatter purchased a farm that was foul with wild oats and the heavy gumbo was hard to plow. His first crop of oats, barley, wheat, and sugar beets froze on the 23 of August, before they had been harvested. He had nothing to sell but this did not deter the irrigation company from shutting down his headgate with a notice on it to pay his water taxes or no water. Gottlieb was a persuasive man and went to Havre where he successfully convinced the Federal Land Bank that without water it was useless to plant a crop and subsequently he would not be able to pay the mortgage on his farm. They paid the debts and Blatter was able to continue with his farming.⁷⁷

Another person in search of land was Archie R. Wright, who visited the Sun River area with his father-in-law, Charles Warnick, and Mark Austin, a Church re-settlement representative. The Church was considering a land purchase in Montana and the Teton Land Company west of Simms had 36,000 acres for sale. Leonard Ball, the railroad representative, was disappointed when the Church decided against purchasing the land, but Archie brought his wife, Miriam, and family to Ft. Shaw in 1937 because drought and depression in Utah had forced him to move. The children in Utah had been raised on stories of the 'wild frontier' and the vast expanses of land, but all around them in Utah were

⁷⁷Gottlieb Blatter, "Biography of Gottlieb Blatter," LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, 10.

settlements of people. In 1847, when members began immigrating to Utah, there were 1,853 resident Mormons. Just twenty-three years later, in 1870, there were 97,229.⁷⁸ The burgeoning population slowly pushed out the more adventuresome.

A willingness to move didn't always guarantee an easier life. After a slow and difficult car journey, Archie and Miriam were pulling into the Ft. Shaw area and Miriam asked her husband, "You like this place?"

"Yes, there's opportunity here," replied Archie.

"There must be, there's nothing else." She eventually grew to love Montana and did not regret her move from Utah.⁷⁹ They did find opportunity and in 1938 they won a \$25 prize for the best production of a large acreage (25 acres) of sugar beets. The following year they increased their acreage but it did not produce as well as the smaller acreage and they lost the prize.

Irrigating in Montana could be very labor intensive or expensive and private irrigation operators sometimes charged water-usage fees. When Archie worked on the Robbins Ranch near Ft. Shaw, he helped construct a brush dam using a large trunk as an anchor and then piling straw and brush on top until the water was diverted into their hand-dug canal. This was a yearly event due to the high spring waters that washed out the dam. Lynn Alan Wright and his brothers

⁷⁸Wayne L. Wahlquist, "Population Growth in the Mormon Core Area; 1847-90," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, Richard H. Jackson, editor, 115.

⁷⁹Archie R. Wright, Miriam Warnick Wright, interview by author, 18 March 2000, St. Ignatius, notes.

helped with the farming, typical of Utah farming families, and typical of farming families in the world.⁸⁰ His sisters followed the more traditional roles of working within the home.

The water was not always as plentiful as in the spring and east of the Rockies was burned with drought causing them to leave Ft. Shaw for Simms and then Simms for North Crow in western Montana. Displaying a bit of wanderlust they had decided that they were going to move back to Utah. Then they attended a district Conference. Although they had told no others of their plans, the speaker, Elder Ezra Taft Benson, announced in his talk that there were present in the congregation persons who were planning a return to Utah. He counseled them to abandon this plan and to help build up Zion and the Church in Montana. No longer were the Utah leaders urging a 'gathering to Zion.'⁸¹ Even when they wanted to leave and return to the Utah Church, they were foiled. Taking his counsel, they stayed in Montana, feeling they had left their Utah Eden and been "charged to rebuild the garden in each desert outpost by the sweat of their brow."⁸² They found comfort in bringing a little Utah with them. They had learned to love trees and flowers while growing up near Pleasant Grove, Utah and at each of their farms they planted trees and flowers in their attempt to

⁸⁰Martha S. Bradley, "Protect the Children; Child Labor in Utah, 1880-1920," *A World We Thought We Knew*, John S McCormick and John R. Sillito editors, 204.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Charles S. Peterson, "Imprint of Agricultural Systems on the Utah Landscape," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, 91.

beautify their surroundings. Stegner observed that “as a people, Mormons have a great deal of civic pride.”⁸³

Charles Warnick also eventually moved his family to Montana in 1939. His children characterized him as a bit of a rebel and oldest of twelve children, a free spirit who wanted the open feeling of a ranch. Even though the Warnicks had a high reputation in Utah for Holstein dairying, Montana had available land. Chinook had a sugar processing plant and while the Church was encouraging movement to Montana to support the Church-owned Utah-Idaho Amalgamated Sugar Company, the Great Northern was likewise promoting the Montana land to support its rail service. When his son Ralph moved to Montana, the temperature in Great Falls was -23 degrees F. As Ralph looked out the pickup windows at the raging blizzard, he thought his dad was the craziest person in the world. It didn't help that they spent their first Montana night in a Conoco station.⁸⁴ The farming was also difficult. They had 100 head of cattle and forty horses. First they had too little hay, then too much. They planted sugar beets the first year and used flood irrigation on their 600 acres.

C.L. Warnick had served as the first Mormon Congressman from Idaho and brought his leadership skills to Montana with him. He was soon called to be the Church's North Montana District President and served in this capacity from 1939-1942. According to a letter from Mission headquarters in Portland, if there

⁸³Stegner, *Mormon Country*, 29.

⁸⁴Ralph and Verna Warnick, interview by author, 11 June 2000, Idaho Falls, notes.

had been more people like him with the "fine spirit of enthusiasm" the work would have advanced much faster.⁸⁵ He oversaw the building of the first chapel in Great Falls and his assignment was to prepare the area to become a stake.⁸⁶ He did not hesitate to use his Congressional connections to help his fellow farmers. The farmers rallied behind him as their spokesman. In an attempt to have the quota on sugar beets raised, he wrote to Montana senator, B.K. Wheeler, chairman of the United States Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce. The response was cordial but pessimistic due to opposition by the Administration.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Aileen Ashbacker, Portland, to Mr. and Mrs. C. L. Warnick, Fort Shaw, 24 February 1939, Courtesy of Miriam Warnick, St. Ignatius.

⁸⁶Lloyd Warnick, interview by author, 13 June 2000, South Salt Lake, notes.

⁸⁷B.K. Wheeler, Washington D.C., to C.L. Warnick, Fort Shaw, 8 August 1940, Courtesy of Miriam Warnick, St. Ignatius.



Charles Louis Warnick, North Montana District President 1939-1942.
Photo courtesy of Miriam Warnick.

Canada was a popular destination for many Mormons but there were a few who managed to trickle south, back into the U.S. Lyman Tracy was born in Magrath, Alberta in 1901 but graduated from Polson High School. He went to Tyler where his parents had previously moved. After marrying, he left Flatwillow Creek and worked for a season at the Grand Canyon as a construction worker, putting up government buildings. When that ended he went to work in Mesa, overhauling tractors. The amazing turn of the story is that after a winter in Mesa he wanted to return to Montana and his stored farm machinery. For three years he leased a farm from the large ranching outfit, the Judith Farm Company. Finally the opportunity for his own place came when the irrigation project opened up homesteads and he purchased one hundred sixty acres of land and a homestead right, eight miles west of Fairfield. It was 1940 and government

loans were available, which he took advantage of, to build the buildings on the homestead.

Lyman Tracy played an important role in the early Church activities in Fairfield. He was chosen to be the Sunday School Superintendent in 1936. For two years the LDS group grew steadily, as family after family moved in to settle on the irrigation project. Lyman was then chosen to be the branch president. This posed a problem because he lived nine miles from Fairfield but the school where meetings were held was another seven miles. Multiple Sundays he fought snowdrifts to attend to his branch. The homesteaders were privileged to see advancements; six years after filing his homestead he received electricity and they improved the roads. Finally the Saints numbered enough to warrant building a chapel. Even better yet for Lyman, so many Mormons had moved out onto the homestead area that they organized another branch they dubbed Golden Ridge. For seven years, eight families met in a little school house they had moved out there to serve as their chapel.

Occasionally, the smaller branches were dissolved to make fewer, larger branches. The Simms branch had been dissolved for such a purpose and eventually Golden Ridge was consolidated into the Fairfield branch. Charles Warnick had been given the charge to help the area become ready to be a stake. Lyman saw it actually happen on June 16, 1957, the same date the Missoula Stake was organized. He credits the 'goodness' of the people with the General Authorities' decision to grant stakehood. He shared an illustrative tale

of the members' willingness to help one another. An Augusta Church member's non-member husband passed away. They had a large stock ranch and he had the bad timing of dying during the busy haying season. Two hundred and fifty acres of hay needed to be cut. The Elders quorum president, Harold Porter, called together the forces of the quorum, predominantly farmers, and they brought their machinery and lunches for five days. The result was a very tall haystack, two hundred fifty acres mowed, raked, and baled. The General Authority Marion B. Hanks was in the district for a conference when he heard the story. He told Lyman, "I think you are about ready for a stake." Lyman had the honor of being ordained the stake patriarch.

