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## Mexico's Mormon Colonies: 1876 to Revolution Chihuahua and Sonora Farmers

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### **Mexico's Mormon Colonies: 1876 to Revolution Chihuahua and Sonora farmers**

Mitt Romney, 2012 Presidential candidate, is a Mormon descendant from the Mexican Mormon Colonies (MMC) in Chihuahua, Mexico, a northern Mexican state bordering New Mexico and Texas.<sup>1</sup> His father George Romney, 43rd Governor of Michigan, was born in Colonia Dublán, Galeana Municipality, Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1905. George's family fled Mexico via train in the 1912 Mormon colonists exodus to El Paso, Texas, avoiding Mexican Revolutionaries killing them.<sup>2</sup> Mitt's candidacy has brought to light the MMC. Mormon polygamist families fled to the Mormon colonies in Chihuahua and Sonora, Mexico in the 1880's and 1890's to avoid United States (US) anti-polygamy laws prosecuting the men. This paper will discover how the MMC were established, the issue of polygamy and if they had an important role in northern Mexico through the 1910 Mexican Revolution years.

The story of the MMC begins with Mormon missionaries being sent to Mexico 1875 by the Prophet Brigham Young and entered January 1876.<sup>3</sup> Mormon prophets lead the Church, are also referred to Presidents, and under them are twelve apostles. Mission presidents, over missionaries, assigned to specific areas of the world, report to the Church leadership.<sup>4</sup> The Mission Presidents over Mexico in the 1870's on were assigned to all the missionary work there and the Mormon members. They were influential in the Mexican government at all levels

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1 . Amy Bringham, "Mitt Romney's Mexican Roots" in *ABC News*, August 30, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/08/mitt-romneys-mexican-roots/> (accessed March 24, 2013).

2 . Ibid.

3 . Agricol Lozano Herrera, *Historia del Mormonismo en Mexico* (D.F.: Editorial Zarahemla, 1983), 18.

4 . Gerald J. Day, "Mission President," *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 914-915, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormon-lay-ministry> (accessed March 27, 2013).

interceding between and on behalf the MMC, Mexican members, and later, the 1910 Revolutionaries.

Mormons belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Members are called "Mormons" referring to an ancient America prophet Mormon. They can also be called Latter-day Saints or just "the saints." Small groups of Mormon members in a particular area form a "Branch" in the mission. When a Branch is over a hundred members, more or less, they are organized into a "Ward." Many Branches and Wards in an area are part of a "Stake." Branch Presidents oversee their small Branches. Bishops were over Wards. Stake Presidents are over Stakes and all their members in the Branches and Wards. Mormon men and women are referred to "brothers" and "sisters." All worthy Mormon men can receive the higher priesthood and are called "Elders," except certain leadership positions. No one can aspire or train for Mormon leadership. Leaders are called by inspiration, are not paid, and except the Prophet and Apostles, are usually released after five or six years.<sup>5</sup>

Mormon congregation and stake leaders volunteer their time when they are not working to support their families, like nights and weekends. They are responsible for all the people in their areas, Mormon or not, and have in the past had to work with local authorities to maintain the peace. Their families and health often suffer because these leaders are busy taking care of the temporal and spiritual needs of their families, members and areas. The whole Mormon story of MMC depended on this Church spiritual, temporal and social organization. The early Mormon missionaries to Mexico and MMC leaders had heavy responsibilities and often suffered a lot physically.

One of the most influential Mormon missionaries to Mexico was Elder Daniel Jones. He

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5 . "Lay Leadership: Volunteer Ministry of the Church," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Newsroom*, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormon-lay-ministry> (accessed March 27, 2013).

was sent with other missionaries 1875 to teach the native Indians about the Book of Mormon, scout areas of Arizona, New Mexico, and possibly Mexico, to find locations for Mormon settlements, colonies.<sup>6</sup> Mormons believe in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is the story of ancient native inhabitants of the Americas, from about 2200 B. C. to 400 A. D.<sup>7</sup> These missionaries taught many tribes in Arizona and New Mexico about it, and found locations for settlements. Mormons established the first settlement in Arizona in 1876.<sup>8</sup>