Eventually the farm was too labor-intensive and he had to sell and move into Great Falls in order to work for General Motors. When he retired from this job, he left Montana for Tacoma but found himself in Helena three years later to help his son-in-law with a taxi cab business. Within this stake he also served as patriarch, an active member wherever he found himself.⁸⁸

The Utah Mormons developed their communities along irrigation canals and following the counsel of Brigham Young, they had small, intensively farmed plots.⁸⁹ It is not surprising then that the Montana Mormons sought the irrigating life they had known. The match between Mormon farmers who wanted land and

⁸⁸Lyman Tracy, interview by Addie B. Smith, 9 September, 12 and 19 October 1976, Bountiful, photocopy, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City.

⁸⁹Stegner, *Mormon Country*, 38.

irrigation district bond holders who wanted reputable irrigators was sometimes advantageous and sometimes not. Legends of what the Mormons had accomplished in Utah with their irrigation had reached Montana. Although their treatment of the environment often proved destructive,⁹⁰ they had accomplished the feat of raising crops in a semi-arid desert.⁹¹

Much of the land in Montana, particularly the East, is better cultivated in a dry-farm method. Utah began experimenting with dry-farming in the mid-1880's.⁹² In 1909, the Fourth International Dry Farming Congress convened at Billings and Elders from Utah serving in Montana were appointed to be delegates. The Northwestern States Mission President, Melvin J. Ballard, was appointed a member of the Committee on Resolutions and he was the Executive Committeeman from Utah.⁹³ Ralph Warnick was hired as the Ft. Shaw irrigation manager of Sun River but felt dry land ranching was the only viable option in Great Falls. The water was diverted toward Augusta and a main canal twenty

⁹⁰For a discussion of the environmental degradation due to intensive agriculture please see Dan Flores', "Zion in Eden: Phases of the Environmental History of Utah". This is a very popular and insightful article, consequently it has been published three times: *Environmental Review* 7 (Winter 1983), 325-44; *A World We Thought We Knew*, John S. McCormick and John R. Sillito, editors (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995) 422-440; *The Natural West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 124-44.

⁹¹Jeanne Kay, "Mormons and Mountains," *The Mountainous West*, William Wyckoff and Lary M. Dilsaver editors, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) , 368-391.

⁹²Peterson, "Imprint of Agricultural Systems on the Utah Landscape", 100.

⁹³*Liahona*, (Salt Lake City) , 18 December 1909, 420.

miles long ran down to Ft. Shaw. The land south of the canal from Simms to Ft. Shaw was irrigated and the land north of the canal was all rangeland. The Sun River ran 100 acre feet one inch deep per minute but there was never enough irrigation water in the summers. He said people were constantly mad there was not enough water and one woman shouted at him in exasperation, "A healthy boy could piddle a bigger stream in our ditch!" Religion was of no concern when he had to try to gain the irrigators' respect, especially if they thought he was cheating on the water he was allotting. Initially he felt a sense of resentment because some community members felt the Mormons were trying to take over the valley but through equitable water allotment he made many friends. Although at first they didn't feel accepted at PTA meetings and square dances, people started to welcome them and even started serving punch alongside the usual coffee. The Mormon dairymen were particularly liked in the valley because dairying brought the most cash into the community.⁹⁴

Gottlieb Blatter tried to irrigate his farm near Chinook with too little help. He recalled times he didn't have his irrigating boots off for three days and nights. He just lay down on the ditch bank to 'catch forty winks'--then he had to change the water again. After a heart attack his doctor advised him to stop working so hard so he rented his irrigated farm and bought a 3,000 acre dry farm. It only

⁹⁴Ralph and Verna Warnick interview.

took two years for him to realize that a dry farm was also too much work. He sold both farms and moved to St. George.⁹⁵

In addition to their farming expertise, the Mormons had a reputation as a tough and pioneering people, due in large part to their overland trek to Utah.⁹⁶ When the bondholders of the Bynum Irrigation District began to realize that they were not making any money, the Mormons seemed a natural solution.⁹⁷ The Great Northern Railway started to advertise in Idaho and Utah for families to settle the Bynum project.⁹⁸ Joseph Kinsey Howard attributed the general Montana influx to the promotional activities of James J. Hill of the Great Northern Railway⁹⁹ but there were multiple factors pulling the Mormons North. The district owners wanted people who could “make a go of it,” and the Mormons had been good pioneers who knew how to irrigate. There was a difference however, for in Utah irrigating had been a collective undertaking. Based upon Hispanic water

⁹⁵Gottlieb Blatter, “Biography,” Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

⁹⁶Richard H. Jackson, “The Overland Journey to Zion,” *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, 21.

⁹⁷“Mormon success in irrigation pioneering was by now, (1899), an old story in the American West...” Meinig, “The Mormon Culture Region,” 208.

⁹⁸Marge Stott, “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” *Bynum, A Roundup of Memories* (Choteau: Choteau Acantha, 1986) , 94-96.

⁹⁹Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Montana: High, Wide, and Handsome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943) , 166-209.

law, the Church publicly owned the canals and laterals, granting a "priority right of diversion for users."¹⁰⁰

Edwin Bingham moved to Bynum in 1928, when his son Glen was thirteen years old. A homestead was an opportunity he didn't foresee happening in Utah. They received land, an old tractor, a plow, and a shack. Edwin moved there because the favorable farming land in Utah was all occupied and he was forced to support his family by driving truck. Historian Lynn A. Rosenvall noted that by 1870 the most desirable lands of the Mormon region had already been occupied. By Edwin's time the leftover land was even more marginal.¹⁰¹ But Utah had instilled a Jeffersonian admiration for agriculture and he wanted to get back on the farm. He visited the Bynum area and it was big, flat country that looked promising. D.P. Fabrick ran the project and promised they would have help getting started. There were many from the Duschane, Utah area who moved to Bynum and nearly everyone on the project was LDS. If one family was recruited from a small town they would usually influence other family members or friends to move with them and in this manner whole segments of Utah communities were transplanted into Montana.

Other families moved to Bynum from Idaho. In 1927 John Ernest and Lovina Lee were living in Riverside, Idaho, struggling to make a living when they

¹⁰⁰Dan Flores, "Agriculture, Mountain Ecology, and the Land Ethic: Phases of the Environmental History of Utah," *Working the Range*, John R. Wunder editor, 165.

¹⁰¹Lynn A. Rosenvall, "Defunct Mormon Settlements: 1830-1930," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, 61.

were visited by a representative from the Northern Pacific Railroad. Their daughter remembers that he made Bynum “sound like the best place in the world.” The Lees decided they would quit the Riverside area, where they repeatedly had to throw away the potato crop due to lack of a market. They were joined by Sam Burke, Dee and Hazel Shores, the Joe and Maimie Burke family, and the Joe and Josie Moss family, all from the same area. For almost a week, they traveled by train and car to reach Bynum. When the Bynum Branch was organized in 1927, John Lee was ordained Branch President with Sam Burke and Joe Moss as his counselors.¹⁰² A couple years later Mr. Fabric took a picture of Lovina Lee feeding chickens in Bynum for advertising purposes to encourage more people to move.

Although it was an individual decision to move and enterprise, the Utah example had shown there was a certain degree of security in undertaking a communal and socialistic endeavor. The project offered centralized planning, regulation, and cooperation. This was not just a Utah pattern but the general mode of environmental operation at the time.¹⁰³ They raised wheat and when wheat prices went down they raised flax. Flax sold for higher prices but yielded less per acre and was more labor intensive, so Glen felt they profited nearly the

¹⁰²Elizabeth Lee Hogge, “Tales of the Times,” *Bynum, a Roundup of Memories*, 95.

¹⁰³Flores, “Phases of the Environmental History of Utah,” 159.

same.¹⁰⁴ Although the Mormons did not plan the town layouts, as in Utah, they had learned the important lessons of cooperation needed for extensive irrigating. Once the national government began establishing federal reclamation areas, it in a sense replaced the organizing structure the Church had provided colonists.¹⁰⁵ The largest impact may have come with the Reclamation Act of 1902 that prompted the establishment of various irrigation projects. The West was fertile ground for cooperation, not rugged individualism.¹⁰⁶

Shortly after they moved to Bynum, Mormon farmers shared with other farmers the economic hardships of the Great Depression. The soil was not very rich and so sticky a disc plow had to be used rather than a mold board. Those from the rich soil in Utah and Idaho were particularly discouraged. Then prices dropped to the point cattle were selling for twenty dollars and wheat for sixty cents a bushel. Edwin decided he was never going to be able to earn enough to gain clear title to the land.¹⁰⁷ Mormon folklore expounded the virtues of tilling the hostile desert into a blooming rose but even they could not always achieve a “pragmatic mastery of the forces of nature.”¹⁰⁸ The common denominator that

¹⁰⁴Glen Bingham, interview by author, 5 February 2000, video and tape recording, Charlo.

¹⁰⁵Meinig, “The Mormon Culture Region,” 209.

¹⁰⁶Leonard Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, 1967.

¹⁰⁷Bingham interview, 5 February 2000.