Elder Jones and his companions entered Mexico 1876 from El Paso, Texas to Paseo del Norte (now called Ciudad Juarez), Chihuahua.<sup>9</sup> The Juárez people were not friendly because the Catholic priests there told them about the evils of Mormon polygamy and that Mormons were an awful disease.<sup>10</sup> So the Juarez people shunned them. The missionaries Liberals ignored the Catholics and helped the Mormon missionaries, when they heard what the Juarez priests had said and done. When the Mormon missionaries got to Chihuahua City they were able to locate liberals by watching people passing the Catholic cathedral. If someone did not take off their hat passing by the church they were probably Liberal and would help them.<sup>11</sup>

The Juarez Liberals' Reforma laws in the mid 1850's and 1860's imposed separation of church and state, diminishing the Catholic Church's power in Mexico.<sup>12</sup> They invited non-Catholic religions to Mexico, and starting in 1871 to 1880 many Protestant religions were

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6 . Agricol Lozano Herrera, *Historia del Mormonismo en Mexico* (D.F.: Editorial Zarahemla, 1983), 12-13.

7 . Thomas Cottam Romney, *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1938), 22-23.

8 . F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), 31.

9 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 44.

10 . *Ibid.*, 44.

11 . *Ibid.*, 45.

12 . F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), 15.

established there with the Liberal government's blessings.<sup>13</sup> The La Reforma opened up the doors to other religions and made it possible for the Mormon missionaries to come in 1876 and later the Mormon Colonies in Chihuahua and Sonora.<sup>14</sup>

Chihuahua City and the state Governor Ochoa were Liberal. He had heard what Mormons had done in desert communities establishing productive farms. He invited the missionaries many times to talk about possibly having Mormons colonizing parts of Chihuahua with his blessings. The missionaries found out they were better received than they thought they would be in Chihuahua because of Liberals there.<sup>15</sup> Their main purpose was missionary work among the Mexican Indians and they were well received as they traveled throughout northern Chihuahua, especial with the Tarahumara Indians. They passed through the Casas Grandes River valley and noted it was a good place for colonies. However, the local Mexicans were having trouble with Apache Indians at the time, in 1876.<sup>16</sup> The missionaries concluded that for missionary work to establish well MMC were needed there.<sup>17</sup>

The prophet Brigham Young died in 1877.<sup>18</sup> He was called the great colonizer because he sent Mormons all over the West establishing colonies. He had sent the missionaries Elder Jones and his companions to Mexico in 1876, and other visits, to teach the Mexican Indians and look for places for Mormons to colonize. The Mormon Church had been persecuted the latter half of the 1800's for their practice of polygamy, marriage to more than one wife. But President Young was not so concerned that Mormon colonies should go into Mexico at that time, because of it.

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13 . Ibid., 15-16.

14 . Ibid., 16.

15 . F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), 24-26.

16 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 46.

17 . F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), 28-29.

18 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 46.

Missionary work continued in Mexico after Brigham Young's death. Some intellectual men in Mexico City had contacted the Church in Salt Lake City to come baptize them. They had read a section of the Book of Mormon. The Church sent the Apostle Moses Thatcher and others to Mexico City in 1879, via New Orleans and a steamer to Veracruz.<sup>19</sup> He was to re-start missionary work in Mexico and establish a relationship with the Díaz government. The newspaper *El Monitor Republicano* greeted the Mormons arriving November 16, 1879. More importantly on the same page in the "At the last hour" column was the news that the Minister of War General Manuel González had resigned and General Carlos Pacheco took his place.<sup>20</sup> General Manuel González was the President of Mexico 1880 to 1884.<sup>21</sup> General Pacheco who was a hero of a Puebla battle against the French where he lost a leg and an arm,<sup>22</sup> became an important ally in the Díaz government for the Mormons.

Elder Thatcher noted in January 1880 the Mexico City newspapers wondered why he had not formally established the Mormon Church with the government. He had met with many government officials about missionary work but there was no need to have the Church recognized. The Reforma laws, that required religions register with government, ended in 1876.<sup>23</sup> The newspapers also rumored the Church was looking to colonize in Mexico but Elder Thatcher maintained he was there for missionary work.<sup>24</sup>

He was introduced in January 1880 to a Belgian man Emilio Biebuyck, influential in the government, with contracts to colonize in Mexico with many concessions for any colonizers. Mr. Biebuyck convinced Elder Thatcher to consider his proposal. Mr. Biebuyck had been to

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19 . Ibid., 52-54

20 . Agricol Lozano Herrera, *Historia del Mormonismo en Mexico* (D.F.: Editorial Zarahemla, 1983), 29.

21 . Burton Kirkwood, *The History of Mexico* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 116, 118.

22 . Agricol Lozano Herrera, *Historia del Mormonismo en Mexico* (D.F.: Editorial Zarahemla, 1983),

44.

23 . Ibid, 32-33.

24 . Ibid., 37.

the Utah Territory three times and knew President Brigham Young. Elder Thatcher and Biebuyck met in Salt Lake City, February 1880.<sup>25</sup> Mr. Biebuyck, with Elder Thatcher, had done a lot of work and presented a colonization contract to the Presidency of the Church and Quorum of the Twelve (Apostles). But the Council decided it still was not time to establish colonies in Mexico.<sup>26</sup> Both men were very saddened by this and returned to Mexico.

Back in Mexico City, Elder Thatcher was introduced to important government officials that would later prove very helpful to the Church and colonies. Elder Thatcher and a couple others Mormons met Foreign Minister Zárate, Minister of War Carlos Pacheco and Minister of Public Works and Colonization Fernández Leal, October 1880. Minister Leal had been to Utah and admired the Mormon enterprising abilities and prosperity he saw. He thought Mormons were the most successful colonizers of the world and Mexico welcomed any of them wanting to make Mexico their home.<sup>27</sup> Elder Thatcher had also met with President Díaz and other Ministers. President Díaz's administration goals were to colonize distant uninhabited deserts, and he decided Mormons were the best suited for doing this.<sup>28</sup>

The United States (US) Republican party provided a big push towards Mormons colonizing in Mexico. Republican Protestants had been pushing for stronger anti-polygamy laws and in 1881 the Church was under a lot of pressure from them. Few Mormon men had many wives but the Edmunds Act of 1882 punished polygamist men and those who even believed in it, severely.<sup>29</sup> United States' marshals went into Mormon colonies and hunted them in force sending many to penitentiaries, some even to Detroit, Michigan, "the American

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25 . F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), 38.

26 . Richard Alan Schwartzlose, "The Cultural Geography of the Mormon Settlements in Mexico" (PhD diss. University of California, 1950), 31.

27 . Thomas Cottam Romney, *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1938), 45.

28 . Agricol Lozano Herrera, *Historia del Mormonismo en Mexico* (D.F.: Editorial Zarahemla, 1983), 37-38.

29 . F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), 53.

Siberia.”<sup>30</sup> Their wives and children were left to fend for themselves. Polygamist men hid all over the west, traveling between Mormon colonies in Utah, Arizona, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico, evading US Marshals. Some hid in Hawaii, in caves and empty buildings.<sup>31</sup>

Federal judges essentially took over Utah and put as many Church leaders they could find in jail. Still the marshals and judges could not break up the priesthood authority because too many polygamists and Church leaders were successfully avoiding getting caught.<sup>32</sup> It was putting a lot of pressure on the saints in the 1880's and created terror in the Mormon communities. An Arizona Stake President wrote in 1884 he felt the government in Washington was pushing members into a corner, destroying religious liberties and bent on destroying the Church. He said Utah Commissioners recommended the government should do more than punish polygamists, it should in fact destroy the religion.<sup>33</sup>

The 1887 Edmunds-Tucker Act confiscated Church properties because it was seen as breaking the law and treasonable. The Act also abolished all Church institutions, like women's right to vote, which they had since 1870, schools, welfare organizations, political and governing bodies.<sup>34</sup> The US government bankrupted the Church with this Act.<sup>35</sup> Before this second Act was passed the Church decided to start colonies in Mexico the Mexican government offered them years before. They needed a place where US laws did not have

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30 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 69.

31 . "The Mormons of Mexico," ed. Arthur W. Page, *The World's Work* 31, no. 5 (March 1916): 484, <http://goo.gl/d8xV2> (accessed March 14, 2013).

32 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 69.

33 . Thomas Cottam Romney, *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1938), 51-52.

34 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 46.