¹⁰⁸Flores, “Phases of the Environmental History of Utah,” 159.

affected whether a homestead would succeed or fail was aridity-- and the irrigation and soil were not favorable enough for Bynum's success. Between 1927 and 1943, 304 of the 450 members had left.¹⁰⁹ One notable Bynum family, the Stotts, remained and in subsequent years made a profit with their livestock. They bought the land cheaply from the departing families and acquired the necessary acreage for range animals.¹¹⁰ A few families left for Charlo in 1933 and in 1934 the Bingham's followed.

At Charlo, the Bingham's purchased eighty acres for \$2,200.¹¹¹ Although they prided themselves on being self-supportive, they were willing to accept what government aid they were able to get. Utah was a huge beneficiary of government funds and Montana farmers received some also. Their conditions had been nearly as bad in the 20's as in the 30's. Fortunately the government grew increasingly willing to aid small farmers.¹¹² The Bingham's followed Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) guidelines and set aside acreage to lay fallow. Glen is proud they didn't leave any debt behind in Bynum and that he also never used a credit card in his life. Part of this may be attributed to Mormon teachings of self-reliance and debt-avoidance, but the teachings were

¹⁰⁹Record of Members Collection 1836-1970 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints History Department, Salt Lake City: Microfilms).

¹¹⁰Marge Stott, *Bynum*, 95-96.

¹¹¹Bingham interview, 5 February, 2000.

¹¹²Brian Q. Cannon, "Struggle Against Great Odds: Challenges in Utah's Marginal Agricultural Areas, 1925-1939," *A World We Thought We Knew*, 318.

not always followed. There were some families in Bynum who left behind debt and some later in Charlo who could not always pay their bills. He felt these cases sometimes reflected poorly on Mormonism because they were always identified first as Mormons. Except for those situations, he felt welcome as a Mormon in Montana and thought they always had a good reputation with their fellow citizens.

Pearl Clawson Bennett earned a reputation as a community oriented woman and her life serves as a case study for a Mormon experience in Montana. Pearl's father, George Washington Clawson, Jr., was baptized a member of the Church at age twenty-two while living in Farmington, UT. While he was away building flour mills, her mother Jeanette Orilla Clawson had to "make do" to keep the family fed. Her ancestors were Quakers and like so many other Mormons, from England. Pearl was born 26 March 1887. Her family moved to Shelley, Idaho when she was twelve. She missed Utah and was not overly impressed with Idaho. She "despised the lonely little old frontier saloon town." At least she fell in love in 1904 with Stephen Nathaniel Bennett. He was ten years older than Pearl, born in 1877 in Cannah Quay, Wales, England. His foster father joined the Church and in 1884 they sailed on a White Star Line called The Arizona. Three fourths of Utah immigrants came from the British Isles and "conversion to Mormonism was almost tantamount to migration to the United States."¹¹³ The

¹¹³Wayne L. Wahlquist, "Population Growth in the Mormon Core Area: 1847-1890," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, 124, 129.

family journeyed to Utah and when grown, Stephen went even farther, to Canada. Most early Mormons bypassed Montana for Canada. He later settled into Shelley, Idaho's, mercantile business.

After marrying Pearl, the Bennetts went back to Canada and proceeded to "make lots of money and lost lots" raising cattle and dry farming. They then left Canada and Stephen obtained employment as a ditch rider on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. While at Fort Hall, Pearl befriended many Native Americans and came to call them her friends. She gave birth to her fifth child in Idaho and took pictures of her children along with her Indian friends. Chief William Penn of Gibson, Idaho, once found Pearl's two oldest daughters running away and he told them to return home. At another time Pearl was able to help him by arranging, through her position on the Gibson school board, to have his children transferred from the Ft. Hall Indian School to the Gibson school. He requested this because the Ft. Hall Indian School was much further from his home. Pearl had Indian friends in Canada and continued to expand her circle of friends to include many of the Shoshone Bannock Tribe in Ft. Hall. She taught school, cooked, and played the piano at the Fort Hall Indian School.

After Idaho, the Bennetts moved on to Montana and difficult years. In 1926, Pearl's husband was ordained the Charlo Branch President. After meeting with the Saints he spearheaded the effort for a meetinghouse. He was probably the connection that enabled George Washington Clawson, Pearl's father and builder by trade, to be employed as director of the construction. At

the same time, Pearl and Stephen built a home three miles south of Charlo on eighty acres they owned. Stephen had difficulty maintaining employment in Charlo, often working as a temporary farm hand. Even within the Branch there was sometimes conflict. At one time she was very pained when three other members accused her husband "of being a crook, and abused him terribly." Not a person to sit by and do nothing, Pearl went to visit one of the accusers the next day and told him he was a "mockery to the Holy Priesthood." But true to her charitable character she finished her diary entry with "I'll watch his kids." Pearl remained positive and involved, not restricting herself to Church socialization. From 1934 to 1936 she organized an old folks party, commenting, "The Party is sponsored and arranged by people of the community who have at heart the interests, well-being and happiness of their old folks." Pearl directed plays as part of the entertainment at the dinners she hosted to fund the party. Pearl loved acting, drama, and Shakespeare, despite her husband's exhortations to read only the scriptures. She directed plays that grew in fame until people from all over the Flathead Valley came to see them. The money was donated to build a gym for the high school.

Part of Pearl's responsibilities as wife of the branch president included hosting visiting Church dignitaries. President Joseph Fielding Smith came to speak with Stephen about settling Saints in the Valley. Others who visited their home were President David O. McKay, Rudger Clawson, and President William R. Sloan. Pearl also opened her home to multiple missionaries for the eight

years Stephen was the presiding priesthood authority. He put so much time and effort into his calling that he eventually lost his home and had to move into town. By the end of 1936 the Bennetts were completely broke and Stephen was unemployed. Like so many others, they moved into a community and made friends, but couldn't make a living and had to move on. They migrated to Los Angeles, hopeful to share in that state's prosperity. A year later she went back to visit Charlo and recorded in her diary that her friends there gave her a party and presented her with a cut glass basket for flowers.¹¹⁴

The small pods of Mormons scattered throughout the state all sought Church organization and hence closer Salt Lake affiliation. When their numbers grew enough, they were organized into branches and then wards. The Mormon pattern in Utah had been one of concentrated settlement rather than scattered individuals, making social and practical functions possible.¹¹⁵ This aided their feelings of being part of a larger entity rather than just individual Mormons. An 1882 First Presidency letter to William B. Preston of Logan read:

In all cases in making new settlements the Saints should be advised to gather together in villages, as has been our custom from the time of our earliest settlement in these mountain valleys. The advantages of this plan, instead of carelessly scattering out over a wide extent of country are, many and obvious to all those who have a desire to serve the Lord. By this means the people can retain their ecclesiastical organizations, have regular meetings of the quorums of the Priesthood and establish and maintain day

¹¹⁴Pearl Bennett, "Pearl Bennett Project," Kevin Merrell editor, [CD-ROM].

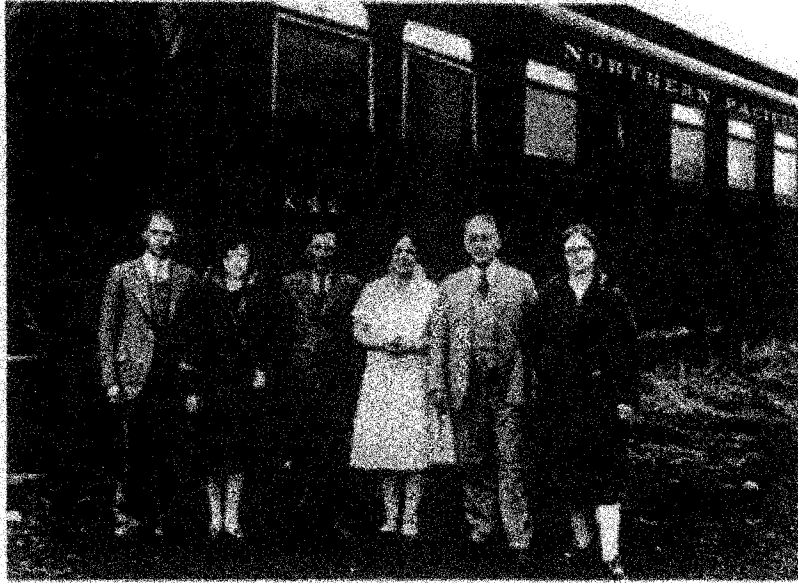
¹¹⁵Grey, "Mormon Settlement in a Global Context," 83.

and Sunday schools.¹¹⁶

Although each area experienced organization differently due to the personality make-up of the Saints, they shared commonalities. Charlo's experience was fairly common place. The official Charlo Sunday School began in July of 1926. They organized a picnic at McDonald Lake for all of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Flathead Valley to determine whether the populace warranted an organization. It did and they established the Sunday School with Brother I.W. Pierce as President. A more official founding came in November. President W.R. Sloan of the Northwestern States Mission met with members in a railroad car on a Charlo siding to organize the Flathead Prairie Sunday School with Stephen N. Bennett as Superintendent. The Charlo Sunday School minutes of November 21 noted there was no Sunday School held that day because of the simple fact that it was being organized. There were five people enrolled and sixty one people present. The next week there were sixty-one enrolled and forty-five present.¹¹⁷ This was the first LDS Church organization in the area from Sandpoint, Idaho, to the Canadian border. The railroad car was rented whenever larger meetings were held because there was no other building.