35 . "The Mormons of Mexico," ed. Arthur W. Page, *The World's Work* 31, no. 5 (March 1916): 484, <http://goo.gl/d8xV2> (accessed March 14, 2013).



jurisdiction so they could practice polygamy in peace. This is interesting because we will see though they weren't being thrown in jail, there was not a lot of peace in Mexico either.

The Church leaders decided in 1884 they needed to seriously look in Mexico for suitable farm land and Sonora was again considered. Before Brigham Young's death in 1877 he sent missionaries a second trip, four months, to Mexico in latter 1876. They continued visiting and teaching native Mexican Indians in Chihuahua and Sonora. They were aware that the Sonora Yaqui Indians were at war with Mexico again, as they had been earlier before the French.<sup>36</sup>

The Spaniards, French and Mexicans, hadn't been successful conquering them and there were some fierce battles fought with Mexico at that time. Yaquis, like many Indians in Mexico, had endured over a hundred years of violent oppression and their people enslaved. Mexico was aggressively fighting them, so the Yaquis killed any non-Yaquis they found. The missionaries chose to ignore the warnings and visit them, having faith they would not be killed. The proud Yaquis lived in homes in large communities, and the missionaries thought if they could teach them it would open up Sonora Indians to them.<sup>37</sup>

Probably in January 1877, the missionaries were caught, tired up and tortured by the Yaquis, who were about to kill them. A Yaqui head man spared their lives, told them to leave and never come back, because he wouldn't be there to save them again.<sup>38</sup> The colloquial "we told you so" seems appropriate at that point. Maybe God did protect them, they had success in other parts of Sonora but there wasn't any missionary work done with the Yaquis. This is why it was questionable that the Church would attempt to visit the Yaquis in 1884 because Sonora officials told them the Yaquis were still on the warpath.

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36 . F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), 33.  
37 . Ibid., 33.  
38 . Ibid., 34.

Apostles Heber J. Grant and Brigham Young, Jr. lead an expedition of a few men to southwest Sonora Yaquis in December 1884. They stopped in the capitol city Hermosillo to see Governor Torres about going down to Guaymas on the coast and taking a boat to the mouth of the Yaquis River to find the Yaquis village. Governor Torres was concerned about their safety to the warring Yaquis and offered to send some soldiers with them. They were also warned that yellow fever was actively attacking the district, but the men declined the military escort and chose to go on in faith that they wouldn't get yellow fever.<sup>39</sup>

When the Elders were ready to board a boat in Guaymas many people, a Catholic priest and the Harbor Captain, warned and begged the men not to go. The people were convinced the Mormons were going to die. The priest told them to make their last confessions before going. Their guide and translator was frightened by the people and would not go with them. The Mormons spent four days in awful weather getting to the mouth of the Yaqui River sea sick. Then they found out they had to wade through a five mile knee deep mud plain to get to the Yaqui village. Elder Young was heavy and sank in the mud a lot, caught a cold and then yellow fever.<sup>40</sup>

There was a man there that spoke Yaqui and Spanish. That night the Mormons discussed the Gospel and told the tribal council of the *Book of Mormon's* importance concerning their ancestors, the history and blessings, that would come to their race. The Yaquis were very happy and their leader promised protection and support to Mormon missionaries and colonies' established. All they wanted in return was a translated copy of the *Book of Mormon*. The Mormons were encouraged by their friendly visit with the Yaquis and returned to Guaymas in December 1884. The Church never imposed on the Yaquis or visited

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39 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 49.

40 . Ibid., 50.

them again. That was the end of the missionary work with Sonora Indians at the time.<sup>41</sup>

Apostles Young and Grant returned to Salt Lake City, both ill. Mexicans were shocked the Mormons were successfully received by the Yaquis. The Mexican press heard about the good visit the Mormons had with the Yaquis and accused them of working with the US against Mexico by an alliance with the Yaquis. The Mormon President said there would not be any colonies in Yaqui areas to avoid problems for a while.<sup>42</sup>

This still left the need for locations to colonize in Mexico. A group of Church leaders were sent into Chihuahua and other areas of Sonora looking to colonize in January 1885. They chose the fertile Casas Grandes Valley for colonization in Chihuahua, and the long awaited MMC began. Small poor groups started arriving at La Ascensión, Mexico, camping along the Casas Grandes River in February 1885 and polygamist men were told to go there immediately. ("La Ascensión," "Ascensión" was spelled "Ascención" in some sources.) By mid-May 1885 there were close to 400 Mormons camped 60 miles along the River waiting word to start planting.<sup>43</sup>

Many years ago in 1876 Chihuahua Governor Ochoa had warned the missionaries to beware of false land titles or worthless land. The Church spent months trying to secure land for the Saints in desperate conditions by then in the Ascensión Casas Grandes River areas. The Saints ran out of money, most of their food and clothing. Shoes wore out so they made rawhide sandals or went barefoot. They were living in wagon boxes, tents and dugouts in the river banks, in the hot summer. Church leaders there begged them to hold out and not return to the US. Some Mormons were able to rent land to plant but most had to suffer waiting. Miles

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41 . Ibid., 51.

42 . Thomas Cottam Romney, *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1938), 54-55.

43 . Melvin J. Frost, "Mormon Settlements in Mexico: A Study in the Hazards of Foreign Colonization," in *International Aspects of Development in Latin America Geographical Perspectives*, edited by Gary S. Elbow (Muncie: Clag Publications, 1977), 86.

Romney decided after ten months of hardship, horse thieves and Mexicans harassing them, it was like they were living in a nation of thieves. During all this stressful living, lack of food or land to settle on, Saints continued to stream in.<sup>44</sup>

The Jefe of Canton de Galeana, Chihuahua, Mexico was alarmed by all the Mormons showing up in Ascensión. He thought they were there to conquer Mexico and contacted the Secretary of the State of Chihuahua who then told the Mormons to leave.<sup>45</sup> They received an expulsion order to be out of Chihuahua in fifteen days, in early April 1885. Apostle Teasdale and Brother MacDonald went to Chihuahua City to plead the colonists case. Acting Governor General Fuero refused to stop the expulsion order. Apostles Thatcher and Young Jr. were sent from Utah to Mexico City to get help from the Federal government, arriving in May 1885.<sup>46</sup>

Secretary of State, Mariscal and Secretary of the Interior, and Governor of Chihuahua, General Don Carlos Pacheco, saw them soon after they arrived. General Pacheco was offended by General Fuero's expulsion order and promised to help the colonization efforts. President Díaz then met with them affirming that Mormons were welcome colonists the Mexican government actively wanted to help develop Mexico's natural resources. He then officially annulled the order demanding Mormon colonists leave Mexico.<sup>47</sup>

Another source said General Señor Carlos Pacheco was Secretary of Public Works and Governor of Chihuahua. Before meeting with General Pacheco in May 1885, the Apostles had seen Sub-Minister Señor Ferdandez Leal, who Elder Thatcher met in October 1880.

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44 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 80-81.

45 . Richard Alan Schwartzlose, "The Cultural Geography of the Mormon Settlements in Mexico" (PhD diss. University of California, 1950), 33.

46 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 77-78.

47 . Ibid., 79.

Señior Leal said he would use his influence to help the Mormons. These government officials Elder Thatcher met with in 1880 continued helpful and friendly towards Mormon colonization. General Pacheco was astonished and bewildered by General Fuero's abusive treatment of the Mormons because General Pacheco had told him to welcome the Mormons. Señor Pacheco requested a letter from the Apostles to him with the acting Chihuahua Governor General Fuero's expulsion order. Minister Señor Pacheco replaced acting Governor General Fuero.<sup>48</sup>

The Chihuahua border customs, aduana, agents did not know many Mormons, or any large groups, were coming into Mexico. Mexico had aduana procedures and tariffs on everything coming into their nation. The poor Mormons were not expecting having to list everything they had, declare it all and pay fees on it to bring it into Mexico. The Chihuahua border agents were uneasy about so many people at once and uncooperative at times.

Deming, New Mexico, north of La Ascensión, Chihuahua, became the American side border crossing. Goods requiring duties were listed and stamped in Deming before entry into Mexico. Duties were paid in Ascensión.<sup>49</sup> Example duties charged for a few items are: \$22.00 for a new wagon; \$16.00 for an old one; \$25.00 for a new stove; and \$10.00 for an old one. Livestock were duty free but furniture was assessed after inspection.<sup>50</sup> The Saints were charged these duties for a few years. Many left belongings at the border they could not afford to pay duties on. Many years after the colonists began arriving, the Mexican government

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48 . Thomas Cottam Romney, *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1938), 58-59.