¹¹⁶Charles S. Peterson, "Imprint of Agricultural Systems on the Utah Landscape," *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, 92.

¹¹⁷Thelma Gallup, "Charlo Sunday School Minutes," 21 and 28 November, 1926, courtesy Grant Hogge, photocopy.



President Blaine Bauckman and wife, Pres. Stephen Bennett and wife, Mission President William R. Sloan and wife at the organization of the Charlo Sunday School, 1927. Photo courtesy Grant Hogge.

After the branch was organized in April of 1927, there were enough members to necessitate the building of a chapel. The pre-cut building was shipped from Washington but the members volunteered their time and materials to put it together. Because it was the first church in Charlo, many community members also contributed work and finances to have it completed. It was seen as a positive influence for the community.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸Verna Hogge, "Charlo Ward," 1-3.



The Charlo Building. Photo courtesy of Grant Hogge.

Brigham Young led the way in establishing the Mormons as a dancing, theatre-going, and recreating people who enjoyed life. Social opportunities had always been a “major concern” with Mormon wards.¹¹⁹ Bynum’s “Roundup of Memories” publication lists the participants in school plays, 4-H, home demonstration clubs, recreation schools, and Chautauquas. Many of the participants such as the Moss family members, Lucille Lee, multiple Stott family members, and Glen Bingham were LDS. The Church also sponsored the first Bynum Boy Scout troop, 1949.¹²⁰ Within Utah, the ward house was a social

¹¹⁹Grey, “Mormon Settlement in a Global Context,” 83.

¹²⁰Bynum, “School, Church, Social,” 97-100.

center¹²¹ and this also did not differ with the move to Montana. The building became an activity place for all of the Charlo residents. For a short time they even showed a movie once a week. When the members wanted to add a gym in 1935, the community again donated labor and raised the funds. After the gym was completed, they held roller skating parties every Friday night and presented community plays on the stage. Other events were dinners, dances, and basketball games. Glen Bingham played the saxophone in a band first in Bynum then in Charlo and they traveled to play for dances around the countryside. He always wanted to be a professional musician but the times were tough and his father told him if he stayed on the farm and helped him, he would in turn help Glen when he married.¹²²

The times were often tough enough that the building was used for service work in addition to entertainment. Joseph Smith had organized the first Relief Society and the Charlo Relief Society was organized in 1927. The women used the building to learn about caring for the needy and to learn homemaking skills.¹²³ Orilla Wright recalls learning to make quilts in the gym during their

¹²¹Bruce and Eugene Campbell, "Early Cultural and Intellectual Development," *Utah's History*, edited by Richard D. Poll, Thomas Alexander, Eugene Campbell, and David Miller (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1989), 308-309.

¹²²Bingham, interview, 5 February 2000.

¹²³Hogge, 2.

many Relief Society work days.¹²⁴ The Charlo Boy Scouts also now had a place to meet and more leaders to help them.

Through a collective effort, the members of the Charlo Branch remodeled and reconstructed part of their building in 1946. The majority of funds had to come directly from the members and they decided to raise these funds through farming potatoes. They leased a plot of land in Round Butte and in the early spring Edwin Bingham, Kent Homer, Laron Wright, Harry and Rex Maughan, and Jim Perry plowed and harrowed. They had trouble with a few wet spots but enjoyed a lunch brought by Fay Homer and Ardis Maughan. The Branch tended the potatoes throughout the summer and in the fall the Maughans dug them. Branch members then picked and sacked them. The potatoes were stored in George Allred's garage and sold throughout the winter for food. Jim Perry commented that he "developed into a better person by taking part in this project."¹²⁵

Early church buildings, while far from ornate cathedrals, served as places to meet. The Billings members met in the lecture hall of the YMCA in 1910. When the membership grew enough to justify their own building, the process of raising the funds and working together to build fostered strong friendships and loyalty to the Church. The early Saints who met at Sun River had to meet in a

¹²⁴Orilla Wright, to Grant and Verna Hogge, Charlo, 8 June 1997, courtesy of Grant Hogge.

¹²⁵James L. Perry, "Church", Personal Recollection, letter given to Grant and Verna Hogge.

room used as a bar at night, necessitating that they rise early and sweep the peanut shells and sawdust away, as well as air the smoky rooms before meetings were held. The early Saints in Utah had set the precedent of ward labor to construct their buildings. The Simms members finally built a church nearly identical to the one in Charlo because they both came from the same pre-fabrication plant.

The first buildings were financed entirely by the members in the area. The Bynum members held a meeting on November 20, 1927 because their population had grown to 250 members. Rather than continue using the school house for their multiple activities and worship services they decided to build. Each family was assessed \$100 and \$500 worth of labor toward their new building. The men went to the mountains and logged to help supply lumber and everyone worked together to complete the building by 1931. When it was dedicated, there were 203 persons present for the meeting.¹²⁶ In the same trip, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith dedicated the Simms, Charlo, and Helena chapels. The Butte church choir was kind enough to travel through a blizzard to present the program for the Helena dedication.¹²⁷ For later buildings the Church began paying 20% of the cost with the members paying 80%. Eventually the Church financed 40%, then later 60%, then 80%, until contemporary times when all of

¹²⁶Stott, *Bynum, a Roundup of Memories*, 95.

¹²⁷“Church Dedicates 4 Montana Chapels,” *The Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), 3 October 1931, LDS Church Historical Archives, Salt Lake City.

the funds are received from Church Headquarters in Salt Lake. Keith Schlappy, who had been both a branch president and a bishop, preferred the early years when the branches were assessed a percentage of the cost. It was often hard to pay and he felt sacrifices of the members led to a more spiritual people.

Even without a building of their own, the members would gather. The Billings members called the Billings Business College home for a few years in the early 1930's.¹²⁸ Other organizations were creative in finding space. The Whitehall Boy Scouts enjoyed Church support and they aided in cleaning, making drapes and curtains, painting, and even repairing the old town library so it could be turned into a shop for their early carpentry endeavors. Aside from Boy Scouting, Whitehall Church members could be found participating in other town activities such as the Harvest Festival and Fireman's Ball.¹²⁹

A logistical problem of no building was the absence of a baptismal font. The first Saints to Utah had used streams and canals. Orilla Wright was baptized in 1932 in Post Creek, which they dammed up until it was high enough for the performance of baptisms. Her most vivid memory of the occasion was the icy cold water.¹³⁰ Lois Bartlett was baptized in The Plunge, a basement swimming pool of the Wilma Theatre in Missoula. Lois and her sister RaNae

¹²⁸“Billings 1st Ward, Billings Montana Stake,” *Manuscript History and Historical Reports*, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

¹²⁹*Whitehall Centennial 1890-1990*, 19.

¹³⁰Orilla, to Grant and Verna Hogge, Charlo, 8 June 1997.

remember the poor heating of the early church on Sixth Street; the class in the boiler room was too hot and everyone jumped when the boiler came on and the class under the stairs was freezing cold.¹³¹ More important than the heating, they remember the closeness that the members shared and the willingness to help one another. They, along with Keith Schlappy, Glen Bingham, and Margaret Clawson feel that much of that has been lost and that the wards are not as united as the small branches used to be.

Closeness was something they sought and wherever Mormons moved, they found other Saints to associate with. Margaret Clawson moved from Wellseville, Utah, to the Allendale area when she was sixteen. She milked cows and did housework until she married Francis Lishman in 1922. They rented a farm in Garrison but the bank went broke and took their money with it. They moved to Charlo and there made new friends. Margaret missed her friends and family in Drummond, but she felt that Charlo had a more spiritual atmosphere.¹³² The Wrights moved from Ft. Shaw to Simms, later to North Crow, then to Ronan, and lastly to St. Ignatius. They found warm and friendly Mormons in every area. The search for better land within Montana was not always successful and the reason many Mormons came to Montana was the same reason many of them left. Margaret saw many of her good friends and members leave because they

¹³¹Lois Bartlett and RaNae Harris, interview by author, 19 January 2000, Missoula, notes and manuscripts, Missoula.

¹³²Margaret Clawson, interview by author, 5 February 2000, Charlo, tape recording, Missoula.

could not make a living, forcing them to travel out of the state. In only five years, between 1920-1925, the rural population in Montana fell from 225,389 to 203,962.¹³³ The Montana District Mission reported 996 members between 1915 and 1923. Their 1924-1925 number is only 707.¹³⁴



Veda Johnson, Margaret Clawson, Glen Bingham, Charlo, Montana, February 2000, photo by author.

Utah did not exist entirely on agriculture and the Saints had learned to diversify. They had established urban centers and professions similar to other American cities. The same was true within Montana; other jobs existed for the

¹³³Dalich, "Dry Farming Promotion in Eastern Montana," 13.