49 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 75.

50 . Clarence F. Turley and Anna Tenney Turley, *History of the Mormon Colonies in Mexico: (The Juarez Stake), 1885-1980*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, ed. by Lawrence Benson Lee and Marilyn Turley Lee (Publishers Press, 1996), 27. Internet inflation converters suggest multiples of 20 to 25 converting 1890 cost to 2012. A \$22.00 (x 25 multiple) duty might be equivalent to \$550.00 +/- . It is understandable why the Mormon colonists were out of money soon after arriving in 1885.

made some changes allowing more duty free items brought in if they planned to stay and sent lists of what they were bringing in sixty days in advance, to the appropriate officials. Colonists were also exempted from military service and some taxes, for ten years after arriving in Mexico.<sup>51</sup>

The Saints did not like waiting at the border for the Mexican customs to process their things. Worse than that was waiting so many months for land to be found and bought with proper titles. They had planted along the Casas Grandes River so they could survive in 1885. Many of the Mormons had planted on a section of the river that went north of Ascensión into the Zona Prohibida. It was a 20 kilometer wide strip of land on the Mexican side of the border no foreigners were allowed to own land in. The Mormon were allowed to harvest what they planted then move out of the Zona. Some were charged revenues and others fined for no reason, besides having the customs' duties fees.<sup>52</sup>

Colonia Díaz of La Ascensión was the first Mexican Mormon Colony, located the closest to the American border. Ascensión had about 1,100 residents in 1885 and the customs' house where immigrants were processed slowly. Sometimes, there was a back up so Mormons were forced to wait there.<sup>53</sup> In 1886, land was finally purchased for colonists to lay out a city. Colonia Díaz was named after President Porfirio Díaz who helped the Mormon establish the MMC. The first year was tough on the colonists who lived in their wagons or shelters made of willows. Strong winds and dust were other problems.<sup>54</sup>

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51 . Richard Alan Schwartzlose, "The Cultural Geography of the Mormon Settlements in Mexico" (PhD diss. University of California, 1950), 35-36.

52 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 79.

53 . Clarence F. Turley and Anna Tenney Turley, *History of the Mormon Colonies in Mexico: (The Juarez Stake), 1885-1980*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, ed. by Lawrence Benson Lee and Marilyn Turley Lee (Publishers Press, 1996), 26.

54 . Richard Alan Schwartzlose, "The Cultural Geography of the Mormon Settlements in Mexico" (PhD diss. University of California, 1950), 37.

Colonia Díaz had good soil but little water. The colonists put up many windmills to pull up water and built a canals from the Casas Grandes River. There were 15,000 fruit trees, 5,000 grape vines, 2,000 shade trees in 1894. There only existed a few flour mills, that were all backed up with wheat to grind, in the area. Colonia Díaz built a small wind powered grist mill in 1891 and in 1892 they built a water wheel mill, too. The Ascensión mill was slow because it was powered by burros. The Colonia established a candy factory in 1887 serving mainly the colonies and local pueblos. It was a good business by 1894. They also started a broom factory that year.<sup>55</sup>

More land was bought in 1890 to raise more cattle. They grew wheat, corn, sorghum, beans and potatoes and in 1896 had some fairs displaying the Colonia products. There was prosperity but for the next sixteen years not much changed. They were not close to the railroad and could not get their products to market as cheaply as the railroad low freight rates.<sup>56</sup>

While Colonia Díaz got started in 1885 groups were moving south along the Casas Grandes River to the small Casas Grandes town, pueblo. April 1885 colonists received permission to rent land from Mexicans and spread out in smaller groups. One group set up camp a few miles north of Casas Grandes on the west side of the river and came to be called the Turley Camp.<sup>57</sup> December 1885 Camp Turley were able to move to the Piedras Verdes River camp that had been officially purchased, about six miles northwest of Casas Grandes. The colonists made half a mile of spacious dugout winter homes supported by cottonwood

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<sup>55</sup> . Ibid., 40.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Alan Schwartzlose, "The Cultural Geography of the Mormon Settlements in Mexico" (PhD diss. University of California, 1950), 41.