¹³⁴Record of Members Collection, 1836-1970 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints History Department, Salt Lake City: Microfilm).

industrious who didn't have a talent for farming. The sugar beet industry employed many Mormons, both raising the beets and then processing them into sugar. Keith Schlappy, RaNae Harris, and Lois Bartlett believe it was the sugar beet industry that brought Mormons to the Missoula area. In the earliest years of Mormons in Montana, Missoula was not one of their favored destinations, largely because of its low Mormon population. In 1911 two Elders organized the first Missoula Sunday School but it only operated sporadically until 1917 by which time so many members had left the area it was discontinued.

For ten years there was no Sunday School until the coming of the Utah-Idaho Amalgamated Sugar Company. The Church-owned factory sent many members to Missoula as key men to construct and operate the plant. Average attendance at their Sunday School soared from twenty four to seventy-six, enough to necessitate the establishment of a branch.¹³⁵ Even those who came to Montana for farms sometimes found themselves in cities because the Depression drove families despite their preferences. During the Depression, Edwin Bingham was employed at the American Crystal Sugar Company. Glen used to travel from Charlo to Missoula every day with him and stand outside in a line. He was finally employed after three days of waiting. Mormons had always been an industrious people, even desiring to name their state Deseret, after the

¹³⁵RaNae Harris, "Historical Sketch," *Souvenir of Dedicatory Services*.

hardworking honeybees.¹³⁶ The psychological turmoil of Americans who were willing to work but could not find work struck everyone but could be particularly harsh on Mormons who consistently heard sermons about the virtues of self-reliance.



"Sugar Beets Grown by the Farmers of Western Montana." Photo courtesy of LDS Archives.

¹³⁶For a more fitting state symbol see Donald Worster, "Expanding Our Moral Vision Beyond the Human Community," *A World We Thought We Knew*, 412. He argues the people should identify themselves as the Lord's Beavers due to their relationship with water, and communal, family centered characteristics. Most of the Mormon moves to Montana also had water at their center, the early farmers interviewed all described their plots of land according to what watershed it was a part of.

Henry Arnold Schlappy came to the state to sell for the Utah Woolen Mills. He said he would live there on a three-year trial but being an avid outdoorsman he fell in love with the state and soon moved his family to Montana permanently. His son Keith, who was six at the time, remembers that the Missoula Branch used to meet in the Oddfellow's Hall until they bought the Greek Orthodox building. The Missoula Branch President was Harry Peterson, a man who worked for the Western Union Telegraph Company. Construction also employed many Mormons such as Art Crum's father who had a cement mixing plant.¹³⁷ Keith's brother was the division superintendent of the railroad.

Brigham Young encouraged the Mormons within Utah to work for the railroad during its construction, largely to stave off a Gentile influx. As a side-product, the railroad has been traditionally held in high regard amongst Mormons. Much to the dismay of one mother, Annie Clark Tanner, some sons went off to work the railroads prior to informing their parents. Her son Myron wrote her about some of his perils learning to be a brakeman near Troy. He doubtless didn't put her mind at ease with sentences such as "I have had lots of trouble and will have more. Just this last trip I came within two feet of ramming the engine through a switch." Although he could escape to Montana to make some money, expecting to make about \$100 in January, it wasn't the destination for an education. His mother would have much preferred he had pursued an

¹³⁷Keith Schlappy, interview by author, 18 January 2000, East Missoula, tape recording, Missoula.

education rather than giving her “an idea of the anxiety a parent has when a boy is engaged in such dangerous work as railroading, especially when he secures the job by assuming to be older than he really is.”¹³⁸ Although industry played a role in the early settlement of Montana Mormons, the majority came to farm.

Another drive bringing Mormons to Montana was the Church Welfare Office, which preferred to relocate members in favorable areas rather than give them handouts. As part of their calling, workers in the Church Welfare Office reported on various places and encouraged some moves to Montana. The General Church Welfare Committee compiled vital statistics for the Northwestern states and although the Montana folder was considerably thinner than the others, it revealed options. It gave the populations of different counties, told if irrigation was viable, what resources existed, and what kind of crops to raise. It also told whether railroads serviced the area. They stressed the railroad hub as a highlight for Missoula County as well as the sugar processing plants.¹³⁹

Traveling was time-consuming and expensive, so it wasn't uncommon for youth to be raised in one area, never travel very far, and die in the same state. Both wars and missions broadened the horizons of young LDS. It is currently typical for young, worthy men to serve a full-time mission for the Church

¹³⁸Myron Tanner, Windsor Hotel in Troy, MT, to Annie Clark Tanner, Farmington, UT, 1 January 1910, in Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991), 201-204.

¹³⁹General Church Welfare Committee, “Reports of Land and Opportunity in Montana,” 1946. LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.

following their nineteenth birthday. They usually serve for two years, whereas young women usually serve for eighteen months following their twenty-first birthday. The early missionaries served at different ages and for differing amounts of time. Missionaries of the Mormon faith were called long before the Saints moved to Utah; Sidney Gilbert and W.W. Phelps were called on missions in 1831.¹⁴⁰

The Saints in Montana were not exempt from this calling. Following the example of earlier Saints who had left during trying circumstances, Gottlieb Blatter accepted a call from Mission President Melvin J. Ballard in July of 1934. Blatter had moved to Chinook with his nine children, searching as usual for enough land to make a living. His wife had died in April 1934 and left him with eleven children. He was promised he would meet his new wife while serving, and he did meet her, in Arkansas.¹⁴¹ Other missionaries served under more conventional circumstances. Keith Schlappy served a mission from 1949-51 in Hawaii because his friend, Boyd Bigley, was preparing to serve and he invited Keith to serve also. Keith thinks they were the first two from Missoula to serve Mormon missions.¹⁴² Mission farewells were a common event in Utah and

¹⁴⁰*Doctrine and Covenants*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 61:7.

¹⁴¹Gottlieb Blatter, "Biography of Gottlieb Blatter," LDS Archives, Salt Lake City, 9.

¹⁴²Schlappy, interview, 18 January 2000.

although not common in the early years, the Montana Mormons did serve missions.

As well as serving missions, they were willing to support and fight in wars. When President Grant, then president of the Council of the Twelve, visited Great Falls he declared, "The state of Utah has done herself proud in every war activity since the United States entered the great conflict, and the Mormon Church has been a leading factor in the establishing of this record."¹⁴³ Following World War I, Western Senators from Arizona, Colorado, and Nevada praised the Mormons, calling the sect's integrity, thriftiness, and patriotism unimpeachable.¹⁴⁴ During World War II rationing, the Saints established home Sunday Schools to curtail their travels. The Zurich home Sunday School enrolled nineteen people, only six of whom were members. The Fort Benton home Sunday School boasted that all of its members were converts and they were baptizing two more.¹⁴⁵

David O. McKay, President of the Church from 1951 to 1970, followed the example of earlier prophets and encouraged the young men to take up arms for their country when the call to serve was issued. He pledged to limit the missionary calls to young women, veterans, persons married before July 1,

¹⁴³"Leader Tells What Mormons are Doing," *Tribune* (Great Falls), 11 May 1918.

¹⁴⁴"Mormons praised in U.S. capitol by Western Senators," Associated Press, Reprinted in *Anaconda Standard*, and *Great Falls Tribune*, 12 November 1919.

¹⁴⁵"L.D.S. Missions at Work in War Time," *The Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), 29 May 1943.

1950, and young men physically unfit for service.¹⁴⁶ The Relief Society joined in the effort by sending stored grains and sewing clothing for the soldiers. Within Utah, a higher ratio of eligible Mormons than non-Mormons served during the Korean War.¹⁴⁷ Although the numbers are not available for Montana, the message delivered to the Utah members was also delivered to the Montana members and Archie Wright attests that many of his friends left to fight the American wars. Farmers raising crucial foodstuffs were exempted, Mormon or not. Keith Schlappy was eager to enlist in the World War II battle but it ended before he came of age. Although not old enough to fight, he and other kids scoured the neighborhoods collecting old tires and metal to help the war effort.

¹⁴⁶“LDS Pledges Draft Board Co-operation,” *Tribune* (Great Falls) , 17 January 1951.

¹⁴⁷Vetterli, *Mormonism, Americanism, and Politics*, 712.

CHAPTER 4

Church Growth

Native American history with the European encroachers has been one of broken promises and struggles over land control. The inception of the Mormon involvement is clouded by varying and conflicting reports of what Brigham Young taught his followers. When the Mormons moved into Utah, Brigham Young told the Church members to buy the land properly from the Indians and to help convert them when possible. "It is cheaper to feed the Indians than fight them," was his pronouncement.¹⁴⁸ Later it was denied that Brigham Young ever promised payment. Rather than paying the Indians for the occupied lands, Brigham Young proclaimed, "The land belongs to our Father in Heaven, and we calculate to plow and plant it; and no man shall have the power to sell his inheritance for he cannot remove it; it belongs to the Lord."¹⁴⁹ This is a fine and

¹⁴⁸Juanita Brooks, "Indian Relations on the Mormon Frontier," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 12 (1944) 1-48.

¹⁴⁹Howard A. Christy, "Open Hand and Mailed Fist: Mormon-Indian Relations in Utah, 1847-1852," *A World We Thought We Knew*, John S. McCormick and John R.

grand proclamation unless of course you are one whose land is being occupied. Despite often friendly relations, hostility and bloodshed between Mormons and Indians existed within Utah. Differing views of land ownership accounted for much of this. Mormons carried both friendly and hostile views of Native Americans to Montana. Within Mormon teachings, Native Americans are identified as Lamanites, a branch of the House of Israel of ancient Hebrew origin. Joseph Smith received a revelation informing him that the Lamanites would 'blossom as a rose' before the Lord comes again.¹⁵⁰ With this belief the Mormons have actively tried to spread the Gospel among Native Americans.

Although the Montana missionaries followed the missionary traditions of their church, they fit within a much larger scheme: the crusader 'missionary syndrome' identified by Robert I. Burns. The Indians the Mormons came into contact with had previous experience with white men. Those on the Ft. Peck Reservation had the cruel history of having been driven there by white men. The white man characteristically did not care if the Indians had a different culture, so long as they moved out of the way. It was with the emergence of missionaries among the Indians that deep cultural mingling began to take place. Burns identifies the pattern of "arrogantly expansive society moving in to stay, in ever growing numbers." By the time the Mormon missionaries contacted the Montana Indians, they no longer wanted to take their land, as had been the case

Silto editors, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995) , 35-37.

¹⁵⁰*Doctrine and Covenant*, 49:24.

in Utah. But their arrogance is undeniable. Much animosity aimed at the Mormons finds its roots in the Mormon belief that their church alone holds the complete truth and the keys to salvation. So, from the viewpoint of a Native American who is very content with his Native religion, the pomposity of the Mormons would be an affront. From the viewpoint of a Native American who has been baptized a Mormon, and believes the teachings, he has been brought the greatest gift possible.¹⁵¹

Melvin J. Ballard, President of the Northwestern States Mission, felt it was crucial to teach the Indians of Christ, and although he was stationed in Oregon, he often visited and wrote letters to those involved in the work in Montana. To Nimrod Davis, an Indian Church leader in the area, he advised that Indian wives should be given the same name as their husbands to facilitate the keeping of their genealogy. But he asked Davis' advice as to whether the Indians would object to the arrangement.¹⁵² Although the tone of the letters was caring, with an interest in the welfare of the Indians, the result was still a loss of the Native religion. "Acculturation proved overwhelming and thus destructive: What the victim could salvage was not his old society but a dispirited mutation."¹⁵³ The

¹⁵¹Robert I. Burns, S.J. "The Missionary Syndrome: Crusader and Pacific Northwest Religious Expansion," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30 (April 1988) : 275.

¹⁵²Melvin J. Ballard, Portland, to Nimrod Davis, Wolf Point, 14 August 1912, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.

¹⁵³Burns, 275.

Mormons were not unlike their other Christian brethren in their encouragement of the Indians to put behind them their other religion and grasp only what was taught by the new religion. Whether the trade-off was worth it was something that had to be decided on an individual basis. Unlike the force used to convert the Pueblos of New Mexico, the Mormons did escape the temptation of coercive conversion.

Church leaders felt it was important to keep the converted Indians grouped together as much as possible. Ballard wanted the Church leaders on the Ft. Peck Reservation to keep the "little flock" together in a Sunday School and sent outlines for lessons to keep them interested in studying. If a great number of Indians were going to join the Church in Wolf Point, they felt it would be necessary to colonize them on that reservation and keep them located together in one place so they could keep some missionaries there most of the time. This was very similar to the manner of colonization used by the early Saints, living closely together to give support to one another and lessen the influence of Gentiles.

Ballard asked Davis' advice on how the recently converted Indians at Ft. Peck were feeling and what his ideas were for taking care of the members, as well as when the Indians would be through hunting so that he could come and visit them. He was looking forward to being granted permits to organize and

preach.¹⁵⁴ A later letter from Congressman Howell stated that their request for a permit had met with favor and they would soon have more liberty to do their work.¹⁵⁵ Two years later, Davis succeeded in getting the Indians to approve the Church's application for land upon which to build. The Indians objected to the initial request of eighty acres but granted forty. President Ballard explained to Davis that the request for eighty had been to facilitate experimental farming for the benefit of the Indians. Their earthly welfare fit within the "gospel of their salvation."¹⁵⁶ Establishing farms and instructing the Native Americans in the labor of farming was a precedent set by Brigham Young when he approved the original three Indian farms in Utah, 1855-56.¹⁵⁷ Richard R. Lyman, a member of the Council of the Twelve referred to them as "fine Indians" in his correspondence. When Heber C. Iverson, President of the Northwestern States Mission gave his annual report to the Butte Elders he commented, "The Church is doing splendid educational work among Indians, and the boarding school now at Fort Peck Reservation will be enlarged this summer to care for the increased

¹⁵⁴Melvin J. Ballard, Portland, to Nimrod Davis, Wolf Point, 14 August 1912, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 23 August 1912.

¹⁵⁶Ballard to Davis, 24 February 1914.

For a discussion of the less than successful attempts at turning the Utah Indians into farmers see, Howard A. Christy, "Open Hand and Mailed Fist: Mormon-Indian Relations in Utah, 1847-1852", *A World We Thought We Knew*, 49. Why Ballard thought it would be more successful in Montana is a mystery except that the general mindset of the time reinforced the superiority of a farming lifestyle.

¹⁵⁷S. Lyman Tyler, "The Indians in Utah Territory," *Utah's History*, 362.

work in agricultural and other teaching there.”¹⁵⁸ Elder Jay Durryon also had plans for the Indians. The young members of Billings had been organized and were competing with members of other areas in public speaking, retold story, singing, drama, and in the “right kind” of dancing. The winners of various districts would compete and the final winners would go to Salt Lake City to compete again. Elder Durryon wrote to Davis, “I hope that sometime we can do this at the Wolf Point Branch and have them win out in the Church. Wouldn’t that be great?”¹⁵⁹ The Mormon missionaries did not always share the condescending view of Native Americans that some other denominations had.

The Mormon religion feels it has particular relevance for the Native Americans because the *Book of Mormon* is reputed to be a history of their people. While the idea that Indians were the lost Tribes of Israel was current in Smith’s day, there is no current academic proof of such.¹⁶⁰ The book tells the story of the Native Americans who first came to the Americas, and it tells of their wars, religion, and great buildings. It is not surprising that the *Book of Mormon* would be a compelling attraction for some Native Americans, while other Native Americans completely refute the story.

¹⁵⁸“Mormonism Growing Faster in Montana,” *Miner* (Butte) , 20 May 1921.

¹⁵⁹Elder Jay Durryon, Billings, to Nimrod Davis, Wolf Point, 17 May 1934, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.

¹⁶⁰Dan Flores, Note on paper, 2 May 2000, 28.

There are a myriad of theories exploring Indian origins; the one specifically relating to Mormons links Native Americans very closely with Mormon beliefs. Third Nephi in the book describes Jesus Christ's visit to America and this is believed by many Mormons to be the source of the legend that a Great White God appeared to the Native Americans. Another aspect of the book that has deep meaning for believing Native Americans is chapter 15 in The Book of Helaman, the prophecies that in the last days the Native Americans would be "afflicted, driven to and fro upon the face of the earth, and be hunted, and shall be smitten and scattered abroad, having no place for refuge." And then they would be brought the true knowledge of their Redeemer.¹⁶¹ It is this last clause that the missionaries traveling to Montana felt they needed to fulfill.

Today there are about 400-500 members in the Wolf Point Branch but only 100 regularly attend church meetings. Their conversions were prompted not only by the temporal assistance the Church gives, but also by belief in those who came to teach them. On Chicken Hill, there is a Mormon church building today, but many years ago, when Melvin J. Ballard was traveling through on train, he asked the train to stop so he could get out. There he had a vision in which he saw many Indians on the hill and among them stood Christ. Another legend attributes one of their Indian wise men with having a dream and prophesying to his people that there would be a great book that would come to them. And there were also healings and a miracle; Looking, a blind Indian, was

¹⁶¹*Book of Mormon, Helaman 15:12-13.*

given a blessing and received his sight. Sheldon Headdress enthusiastically stated that the Mormons were a very positive presence but when questioned more, he conceded that not all of his Indian acquaintances have appreciated the Christian influences.¹⁶²



Elder and Sister Melvin J. Ballard and missionaries meeting with Montana Native Americans. (Unfortunately the tribal name was not recorded) Photo Courtesy Ballard Family.

The first white female settler in Montana had connections to both the Indians and the Mormons. In the fall of 1855, Henry Miller, from New York,

¹⁶²Sheldon Headdress, interview by author, 28 April 2000, Ft. Peck Reservation/Missoula, phone interview. Sheldon Headdress was recently the Branch President of the Wolf Point branch and being a Mormon is unsurprisingly very positive in his views about the religion.

spent the winter at a Mormon settlement in Ogden. Because he was not Mormon, he was not allowed to marry the young woman, Minnie Miller, he had fallen in love with, so he escaped with her on horseback in 1856. They were married at Fort Hall, Idaho. A Dr. Landsdale persuaded the young couple to take charge of the Jocko Indian Agency, which they did and during her year there, Minnie Miller never saw another white woman. She reportedly interacted very well with the Indians.¹⁶³ Although the Indians had faced increasingly narrowed choices from the white men, the role of missionaries cushioned some of the more brutal acculturation that was forced upon them.¹⁶⁴ The role of the Montana missionaries coming and seeking their friendship after they had been forced onto reservations was a very meager recompense, but the attempt was made.