<sup>57</sup> . Lester B. Whetten, *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico – Commemorating 100 Years*, (Deming, NM: Colony Specialists, 1985), 8.

branches along the riverbank quickly in one day.<sup>58</sup>

This colony decided to call themselves Colonia Juárez in honor Benito Juárez and had a celebration on his birthday March 21, 1886. Life was slowly improving there. A canal was dug from the river to irrigate the farmland in March 1886. Spring and summer abode homes replaced the dugouts, vegetables were coming along well for winter harvest and shade trees were planted. The optimistic colonists were busy preparing for a prosperous future.<sup>59</sup>

That summer they found they had started their colony in the wrong place, on Don Luis Terrazas big San Diego ranch, hacienda. Their property was two miles up in a rocky narrow Piedras Verdes River valley. The soil was poor and bringing water in was a problem. They were allowed to harvest what they planted on the Terrazas first colony site. Mexicans down river complained the colonists were using too much of the river water. The move from the fertile site with better water access to new one was disheartening for the Mormons.<sup>60</sup>

The water level in the Piedras Verdes River dropped in Spring 1887. June 1887, at three o'clock a strong earthquake hit the area. The Sierra Madres mountains around the new Colonia Juárez swayed and big rocks broke off causing clouds of dust when they hit the ground. Smoke from fires started by the earthquake rocks' friction were seen and some took weeks to burn out. It was an amazing sight for the colonists. The next day the river level rose one third and stayed that high from then on, providing enough water for the Colonia and Mexicans downstream. The colonists praised God for the earthquake.<sup>61</sup>

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58 . Clarence F. Turley and Anna Tenney Turley, *History of the Mormon Colonies in Mexico: (The Juarez Stake), 1885-1980*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, ed. by Lawrence Benson Lee and Marilyn Turley Lee (Publishers Press, 1996), 71.

59 . Ibid., 73-74.

60 . Blaine Carmen Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: a History, 1885-1912" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1963), 85.

61 . Amram, "The Saints in Mexico," *The Deseret News*, September 21, 1887, 574, <http://goo.gl/QUUHS> (accessed March 13, 2013). The article refers the earthquake in June 1887. A couple other sources have May 3, 1887 as the date.



Colonia Dublán was the next colonia established northeast of Casas Grandes a few miles. The colonists bought or rented "terreno" land plots from the local Mexicans which came with adobe homes and farm tools. They planted in 1889 in the flat fertile land there and named the Colonia "Dublán" in 1890. Only ten percent of the terrenos had been planted which was enough to get through the first winter. They opened a store and bought flour grist mill in 1891. Another store opened in 1897.<sup>62</sup>

June 24, 1897, the Rio Grande, Sierra Madre and Pacific Railroad opened from El Paso running to Western and Southern Chihuahua through mining and white pine country, Casas Grandes, Colonias Dublán and Juárez.<sup>63</sup> The Mexico North-Western Railway, Ferrocarril Nor-Oeste de Mexico, took over the Rio Grande, Sierra Madre and Pacific Railroad route in 1909. The first train out of El Paso at 1:00 PM would arrive in Colonia Dublán about 7:00 PM, six hours later (takes 3.5 hours to drive that, per Internet map distance).<sup>64</sup>

The railroad brought more prosperity to Colonia Dublán and Juárez. Many colonists work on the railroad bringing hard currency, since a lot of their transactions were made trading within the colonies. Supplies came from El Paso cheaper, quicker, and more Mormons immigrated there. They started shipping their food stuffs and small industries' products back through Ciudad Juárez to El Paso or south to Central Mexico. When their Railroad connected in southern Chihuahua they could send produce directly south to Mexico City.<sup>65</sup>

There was an attempt to built a railroad line from Deming, New Mexico, 90 miles south

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62 . Richard Alan Schwartzlose, "The Cultural Geography of the Mormon Settlements in Mexico" (PhD diss. University of California, 1950), 56-58.

63 . *N. Y. Times*, "New Mexican Line: Opening of the Rio Grande, Sierra Madre and Pacific," June 25, 1897, <http://goo.gl/lzbCk> (accessed March 13, 2013).

64 . Mexico North-Western Railway Company, *Mexico North-Western Railway Company* (London: Waterlow & Sons Limited, 1909), [http://libraries.ucsd.edu/speccoll/DigitalArchives/f1261\\_r63-1909/f1261\\_r63-1909.pdf](http://libraries.ucsd.edu/speccoll/DigitalArchives/f1261_r63-1909/f1261_r63-1909.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2013).