Mormons tried to convert not only the Indians, but also felt it was their duty to share their beliefs and the happiness of the Gospel with all of their Montana friends. Utah's Mormon population grew exceedingly fast due to a large Mormon base population, but Montana's Mormon population also grew. Not only was Montana affected by missionaries who left and came back with new experiences, but it was even more impacted by the missionaries who came to Montana. Formal missionary activity began when Elder Edward Stevenson and Elder Matthias F. Cowley traveled to Montana in June 1896. They were officially

¹⁶³Frank H. Woody, "The History of the Reservation," *The Missoulian*, 1910.

¹⁶⁴Burns, "Missionary Syndrome," 281.

charged with preparing a way for a mission. To accomplish this they called on Governor Richards and were warmly received. He gave them letters of introduction to prominent men of the state. The Elders preached in Lima and organized the first Montana branch there on July 8, 1896. They also preached at Dillon and Butte; in Anaconda they established Mission headquarters. Elder Phineas Tempest was called as the first Montana Mission President.¹⁶⁵ The Montana Mission had some success despite early comments of the organizing Apostles that the Saints would probably be better off in Utah than in the "less righteous" atmosphere of Butte and Anaconda. Part of their opinion may have been prompted by articles that coincided with their travels. The *Butte Miner* vehemently reported,

The Mormons are determined to control the politics of Utah-and to control under a system of church domination unprecedented in the history of any state. The people of Utah should organize for effective opposition to this proposed system of serfdom and the citizens of every state in the Union should aid the cause of liberty and justice by promptly suppressing the proselyting agents whom the church selects to bring converts and recruits from the remote corners of the earth.¹⁶⁶

Nonetheless, mission headquarters were established at Anaconda and the mission was to serve the entire state.¹⁶⁷ The first Relief Society in Montana was

¹⁶⁵Jenson, 526-527.

¹⁶⁶*Miner (Butte)*, 19 April 1896.

¹⁶⁷Rollins, 227.

organized at Butte on June 8, 1898. At their first Relief Society meeting Sister Nellie Yauncy played the piano and everyone danced for a couple hours 'then went home happy.' Butte at the time claimed the largest membership, 146 in 1898. The next year Butte also had the highest number of converts, twelve. The missionaries had to work hard for those twelve converts: they rode 4,726 miles, walked 6,617 miles, visited 5,140 families in the year, held 240 meetings, distributed 2,848 tracts, and 289 people refused tracts. By the time it was absorbed into the Northwestern States Mission, 1898, Church membership was on the rise. There were 82 members in the Billings area at the end of 1898 and 119 by the end of 1900.¹⁶⁸ Much of their early work was rebaptizing because the members hadn't had Church contact for so many years. Elder Cowley reported that several grateful people were "much overcome by seeing an elder from Zion." Brother Lauritz P. Nelson was set apart specifically to hunt for scattered members and report them to the elders. They also held a public meeting and advertised such in the *Butte Standard*. They recorded they were able to "renew the testimony of many who had been members in their youth."¹⁶⁹

A year later, Elders Black and Young had reason to feel discouraged. They visited the little villages of Silver Star and Iron Rod. Even offering to pay, they could find no accommodation for the night. They had walked fifteen miles,

¹⁶⁸"Billings Montana," The Montana folder, LDS Church Historical Library, Salt Lake City.

¹⁶⁹"Butte District, Northwestern States Mission," *Manuscript History and Historical Reports*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City.

visited twenty-six houses and been rejected seven times. Their estimation was that "many of the saints in Montana had grown lukewarm from being deprived of association with the saints for so long." Then the Mission President T.E. Ricks visited and railed against those who moved there from Utah, etc. and left unpaid debts. He preached against the dishonesty and warned them it would not be tolerated by the Church. The mission reports give the impression that there were the best and the worst of Mormons to be found in Montana.



**Northwestern States Mission, bottom left corner reads "Hawkes Photo, Butte".
Photo courtesy LDS Historical Dept. Archives.**

Because there weren't huge numbers of Utah Mormons particularly seeking out Montana and those that did tended to congregate in predominately Mormon communities, there was a heavy reliance on missionary work. Keith Schlappy felt that Missoula in the mid-1900's was a particularly high convert area, with growth coming from the converts more than members moving into the

area or having children.¹⁷⁰ Under the leadership of President Merrill, the missionaries used more tactics than knocking on doors. The twelve man “Mission-Aires” toured the state performing popular music, spirituals, and LDS hymns for civic groups, ladies clubs, and schools. Other missionaries held basketball and weight-lifting clinics for members and non-members. They even held an aviation clinic once.¹⁷¹ They did not hesitate to use new technology, radio performances were not rare and by 1947, the two Elders assigned to Shelby were giving a regular fifteen minute broadcast.¹⁷²



Missionaries, Butte, 1919. Photo courtesy LDS Archives.

¹⁷⁰Schlappy, interview, 8 January 2000.

¹⁷¹President and Sister Grove, “The Great Montana Billings Mission,” LDS Church Historical Library, Salt Lake City.

¹⁷²“Use of Radio Continues to Aid L.D.S. Missionaries,” *The Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), 8 November 1947.

George Spencer Young and his companion came to Montana in 1896 as missionaries. He recorded in his journal that most of the people were friendly to the missionaries. The missionaries were responsible for their own living and he once spent six and a half days with a pick and shovel to earn \$19.80. They usually walked at least seven miles in a day when visiting investigators and other days were entirely spent studying the gospel. Their greatest challenge lay in securing buildings for holding meetings. In Twin Bridges the other churches were against the Mormons and influenced the public school and Good Templers' Hall to refuse their request for building rental.¹⁷³ Almer Burns Cox's diary revealed that other churches were friendlier—he and his companion were allowed to use the Seventh Day Adventist building for meetings.¹⁷⁴ Young reported in February of 1898 that they had visited 85 families, administered to three sick persons, distributed 34 tracts, held 26 meetings, and walked 187 miles.¹⁷⁵ The members did their part to try to keep up the spirits of the missionaries. One of Young's friends gave him a poem he had written:

Let us sing and be happy for the Spring is coming,
Let us put into rhyme some of the words that we say;
The snow has been thawing, the snow has been thawing,
Indeed we have been having a beautiful day
We would not hope for the Summer if not for the Winter

¹⁷³George Spencer Young, missionary journal, 1898, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.

¹⁷⁴Almer Burns Cox, missionary journal, 1909, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.

¹⁷⁵Young, 1898.

Nor rejoice when in health if we never knew pain:
Neither respect the honest, nor value the faithful
But for the untrust, the thievish, the vices
Through our own rights, if need be we sacrifice some time
To establish good feelings, discarding all strifes;
If we do what is right and do what is honest
When assailed with injustice or other things evil,
Let us honestly face it, that maketh us brave,
If through trials and troubles of the present
There is hope for rejoicing beyond a rest in the grave.¹⁷⁶

The hard work of the missionaries paid off and President Iverson of the Northwestern States Mission commented that Mormonism was spreading more rapidly in Montana than in any of the other Northwestern States. To keep up with the spread he announced a fifty percent increase in missionaries to the state.¹⁷⁷ In 1927 there were six Church branches in Montana and by the end of 1937 there were eighty branches.¹⁷⁸ The members aided the missionary effort through less direct means. In 1897, the people of Salt Lake City sent a carload of beautiful flowers as a present to the people of Anaconda. The mission journal noted that between two and three thousand people assembled, "all eager to get some flowers."¹⁷⁹ At other times their talents were employed. The Mutual Improvement Association of Big Horn Basin presented free concerts at Senior

¹⁷⁶Brother Thorgunton, "Reminutions of a Mormon Shepherder," Bannack, MT, 1896, found in George Spencer Young's missionary journal, LDS Church Archives.

¹⁷⁷"Mormonism Growing Faster in Montana," *Miner* (Butte), 20 May 1921.

¹⁷⁸Rollins, 233.

¹⁷⁹"Butte District, Northwestern States Mission," *Manuscript History and Historical Reports*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Archives, Salt Lake City.

High of Billings as part of a typical community outreach program. They kept their songs in line with the general recreational and cultural policy of the LDS-MIA.¹⁸⁰ All of this missionary work led to the first Montana Stake in 1953. It was created after Elder Spencer W. Kimball and Elder LeGrand Richards visited the Butte area and determined it had sufficient members of the Church and leadership sufficiently capable of staffing a stake.¹⁸¹ It had a membership of approximately 3,500 persons.¹⁸² Subsequent stakes were formed in Great Falls (1957), Missoula (1957), Billings (1963), Helena (1968), Kalispell (1970), Billings East (1977), Great Falls East (1978), Bozeman (1979), Stevensville (1979), and Glendive (1997).¹⁸³

Aside from active missionary work, the main Church growth was from families moving into the state and members having many children. As mentioned earlier, land acquisition was a prime motivator for the early families. The homesteading era was ushered in by the Homestead Act of 1862 and the subsequent Homestead Acts with their various criteria. The Northern Pacific Act of 1864 and 1870 opened up additional land for the railroads to promote. Because of the aridity of Montana, the largest impact may have come with the

¹⁸⁰“Big Horn Basin L.D.S. Chorus Will Present Concert at Senior High School Auditorium Tonight,” *The Billings Gazette* (Billings), 27 June 1948.

¹⁸¹“Latter-Day Saints May Organize First Stake Here,” *Post* (Butte) 22 June 1953.

¹⁸²“Edgar T. Henderson Chosen President, New Butte Stake- No. 208,” *Church News* (Salt Lake City), 4 July 1953.

¹⁸³1999-2000 *Church Almanac*, 218.

Reclamation Act of 1902 that prompted the establishment of various irrigation projects.¹⁸⁴ Each of these acts beckoned land-seekers to Montana and those LDS not daunted by the scarcity of Mormons were not left behind in the land-grabbing. They displayed a penchant for Americanization in their willingness to expand.¹⁸⁵

They also displayed the ability to move about and so their numbers fluctuated. Sunday services had ceased in Whitehall in the 30's due to lack of members. In the 40's there was an influx from Northern Utah and Southern Idaho. The Whitehall members had felt alone and slightly alienated but with the new members and their valued information about Church activities, the district primary schools and Sunday services started up again.¹⁸⁶ Once Mormon families moved into the state, the Mormon teachings to "replenish the earth" caused population growth. Utah claimed the second highest birth rate in the nation in 1880 with 41.2 births per 1,000. In 1915 it was 40.2 per 1,000 and in 1954 it had only dropped to 39.4. Children comprised 50 percent of the Mormon towns.¹⁸⁷ The Montana Mormons shared these pro-family/pro-children

¹⁸⁴Lester A. Ross, "Agricultural Land Acquisition and Settlement Patterns in the Far West, ca. 1840's-1940's: A Proposed Historical Archaeological Model for Private Land Entry Periods," 2 February 2000, <http://www.mindspring.com/~larinc/ahapn/research/homestead/ross.htm>, 7-9, 16.

¹⁸⁵Peterson, "Imprint of Agricultural Systems", 102.

¹⁸⁶"Fifth Church, LDS," Whitehall Centennial, 19.

¹⁸⁷Wayne L. Wahlquist, "Population Growth in the Mormon Core Area, 1847-90", *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, 111-113.

attitudes.¹⁸⁸ Another motivating factor to have large families was the labor intensity of farmwork. Farmers have often viewed children as an asset, a form of bonded labor. The children in Utah worked on the family farms as did the Montana children.¹⁸⁹ Although they generally followed traditional gender roles, many girls did farmwork. Elizabeth Hogge in Bynum spent days herding cows around the creek bottom and milking them. She also drove the horse teams during haying.¹⁹⁰ Children were more of an asset than an expense. Add to that a religious obligation to have children and raise them in the Church, and the result was increased Church membership. The Northwestern States Mission in 1912 lost 46 members because they moved back to Utah. They lost fourteen in deaths such as trainwreck, typhoid, strangulation, killed by a switch engine, and indigestion. But this was far offset by 178 baptisms and this number almost equaled by the 152 children who were blessed.¹⁹¹ Clarence Jackson's parents were persuaded to move to Belfry in 1923 solely because the ground was bare compared with the snowdrifts in their Driggs, Idaho home. Clarence grew and

According to Phyllis Barber's "Culture Shock", *A World We Thought We Knew*, 401, Twenty-three percent of Utah's current population is under the age of nine. The national percentage is 14.6.

¹⁸⁸D.W. Meinig, "The Mormon Culture Region," 194.

¹⁸⁹Martha S. Bradley, "Protect the Children: Child Labor in Utah, 1880-1920", 204.

¹⁹⁰Elizabeth Hogge, "Tales of the Times", 111-112.

¹⁹¹Record of Members Collection, 1836-1970 (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints History Department, Salt Lake City: Microfilm).

married and counts as his most important contribution to his small town, his ten children.¹⁹²



Charlo Primary Children and Leaders, 1927. Photo courtesy Grant Hogge.

¹⁹²“Most important crop in town of Belfry: Children,” *Church News* (Salt Lake City), 3 June 2000.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Mormons exhibited a willingness to assimilate into the Montana farming and small community culture. As the Mormons dispersed and carried their religion with them, they acted as they would have acted within Utah and gained the respect of their peers. It was not always immediately possible to discern who was a Mormon but authors Richard and Joan Ostling have identified some clues: "He might be your neighbor, the one most likely to help in a time of crisis, not at all strange. More than anyone else on the street, he might seem honest, reliable, hardworking, and earnest...his children are obedient, his family close-knit."¹⁹³ Their attitudes toward their fellow citizens were usually characterized by good will. They also influenced contemporary Montanans by bringing church buildings into areas and organizing activities. Their political influence was never large in Montana, but they did show their patriotic spirit during times of war or elections. The manner in which they treated the land was shaped by their

¹⁹³Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America*, XXIV.

irrigating past in Utah and Idaho. The common belief that the land was placed there for man's use showed itself in their irrigation efforts and raising of livestock. As Montana was increasingly industrialized, more Mormons moved off the family farms and found jobs within the cities. For the Mormons who came here initially to mine or seek urban employment, they found themselves members of increasingly larger wards and stakes. But the early story remains one of farmers in search of land. The West may have been moved by industrial forces, but it was the farmers and agriculture that secured the anchor. The same culture that defined Mormons within the boundaries of Utah, moved with the Mormons to Montana.



The Ronan Saints 1919. Photo courtesy LDS Archives.

To answer the curator, "Yes, there were early Mormons in Montana." They finished the century with 40, 663 members in Montana and the addition of a most visible sign of Mormon presence, the Billings, Montana Temple. Despite the large growth within the state, the Church numbers more international members than U.S.¹⁹⁴ The slow spread from a Utah church to an international church began with small moves such as those to Montana.

¹⁹⁴"Montana", 2003 *Church Almanac*, 218.

Definitions of Mormon Terminology

Branch The smallest organizational unit within a stake. Members attend Sunday church meetings as a branch. When membership increases, the branch is converted into a ward. The Branch President is the authority within a branch. Montana has 41 branches.

Council of the Twelve The twelve General Authorities who are called to lead the Church. They fill the same office that Christ's twelve apostles filled when Christ organized his ministry on the earth. Their main calling is to serve as special witnesses of Christ.

District An early term for an organizational unit of the Church. Its purpose was very similar to that of the stake today.

Elder The designation of a male member of the Church who has been ordained to the Melchezideck priesthood. It is also used as a title of respect for the members of the Council of Twelve. Missionaries currently serving a full-time mission are called by the name of Elder.

General Authority One of the leaders of the Church who is an authority for all Church members. They are highly respected and are headquartered in Salt Lake City.

General Conference Twice a year the General Authorities speak to the Church membership throughout the world. These talks are transmitted via satellite or the Church's magazine the *Ensign*.

Gentile The appellation give to persons not of the House of Israel.

LDS or Latter-day Saint A member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mission An area designated as the mission field, and in which missionaries labor to teach people about the Church. The authority is the Mission President. Montana, Wyoming, and eastern North Dakota comprise the Montana Billings Mission.

Mutual Improvement Association The organization for the youth of the Church ages 12-18. Activities, learning opportunities, and service projects give the youth a wholesome atmosphere in which to interact with one another. On Sundays they attend Mutual classes to learn about the teachings of Christ. It is now known as the **Young Men and Young Women**.

Mormon The slang terminology given to people who believe in the *Book of Mormon* and the Prophet Joseph Smith.

President of the Church The President and his two counselors are known as the Presidency. The president is currently Gordon B. Hinckley. The president is the divinely appointed Prophet of God who receives revelations concerning the entire Church.

Primary An Auxiliary of the Church designed to teach and provide activities for children twelve and under.

Relief Society The women's auxiliary branch of the church designed to form friendships amongst the members, instruct women in homemaking, mothering, practical skills, and Gospel knowledge. Its role is also to administer relief and charity to people in need.

Stake A large organizational unit with jurisdiction over the wards and branches within its boundaries. The Stake President is the authority within a stake. There are eleven stakes in Montana.

Stake Conference Twice a year all of the wards and branches within a stake meet together at the stake Center to receive counsel and guidance from Stake leaders.

Tabernacle Located on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, the tabernacle was constructed as a place for large meetings. It is most famous for its Mormon Tabernacle Choir and large pipe organ.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints The church originally founded by Joseph Smith through revelation received from God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. The members accept the teachings of the *Book of Mormon* in addition to *The Holy Bible*. It was organized 6 April 1830. The headquarters are located in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Following the martyrdom of Joseph Smith there was a schism among the members due to a conflict over who would be the next prophet. The RLDS felt it should be a hereditary office and they broke from the main group. Their headquarters are located in Independence, Missouri.

Ward An organizational unit within a stake. Members attend Sunday church meetings as a ward. The Bishop is the authority within a ward. There are 68 wards in Montana.

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