65 . Richard Alan Schwartzlose, "The Cultural Geography of the Mormon Settlements in Mexico" (PhD diss. University of California, 1950), 59.

to the colonies in 1890, to Chihuahua City. Many colonists worked for the project started by a Mormon businessman and other investors. Tent cities grew around Deming and workmen learned how build railroads. Paperwork from the US, Chihuahua City and Mexican federal government, was obtained and in 1891 work started in both Deming and Chihuahua City grading track lines. The Colonia Díaz, closest to Deming, worked hard to prepare work wagon teams, supplies, new clothes made, etc., for the men.<sup>66</sup>

There were problems with lack of water, food and pay to the workers. Mexican customs' duties and fines multiplied until customs impounded materials until paid. Investment moneys promised did not come from England as expected. The project stopped in 1892 before one railroad tie had been laid. Colonia Díaz was the hardest hit since so many of their men were sent home without pay for work done in 1892. The Mormon men, and others, who started the endeavor were not blamed. They were sincerely convinced the railroad was going through since they had the material resources and the Mexican government support (customs not included). Still, it was a financial blow to the Colonia and the women who took care of the farms while their men were away.<sup>67</sup>

Colonia Dublán's agriculture had reached its limited potential until 1904 when a canal was dug from a small lake seven miles away. There were floods often during rainy seasons. Two reservoirs were built in natural depressions near Colonia Dublán that alleviated flooding. Between the lake and the reservoirs the Colonia and Mexicans had more water always available than the other colonies. Agriculture yields increased since now they had water during the dry summer months.<sup>68</sup>

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66 . Clarence F. Turley and Anna Tenney Turley, *History of the Mormon Colonies in Mexico: (The Juarez Stake), 1885-1980*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, ed. by Lawrence Benson Lee and Marilyn Turley Lee (Publishers Press, 1996), 51-52.

67 . Ibid., 53-54.

68 . Ibid., 60.

It should be noted that while the colonies used US farming methods and some learned from the Mexican farmers, Colonia Dublán developed their own different from the Mexicans'. They used new strains of wheat, for example, that grew better in their climate. They relied on corn and sorghum, for molasas production, until they had enough water in 1904 and planted wheat. Dublán's culture and income was agrarian whereas Colonia Juárez and the mountain colonies lived off their industries.<sup>69</sup>

There were three small mountain colonies southwest of Colonia Juárez that were considered the six main Chihuahua colonies which are discussed. Colonia Chichuichpa was the farrest one up in the mountains in a small valley and was settled late 1892. Growing crops was poor due to their short season but they had plenty of lumber they sold to the Casas Grandes Valley people. It was know for its wilderlife and hunting. They raised excellent horses and cattle that were considered some of the best in the area. Their most prosperous year was 1911 but they left Mexico in 1912 because of the Revolution and did not come back until 1918.<sup>70</sup>

Colonia Garcia was the next closet to Colonia Juárez. They lived off sawmilling, some farming, cattle and dairy products. It was settled in 1893, but all went to the US in the 1912 MMC exodus. Some Mormon Colonia Garcia people returned in 1917.<sup>71</sup>

Colonia Pacheco, started in 1887, was the biggest of the mountain colonies and closest to Colonia Juárez. Lumber and a sawmill was the main industry, but cattle and crops were important to its survival, too. The hunting was very good there, like the other mountain colonies, and the Colonia often lived off venison, wild turkey and trout. They also were forced

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69 . Ibid., 61-65.

70 .Ibid., 259-62, 264, 268, 276.

71 . Ibid., 251-252, 256.

out in 1912 and some came back in 1917.<sup>72</sup>

There were other small colonies in Chihuahua but not significant because they were extensions of the bigger ones and did not last. Sonora also had a few small ones and two notable bigger colonies. Oaxaca was a promising one in

Colonia Díaz was burned during the Mexican Revolution in February 1913 and was never rebuilt. There wasn't lumber there so colonists imported from the US paying expensive duties. The Casas Grandes and mountain colonies had plenty of wood from the surrounding Sierra Madres.

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72 . Ibid., 228-229.

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